



Work Place: Implementing a Strategic Plan Puts Companies on Path Toward Victory

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Whether it's called a strategic plan for larger organizations or a plan of attack for smaller mom-and-pop businesses, the foundational elements are the same.

Having a clear plan on where your business is going and how to successfully and consistently achieve goals, so that all of your employees, managers and leadership fully understand their respective duties on how to get there, is paramount.

The most pivotal aspect of this entire process rests on the ability of leadership to implement the strategic plan so that actions, statements, and behaviors result in improved conditions at all levels within your organization. When this takes place, your internal and external customers will benefit greatly and your competitors will try to emulate, resulting in your leading and your competitors following.

In my experience working with national and international companies, approximately 95 percent of them have strategic plans, but only 3 percent to 7 percent implement them consistently and effectively.

For example, I had one president share with me that his organization had just finished a yearlong, mid-six-figure, strategic plan creation project. However, when I asked him what he intended to do with it, he replied with a deer-in-the-headlights expression, "I don't know."

Many of the problems surrounding implementation don't stem from lack of trying, but rather from lack of understanding. Company leadership either believes the creation of the plan is enough and implementation will automatically take care of itself, or they confuse general strategic plan knowledge with the processing of the plan.

In other situations, I have found they have gathered inaccurate information or no information at all, which they base their strategic plan on. Successful strategic plan implementation requires that your leadership team have skills, knowledge and experience, which creates competency when faced with follow-through.

To test your and your leadership team's competency in relation to strategy implementation is to assess their understanding and skills in this area. To improve upon performance, you must consistently measure it. These questions will help you and your team discover what needs refinement.

I suggest you use a 0-5 Lickert Scale, where zero means "some of the managers" and five means "all the managers."

1. Your managers understand the strategic plan and are able to successfully set department goals in support of the strategy?
2. Your managers lead meetings in which strategic issues are discussed in relation to operations?
3. Your managers, if asked, could provide a priority list of issues directly related to strategy implementation for which they are responsible?
4. Your managers set their subordinates' goals and objectives according to the strategic goals that relate to their operations?
5. Your managers evaluate, reward, and promote their people with strategic goals in mind?

How did you and your management team do? If you scored mostly 4's and 5's then you are probably doing well despite the economy. If you scored in the mid range of 2's and 3's then you are doing OK but now you know who and what needs to be improved upon. If you got blank stares or scored 0's and 1's then you and your leadership team would be wise to take your noses off the grind stone and put some time and energy into your destination and how you intend to get there.

Working hard is needed, but working smart is required and nothing is more important to business success than working toward a specific destination and making sure you and your team have the fundamental skills, knowledge and competency to create and implement a useful strategic plan.

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