

# Keep Your Strategic Plan Out Of The Trash Heap Of Dead Possibilities

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Only bad strategic plans should end up in the dump. That, however, is not the case. Good plans end up here also. When they do, they are wrapped in a mix of good intention and failed leadership.

Building a robust strategic plan for business growth is hard work. Inherent in the process is a foundation for successful execution of the plan.

This is when the collective leadership capacity of the executive team goes on display. The plan is communicated beyond those who created it. The stake is in the ground. Expectations are created.

Is the executive team good enough to win the commitment of others who are essential to successful execution? Is the team good enough to persistently drive the plan to full implementation while continuing to produce products and revenue?

Is the strategic plan robust and worthy of the energy required to make it reality? For some details about the components of a solid executable strategic plan take a look at Strategic Planning, Much Ado About Something.

The leadership team that created the plan is aligned and committed to success. Now it is time to proceed with the tactical actions that must get implemented for the plan to succeed.

Even with a good road-map for tactical execution of a solid strategic plan by committed executives there are some pretty consistent realities that can push the plan toward the trash heap. Consider these challenges; ones we see with some regularity.

1. Over communicate and pay attention to WIIFM (Whats in it for me?) concerns. A compelling story of how the business got to where it is, why the new directions are essential and what the future looks like will help people connect. The actions and consistency of the executive team relative to strategy execution sets the bar and demonstrates commitment. Continuity between words and actions is important.
2. Get a big-picture driver. The implementation of the new tends to succumb to the demands of the now and the comforts of status-quo. Some of the related reasons are real and significant; others are smoke screens of resistance. An outsider, who sees the big picture, has no turf to protect and no agenda other than successful implementation can provide profound value in driving the process forward.



3. Cast a broader net. Strategic plans are created by a relatively small group of leaders. Ultimate accountability for successful execution rests with these people. For effective implementation, more people must be assimilated into tactical teams and engaged in creating and executing the roadmap elements that get results. There are lots of moving parts here. Set these teams up for success with effective team chartering.
4. Hold each other accountable. Scheduled regular, honest, no-punches-pulled executive team discussions are essential to maintaining accountability and consistency of words and actions. A good visual tool will help with progress tracking. Be sure to include implementation commitments in individual performance management/review process.
5. Get real about resources – time, money, and people. Beware this hackneyed truism: “Want something done? Give it to a busy person.” Slow down a minute here. Our top busy people tend to figure out how to get important stuff done regardless of workload, conflicting priorities or other distractions. These people are stretched exceptionally thin in many companies now, yet they only cry “uncle” to family and friends, then they are gone. So get deliberate and real about the resources required for leaders at all levels. Fund the process appropriately including the necessary talent.
6. Leverage legacy and stop reversion. Status quo is a powerful reality both good and bad. One of the greatest barriers to future success can be past successes. “If it ain’t broke don’t fix it.” But change is inherent in a robust strategic plan. Change is tough for most people. It carries an element of fear and forces people beyond what they know and where they are comfortable. It is much more powerful to show than to tell. Do something as an executive team that is big, visible, and positive and profoundly demonstrates a change in behavior that aligns with new direction. Leverage legacy that informs and enhances the future. Don’t revert to what needs to be left behind. Make people want to be a part of the new.
7. Accept ambiguity and build agility. There is seldom enough factual answers to the many questions inherent in big decisions. Veteran leaders know that the route to results is seldom a linear one. Leaders make decisions, take risks and succeed anyway. Leaders are aligned, excited and committed. Execution is underway. Then something big changes and a key initiative that is in process is no longer the right thing to do. Learn to see this and move on it quickly. Manage the fallout, minimize the impact so that such changes don’t send the process to the trash heap of unrealized potential.

The abilities to think and act strategically are important leadership success factors. Doing these as an individual is one thing. Defining and executing a new strategic direction with multiple initiatives is an exponentially bigger deal. It carries greater risk, greater accountability and a greater test of overall leadership capacity. Doing it well is not easy, yet the process, team growth and results can be extremely satisfying for those who make it happen. Look for reasons to reward yourself and your team. Celebrate along the way.



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