

**BOARDROOM STRATEGY****MIKE DESJARDINS***Your company's strategic plan needs a solid framework*

A successful strategic plan design keeps two things in mind: focus driven by simplicity and clarity and engagement of the people who will be held accountable for the results.

The more complex the plan, the less likely anyone in your organization will read it or, even worse, take action from it.

Here is a framework and process for your strategic plan that will ensure you focus on what's important, narrowing down the details to the critical pieces around which your team can rally. Using this framework with your team to build a plan will dramatically increase engagement and accountability.

Wildly courageous decision (WCD). As CEO, you are the chief dreamer, schemer and long-term thinker. Before engaging your team in a strategic planning experience, carve out some time from your schedule to dream 10 to 25 years ahead from today. What courageous direction can you passionately make a decision to take your organization in? Think of this as the North Star you are navigating toward: a simple statement that sets a long-term perspective that everyone can rally behind.

Mission. If your wildly courageous decision is the "what" then think of your mission as the "how": what behaviours and actions over time will lead to your organization realizing its WCD?

Strengths, weakness, opportunities, threats and vulnerabilities. Have you, your team members, and their direct reports list out what your organization is truly strong at, weak at, where the market opportunities lie, what external forces can threaten your success and where you are vulnerable to inside and outside forces - your company's Achilles Heal.

Rhinos, whinos, sacred cows and hidden agendas. Rhinos are the large, dirty, messy issues that are hiding under your boardroom table causing big distraction, wasted resources and energy, and yet everyone is pretending they're not in the room.

Whinos are the issues team members consistently whine about that never seem to get dealt with. Sacred cows are the core tenets in your business that you're not willing to compromise on or change: they're part of the secret sauce of your success. Hidden agendas are the plans that people are not disclosing, instead they're se-

cretely working on building alliances and putting significant energy into something that may or may not be right for your organization. (The Lexus ISF is a good example of a hidden agenda of an engineer at Lexus. It was built in secret in a remote warehouse behind the head office by a skunk-works team and unveiled to Toyota's CEO after the final prototype

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was complete.)

Values and core purpose. What core values are forming the concrete foundation upon which your organization is built? These are the values driving key decisions made at a senior level within your business, not values you may aspire to. What is the core purpose for your company existing in the world? Why will the world be a better place as a result of your long-term success?

Objectives. Use the infor-

mation you uncover in the sections above to craft a series of five to 10 key objectives that your organization will achieve over the next 12 months. The easiest way to know whether you have a well-framed objective is to ask, "How will we know when this objective is complete and would we throw a party to celebrate achieving it?" If the answer is unclear then you're likely missing a deadline, a clear success measure or the objective is not specific, reasonable or challenging enough.

Owners. "The executive team" is not the answer to effective accountability for strategic objectives. Each objective should have an accountable champion who ensures that the executive team is kept up to speed on progress and the road blocks along the way.

Action steps. Many companies stop at the objective stage and the result is low clarity on the first move and subsequent steps. The result is a sandbagged plan. Create an action-step plan for each objective that answers the statement, "When these steps are complete, the objective will be successful."

Communication. Without a communication plan that shares the strategic plan, the

reality is the same as winking at someone in the dark: you know what you're doing but they haven't a clue. Decide as an executive team what consistent, concise and compelling messages you plan to share with the rest of the organization, including reporting on results throughout the year, and what mediums have the best chance of reaching the widest audience. Using the steps we've walked through will provide a solid framework to build your strategic plan, ensure that year after year you have a consistent way of describing the path for your business and engage your team in executing the plan effectively.

As the Cheshire Cat said to Alice, "If you don't know where you're going, then any road will take you there." ■

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