

Strategy to Succeed:

A Practical Guide
to Being a
Strategic Leader

by barbara higgins

an MSBCoach leadership resource

INTRODUCTION

A leader without a plan or a plan without a leader simply won't succeed. Great leaders match their passion for a future vision with the confidence and credibility that comes from strategic planning, in order to achieve that vision. To be successful in the long-term, your organization must have quality leadership and actionable strategy.

Wikipedia defines strategy as “a high level plan to achieve one or more goals under conditions of uncertainty. Strategy is important because the resources available to achieve these goals are usually limited.” Although there are volumes written about the methodology to articulate, the working definition is that simple and that complex. Your strategy process requires effective communication about your purpose and how you plan to implement, typically expressed as your “mission and goals”. Internally, this strategy can provide a vital decision-making tool that rallies your staff around your long-term goals. Externally, strategy defines your organization’s identity, communicating what your unique advantage is, in the marketplace; it only makes sense that if you can’t easily define your organization in a brief, passionate description, your clients can’t either.

...if you can't easily define your organization in a brief, passionate description, your clients can't either.

So how do you help your organization define and manage an effective strategy? Consider the following practical ways to **assess your organization, enhance your approach, and energize your role.**

1

Commit to being a Strategic Leader and Manager

One of the simplest tests of your connection to the organization is whether you refer to the organization as a “we” or a “they”. If you talk about initiatives saying “our plan is to” or “we are building a program to”; you are part of the strategy. To truly be a part of impacting the future, your level of commitment is important.

Take the time to talk to your staff regularly about your view of the purpose and future for your business.

Ask yourself the following questions in your role as a strategy leader:

- Do you discuss your strategy with others on a regular basis?
- Are new employees trained to understand the organizational strategy?
- Do leadership messages convey the mission and strategy?
- Could you describe the mission for your organization?
- Do your goals tie to the broader objectives for your organization?

An effective approach to strategy has been proven to be an integral part of the culture for highly successful companies. Leaders who understand long-term goals are more effective in moving the organization forward in mission with purposeful decisions. Your leadership skills will improve as you consider the broader purpose of your organization. Like all complex processes and human resource challenges, you must be committed to the time and effort necessary to participate. The system works best when the leadership prior-

itizes discussions of strategy. If you commit to your role as a strategic leader, you can make a real difference in organizational success.

“ Take the time to talk to your staff regularly about your view of the purpose and future for your business. ”

2

Understand and Internalize Your Mission Statement

Your mission statement is the highest level purpose statement for your organization. As a leader in your organization, you should take the time to understand the mission. Your mission statement should convey what you do, who it's for, and why your product is superior.

Although I have read many articles and books on strategy, my favorite thirty-second explanation of mission statements comes from the movie *City Slickers* as they discuss the meaning of life. [In this clip](#), Curly explains that you need to figure out the one thing that matters most and stick to making that work. Even though this is a movie reference (with colorful language) the secret to strategy really is about knowing what your organization's "one thing" is. It also means knowing what that one thing is not; when you have to manage scarce resources for money, effort, and time, you need to consider what not to do in order to focus on your core purpose. Quoting Michael Porter of Harvard Business School, "The essence of strategy is choosing what not to do".

Your mission statement, communicates your "one thing". Like the movie, the secret to business success comes from that passion and clarity of purpose.



To be an effective strategic leader, you need to take time to challenge your understanding of the mission. What do you say when someone asks what your organization does? Does your mission statement clearly define what your organization does? Could you tell from the mission statement what your organization would not do?

Try this simple formula to consider key areas of your mission statement. Answer these three questions:

1. WHAT DO YOU DO?

2. WHO DO YOU DO IT FOR?

3. WHY PICK YOUR PRODUCT/SERVICE?



Barbara Higgins
Leadership and Strategy
Consultant

barbara@msbcoach.com

Barbara has over 20 years of experience developing and leading teams in customer service, change management, leadership development, long-term strategic planning and more. She has served as Chief Planning Officer for CFA Institute and currently works as an adjunct business professor.

Her broad experience in strategy, operations, and leadership translates to creative and relevant solutions for your leaders. She specializes in mission-driven organizations and measuring long-term success, utilizing her experience in the Balanced Scorecard and Strategy Maps (The Balanced Scorecard; Kaplan and Norton; Harvard Business School). She is similarly passionate about bringing her experience to local non-profit organizations to help with strategy and business planning.

Envision the Future Possibilities and a Plan for Strategic Success

As Jim Collins documents in *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, “Highly visionary companies often use bold missions--what we prefer to call BHAGs (pronounced bee-hags, short for “Big Hairy Audacious Goals”)--as a particularly powerful mechanism to stimulate progress” . Especially when starting a business or approaching significant change, an inspiring and audacious goal provides the necessary energy for big change. We are a short-term society and too frequently decisions are made for short-term benefits. As a leader, though, you need to articulate a long-term vision to realize future potential.

Some visionary leaders have a powerful vision to communicate that can energize an organization for success. But not all leaders have that level of clarity. Take the time to plan a dynamic strategy discussion with diverse participant perspectives to really dream about the possibilities. Inspiration and energy is created in this context. Be sure to let in all the brainstorming ideas to pollinate creativity and the magic of collaboration. To make a diverse group feel comfortable with talking about long-term options, having the right template can be helpful to capture ideas. One effective tool for defining vision is the Shift Chart or Change Portfolio template.

So how do you discuss the changes needed for future planning in an inclusive format that is specific and actionable? In a presentation by David Norton, of Harvard Business School, he detailed the concept of a shift chart or change portfolio. Consistent with their [Balanced Scorecard methodology](#), Robert S Kaplan and David P Norton, have used this simple concept to define areas of change for your organization.

SHIFT CHART

current	type of change	future
How do you describe your current organization?	What are the key areas that need to be changed?	How will you need to operate to reach future success?

CONSIDER THESE FOR STRATEGIC CHANGE

STRATEGIC STEP

4

Define and Align your Strategic Objectives

With the mission statement as your guide, define the objectives that move you toward your vision for the future. For the pragmatic leader, this practical step turns planning into specific action steps to achieve your vision. Strategic objectives are the highest level, organizational goals. Your new initiatives should all align with approximately five strategic objectives. Although it is hard work to draft these objectives to fit into a few objectives, the benefit is in the communication of priorities for progress and the focus for your resources.

Strategic objectives create a framework that connects the goals throughout an organization. Defining goals is the critical step to cascade bold initiatives. You need to involve a broad cross section of your leaders, in order to ensure you've really considered the comprehensive impact of any new initiatives. The process should be scheduled with enough time to edit and refine in order to create a viable annual action plan.

If you are concerned about the time involved, consider how much confusion is created when employees are not clear about what you are trying to accomplish. Using a facilitator for this session to maximize the effective output and allow everyone to participate without dominating the discussion.

brainstorm
opportunities

define
options

refine plans
and budgets

finalize and
prioritize

implement
and manage

STEPS TO ENSURE AN EFFECTIVE PROCESS

STRATEGIC STEP

5

Develop a Powerful Visual: the Strategy Map

Because visuals can be very impactful for telling your strategy story, it is important to develop a visual that you can use in communications and repeat so the message resonates. The strategy map concept was also created by developed by Robert S. Kaplan and David Norton of Harvard Business School Strategy Maps can be very complex in communicating the operations of a complex organization. But they can also provide a simple and meaningful to tell the story of how you plan to achieve your mission. The Strategy map can help to illustrate how your strategic objectives connect to your mission. In my experience, it is a powerful visual to connect the mission, objectives, and to add the operational necessities as the platform for success. So what does that look like?



MSBCoach provides services to support your strategic planning and leadership training. Please [contact us](#) for further information.



501 West Main Street Charlottesville VA 22903
434.293.5758