



## Carry Out a Premortem

*How to anticipate problems and failure before they occur*

By Andrew Cooke, [Blue Sky GPS \(Growth & Profit Solutions\)](#)

We are all familiar with post-mortems and forensic examinations from all the TV crime series. Post-mortems are good for telling you what went wrong, why it went wrong, and the consequences of things going wrong (death in this instance) – but it doesn't change the fact that the individual is still dead. It is case of being wise after the event, but being wise after the event doesn't stop or prevent things happening.

Pre-mortems are different. Pre-mortems are a great way to assess and think through a potential strategy or a negotiation. It is about being wise *before* the event. Gather your team together and take them through the following exercise:

### **Andrew's Five Steps in Carrying Out a Premortem**

<b>Step 1:</b>	<i>Select a prospective strategy.</i> Make sure you have a clear description of the strategic initiative.
<b>Step 2:</b>	<i>Set the scene.</i> You are a year in the future after you have implemented the strategy. Everything that could go wrong has gone wrong. To call it an unmitigated disaster would be kind. It is a total catastrophe and it has very serious consequences on the organization. People are not talking to each other. It has gone beyond being embarrassing. You know what has happened, but not <i>why</i> .
<b>Step 3:</b>	<i>Generate reasons for failure.</i> Give everybody in the room three minutes to write down on post-it notes all the reasons why they think this strategic initiative failed. Do this without talking or discussing, this allows each individual to contribute their ideas and intuition. This allows you to capture and utilize the unique blend of experiences, mental models and insights that each person has.
<b>Step 4:</b>	<i>Share the reasons.</i> Go round the group and get everybody, in turn, to share and explain one reason at a time. Stick all the notes on the wall or whiteboard. As a group get them to group any common or shared reasons.



	This helps you to identify the key reasons why the strategic initiative might fail.
<b>Step 5:</b>	<i>Reassess the strategic initiative.</i> In the light of what has been uncovered, identify what will need to be changed about the strategy to improve it How will this impact other strategic initiatives, and what are the consequences? Remember, good strategy consists of strategic initiatives that interlink and leverage each other, they do not stand alone.

Benefits of using pre-mortems include:

- Stopping people and teams from becoming over-confident, encouraging a more realistic assessment of risk
- Allowing people to voice their concerns and to share insights and experiences.
- Helping teams to worry about the right things.
- Allows you to regularly visit you strategy and anticipate problems.
- Helps you to prepare backup plans and exit strategies.
- It allows you to highlight factors that will influence success or failure, which may increase your ability to control the results.

So look at one of your strategies and carry out a premortem – what will you find?

### **About Andrew Cooke and Blue Sky GPS (Growth & Profit Solutions)**

#### **Andrew Cooke**

*An experienced executive coach, business facilitator, and management consultant Andrew has more than 25 years' national and international experience, working across a range of industries and businesses. He is passionate in helping people, teams and companies to unlock their individual and collective potential, enabling them to achieve their personal and business goals and, in turn, to help them unlock the potential of others.*

*Andrew has extensive experience in dealing with both blue-chip and start-up companies, and has had extensive international experience in the UK, the Middle East and Ireland across a range of industries.*



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*He has post-graduate business qualifications with a Master's in Business Administration (MBA) from the London Business School. He is an accredited associate coach for Marshall Goldsmith Stakeholder Centered Coaching in coaching executives and leaders.*

**Blue Sky GPS (Growth & Profit Solutions)**

*Andrew runs [Blue Sky GPS \(Growth & Profit Solutions\)](#), working with individuals, teams, groups and corporate so they can unlock their potential, that of others, and create a life and a job they love and choose to lead.*

*Through customized development programmes using experiential learning, backed by group workshops, individual one-to-one coaching and on-going support the individual and group development needs are addressed, the skills and capabilities are unlocked and the people can grow and achieve both personal and business outcomes on a sustainable basis. His blog, Growth and Profit, can be found at <http://growthandprofit.me>.*

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