

BATTERIES NOT INCLUDED



Do you remember being a kid when your birthday was one of the greatest days of the year? It was like Christmas, but you were the only one getting gifts. Do you remember wanting that one special gift, the one that you would have traded in almost all of your other toys in your closet to get? Did it ever happen to you when you got that gift, and while ripping the wrapping paper from the box, you saw the dreaded words in the bottom left corner that read, “batteries not included”? These words were the kiss of death to many birthdays, as it meant you’d be waiting a while longer before you would be able to play with the greatest toy ever.

Although we learn to control our disappointment as we grow older, this simple illustration still happens to us more often than it should in business. We make great plans to grow and optimize our business, but we overlook the resources it will take to reach these goals.

While the idea of a couple of AA batteries is pretty simple, in business it represents a vast and complex array of resources needed to accomplish a goal. I’ll break this down into four major categories.

1. **Market resources:** Is there enough of a market to support what you’re planning to do, and if so will they want what you plan on offering?
2. **Organizational resources:** Does the current state of your business at its current level of optimization allow you to undertake the plan?
3. **Financial resources:** Do you have the monetary investment it will take to complete the plans.
4. **Energy:** Do you and your staff possess the physical and mental energy it will take to complete the plans while sustaining everything else you need to do to keep the business going, your personal life healthy, and the men in white jackets at bay.

“Before taking any action with any plan, make sure you’ve included the batteries.”

Easy enough, right? Don’t fool yourself so quickly. These four categories sound easy, but force yourself to push into them and truly assess if you have the resources needed. If you don’t, you are likely to face unwanted consequences.

There are two main consequences that can occur if you don’t accurately determine if the batteries are included when you set out to accomplish your goals. First, you will fail to accomplish the goal altogether, give up and quit. This doesn’t mean the goal itself was bad, or that the idea behind the goal was misguided, which often times becomes the scape goat for failed attempts. Rather, it simply means that you underestimated what it would take to accomplish it, and had to abandon it at some point along the way.

Second, you will fail to reach the full potential of of the goal. You may be able to check the box “complete” but by pressing the limits of the resources you do have, but you will find yourself short of resources to keep going forward at top performance levels. Like an engine where only five of the six cylinders are firing, you can say the engine is running, and technically it is, but not very smoothly. Eventually the stress and the strain of the underperforming parts of your business will cause extra strain on the parts of your business that are performing, and the whole engine will suffer.

To make sure you’ve done all you can to accurately estimate what resources are needed, here are the three biggest things you can do.

1. **Ask all who will touch it.** This includes your employees, your leadership team, your vendors, your customers and anyone else you can think of that will directly or indirectly come into contact with your plan as it gets started, and as it takes off.
2. **Plan for the unknown.** Ask yourself what would happen if something changes, or what if part way through you realize you missed something. Can you determined if one of these things happens can you live with it. Then take steps to mitigate the undesired outcome as much as possible, or decide to pull the plug.
3. **Continually take status updates.** Continually go back to the group of people you identified in the “Ask all who will touch it” step, and as time progresses ask them if they have come across anything they have originally missed, or underestimated.

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