

## You Have a Plan, Now What?



This article is about leading excellent execution of a strategic plan. It assumes you have a plan. If you do not, I recommend [this article on strategic planning](#) first.

The desire for perfection can be the enemy of progress, and the strategic plan is a work in progress. It should not be a set-and-forget tool. It should be a living and breathing roadmap that *guides* alignment, collaboration, and helps people in your organization make tough choices. When managers lose faith in the value of strategic planning, they often haven't thought through how to keep their plan fresh.

The undeniable truth that circumstances are changing evermore rapidly is a very good reason to visit the plan regularly. How regularly? I believe the plan should be worked on a monthly basis by the leadership team in work sessions where the agenda is created based on the strategic plan. The leader of each strategic vector owns his or her portion of the agenda each month so it is not just the CEO's or overall team leader's agenda. They should invite difference-makers and key teams into the work sessions when they are at a critical milestone of a priority project or initiative connected to the plan. This is not micro-management. It's simply leaders living up to their responsibility to cultivate broad scale engagement, accountability, and talent development beyond the leadership team. It's a force-multiplying mechanism for leaders who understand the importance of exponentially expanding their leadership influence by giving the people they lead the context and support they need to maximize their contributions to the success of the company.

This monthly work session becomes an efficient and strategic bucket into which leaders can dump topics related to the plan that are strategic but not urgent. This helps the team eliminate other meetings from the calendar. This work session can become a very productive, roll-up-your-sleeves yet strategic day in which the team continues and even accelerates the momentum they generated during the strategic planning process. It's also an excellent mechanism for teammates to hold each other accountable for progress against the objectives and goals detailed in the plan.

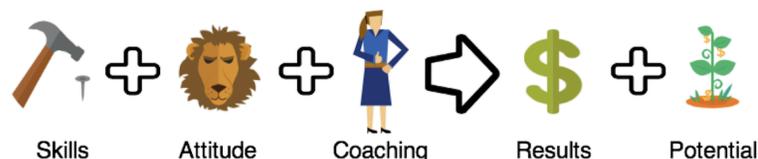
## People and Process

The best way for you to ensure that your strategy translates into execution that delivers desirable results is to sweat the details of people and process.

***Execution is first and foremost a people challenge more than it is a strategy problem***

Below I offer ten steps to better execution with several questions designed to help you improve the deployment of your people and improve the processes needed to execute your strategic plan with excellence.

1. Does your **organizational structure** alleviate or add unnecessary friction or barriers to your people executing effectively? Is your structure hamstringing your ability to achieve more? Are you investing appropriately into the talent needed to achieve your goals?
2. Do you have the right talent and skills in critical roles? Do you honestly and consistently assess your **talent** and capabilities? Do you invest enough in the development of your people? When was the last time you did a complete talent review (not just appraisals) of your entire team or organization? Have you identified your difference-makers? Do you differentiate enough?



3. Do you fully understand your **culture**, and do you pay enough attention to it? What are the values, mindset and attitudinal disposition of the people in key roles? Do their hearts, minds and aspirations align with leadership's vision for the organization?
4. Do you have a shortage of leadership? Are you **cultivating future leaders**? Are your current leaders in the organization encouraged and rewarded for developing future leaders?
5. Are you developing talent and systems in such a way where you don't need to rely too heavily on too few difference-makers to drive your business? Do you

hold leaders **accountable** for improving the performance of all of the people they lead? Do you give poor performers the help they need to improve, and prune them if they cannot or choose not to improve? Do you measure performance in ways that are consistent with your strategic plan?

6. Do your people fully understand your envisioned future? Have you adequately **communicated** the strategic plan to achieve that vision, and given your people the context they need to change behavior? Do you keep it alive, compelling and relevant? Has your leadership team and other key leaders defined the activities and the behaviors required to achieve the goals in your strategic plan? Have you communicated clearly how these activities and behaviors will fuel your ability to accomplish your goals and achieve your vision?
7. Does each person know which activities and behaviors for which they are accountable, and why based on the markets you serve? And do they know how their responsibilities connect to the interdependent roles of **teammates** across the organization? Are you modeling and encouraging your people to work across boundaries, and giving them the context they need to be better teammates?
8. Does your organization have a **growth mindset**? Do you have a system in place to measure the activities needed to execute your plan well? Do you have a balanced scorecard? Do you hold each other accountable for results? Do you regularly review, calibrate and course-correct your activities and behaviors based on new learning? Are you adequately focused on the consumers and customers you serve? Do you encourage and embrace constructive contention to foster continuous improvement, agility, innovation and growth?
9. Does your **performance management** and **talent development** process align coaching, training and development to the right behaviors and activities needed to achieve your goals and vision? Do your supervisors consistently provide people the feedback they need to elevate their game?
10. Are you rewarding and **incentivizing** the right activities and behaviors needed to drive the results you desire? Are people rewarded for results *and* how they are achieved?

## **Organizational Structure, Roles, and Responsibilities**

During the strategic planning process, many of my clients discover that their company is not organized optimally to achieve their vision and purpose. The strategic plan can be an excellent springboard for reorganizing structure, roles, and responsibilities. Here is my twelve-step process for syncing your organizational structure and capabilities with your vision, mission, core values, and strategic plan:

1. **Review** your company's purpose, promise, "reasons to believe" the promise, and your core values.
2. **Prioritize** the Goals in your strategic plan (OGSM) accordingly.

3. **Prioritize** the Actions in the 3-Year **Action Plan** accordingly. If you are looking for criteria for establishing priorities, refer back to the purpose, promise, and reasons to believe that promise, and assess the impact or value each specific goal or action will contribute to this statement of your intentions and strategic direction. Also, consider the degree of difficulty. I suggest using a five point scale, and plotting both impact and degree of difficulty on a two-dimensional X:Y chart. Constantly search for what can be eliminated or reduced in an effort to reallocate resources to higher value work.
4. Consider the more important day-to-day tasks that must be accomplished to run the business that might not be included in the OGSM or three-Year Action Plan. **Focus** on the most important tasks and prioritize them. Don't try to boil the ocean.
5. List key decisions that must be made starting with the highest priorities. To do this, process-map the workflow using decision trees for the most important actions, priorities, and tasks. Highlight key decisions, as well as who makes them today. Work with your team to **simplify**, streamline, re-engineer, and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of your decision-making. All of this should be grounded in an objective view of the current state and the root causes of less-than-optimal performance.
6. Identify touch points between strategic vectors/functions. How much value does each touch point add to the decision making process? Keep challenging why you do what you do today, looking beyond symptoms (effect) for root causes. The principles of Lean Six Sigma are helpful. Which steps or touch points could be eliminated, reduced, or reallocated to a more effective or efficient function or teammate? Which touch points add the most value, and which add little? Are you missing touch points that could improve the effectiveness or efficiency of your decision-making? Seek **cross-functional feedback** to complement your thinking and augment potential blind spots.
7. Identify capabilities or skills your organization possesses that are **strengths** we can lean on and leverage to get better.
8. What **capabilities** or skills need to be built or elevated to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of your decision-making, workflow, and the quality of your work? Be honest about the weaknesses you should augment with new talent or outside help.
9. Now, step back and **analyze** your current organization today. Prioritize the organizational strengths and opportunities for the biggest improvement. Seek inefficiencies in the way you currently work in light of steps 1 through 8 above. Where do you need to improve your capabilities or invest resources to raise your game?
10. With this as your springboard, **design** at least one alternative organization structure that could help your organization improve your ability to deliver your stated purpose and promise, and help you achieve the goals you've identified in your strategic plan. Once designed, draft the unique responsibilities and value-

add for each function and role, highlighting changes versus the existing structure and roles.

11. **Test-drive** the new organizational structure(s) and roles by repeating steps 5 through 8 above. Iterate modifications to improve the structure and roles further. Keep an eye out for hidden processes that would have to be changed to avoid something important slipping between the cracks once you transition into execution. Seek different points of view to challenge your thinking.
12. **Assess** your current talent, and **deploy** everyone where they add the most unique value by leveraging their strengths. Ensure that difference-makers are differentiated, stretched, and placed in vital roles that will develop them into servant leaders. Make sure you review their compensation packages to ensure retention of the vital players to need to excel. Also, and just as importantly, use this as an opportunity to either commit to developing weaker talent, or outplace them gracefully. Begin recruiting immediately to fill skill gaps and strengthen your team.

Leading your team to the success you desire requires both insightful strategy and improved execution. But there is a third ingredient too often overlooked: servant leadership.

### ***Servant leaders bring out the best in others***

While strategy is important, servant leaders understand that achieving improved execution and results is first and foremost a people challenge, not just a strategy problem, and they focus relentlessly on bringing out the best in others.

### **Success Models**

I try to eat fairly healthy. But occasionally when I want to indulge in something really tasty, I head to Popeye's Louisiana Kitchen for spicy chicken, red beans and rice, and a biscuit. As a consumer, I have been a fan of Popeye's for many years. Unfortunately, Popeye's business was on the decline until Cheryl Bachelder was hired as the new CEO in 2007 to turn the company around. The stock price had declined by roughly 60 percent because of a long-term decline in sales and profits. Guest visits were declining at an alarming rate, and relations between corporate leaders and franchise owners were adversarial at best.

Cheryl and her team introduced the organization to the concept of servant leadership and focused the company first and foremost on their purpose and principles. They prioritized serving their franchisees and customers with excellence, and they measured their results with the highest levels of rigor and accountability. Cheryl and her team genuinely valued and prioritized the people they served both inside and

outside of the organization. They understood that the best leaders have motives that go beyond self-interest—they serve a purpose greater than themselves—and they serve others well.

### ***The best leaders serve a purpose greater than themselves***

They challenge the people they lead to pursue daring, bold aspirations, which grow the capabilities and confidence of the organization they lead. They shun the spotlight and instead shine it on the results of others. In doing so, they create a healthier work environment that improves execution and ultimately produces better results.

By the end of calendar 2016, Popeye's average restaurant was up 45 percent in sales and profits. The stock price reached all-time highs. If you are interested in learning more about Cheryl's servant leadership approach and results, I highly recommend her book *Dare to Serve*.

I also want to highlight Walmart as a success model. Since Sam Walton founded the company in 1962, Walmart has been clear about its purpose as an organization and the priorities against which they execute their plans. Of course, no company is perfect, but, for the most part, the people of the Walmart organization have been unwavering in their embrace of principles and core values. Equally important, Walmart has relentlessly focused its entire organization on a few big and simple goals that everyone, including its business partners, understands, because Walmart focuses so much energy on managing the details of execution relentlessly.

Walmart has lost some of its luster recently as consumer purchases migrate online, and competitors such as Amazon threaten its business model. But Walmart remains one of the most amazing success stories in the history of business. The growth in market capitalization and stock trend over the past thirty-four years speaks for itself.

Over the course of my career, Walmart has often been an important customer. On multiple occasions, a company I worked for won the Walmart Supplier of the Year award. I've travelled to Bentonville, Arkansas, more than any other city in the world, and I've attended the Walmart annual meeting with business partners and suppliers on several occasions.

Many times I've observed other business leaders mocking the down-home simplicity and down-to-earth nature of Walmart's culture. They do so at their own risk. Some manufacturers dislike Walmart because Walmart exposes flaws in their business models, and Walmart passes along savings from the inefficiencies that are uncovered to consumers or to its own bottom line. But the free market works. Walmart has

made most of its business partners improve as a result of working with Walmart. The focus on wowing consumers with lower prices is almost cult-like—it’s a strong mantra at the annual meeting, within the walls at headquarters, and in Walmart stores. Meetings at the Walmart offices have always been legendarily challenging for visitors. But over time, people have come to realize that this is a company that is dedicated and aligned throughout its massive organization to providing the most affordable products to shoppers to make their lives better, and Walmart will do whatever it takes within the riverbanks of their core values to make that happen. You have to admire the focus, determination, and simplicity with which Walmart has executed its strategy. Of course, we’ll see if they can navigate the digital transformation currently challenging their business model with the same level of success, but the success of their strategic focus over the last 50-plus years is undeniable.



Strategic companies such as Walmart make their strategies more executable because they say “no” a lot, and when they say “yes” it’s a *big* yes (e.g. the recent Jet.com, Moosejaw and Bonobos acquisitions). They fail fast on bad ideas, lower the cost of experimentation, and they improve execution by *focusing* precious resources on fewer, bigger, more consumer-meaningful ideas that generate the largest return on investment. Perhaps most importantly, they do the hard work required to achieve exceptional execution throughout their entire organization and with their business partners by engaging them in the planning and execution of the plan to ensure broad scale alignment, commitment and accountability.