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Great strategies are not dry documents – they are exciting undertakings that guide the actions of your people so that an exciting vision is successfully implemented.

From working with many industry-leading organisations around the world, making sure your strategy can be executed starts at the beginning of the process, not once it is decided. Here are some of the steps these businesses take to ensure their strategies successfully galvanise their employees.

Start your strategy with your vision

Your vision is where you are heading, so strategy must start with the vision and ultimately end with it.

How does the vision connect to the strategy at many businesses– usually only vaguely! The longest vision I have seen was 198 words long and meant everything to everyone. This contrasts with one of the most powerful vision statements ever, JFK’s “this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before the decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth”. Clarity and simplicity is crucial.

Get to really understand your competitors

Competitors will respond to your actions, yet many businesses ignore this. You need to know their potential response and plan for it. To achieve this you can’t watch from afar, you need to really get inside their head. Your strategy not only needs to build this in, but also allow monitoring and flexibility should the unexpected happen. It is not about rummaging through bins and espionage: there is more than enough intelligence readily from your customers and online!

Making strategy – get everyone involved

Strategies that are badly implemented fail, not matter how great the idea behind them, so ensure they are implementable. In fact, splitting “creating the strategy” from “executing the strategy” is where many businesses go wrong: you need clear alignment between the two.

Having a small isolated strategy team ensures that senior leaders responsible for its implementation don’t know the ins and outs, and also feel little personal ownership. You need your leadership team to understand the intent so they can respond confidently when the unpredicted, inevitably, happens.


Give heresy permission

Generally people don’t readily challenge the CEO’s pet initiatives. But as a senior leader you need to hear heresy – there must be no sacred cows!

At one session with a leading retailer, they were considering their problems in a particular country. One team was charged with thinking the unthinkable and proposed shutting half the outlets. Even they thought this was a ridiculously extreme idea, but after much analysis the firm did exactly this and has not regretted the decision once.

Don’t hope the strategy will work, test it





Strategy presentations invariably assume things will go to plan, but the real world isn't like that. The military spends lots of time war gaming and rehearsing – they don't go into battles unprepared. Business is a battleground too and wise companies take a leaf out of the military's book. Certainly product trials and market research are a part of it, but learn from the military and use a war gaming approach too – have teams trying to out-think each other and respond to unexpected events. You will be amazed at the shortcomings it often reveals.

About the author: Damian McKinney, CEO, business execution specialists McKinney Rogers (www.mckinneyrogers.com). McKinney Rogers has a Queen's Award for International Trade and has featured twice in the Fast-Track list of 100 fast growth companies. Its clients include Wal-Mart, Bacardi, Grohe and Coca-Cola.

