

SUPPLIER SAVVY



Looking inside the supplier arena:
How to translate strategy to results
through people

By Craig R. Taylor

Strategy plays a crucial role in moving an organization forward. Everyone understands the importance of a well-thought-out plan that includes clearly defined objectives, detailed tactics, and expected results. But time and again, experience has shown that even the most visionary and enthusiastic strategies can achieve their intended outcomes only through solid and sustained execution. All of us, at one time or another, have been involved in great-sounding strategies that fell well short of their intended results.

Such situations remind us that no matter how well-planned or visionary a

strategy is on paper, it takes people to make it happen—people at all levels and in all roles associated with the strategy, from leaders who communicate and support the plan to frontline employees who act on countless details that bring the vision to life. That's true whether the strategy is narrowly defined and aimed at a specific business opportunity, such as opening a new market for your sales team, or as broad as redefining your organization's culture to be more customer focused.

Regardless of the scope of the strategy, its intended results can be accomplished only when the people involved clearly

understand the goals, are motivated to support the effort, and are skilled and prepared to contribute based on their roles and responsibilities.

AchieveGlobal has developed a simple, yet powerful, framework for understanding the principles that help organizations and teams move from strategy to results through people. In simple terms, it's referred to as, "I Know, I Care, I Can." Said differently, it can be described as how to clarify, communicate, and execute organizational strategies both large and small.

I Know! Clarify the intent, direction, and expected results. At its simplest level, "I know" means that everyone

take. Few things are more motivating to people than a compelling vision. Make it clear and understandable, and describe how the strategy will connect to people individually, including what it will mean for the business, your customers, or your department.

The current business climate offers plenty of reasons to change strategies—such as reorganizations, shifts in competition, and rapidly evolving customer expectations. All of those business issues can provide plenty of traction to get the effort going, but clear vision, direction, and a well-defined path forward are necessary to keep people's energy up and sustain momentum.

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involved in the plan understands the strategic objective and is clear about the direction the plan will take. It means engaging stakeholders in the effort by helping people understand the business drivers behind the initiative and outcomes they can expect to see as a result of an effective implementation. At this point in the process, you want to engage people intellectually in the value of the effort. Everyone wants to "know" what's going on, and this phase of strategy implementation helps communicate that. It's important to work with your team and your leaders to ensure that the strategy and its direction are clear and unambiguous.

This is also the time to distinguish the business issues driving the strategy, why it's important to the organization, and the overall direction the plan will

Alignment among your leadership team is equally important early in the process. Do everything you can to make sure the leadership team responsible for communicating and implementing the strategy is consistent in its message and visibly behind the effort. Leaders who communicate mixed messages and conflicting priorities can, and will, quickly undermine the best plans.

Developing an overall communication plan is something we all know is essential and deserves rigorous attention. Share the barriers likely to be encountered and the hurdles that need to be cleared. Establish and communicate the measures that will be used to gauge success. Communicate through a variety of channels. Together, those actions will give stakeholders a clear sense of "I know."

I Care! Communicate the strategy and gain buy-in. People who believe in an effort will work harder to ensure its success. Believing in the strategy goes beyond understanding it intellectually. You may not be able to generate passion in everyone involved, but your goal should be to create a basic level of buy-in that this strategy is the right one for the organization, its customers, or its employees. This principle is equally true whether the strategy is a short-term intervention such as a product launch or a long-term organizational initiative, such as enhancing the brand experience of your customers.

We've all been involved in activities in which people understood a strategy outwardly but no one really bought into its success—thus, dooming the plan. The "I care" phase of the process is your opportunity to describe the roles that individuals play in the plan and to identify the competencies needed to execute the tactics. Helping others to see how they can contribute individually to the strategy's success, including the skills and competencies they'll learn, encourages them to personalize the vision. Establishing for people an individual connection to the plan builds support at the grass-roots level, aiding communication and building acceptance in your culture.

And don't forget the role leaders play here. How often have you campaigned for leadership involvement when rolling out a new strategy? The importance of leaders modeling a strategy's desired behaviors and both reinforcing and visibly advocating appropriate actions can't be underestimated. Leaders involved in the strategy must be prepared to provide ongoing support, be role models, and offer coaching and reinforcement throughout the process.

I Can! Build competence, and execute the plan. Helping your organization understand the intent and business issues

driving a strategy and building internal support and commitment are essential for sustained implementation. But, as we all know, the bottom line in making it happen and keeping it going comes down to individual performance, from the front line to the leaders involved.

A strong desire to close a big sale, lead a team through reorganization, or retain an unhappy customer is important, but motivation and desire alone don't beget skills. Achieving results takes knowledge, skills, and competence. When people have the will but lack the skills, they can become fearful, frustrated, and even cynical.

This part of strategy implementation is where training organizations excel: designing and implementing skill-building and performance improvement.

But the successful execution of strategy must also include integrating skill development with appropriate systems and processes that enable people to perform.

A timely example is the rapid growth of customer relationship management systems. Organizations have spent millions of dollars investing in sophisticated CRM solutions designed to enhance the customer experience and create customer loyalty. A growing body of research, however, suggests that many of those systems fall well short of their goals and lofty expectations. Not because of technical or system issues, but because frontline employees often don't receive the training needed to use the data and system fully in customer interactions.

Envision the future

Frederick Smith, CEO of FedEx, once said, "The hard stuff is easy. It's the soft stuff that's hard." And so it is with implementing strategies.

Getting your leaders and employees to align their behavior with a new strategy and vision for the future usually means they must, to varying degrees, change the way they think and work. The starting point for helping people embrace and prepare for a new direction is two-way dialogue that presents the imperative for change and helps everyone envision the future and develop a picture of a role for themselves within it.

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