

Running, sprouts and strategic planning

Let me guess: your three new year resolutions were to 1) exercise more 2) eat healthily and 3) undertake some strategic planning. So before you lace up the trainers or unwrap another vegetarian on rye, here are some insights to help you bring about the third.

Shareholders' own goal

Before embarking on a strategic planning process ensure that the main shareholders' goals have been defined and discussed. There is little use creating a strategic direction that fails to support the majority shareholders in their personal and business endeavours.

No fans of Status Quo

Strategy, by its nature, means to change. 'More of the same' is not strategic. Ensure there is a commitment from all parties to change, stretch and evolve before any planning initiatives are undertaken.

Neutral umpires

A strategic planning programme led by an external facilitator, rather than the business owner, will be more effective. Ideas from all participants tend to flow more freely and the outsourcing of the facilitation ensures that operational issues are less likely to impact on the quality of the sessions or overall timeframes.

Use your bench

Diversity in backgrounds, age, experience and ideas are key attributes for a successful strategy team. Remember that two people with the same ideas are effectively one person. Get a balanced mix of internal and external participants, ensuring all have positive and creative personas. Seniority is not necessarily a quality that equates to effective strategic contribution.

The higher authority

Who is going to monitor the execution of the strategic plan and hold management accountable? Too often the time, effort and resources invested in creating a plan prove fruitless as its execution falters and fades over the following months. Consider the appointment of an independent advisor or other form of governance in advance of strategic planning.

Here's one I prepared earlier

Group sessions and off site strategy days are important however it's the depth of reflection, analysis and forethought undertaken prior to these sessions that will help guarantee success. Use thinksheets to collate and aggregate ideas in advance. This leads to a better use of group time to discuss and evolve ideas rather than brainstorm from scratch.



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The best way to predict the future is to create it

There's often a moment of doubt or frustration when participants (especially business owners) are asked to look in to the future. "I don't know what will be happening in my market next week let alone in 5 years time" they say. Your facilitator will use envisioning techniques like accolades you can see the company being awarded or opportunities you see arising from limitless resources to help overcome these strategic blocks.

OK, now it's time to shutdown the PC and head to the gym!



