

How to take Strategy and Turn It into Results By Jonathan Goldhill

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Nothing great has ever been achieved without strategy. Strategy is what builds skyscrapers, wins super bowls, launches space shuttles and puts companies on the Fortune 500 list. Yet if you were to ask many business owners to define strategy, they would fall short of being able to tell you what it means. The word probably exists as one of the most misunderstood words in business language.

Wikipedia defines strategy as a long term plan of action used to achieve a particular goal, most often “winning”. Strategic planning (Wikipedia defines) is an organization's process of defining its strategy, or direction, and making decisions on allocating its resources to pursue this strategy, including its capital and people. Various business analysis techniques can be used in strategic planning such as a SWOT and PEST analysis and other tools used by professionals like ourselves who are engaged in strategic planning, facilitation, consulting, coaching, etc.

Strategic planning should be involved in every aspect of your company’s growth if growth is to take place in a way that’s quick and painless. We’ve all heard that those who fail to plan, plan to fail. Planning is important, but having a clear and simple plan is even more important!

Some companies operate with multiple plans in place while some others may have no plan in place. While most companies have no written plan in place. But, how many of those plans are well thought out? When you run your business in a more abstract manner, expecting the “unsaid” to be understood, you don’t move in a linear, targeted direction toward your goal. As a result, you land into what I call the pitfalls of strategic planning.

Having a well defined process for conducting your strategic planning is important. Do you have one? Clarifying and communicating the vision for the company is important. Also, setting the goals for next year and defining the strategies and tactics to support the achievement of those goals is important. When you’ve successfully accomplished this, your strategic plan is complete. But, now it’s time to execute them. Our research says organizations achieve only 60% of their strategies and that fully 50% of all projects fail to achieve their objectives.

So, what are the pitfalls that can occur in strategic planning? Here are 5 “traps” among 15-20 we’ve identified that can occur and how to avoid each.

1) People don’t exactly understand the plan and all the details so they begin to make it up and add their own pieces of input due to lack of understanding, poor alignment and little accountability to the plan.

How to avoid: Leave no stone unturned in the communication process. Test your team to make sure that your message is received well and understood from management to staff. Some people are more visual. Some are more auditory. Test their understanding of the strategic plan in ways that can reach all types of employees. Meet regularly to review the plan and discuss what’s holding us back from successful execution of it.

2) People start to fight over power of who's in charge of what in an almost "survival of the fittest" fashion or mentality.

How to avoid: Spell out exactly who's in charge of each initiative and for how long. Clearly indicate that they are the initiative champion and get others enrolled on their team to work on that project. Define the power structure in such a way that power within your strategy is never simply "up for grabs", shared or has no single person who is accountable for the outcome. Give a timeline for which the task is to be finished by the person in charge.

3) People try to resolve conflict on their own and often not doing so in way that's constructive. This leaves the strategy hung up in ill-emotion and unresolved conflict.

How to avoid: Create a conflict resolution board: when people are in conflict have them go before or submit an email to explain the nature of the problem. The board should be able to create a solution to the problem that is done within a window of three to four hours. If the original board members are occupied, have board alternates that are on call for conflict resolution. If you are the owner and the sole board member extra care is required to judge fairly and reasonably.

4) People become discouraged because they lose focus as they see the goal as something separate from their position or day-to-day responsibilities. They lose momentum and enthusiasm dealing with the tyranny of everyday priorities. And, lose sight of what's important in favor of what's more urgent. After a long weekend or holiday, they come back and forget what they were supposed to be excited about.

How to avoid: Create weekly pep rallies to reignite old enthusiasm midweek. Draw pictures of the overall goal. Let people see it and understand what you're working for again and again. They have to take ownership of the goal. The goal has to become part of them and something they will benefit from. Reward people for reaching the goal. Hold people accountable for failing to follow through.

5) Communication breaks down between departments.

How to avoid: Communications workshops within your company can give insight into ourselves and the other people we work closely with. Practice better communications skills that foster understanding between people. The most basic form of communication explains to your peers what you need. They then repeat back to you what they understood you saying. They then confirm or deny what they understood to be true. If you deny it, the process is then repeated until clarity is achieved.

Strategic planning is something that should be celebrated as a way of bringing people together to share in a common vision or goal. You are simply creating a common language in which the whole team can understand. You are looking for your whole team to be on the same page. This way you can avoid the pitfalls that stop most companies from even reading out of same book in how to get where they want to go. Thinking strategically is a requirement to be a successful business owner.

In the words of Napoleon Hill, "The majority of men meet with failure because of their lack of persistence in creating new plans to take the place of those which fail." Remember to always think strategically!



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