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Browse > [Home](#) / [Small Business Resources](#) / [Business Articles](#) / [Organizational Leadership](#) / [Good Leaders Plan for the Unexpected](#)

Good Leaders Plan for the Unexpected

The failure to plan for the unexpected is one of the biggest mistakes people and companies make when working on their strategic and tactical plans. It's evident in many areas, including their short- and long-term planning and in both their personal and business plans. Here are a few examples:

- Budgeting for expenses. It's amazing how many people don't budget for the unexpected expenses that occur almost every month. Because of this, they often experience a shortfall at the end of the month. It's not unusual to see this lack of planning result in a 10 percent or more shortfall during any given month. This in turn has a compounding effect. When you overspend the budget in one month, you start the next month in the hole!
- Planning to be somewhere on time. The number-one reason why most people don't arrive on time is that they don't plan for the unexpected, such as traffic delays, weather, or last-minute phone calls. They end up 15 to 30 minutes late – often with a room full of people waiting or an important sales call being missed.
- A business downturn or problem. Most people don't want to anticipate future problems. They consider it to be negative. Well, negatives occur every year in business, and if you don't plan for them to happen, you may be caught short.

Here's a specific example of how the unexpected can be planned for and even eliminated: A business owner had a difficult time meeting his annual goals for revenues and profit because something happened every year that caused a down month. In this situation, the unexpected became the expected, but there was no strategy to overcome the problem until he devised a special plan.

Every month, the owner planned to accomplish 110 percent of the goals for the year. Before the year was out, the entire company had reached 100 percent of its goals for the year. Even with unexpected downturns, the company achieved and actually exceeded both its revenue and profit goals because the business owner planned for the unexpected.

LMI JOURNAL, VOLUME IV, NUMBER 3

Leadership Management® Institute

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