



Lucien Canton is a nationally recognized expert on strategic planning for crisis and disasters. A popular speaker and lecturer, he is the author of the best-selling *Emergency Management: Concepts and Strategies for Effective Programs* used as a textbook in many higher education courses.

Prior to starting his own practice, Mr. Canton served as the Director of Emergency Services for San Francisco and as an Emergency Management Programs Specialist and Chief of the Hazard Mitigation Branch for FEMA Region IX.

Lucien G. Canton, CEM (LLC), is a management consulting firm specializing in helping managers lead better in crisis.

Lucien G. Canton, CEM (LLC)
783 45th Ave
San Francisco, CA 94121
415.221.2562
415.520.5218 FAX
LCanton@LucienCanton.com
www.LucienCanton.com

You may reprint this paper provided you include my copyright, the source, the author, and "reprinted with permission."

Strategic Planning

Using your vision statement to demonstrate program value

The comedian Rodney Dangerfield got a lot of mileage out of the phrase, "I don't get no respect." He could easily have been an emergency manager. Our programs are underfunded, our advice is disregarded, and we're the first to get the chop when things go wrong. Add to that the research that shows our elected officials are disengaged from emergency management issues and it's no wonder we feel like Rodney on occasion.

Part of the problem is that emergency management programs, like security and safety programs, tend to be viewed as cost centers. That is, they are perceived as consuming resources rather than contributing to the goals of the organization. We are the equivalent of a fire extinguisher: a necessary cost that most of the time just hangs around and looks good but does little else unless there is an emergency.

However, I submit that the problem lies with us. We have done little to demonstrate our value by aligning ourselves strategically with organizational goals. We're good at tactical and operational planning but we do not plan strategically.

What Is Strategic Planning?

In a recent article in [Security Management magazine](#) entitled *The Strategic Leader*, security consultant Chris Walker defines strategic planning as "the ability to ... align organizational capabilities and competing interests in ways that effectively engage the everyday opportunities and problems presented by the competitive environment."

Peter Drucker, in [Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices](#), writes that strategic planning is a continuous process for making decisions, organizing efforts to carry out those decisions, and measuring the results.

Both the older definition used by Drucker and that of Walker carry the same implication: we can no longer just allow programs to be reactive, whether to grant funding or to disasters. Instead, we need to be able to focus on achieving specific goals and those goals must be aligned with those of the organization we serve.

Whose Vision?

Part of strategic planning involves identification of what the organization intends to achieve. This is usually referred to as a vision statement. But in an organization where every sub

element has its own vision statement, it begs the question, “Whose vision are we following?”

This brings us to our first common mistake: a disconnect between the organization’s vision and that of the emergency management program. We tend to adopt a generic “protect people, property, and environment” statement that is meaningless to senior officials. Consider, for example, the following vision statements:

- To become the premier regional disaster risk management organization.
- The Emergency Management Department will become a nationally recognized leader in emergency management.

Such statements are inward focusing and do not demonstrate any value to the organization. They can be perceived as self-serving and unrealistic. They also hold implications for your mission statement and strategic plan, topics that I’ll cover in future white papers.

Contrast the sample mission statements with the following:

- Leading the [organization’s] emergency management efforts to enhance protection and preservation of the lands and resources with which we are entrusted.
- A city prepared with coordinated capabilities to prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from all hazards
- Emergency management seeks to promote safer, less vulnerable communities with the capacity to cope with hazards and disasters.

Each demonstrate a connection to the organization, even the third which is a generic vision statement from the [Principles of Emergency Management](#).

Let’s consider one more example:

- The Office of Emergency Management will be committed to pro-active planning and preparation in support of emergencies in our community, seeking to establish ourselves as the benchmark by which others like us are judged.

Note that while this vision statement does offer some value to the community, it limits it to emergencies only, perpetuating the “fire extinguisher” mentality. The addition of the benchmarking statement offers nothing to the community and could be viewed as unrealistic.

How Important Is Your Vision Statement?

Does the vision statement really matter? If it is just words on paper, it really doesn’t. But if used correctly as the starting point for your strategic planning, it is extremely important.

The vision statement drives the development of your mission statement which in turn will determine the goals and objectives contained in your strategic plan. Achieving those goals and objectives moves you towards fulfillment of your mission and the realization of your vision.

Aligning your vision statement with your organization’s vision demonstrates your contributions to achieving the organization’s vision. It moves you from being a necessary cost that should be reduced to a minimum to a position where you are at least a player in the competition for scarce resources. 