

No Dust Strategic Plan - Six Points to Start

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Dust is the common element on many business strategies. The binder that your team spent multiple days at the offsite creating, you know, the one full of pages of stuff your team was going to do. It is the blue one with the spine label that says 2009 Business Strategy.

Building the strategic plan was hard work in spite of the great venue. Tough questions were asked. Traditional thinking was challenged. Rigorous discussions got heated. Wine was drunk and the food was good. Stories told. Relationships strengthened. Commitments were made.

You completed the process energized and ready to slay the dragon. It is several years later and the dragon has not been slain or even scratched. Business as usual – status quo prevails.

Many would call this a failure of execution and it may well be. It may also simply be poor management or a poorly done plan. Maybe the world changed too quickly for the plan and people to adapt. There are reasons that strategic plans don't get executed and some of them reside in the strategic plan itself, others in the execution process.

The right strategic plan well executed gets results. Flawless execution of a bad strategic plan can kill companies and careers. Rigid adherence to a plan that no longer makes sense wastes time, resources and credibility.

You are a leader, responsible for getting business results through others. You may or may not participate in the "formal" creation of the strategic plan for your business. You are still a player in the success of the plan. So, player, if you are in, here are some things to consider.

Reset perspective.

Be a business leader first, a department, division, functional leader later. If you spend all day every day being the scientist Senior VP who runs the 50 person R&D lab, chances are you have a tight focus on some specific projects. Success in these projects defines your value to the business, and likely your rewards and recognition. Get ready to take off the lab coat. Your scientific knowledge base, merged with a broad business perspective and divergent thinking are essential. Show up as a business person or better yet as a customer. What is best for the business may not always feel best to a specific part of the business.

What's going on?

Speed and magnitude of change in the world creates opportunities and risks. Get ready to talk about what's going on in the world. What trends are shaping the future? What did you believe to be true last year that is no longer true? What aspects of your business are based on historical realities that no



longer exist? Shift Happens is a fascinating slide show about new realities that will take about 5 minutes to watch and a few minutes to catch your breath. This show began life as a slide deck two years ago and you may have seen it then. It is now a video - fun to watch, mind-boggling and there are a few things in it that are no longer true. Wow! BTW, 5 billion YouTube videos were watched during July. For a deeper dive, take a look at Futurist Update from the World Future Society.

Find, engage and learn from strange folks

The late Jim Morrison said it best, "People are Strange." Others view the same situations and even data points different than you or me. They also behave differently. We tend to surround ourselves with people just like us. It is easier. Status quo gets perpetuated and innovation takes a back seat when everyone thinks alike.

Conflict is good – Easy consensus is suspect

I'm talking about real substantive and animated debate and disagreement about the future and possibilities. Passionate people with different perspectives are golden. Whiney wimps, turf protectors or grandiose egos running amuck may need some help to succumb to the positive dynamic of the team or be gone.

Trust the Process

There are a few owners, CEOs and senior execs that see themselves as capable leaders of strategic planning for their organizations. Some are and some aren't. Strategic planning consultants abound like flies at a summer picnic. The best will provide you not only with desired results but a great time in the process. Others are incompetent. Find someone trustworthy to lead the process, then trust them. If they are doing their job, you will be uncomfortable at times.

No "How?" for now

There tends to be a gravitational pull to tactical discussions too soon. Maintain the right altitude and avoid the "how" discussion until after the "what" is clearly defined.

Get your mind aligned with the points above and you will be better prepared than 90% of the leaders who begin a strategic planning process. Remember, in times of great change there will always be self-appointed guardians of the past and other naysayers. Some may be right about some things. Some are losers. Some are wealthy, famous, powerful and wrong. Real participation builds ownership and commitment which drives execution to results.

Kill Killer Phrases

What are the common phrases frequently said in your organization that stifle creativity, kill innovation and generally toss a wet blanket on the party? What phrases do you personally use that do the same? Stop it.



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