

Essentials for Successfully Implementing Your Strategic Plan – Part One

By Gayla Hodges

Developing a strategic plan is a critical effort both for corporations and for individuals or families. Developing the plan, however, will not achieve the goals outlined in the plan without certain essential actions and activities by the people who created it. Far too often, strategic plans are written and then put away and ignored. This approach is almost never successful in achieving goals.

Whether your strategic plan is intended to guide a corporation, a small business, a family or your personal life, successful goal achievement is directly proportionate to the steps taken to ensure systematic implementation of the plan. There are, thus, several essentials for successfully implementing your strategic plan. The steps outlined below are the most critical for success.

The first step in implementing your strategic plan is to communicate the contents of the plan to the people who are affected by it. Although this is also a place for involvement, effective communication must occur first. The communication piece is critical because leaders need to understand first what the strategic plan contains – what is the intent of the strategic plan – before they can communicate it to others.

Once the leaders understand the plan and its intent, they should communicate their understanding to employees. Research has shown that frontline employees prefer to get the information about corporate goals and strategic planning from their immediate supervisor. This is the person they know best and the person they choose to trust.

It is very easy to assume that a personal strategic plan needs to be known only to the person who wrote it. This is a mistake. It is important to identify the people who need to know what is in your plan. Who are the people who can support you in trying to reach your goals? Who are the people who are likely to encourage you as you strive to reach those goals? These are the people with whom you want to sit down, spend some time, and just share what you put together as your goals for the year.

In a corporate setting it is even more important that everyone get on board and know the goals of the organization. In this context you simply cannot over-communicate your strategic plan. Doing a session with smaller teams and groups within the company gives individuals an opportunity to look at the strategic plan in detail. They can ask questions, they can pick it apart (not in order to edit it into something different) and ask all the questions they want to ask about it. It is vital to have someone in the session who was involved in creating the strategic plan. This person can explain what was intended by specific words and ideas.

My experience is that we spend a large amount of time finding just the right words to put in a plan. Too often, however, we do not spend enough time communicating what we meant by those words.

The second step in implementing your strategic plan is to get people involved as you communicate. Get workgroups and/or individuals involved so they actually do something with the strategic plan. In many organizations getting people involved in doing something with the plan means there is a performance plan. Creating the individual or team performance plan is a matter of asking, “Given that these are the goals of the organization, how does my job fit into these goals? How do I make a difference? How do I help the company reach toward achieving the goals set out in the strategic plan?”

Communication of the content and the intention of the plan should be linked with involvement in implementing the plan within the organization so that, whether I am the CEO or the janitor, I understand clearly how my contribution helps us meet the goals and implement the strategic plan.

The third step in successfully implementing your strategic plan is to keep it before the people. Many companies create a beautiful strategic plan. It is glossy and colorful. People look at it and say, “Hey, that’s nice,” put it away, and no one ever looks at it again. It is critical that the leaders in your organization carry the strategic plan with them in a printed document. They should bring out a copy of the plan and say, “This is how what we are doing fits our strategic plan.” All reporting on performance goals should refer back to the plan. “This action supports our strategic goal of people management.” “This activity supports our strategic goal of production.” The point is that people clearly and repeatedly see the link to the strategic plan.

If you are working with your personal strategic plan it is even more important that you keep it before you because it is so easy to become distracted and get off track if you do not have a performance plan or an accountability partner. In fact, I would encourage everyone working with a personal strategic plan to find an accountability partner.

The fourth step in successfully implementing your strategic plan is to conscientiously live the values expressed in your strategic plan. Strategic plans usually carry other information, such as company values. Again, the values are very important because your leaders need to live them. This means you cannot post the values on the wall while people behave totally differently and still call it a corporate value. A stated value is not a value unless or until you see it behaviorally embodied within the organization.

If you are working with a personal strategic plan, you need to monitor how things you are doing and trying to accomplish fit your value system. If you are trying to do something which goes against your value system, it will be extremely hard for

you to accomplish the task or goal. It will be much harder to stay on track, and you will encounter many more obstacles.

An important part of Natural Effectiveness™ is to know what your values are and to work within your value system. This observation applies equally to individuals and to corporations.

Steps five through eight will be discussed in the second part of the article.