

THE REAL SIDE OF LIFE AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

Preface: This is the third in a series of eight articles on issues of importance to the management of organizations and the leadership of people. The first article created a Management “Jambalaya” using various ingredients - “leftover” ideas that still have application in the world of people and work. The articles that follow will use the same series of ingredients and a “fresh” approach to create an entrée – nutritious food for thought.

Disclaimer: If you’re standing close enough to 50 years of age, the set up of this article will make sense. If you’re much younger you probably have been “jaded” by the coarse (but probably more real) worlds of Roseanne, the Simpsons, Will and Grace, etc. You can’t appreciate or maybe even understand television shows in the early days and how naïve they and we were. We were protected from the real side of life and families – the good, the bad, and the ugly.

The article that follows will not re-invent strategic planning, it will merely point out the REAL side of the process.

The Ingredient / Entrée – Reinventing Strategic Planning

Remember Ozzie and Harriet and Leave it to Beaver. Did you ever wonder what their families were really like? Did June Cleaver really vacuum the house in pearls and a pleated skirt? Did Ward ever yell at the kids? Did the boys ever get into REAL trouble – busted for drugs or get a girlfriend pregnant?

What about Ozzie – did he mess around? Did he drink or gamble? Was Harriet mellow on life or Valium? Did David and Ricky fight? Did they ever get thrown out of school, punch a hole in a wall, or get arrested for shoplifting?

Television programs in the “old days” were nice, simple, naïve, and totally UNREAL. Today’s programs aren’t as “nice” but they are more real.

Strategic Planning as a process is also simple, nice, naïve, and totally UNREAL. All too often leaders and managers of organizations believe that their future lies in “writing a plan”. The reality of the planning process is that the writing of the plan is not the challenge – APPLICATION IS!

Write a plan and in all likelihood it will end up on the “bottom shelf”; effectively implement a plan and it will be seen on your BOTTOM LINE.

Hundreds or thousands of books exist today that explain the process of writing a plan (the best [and simplest]) I’ve ever used is Organizational Planning Quick and Simple by this writer- it’s not really perfect but do you really expect me to promote someone else’s book in this article?

From the most sophisticated academic view or the simplest analogy of planning the process is easy. My favorite is “planning is like making a jigsaw puzzle”. The table or the work surface used to build the puzzle is the Values of the organization. The finished picture is the Vision and the Mission. The border that determines the size and shape of the puzzle is the Situation Analysis (environmental assessment) and the pieces are the objectives or desired results.

What follows are observations of one cynic on why such a simple process rarely works as effectively as it should:

1. **Leadership is about CHANGE.** If you don’t need to change (or if your world isn’t changing) you should only need to manage the status quo. Obviously the future is change so you have only three options: One is to do nothing and die, the second is to manage the change and survive or the third and best option is to “architect change” and prosper. As Peter Drucker suggested, “the best way to predict the future is to create it.”

Churchill said to “take change by the hand before it takes you by the throat.” Einstein defined insanity as “continuing to do what you’ve always done and expecting a different result.” In tomorrow’s world, **CHANGE IS REALITY.**

2. **Planning is a leadership responsibility not one of management.** Leadership is about people. Management is about things / processes. People are always more important and challenging. A leader establishes the Values of the organization, captures a Vision, and defines a Mission. This stage of the plan is not about consensus. Margaret Thatcher correctly stated that “consensus is the absence of leadership.” These are leadership issues.
3. **First define your organizational Values.** These are the absolutes of your organization. The X Commandments and the Constitution. Communicate these. Live these. These are the foundation of the future. Don’t violate your values. Measure new hires against this standard. If they aren’t compatible with these Values, don’t hire them. If existing employees can comply with the Values – they must change or leave.
4. **Capture a Vision – a future ideal.** Make this big and bold – bigger than what you are capable of doing today (if you can do it today, it’s not a Vision). Remember JFK’s “land a man on the moon and return him safely to earth.” When he shared this dream, what he proposed was **IMPOSSIBLE.** If no one questions your sanity or your Vision, it’s not big or bold enough.
5. **Leaders take “arrows” in the front and the back.** We all share visuals of the pioneer venturing into the dangerous unknown and risking the danger of being “shot”. As a practical matter, leaders venture into the unknown world of tomorrow and are vulnerable from 360 degrees. There is risk from the front, the sides but the greatest risk comes from their backside. Often a

“follower” will “shoot” the leader in an effort to protect the status quo – to protect the leader and the organization from the leader him / herself.

- 6. Good employees not the bad ones sabotage the process of change. Look at the bell curve that is your organization. About 15 – 20% of the employees on the left side are your optimists, risk takers, and change proponents. These are the young at heart. The good news is that they will always embrace change. They are adrenaline “junkies”. The bad news is that if you don’t deliver, they will quickly burn out, leave, or lose their enthusiasm.**

On the right side are the “retirees”. Not literally but these are the people that quit working for you and the new years ago; you, however, have chosen to continue to send them a paycheck. They collectively suffer from “hardening of the attitudes.” Your expectations for them are very low and they meet these. The good news is that if you do change things, they’ll quit.

In the middle of the bell are your “best” employees – those who truly believe in the organization. That’s the problem – they believe in the ORGANIZATION and not in the marketplace the organization must serve. Your ideas and the change these represent are an affront to the status quo – this status quo is the organization – their comfort zone.

People don’t like change (that’s why we need leaders). “Change must be accepted... when it can no longer be resisted,” said Queen Victoria. The majority of your employees are the focus of the queen’s comments. Unfortunately “for change to occur in an organization, individuals must change first” (Reclaiming a Lost Heritage – John R. Campbell).

- 7. Diversity and consensus are very important in the process of working the plan, capturing the Vision, and achieving the Mission. These are the action steps – the how, what, when, and who of the plan. These aren’t leadership.**

The leader must establish the Values, Vision, and Mission. Leaders aren’t about popularity or consensus. What if God had assigned the writing of the X Commandments to a committee? Discussions would still ongoing and we would have mountains of stone tablets.

What if Kennedy had sought agreement on the “man on the moon” fantasy. The best and the brightest would still be fighting him on the idea – AND WE’D STILL BE TALKING ABOUT GOING THERE.

Winston Churchill observed that group think leads to “...weak and faltering decisions, or rather indecisions. When you take the most gallant soldier, the most intrepid airman, or the most audacious sailor, put them at a table together, what do you get? The sum total of their fears.” (Dale Dauten – Beware of the Conference Room [10 / 08 / 2000])

8. **To be successful everyone in the organization must commit to the Vision. To gain commitment you must get the “folks” involved. This is where you welcome diversity and consensus.**

When asking the questions of how, what, who, when, and where everyone should be involved. The process should include discussion, debate, dialogue, dissent, definitions, etc. The final step, however, is simple – DECISION and that must be followed by a group commitment. Can’t commit? Leave!

When our soldiers charged the beaches of Normandy, a vote wasn’t taken. The leader ordered, “follow me.” When he fell, another soldier, knowing the Vision and the Mission and committed to both assumed the mantle of leadership and repeated the ORDER – “follow me.”

9. **“The opportunity is in the detail (Michelangelo).” Details are facts. These are inanimate. They are neither good or bad - they just are! Manipulation of these details (facts) will determine whether God or the Devil is in the process. If your team says “great Vision BUT the devil’s in the detail” beware they are programming themselves to crush your dream. DO NOT ALLOW THIS ATTITUDE TO TAKE HOLD – PROHIBIT THIS PHRASE IN YOUR ORGANIZATION. Remind them – “God is in the detail.”**
10. **You must establish an organizational culture that embraces change. The culture is the Values and Personality of the group. It is nearly impossible to change culture. If your current culture is at odds with your future Vision you may be better off creating a new venture to pursue your new Vision and let your “old” company continue in its march to oblivion or obsolescence.**

To create a culture of change your organization must be able to think and act. In yesterday’s command and control world employees were told what to do. They may not know how to think – to risk. To transition from “do” to “think” you must create a safe and trusting environment encouraging measured risk taking. If experiments fails, “heads DO NOT roll” but rather are gathered to debrief the process and learn from the experience.

A culture of change is about implementing the plan, monitoring the results, and adjusting the process. It’s about standing in the fire, taking the heat and most importantly “becoming steeled” as a result.

I close with a thinker, an artist and an icon – “Business has only two functions, marketing and INNOVATION. (Drucker)” and “What would life be if we had no courage to attempt anything? (Van Gogh)” Change? Lead! Just do it. (Nike)

The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends upon the unreasonable man. George Bernard Shaw

