

The Strategic Planning Process

Nine Reminders for Re-inventing and Re-building your Vision, Enthusiasm & Focus.

Brian Hamilton, CA, CFA

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Maintaining an effective strategic planning process is one of the secrets for long term success. And it is especially important if you are preparing for a Divestiture or an Acquisition. But as the decades go by and times change you may find your company backed into a corner, leaving you wondering what to do. Here are some ideas to consider as you organize your next strategic planning sessions:

1. **Involve Everyone.** It's not a top-down or a bottom-up process. Involve all of your leaders, plus a member of the board of directors. One of the secrets to gain buy-in is to give everyone an equal say as they participate in the discovery process.
2. **Use a good Facilitator.** It is easy to fall into the trap of complacency or even denial. An independent, objective facilitator, with a track record of operating success can provide a fresh perspective to keep you in touch with reality.
3. **Make an Objective assessment of your Leadership team.** Even good companies can have self destructive habits. Use the facilitator to provide feedback on your team's strategic management skills, judgment, common sense, industry knowledge and your vision and ability to understand and tackle change.
4. **How well do you know your Customers?** And if you are struggling to determine what's wrong with your business, there is no better place to go than to your customers. Conduct a careful survey of customers and share the report with the strategic planning team.
5. **How well do you stack up against the Competitors?** There are numerous ways to gain intelligence on your competitors and even to compare your financial performance. Have someone prepare an analysis and present it to the group involved with the strategic planning sessions.
6. **Find the Root Causes.** Sometimes it may require a fresh look from an outside group to help you get to the bottom of negative trends such as flat or declining sales, shrinking margins or employee turnover.
7. **Go Off-Site for the Strategic Planning Days.** Get off the treadmill for two days to gather the full leadership team, including branch managers, board members and the facilitator. Also plan to include a social activity or event on the later afternoon of the first day, plus a dinner.
8. **Summarize on One Page.** Seek to agree upon the top four or five strategic priorities for each functional area of the company, and summarize on one page.
9. **Focus & Execution.** Assign specific responsibilities for each strategic priority. Incorporate into the bonus plan. Review quarterly.