

Free your Business Strategy and Mobilize the Power of your People



TO BUILD A SUCCESSFUL AND ENDURING ORGANIZATION, SHIFT YOUR BUSINESS STRATEGY FROM THE 3-RING BINDER TO THE PEOPLE YOU WORK WITH AND SERVE.

As a leader in an organization, you are likely to be perceived as the one with the answers. You can expect team members to look to you for direction and customers to look to you for accountability. Certainly there are situations and organizations that may require an autocratic leadership style in the short term, but it rarely produces the kind of growth, efficiency, and brand reputation that is necessary for long-term sustainability. Your greatest resource for long-term sustainability is the people you interact with on a daily basis- both employees and customers; their knowledge, their commitment, and their perspective are your reservoirs of growth potential.

How do you take full advantage of that infinite pool of human potential? How do you democratize the business strategy? Here are 4 basic steps to keep in mind to ensure optimal systematic growth, efficiency, and brand reputation.

1. Activate the Vision

Sharing the vision of who you are and where you are headed is critical for success, so every employee should know it and believe in it. Too often organizations craft a vision statement and it resides, lifeless, on a wall plaque or hallway banner. Activate your organization's vision so that it resonates with

every employee and serves as a north star for your strategy, plans and tactics. Everything you do should ultimately align with the vision.

A vision represents what you want to become – it is aspirational in nature. For example, a company's vision states: "To be the preferred and most trusted resource for household appliances in the U.S." This vision communicates clearly their niche market, their geographical scope and their desire to be #1. As strategies are developed and new lines of business are considered, this vision serves to keep the team on course. If they don't align with the vision, they won't be done.

To activate the vision, it needs to be communicated clearly, consistently and in compelling, meaningful ways by all team members at all levels. The vision needs to be positioned top of mind. That can be accomplished through featuring it in all communications, referencing it during strategic planning and goal-setting sessions. For a vision to be an integral part in the life of an organization, it must be made actionable.

2. Engage the Team

Team members who know the relevance of the vision to their daily work are ready to be engaged team members. Engagement in essence describes a workforce that is committed, enthusiastic and emotionally invested in the organization's success. When employees are talking positively about the organization to others, when they remain within the organization and actively contribute to help the company reach its goals, you've got engagement!

How do you achieve it? When you democratize the business strategy, you get the team involved in the conversation. If team members know they have a voice, that their opinion matters, and that their ideas are considered, they will be engaged. This is not to say that you turn over the development of the business strategy to the team, but you can create robust opportunities to share it with them to. Gathering feedback, fine-tuning it, or kicking-off team action planning are three ready examples of how to engage your team. Ultimately, you want every team member to have a direct line-of-sight between what they do and the realization of the business strategy.

3. Shape the Culture

It is the leader's job to shape the culture of an organization in a way that supports the business strategy, and a palpable and consistent culture gives your business integrity. But culture is not an abstract idea, it is the cumulative work habits and attitudes of everyone in the organization. So as a leader, you must deliberately cultivate the team member behavior you value. As an example, if the business strategy is to differentiate through an extraordinary customer experience, the culture needs to be one that is dedicated to the customer – internally and externally. As delivery of exceptional service by team members is recognized and rewarded by that leader it becomes the cultural norm. If the business strategy is to differentiate through process – delivering quality to the customer in the most expedient and efficient way – the culture needs to champion innovation that highlights ideas to improve processes. Team members see the acknowledgement of peers who are successful at this, and they too will strive to innovate and refine processes.

4. Listen to the Customer

The customer needs to be in the conversation. Too often, businesses develop strategy in the absence of the customer's voice. When products, services, delivery systems and the like are created without input from the customer, there is often surprise when the strategy does not fit the customer's needs and expectations. Incorporating the voice of the customer can be facilitated in a number of different ways:

- **Create a Customer Board** – key customers who you can bring together at mission-critical times to get their feedback on strategic decision.
- Conduct **Customer Focus Groups**
- Present a **Customer "TownHall"** – a select group of customers to field questions from employees about their perception of service delivery.
- **Invite customers into strategy or planning sessions**

- Encourage customer-facing employees to **ask questions directly to customers about service** (What do you value most about doing business with us? What area is ripe for improvement?).

No matter what approach you take to fully understanding what matters most to your customers, it will reap rewards and ensure that your strategy succeeds.

5. Make it Operational

Strategy guru, Michael Porter once wrote, "A strategy delineates a territory in which a company seeks to be unique." In order to capture that level of differentiation, the strategy must be a living, breathing doctrine that is integrated into everything a company does and says. It emanates from the vision. It incorporates the voice of the customers and employees. It is a big part of the culture of the organization. It is an on-going part of the conversation the enterprise has with its constituents.

Democratizing the business strategy is about unleashing human potential by tapping into the experience, ideas and insights of all who are a part of your business. Free your business strategy from the three ring binder today and mobilize the power of your greatest asset – your people.