



A Call to Arms

By Chanon Collins

Webster defines strategy as “a careful plan or method used to achieve a goal.” A strategic plan is also noted as being “required for the conduct of war.” While some would prefer not to associate the act of war with operating a business, the parallels are difficult to ignore. Those successful companies have maintained their status not by taking a light-hearted approach to business, but by analyzing their organizations and markets to achieve greatness.

Successful companies arrive at their destination by creating and implementing strategic plans of action. To create a strategic plan is time-consuming and extremely revealing. The analysis required in developing this type of plan leaves no stone unturned. The basic elements of strategic planning are:

- determining strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats,
- gathering relevant data,
- evaluating goals, objectives, and alternatives,
- formulating an action plan,
- communication with team members,
- implementation of the action plan,
- and,evaluation of results.

It would appear that developing a strategic plan is the most difficult part of assessing an organization. This is not the case. In many instances, businesses create magnificent plans only to have these goals and actions set aside to gather dust. The most noted cause for abandonment was lack of time. The old adage of “If you want something done, give it to a busy person” provides the greatest obstacle for implementing a strategic plan.

This obstacle must be removed or the strategic plan will become useless. Some businesses will argue that all their team members are working at capacity and cannot tackle a new project. If these businesses want to continue to have a business so that everyone can work at capacity, they must delegate the implementation of the strategic

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plan. Take a moment to analyze exactly what people are doing with their time to see which activities can be delegated, postponed, or deleted.

In order for the implementation of the strategic plan to be successful, someone must be held accountable. This is not to say that this individual is solely responsible for each aspect of the strategic plan, but this person is accountable for seeing that the objectives are met. Once the hurdles of development and assignment are met, the process of implementation should only require hard work. But not all plans are this easy to execute.

Some strategic plans are doomed from the onset due to several factors. Business owners might see developing a strategic plan as a democratic process. Someone must be empowered to act as the final decision-maker so that the strategic plan will not be vague or divided. Many people also become stymied by creating a mission statement. These statements must be concise and reflect the business's core values.

Don't be too aggressive in creating your strategic plan. Aiming high is a valid inspiration, but ability and operational limitations must be considered. Also take note of the methods for evaluation. Any strategic plan that cannot be accurately measured has been a waste of time. When creating your call to arms, remember George Orwell's advice – "He who controls the past commands the future. He who commands the future conquers the past."

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