



To get Innovative Results, One Must Ask Innovative Questions

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Ninety five percent of the companies I work with all have very nice Strategic Plans. Many of these cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to create and I can tell you they typically look very impressive as they sit on the book shelf and collect dust. Let me explain myself with an example that has happened more than once. I met with a President of a mid-sized corporation a few years back and he was very excited about the Strategic Plan they had been working on with another consultant. I said "that sounds great, let me ask you a question? What do you plan to do with the Strategic Plan once it is finished?" With a surprised look and then a bit of bewilderment he responded with "I don't know." And therein lies the problem. Organizations have strategic plans. They also have their mission statements hanging on the walls and yet a clear ninety percent of the time these plans are not being *implemented in a methodical, efficient and profitable manner*. In my experience the plan was created, people met for the first few weeks with the intent to implement, but other things quickly became more important and the SP got shoved further and further down the priority list and then shelved. Plans are great and plans are essential, but only if they get *implemented and only if they directly impact the customer*.

Perhaps if you approach this from another direction and ask more insightful questions you will arrive at a more profitable and fulfilling destination. Instead of creating or re-creating another Strategic Plan, think instead about how you and the people in your organization can be *innovative* with how you approach your business, your customers, your industry, your processes etc? Don't follow the pack and solve problems, instead set the pace, be *innovative* and create opportunities. Here are some suggestions that Allan Wiess proposes.

- Statistically, our successes will tend to improve when our data and processes become more refined.
- Based on the previous statement, our objectives will become more of a reality when our goals and HOW to achieve them are clearly planned out.
- Review success as well as failures to glean the best of each. We must do this religiously.
- We have built our success on Innovation. Therefore, processes and the refinement of productive and lucrative processes must be our fundamental objective.
 - Questions to help glean the seed from the chaff.
 - What expected/unexpected successes have we had?
 - In which geographic areas have been more or less successful?
 - In which market or industry segments?
 - Customer segments, demographic, racial, gender?

- Successes or blunders from our suppliers/vendors?
 - Competitors successes/blunders and what may we learn from them or what pieces did they miss that we could capitalize on?
 - What unexpected sources have asked us to sample, distribute, and represent them lately?
- Was a success or failure determined by
 - Poor or successful planning?
 - Poor or successful processes?
 - Poor or successful timing?
 - Poor or successful implementation?
 - Poor or successful management?
 - Poor or successful follow-through?
 - Bottleneck issues
 - Out maneuvering a competitor and if so, how?
 - Why do some processes, mgr's, dept's work better at certain times than others?
 - What major changes are occurring with our customers?
 - What major changes with our geographic markets?
 - Changes in our industry and competitors?
 - ETC.....as above?
 - Who is doing business correctly, and what can we learn from them?
 - What potentially high growth businesses related to yours are dominated by only one to three competitors?
 - What parts of our competitors businesses are growing faster than the economic population growth?
 - Technology
 - What tech in your business are converging or merging?
 - Which of your tech is now being joined to outside tech and or partnerships and how can we leverage/improve on this?
 - Which of our tech can be more effective if deliberately converged?
 - What would be the IDEAL convergence of tech in your business?

Demographic

- How has the age distribution of customers and users changed?
- How might the educational level change?
- Income distribution change?
- How might buying habits change and how can we leverage or impact this trend/knowledge?

Perception

- What changes are occurring in how your products are perceived?
- What changes are occurring in how customers perceive our value?

The four assessment areas

COST:

- What resources are available to support this opportunity?
- What are the investment requirements?
- What do we or others have regarding a track record in this area?
- Do we need to hire people?
- Do we need to secure expertise?
 - Other cost considerations
 - People
 - Materials
 - Equipment
 - Research
 - Marketing
 - Legal
 - Promotion
 - Time
 - Pilot
 - contingency

BENEFIT:

- Can a successful pilot program translate into a successful and lucrative offering/department?
- To what degree is the risk worth the benefit?
- Specifically, how long until we see the expected results?
 - Other Benefits
 - Market share
 - Return / Profit
 - Prestige
 - Service
 - Earning's
 - Fallout
 - Safety
 - Quality
 - Morale
 - Growth

STRATEGIC FIT:

- Does the opportunity fit our corporate strategy and or projected strategy?
- How well does the opportunity fit our current systems, procedures and methods?
- Is this opportunity in alignment with our culture and direction of our business?

- Other Strategic Fit questions:
 - Tech
 - Product /service
 - Customer base
 - Market segments served
 - Production needs
 - Distribution
 - Methods of sales
 - Resources
 - Size growth
 - Profit / return
 - direction

IMPLEMENTATION:

- Will the organization/culture reject this idea?
- Do we understand the tech and implementation issues?
- Are we dependent on outsiders for product, parts, service, delivery, returns etc?
- How many new processes and approaches does this require of us?
 - Implementation
 - Current production
 - Current people
 - Degree of control or influence
 - Current culture
 - Acceptance of change
 - Need for a champion or exemplar
 - Financing needs
 - Image
 - Access to outside needs
 - Legal / regulatory needs
 - Precedent

Questions to determine opinion or facts:

Here is where we want to do the mental work necessary to determine if this is a good idea or a profitable idea. The more refined the method at this juncture, the more accurate and useful the process will be.

- What evidence do you have for saying that?
- What precedent can you cite that makes you feel or think that way?
- What is the basis for the revenue projection you're making?
- Why do you think we would have difficulty in getting people to buy in to this approach or idea?