

# Creating a Strategy That Sticks

Learn how to get out of the weeds and move into the future you envision for your company, or even yourself. **BY SARAH LEVITT**

Once arrived at the annual strategic meeting of a Fortune 1000 company and found that the length of an entire wall was papered, top to bottom, with ideas. The senior leadership team, which I was about to lead, had been in an intense brainstorming session for two days.

The wall of ideas was in keeping with what they'd done in the past. They'd gather, ideate and then go back to business-as-usual after returning to the office. The time and money spent was in good faith, but the daily pressures were too consuming. And their plans did not survive beyond the retreats.

They found themselves caught in the challenging position of many of my clients: trying to lead into the future while producing in the present.

Many organizations can come to agreement on the "what needs to change," once their ideas are in the room. The real struggle begins afterward, in the execution and implementation of the how, who and when.

The company's assembled leaders and I whittled down the list of strategic priorities to just two that incorporated their best thinking from that wall. Both would move the company's "needle" across multiple high priority areas: market share, customer satisfaction and brand. Each was crucial for the organization, which wanted to accelerate its pace of growth.

With buy-in from all who were there, a team-designed action plan was created. Measures and check-ins were agreed upon, and there was room for the plan to evolve over the course of the year.

There was also an opportunity for departments to cross-pollinate and learn from one another, further reducing silos and building cohesion. And with regular, quarterly meetings scheduled, there was a

forum for discussing what was going well; what needed to be tweaked, and which IBPs (internal best practices) could be put into process.

They had created a customized strategy tailored to their particular objectives. Perhaps best of all, the plan was carried out amidst the daily demands of doing business. This leadership team was committed to doing things differently.



The president of the division, who already had plenty on his plate, made it clear that he would not be responsible for it all. Accountability needed to be spread among other key stakeholders. Not surprisingly, the senior leadership team was happy to step up and create a piece of their future.

Not bad for a day's work with two more scheduled later that year to follow-up on implementation.

It might seem overwhelming, to wrangle a slew of suggested ideas into a streamlined strategy that can be successfully executed. But these three keys will help you go a long way towards fulfilling that goal:

**1. Make your strategy the living extension of what your organization is and what it stands for.** Know your

underlying why, and you'll pull people along rather than push them uphill.

What's the meaning behind your effort, the reason for your organization? Why do you exist? What do you mean to your customers? Your employees? What do you want to become?

**2. Keep it simple.** Complicated does not mean it's right; it means it's complicated. The quicksand of daily pressures will swallow a strategy if it's not simple and clear enough to be executed within the rigors of daily business.

Take into account that leaders are also likely producers and create support for the work that the strategy will require. And, remember that executing on your strategy is the ticket to getting out of the weeds, even if it means more effort in the short term.

**3. Create agreed-upon measures and check-ins and drop the shame and blame.** View your strategy as one that can be tweaked, modified and improved as you learn along the way.

Make the strategy breathable, and allow it to iterate rather than refusing to adjust. Course-correct when necessary and remember that progress is rarely linear. Continue to bring the best ideas into the room.

If you're leading an organization, you likely see opportunity all around. That's your job. But being able to identify and leverage those few critical ideas is just as important as your skill at inviting them into the room.

Your capacity to take an aerial view, think strategically and execute on those imperatives might be of greatest value.



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