10 Reasons Why Your Strategy Isn't Working

To help you prepare for your best results ever, this short e-book outlines 10 questions to help you get beneath underperformance and identify the gaps in your strategy approach.

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Recently, two statistics caught my eye. Not only do they signal missed opportunity and blatant underperformance, but more importantly, they reveal a 'door' that is wide open for your organization to make your move.

Kaplan and Norton reports that 90% of organizations fail to successfully implement their strategies. Even more, the Economist Intelligence Unit shares that organizations realize just 60% of the potential value of their strategies.

The surface conclusion would assume the organizations cited are simply
failing to adequately mobilize their people to deliver results. Be very careful with that assumption. There’s a whole litany of reasons for poor execution, of which several can be traced back to the decisions and choices made during strategy design.

As an advisor to executive teams leading organizations of all sizes, I am frequently exposed to frustrations, obstacles and traps executive teams face when it comes to getting strategy right. And now is the time to get it right - well in advance of 2017.

To help you prepare for your best results ever, I’ve put together a list outlining 10 questions you can use to get beneath underperformance and identify the gaps in your strategy approach.

In no specific order, they are as follows:

1. **Do You Have A Strategy Or A Strategic Plan?**

Leaders that fall into this particular trap are guilty of running the engines and propellers before they’ve decided where to sail the ship. Putting the tactical in front of the strategy can lead to disaster. The ship ends up lost at sea and full of frustrated sailors.

Your *strategy* should define a strong value proposition for your target market, the distinctive capabilities you will activate to win in that market, and a picture of how you need to organize your business to make it happen. Here are 4 great questions to get you started down this path.

Your strategic plan should feel like an instruction manual for your overall strategy. Essentially, it should tell you the specific, tactical action steps and plans you will deploy to bring your strategy to life. It turns the strategy into specific actions. For a great strategic planning template, click here.

2. **Have You Put Strategy Before Structure?**

Many organizations insist on developing a strategy that works for their organization, instead of building an organization that works for their strategy. Do you see the BIG difference?

With football season in gear, journey across the NFL to read stories of new coaches bringing new systems and strategies to their respective teams. The new strategies often require unique talents and skills in specific positions to
which the management needs to acquire in order to be successful. To think they might be able to execute a new system with the exact same talent and skill at every position is insanity.

Are you bold enough to make the change that's needed to deliver the strategy? People decisions are difficult decisions. In order to release the full potential of the organization in pursuit of the new strategy, it will require change. A number of the organizations sitting in the belly of those statistics are not making tough decisions.

3. Who Is Accountable for Growth?

Business leaders need to find a way to keep growth at the forefront of the organization and ultimately, from slipping into the shadows of the day-to-day priorities. The current approach to strategy typically tasks functional leaders with figuring out where and how the organization will grow. While this has served well in the past, the fast moving external environment coupled with unstable economic conditions and rapid entrepreneurial disruption demands a new approach.

Organizations need to establish single accountability for driving a cohesive approach to strategy and growing the business - unencumbered by political lines, territories or self-promotion. For a few ideas on how to do this in your organization, read The Secret Growth Strategy of the Ant Colony.

4. Have You Made New Discoveries?

One of the biggest reasons for developing a strategy is a new discovery. Every great strategy, business, or billion-dollar start-up success is traced back to a big learning or unearthing of opportunity. Whether it be a new product, service, technology, or experience, someone spent untold hours slaving over the target market to understand their fits, needs and unexpressed wants.

If on-going learning and discovery is not part of the way you operate your business, it needs to be. Or, you run big risk in being out-discovered. With the data capture capability that's available through CRM and other real-time feedback platforms, organize your business to get intelligent. For more on how discovery drives the right strategy choice, read Choosing The Right Growth Strategy For Your Business.

Big discovery is the fuel for strategy.
5. What Capability Will You Add Or Leverage?

They key word here is ‘capability’. Too often, I see cases where leadership has identified opportunity to win share in existing and new markets without having done enough of the necessary research to understand the capabilities they need to win. Whether it’s leveraging an existing core capability or building a new one, business leaders need to spend more time on this topic as it relates to strategy. Tactical efforts are falling short and failing altogether as companies try to expand their products and services only to discover that they don’t have the firepower to get the job done.

6. Are Your Leaders Creating More Leaders?

Perhaps the widest capability gap in any organization in our present day is talent. Stated further, the inability to identify and develop future leadership in organizations is pervasive. The Graying of Corporate America (40% of top leadership headed to retirement) will lead to a lot of vacant seats on the organizational chart - are you ready?

This runs way deeper than the annual, high potential meeting that you started a few years ago. It’s a mindset or DNA of the organization that you need to hire-to. In other words, you should only be hiring leaders into your organization who can show you or point to specific leaders (by name) who they’ve developed and created in previous roles.

Of the entire list here, this is the one that gets the most talk and the littlest action. Organizations that consistently perform at a high-level inherently believe, with every fiber of their being, that the role of a leader is to create more leaders.

7. Where Will You Place Your Bets?

Leaders are spreading resources too thinly across their portfolio of products or services instead of prioritizing and placing bets on a few to go big and deep. Ultimately, this leads to a vicious cycle of creating lots of little initiatives to grow your entire portfolio. As you continue to chase, you fall further behind the curve in core businesses that represent a large percentage of your profit.

8. Is Personal Growth On Your Radar?
Realizing that lack of growth in our personal lives ultimately impedes professional growth, and then doing something about it, could be the trigger point for leaders to start building the kind of cultures that perform consistently. The easy way out is to assume that everyone is accountable for owning their personal growth. The research in this area is compelling and worth your time no matter what size organization you lead.

At CircleMakers™, we’re devoting time and resources to personal growth topics, as we believe it is the top limiting factor to strong and consistent performance. However, if organizations even have it on their radar, it’s last on the list. We’ve recently launched Project 24, an initiative designed to bring awareness and best practices to personal growth challenges leaders face. You can learn more about Project 24 HERE.

9. Are You Simultaneously Running And Building?

The self-assessment version of this question is worded slightly different - does running your business get in the way of building your business? Within your strategy process, you need to be having open discussions about the best methods to run and build at the same time. Every company should be chasing a market and creating a new market simultaneously - in fact, it’s the secret recipe for sustainable growth. Becoming an organization that can create, incubate and build new ventures is not easy, but certainly an attribute that will be table stakes in the future.

10. Do You Possess A High-Performance Team?

There is no question that designing a high performance team is vital to your organization’s ability to deliver beautiful, results-generating strategy. However, it’s far too easy for leaders to be lulled into organizational silos, waiting too long to make necessary people changes, and missing opportunities to build a team instead of just ‘filling positions’. Every leader has experienced themselves stuck in one or all of these ruts at sometime in their career. For more encouragement and ideas on building a high-performance team, check out these 4 traits.

In Closing

Now that that you’re in the final stretch of 2016, have you done a thorough, top-to-bottom progress evaluation on your strategy and results? Where are the big misses? What’s behind or underneath the numbers? What needs to
be done differently?

Which of these challenges will you take into consideration as you plan for 2017? Pick one or two to bring to your next executive whiteboard session.

The door is wide open.

Time to make your move.

**Work With Us**

Are you or someone you know looking for assistance with getting your strategy 'right and done' in 2017? You're at the right place - we can help your with any or all of the above challenges. We're passionate about the business of growing businesses. *Let's talk.*

We're offering a limited number of FREE growth strategy audit sessions during the months of September & October – *signup here.*

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