

Sustaining Strategic Momentum

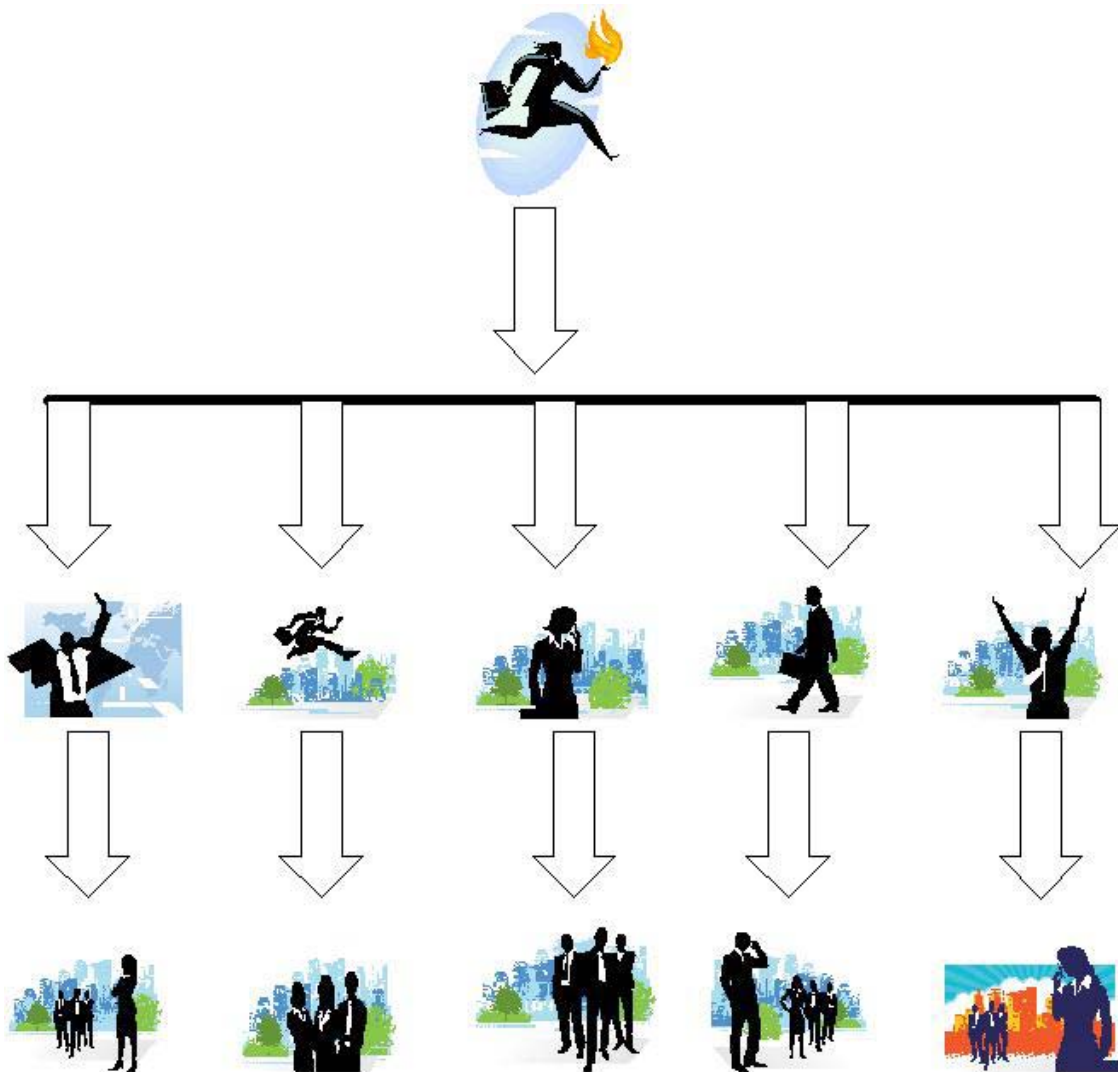
By Gayla Hodges

Sustaining strategic momentum is a leadership function. In our last two-part article, *Essentials for Successfully Implementing Your Strategic Plan*, we mentioned what leaders do.

“Leaders have a vision. They build a small group of people who share that vision. They have the ability to articulate that vision and to build buy-in from others. Then they implement the vision and the small group of people they have gathered can move mountains and make many, many things happen in an organization.”

Your most important role as leader of an organization is strategy. The best way to sustain the momentum you created by following the guidelines of the *Essentials for Successfully Implementing Your Strategic Plan* is to continue to deploy the small group of people who share the vision and are engaged in helping you implement it. If they have taken their leadership role seriously, they will have engaged a group of people who share the vision and who are energized to implement the strategies needed to reach that vision. So the amount of strategic momentum you can attain will be directly proportionate to the amount of energy and attention to strategy that is applied by those key individuals who share the strategic vision.

The diagram below illustrates how you can “spread your influence” and build momentum through others.



Think of this group of key individuals who share the strategic vision as strategic channels throughout the organization. Those who share your passion should be kept in the know about what's going on strategically, how it affects them, and how it affects the people they work with. Your role in this effort is to be constantly in front, leading the way. As we said in the last article, you can't over-communicate the vision; neither can you over-communicate the strategy you are employing to achieve the vision.

The biggest enemy of strategic momentum is distraction. Early in my change management career, one of my mentors taught me that leaders need to be relentless and boring in communicating their vision and strategic direction. It is critical that you stay on track and focused because your ability to stay focused and keep your team focused will directly impact the amount and quality of the results you achieve.

According to Edgar Schein, in his book, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, what you focus on as a leader is what the people you lead will focus on. Let us say, for example,

you have written your plan, outlined your strategies, started building momentum, and the corporate office sends you a new program that is strategic at a higher level which you are expected to implement or you encounter a barrier you didn't anticipate in executing your defined strategy. This is a monumental strategic leadership opportunity for you. This is the time to bring your strategy team together. If the potential distraction is a program in support of higher level corporate strategy, your task is to evaluate the new program and look for ways the new program or process integrates with your strategy. If applicable, incorporate it with one of your existing strategic initiatives or develop and implement an initiative to integrate the new process or program into your strategic plan. If the potential distraction is an unexpected barrier, bring your strategic team back together to devise a strategy to either overcome or circumvent the strategy. Then deploy people and resources in the same manner as you are implementing the rest of your strategic plan. It is now part of your strategic plan and you can lead accordingly.

As your strategic leaders work with the strategic initiatives, there are some questions they should be asking at all levels of the organization:

1. How will this support our vision of the future?
2. How closely does what we are doing or planning to do fit our strategy?
3. Is this the most efficient and effective way to reach our strategic goal(s)?
4. Are we leveraging our strengths and organizational capabilities to have the greatest impact on strategic achievement?
5. Is this a temporary support to help us implement change and/or is it designed to become a permanent part of our strategic direction? If it is temporary, how will we determine when it has served its purpose? If it is designed to be permanent, how does it integrate with other systems and/or processes to complete the vision?

As the leader with the vision for the future, it is your role within the organization to step out and build and maintain the momentum to implement the strategies that will achieve the vision. You must communicate – in fact, you must over-communicate — the vision and the strategies to the point of boredom to every level of the organization to maintain focus, to incorporate new strategic goals and modifications necessary to keep all eyes on the vision and to keep everyone working with energy and enthusiasm toward achieving the vision. By having your strategic leadership team consistently and constantly asking questions that keep the focus of all in the organization on the vision your organization can build and maintain the momentum that will result in strategic success.