

CPM 2020

Rebuilding of the Agency Accountability Report



Kimberly C. Buckley

South Carolina Attorney General's Office

CPM 2020

Table of Contents

| | | |
|------|---|---------|
| I. | Introduction..... | Page 1 |
| II. | Background..... | Page 3 |
| III. | Accountability Report Requirements..... | Page 3 |
| IV. | Data Collection and Analysis..... | Page 4 |
| V. | Implementation..... | Page 4 |
| VI. | Evaluation..... | Page 10 |
| VII. | Summary and Recommendations..... | Page 10 |

The winningest Division 1 college basketball coach in history, Pat Summitt, once said “Responsibility equals accountability equals ownership. And a sense of ownership is the most powerful weapon a team or organization can have”. Pat had over 1,098 career wins before her retirement in 1976. In an article written by Fortune, Michelle Marciniak a former University of South Carolina woman’s basketball coach and successful entrepreneur talks about her time playing for Pat and how it led to her business success today. She explained when she played for Pat, winning was an expectation. And when you won, there were no slaps on the back and no congratulations. It was understood you were just one game closer to the championship, which was always the bar. She explained there was always area for improvement, and work to be done to refine skills to meet the greater goal. She said, “the goal was pristine execution”. She goes on to say Pat molded her into learning she could always be better, and to never stop working to improve her game. She explained the lessons she learned on the court has stuck with her throughout her professional career. She said “If you don’t have the, *it’s not good enough mentality*, if you don’t push yourself past your comfort zone, if you don’t sacrifice each day with the goal of pristine execution in mind, you will never win a championship in business.” So, the questions are: How do you form a winning team like Pat? How do you instill that high level of accountability? How do you make people want to win? (Seller, 2011)

You may be asking yourself how Pat’s story relates to rebuilding of the agency’s accountability report. The answer is the accountability report is your agency’s plan to get to the championship. It is the strategies you will establish and practice daily to ensure your plan is successful. It is the metrics in which you will choose to ensure pristine execution. It is the opportunity to unify your team to work toward something bigger than the individual, to reach

their highest potential, and strive for excellence in carrying out the strategies to meet the agency's mission. My project mission is to take our team to the Championship.

Background

The beginning situation presented an accountability report which was not being completed in a useful way for the agency or state as a whole. The goals, strategies and measures in the report were not challenging or progressive. The report was not a direct result of agency-wide cross collaboration and deliberate strategic forethought. The report had no prominent presence within our day-to-day functions. The agency needed a formal process and leadership investment to establish the required goals, strategies, and measures to make the agency's accountability report meaningful and functional. The goal was to create a living, breathing, continually growing strategic plan that is unbeatable and showcases a team of pristine excellence.

Accountability Report Requirements

The accountability report is mandated by SC Code §1-1-820 and fiscal proviso 117.29 (FY19-20). These mandates require each state agency to submit an annual accountability report to the Governor and General Assembly. The Executive Budget Office was assigned authority for oversight of the reports. The report uses a performance and accountability reporting "PAR" method for compiling and documenting factors that quantify an agency's profitability, efficiency and adherence to budget, comparing actual results against original targets. The report lists the agency's mission, objectives to accomplish the mission, and performance measures that show the degree to which objectives are being met. The report also comprises of an agency narrative and templates to tell the reader what laws we govern by, our partner agency, customers we serve,

program budgets and reporting requirements. The information contained in each agency's report is used to aid decision-makers in their analysis of each agency's budget and current year request for funding. Now one can see why having a winning report would be so valuable.

Data Collection and Analysis

We started with leadership and uncovering their understanding of the report and its requirements. We discovered the agency's leadership was not intimately familiar with the accountability report requirements or how the report is utilized throughout government. The "PAR" method in establishing goals, strategies and measures was unfamiliar to most of the agency's leadership. The idea of setting goals and tying performance measures received pushback due to the judicial complexity of the work done at various levels. They contended that there are too many outside factors such as courts, opposing counsel, etc. which affect outcomes and outputs and therefore they believe the report requirements were unreasonable for our agency.

The report was developed solely by the Agency's Finance Director (I) and former Chief of Staff. Previous attempts for divisional leadership involvement presented challenges and received little to no support. The goals, strategies and measures were formulated with minimal to no input from the divisional leadership. Therefore, the report was comprised of divisional statistics provided in an annual brief to the Attorney General. As previously mentioned, the goals, strategies and measures in the report were not challenging or progressive. Lastly, the report had no prominent effect on our day to day functions.

Implementation

The first step in the road to rebuilding the report was to win buy-in from the agency's top leadership. If my goal was to have investment from all levels of leadership, it had to start at the top. It is a well-known fact that employee engagement is linked to their confidence in leadership. One would think the lack of leadership engagement in strategy has the same direct impact on employees. Research by Quantum Workplace states "leadership attitudes toward engagement are directly linked to engagement levels. Meaning, companies with the lowest levels of engagement are led by people who don't take engagement very seriously in the first place. While almost 90 percent of highly engaged organizations say employee engagement is important to leadership, less than 20 percent of somewhat disengaged and disengaged companies can say the same thing." (Wickham, 2016). When senior leaders are engaged and manning the strategy ship, it has a significantly higher chance to stay course and make it safely to shore. Our agency's senior leadership gave the commitment to partnering with me in righting this ship. Together, we delivered the message down to divisional leadership and requested their partnership in rebuilding the report.

The next step was a mandatory training for all divisional leadership that was held on June 18, 2019 by the EBO's Performance and Accountability Manager. She thoroughly explained all aspects of the report and provided useful examples and recommendations for how we could more effectively develop meaningful and functional goals, strategies, and measures. The Performance and Accountability Manager was excellent in her presentation and went above and beyond to provide the instructional tools and examples needed to help us get started with rebuilding our plan.

At the commencement of the training, we tasked each division's leaders with creating a uniform goal for their division which accompanied strategies and measures to reach that goal. The plan was to take all the goals, strategies, and measures from each division and compile it into the new report. What seemed to be a simple process presented many challenges. Even after the accountability report training it was realized many leaders still faced obstacles with creating goals, strategies and measure based on the type of work which was performed. Over the next several weeks I held meetings with several members of the divisional leadership and their teams to assist with brainstorming and collaboration to establish goals, strategies, and measures. We reviewed their mandated requirements, current processes and procedures, and needs for process improvements and policy enhancements. We focused on ensuring the goals, strategies and measures developed were meaningful, useful, and had direct impact on their division's success. We also focused on ensuring the measures set were attainable and reasonable. Once all divisional goals, strategies and measures were developed it was time to piece the together the report

I quickly realize this job would need more than just my financial background to make the report readable, meaningful, and useful to the general populace. I quickly established an accountability report team to help assist me in building the report based on the data received from the divisions. On this team was a Civil Attorney with a background in multiple areas of the law who assist in many areas of legal operations that spans across all divisions. Another team member has a Masters in English and was chosen to ensure readability and a report free of grammatical errors. The last member chosen was the records and compliance coordinator who has a strong background in strategic and operational planning from the private sector.

This newly formed team sat together in a conference room for two days reviewing, revising, and organizing the goals, strategies, and measures, forming the agency narrative, and completing all other required templates to ensure the report was meaningful, useful, and readable to the general public. The goal was to ensure the report delivered value and insight of our agency's strategic plan and mission.

Upon completion of the report, it was forwarded to multiple staff members to review the report for readability, meaningfulness and delivery of intended message. We reviewed and discussed feedback for improvement. Once the report was finalized, it was submitted to the Executive Budget Office. At submission, I requested review of the report by the Performance and Accountability Manager to provide feedback on the report and any recommendations for improvements.

The Performance and Accountability Manager had recently created a new review tool for evaluating the accountability reports and supplied our agency with helpful information to improve the report for future years. She and her staff looked at the agency's strategic objectives and provided feedback on readability, clarity of desired outcome, relationship of metrics to goals, achievement clarity, and language clarity. We received this feedback on each goal, strategy and measure in our 2019 report. We also received constructive feedback on the agency narrative and other templates within the report. We are currently evaluating this feedback and will apply it constructively to the creation of next year's report.

Once the report was finalized, it was shared with all divisional leadership with the expectation that the goals, strategies and measures in the report were to be monitored and progress reported at fiscal yearend. We also encouraged leadership to ponder the report

throughout the year and begin planning goals, strategies, and measures to be included in next year's report which could bring positive change and advancement to their respective divisions and the agency as a whole.

My next step in rebuilding the report was to uncover who is doing the report well and how. I reached back out to the Performance and Accountability Report Manager at the EBO for her opinion on who was a champion in accountability reporting and her reflection of how they were achieving this success. She explained to me the South Carolina Department of Probation, Parole and Pardon Services was leading the way in overall execution of the accountability report. She explained stakeholder participation and employee engagement in the strategic planning process was paramount. She indicated they have a year-round strategic planning committee with employees from various levels, and their Agency Head is committed to taking the advice of that committee in strategic decision-making regarding organizational goals. This provides positive feedback which encourages commitment from the committee members, and they communicate it back to the teams they work with day-to-day. She goes on to explain how this is a great example of the importance of authenticity in these processes. If you say that stakeholder opinions matter, whether internally or externally, the committee's work must clearly show in the end product.

Given this valuable information I knew I needed to reach out to see just how this agency achieved such an arduous goal. I sent an email to the accountability report contact on the agency's report cover page. I received a timely and lively response from the agency's Grants Program Administrator with no hesitation to talk with me about their process.

I spoke with the Grants Administrator by phone on January 10, 2020. This conversation was quite possibly one of the most refreshing and enlightening discussion I have had since entering

state government in 2011. She said at her agency it *starts at the top*. The Agency Director is heavily involved and center of the strategic planning process. He makes it a priority. The strategic plan is everything and everything is centered on the plan. Of course, my first question was “how did you get there?”

Probation, Parole and Pardon comprises of six hundred fifty employees spread out among 46 counties across the state. Logistically thinking one would say it seems impossible to develop a strategic plan and have it actually stick in the day-to-day of an agency of that size. However, they have done it and proved it successful.

The Grants Administrator said this is the first time in the history of her career she has seen this level of effort go into developing a plan and having it succeed long term. She explained there is involvement at all employee levels and attention is given to the plan monthly. She explained the agency has established a strategic planning team which comprise of various members from all divisions of the agency. This team comes together frequently over a span of several months to create the agency’s strategic plan. Once the plan is developed, they meet monthly year-round to determine how the plan is going and evaluate each objective to determine an action plan to ensure the plan is successful. They have dedicated personnel to each portion of the accountability report and a research coordinator to meet with individual sections periodically to review progress toward their goals and strategic planning objectives comprised of the report. The finger is always on the pulse and the game is never resting.

One of the most astonishing recollections of the conversation was when she said the strategic plan was a living, breathing document. It wasn’t something they checked off a list, threw on a shelf and revisited a year later. This document was at the very heart of everything they did as an

agency. It was their collective agreement for betterment. It was the multilateral tie of all areas to a single mission. She explained the Agency Director mentioned the plan in almost every meeting. In all things he did, he always included the plan. Everyone at the agency at all level knows the plan, vision, and mission of the agency. No matter what county office you step into, the plan is at the center of their business processes. Because this Director owned this plan and chose to instill it in all things... it lives. Research shows executives must lead, support, follow-up and live the results of the strategic planning process. Or, the process will fail. This plan has been ingrained in the team at all levels and governs their daily decisions. It creates a powerful sense of accountability and ownership which proves unbeatable.

Evaluation

After thinking about my conversation with the Grant Administrator I realized I should have started here. I should have had this conversation before trying to start this journey. I should have started by talking with the ones who are getting it right. What I thought was cross-collaboration was not the best approach. What I thought was empowerment was not the most effective. Had I known what I know now, I would have started with the development of a strategic team. I would have started with leadership and employees from all levels at the same table. I would not have met with each division separately and encouraged development of divisionary goals in solitude. While it's true a certain level of planning must be done in smaller teams, the final results should have been discussed at the table by all. Cross collaboration would provide for interdisciplinary analysis of uncovering complex issues, encouraged creative strategic decision making and planning to create powerful change for the betterment of the organization and ultimately the citizens of South Carolina.

What the agency needs the most is cross-functional teamwork. This will create alignment around unifying our goals, create innovation through diversity, build communication and trust within leadership which is the concrete foundation of any successful organization. We must break the habit of divisional segregation if we will truly ever move forward. We must be one unified team working to meet the same mission. This change is instrumental to the health, morale, culture and success of the organization.

Summary and Recommendations

The journey to rebuilding the accountability report has seen its challenges and rewards. We have made important progress since our beginning situation. We have moved from an accountability report process of no involvement from divisional leadership to a process of passing the task of developing goals, strategies, and measures into the hands of those directly responsible. We have given the ability and empowerment to leaders to create strategies that are meaningful, measurable, and for the betterment of their work product and processes. We have moved from an accountability report that was unknown and unfamiliar within our agency to one that will be taught to every new hire which comes through our doors. The employees at all levels will know of the report and how they fit into meeting the goals in which the report comprise. This journey is ongoing and there is still must work to be done.

Recommendations moving forward:

- Construct our own strategic planning team.
- Give responsibility and ownership to all divisional leadership.
- Continue to evaluate our goals, strategies and measures.

- Ensure our next report is comprised of strategic goals to address vital and imperative improvement in process, procedures and legislation which is needed to ensure forward development for the betterment of our agency and the citizens of South Carolina.
- Create a schedule to reach out to all levels of staff on a periodic basis to determine needs.
- Attend one of the monthly strategic planning meetings at Parole, Pardon and Probation to see what it looks like and capture best practices for moving forward with our development of our planning team.
- Create accountability to meet the metrics set forth in the report through period monitoring.
- Continue to talk with agency leadership about the report and its importance.
- Provide an overview of the accountability report at each new employee orientation to create awareness and understanding from the gate.
- Lastly, to *never stop evaluating* our plan.

My hope for the future of our agency is to continue to provide an environment for innovation, growth and diversity. To be a place where when each employee steps through the doors they know how they fit into the overall mission. An agency which is comprised of cross-functional teams working together in uniformity. An environment where everyone has ownership. To never become stagnant but always look for ways to continue forward progress. To strive each day for pristine execution and become champions in business.

References

Sellers, Patricia (2011, August 24), *Tough love: Behind Pat Summitt's leadership success.*

Retrieved from <https://fortune.com/2011/08/24/tough-love-behind-pat-summitts-leadership-success/>

Wickham, Natalie (2016, December 12), *Which Comes First: Employee Engagement or*

Leadership Buy-In? Retrieved from <https://www.quantumworkplace.com/future-of-work/which-comes-first-employee-engagement-or-leadership-buy-in>