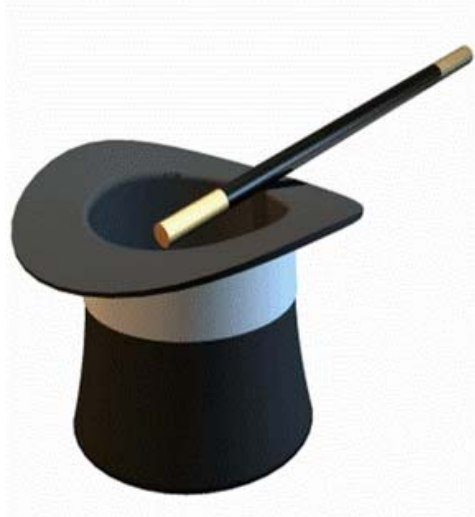


Friday, January 08, 2010

Magic Wand of Strategic Planning

by Holly G. Green



Imagine if Hogwarts, the mythical school of magic and sorcery in the Harry Potter books, taught strategic planning.

You could use enchanted mirrors to gaze into the future with unerring accuracy. You could conjure up potions for warding off evil competitors, recite charms for turning lousy products into perennial moneymakers, and chant incantations for rendering customers intensely loyal under your spell. Most important, you could learn how to wield the magic wand that makes all your business goals and aspirations come true.

Sound crazy?

We all know that magic wands only work in fairy tales and Hollywood movies. But you would be amazed at how many organizations subscribe to what I call the "And then a miracle happens..." approach to strategic planning.

With this approach, management invests a great deal of time and energy in identifying the destination (where the company needs to go), but puts almost no effort into determining how the company will get there. Instead, they believe that someone will wave their magic wand and the organization will suddenly get to where it wants to go.

In all my years of helping companies craft strategic plans, I have seen a lot of misguided thinking about the strategic planning process. But perhaps the most common fallacy is believing that just because you state a goal it will magically happen. Maybe at Hogwarts, but not in the real world!

Without question, creating a strategic plan takes hard work. But it represents only half the battle. To achieve the results laid out by the plan, you must also figure out how you will get there, which requires breaking down the process of reaching your destination into manageable steps. To facilitate this process, I recommend dividing the journey into three distinct phases: incremental, substantial, and transformational.

Start by comparing your destination to your current reality, noting any gaps between the two. Then identify what you will do incrementally different to achieve your goals. Over the next six months, what needs to happen in order to make progress toward your destination? What operating goals and strategies can you achieve in that time frame? What capabilities must be in place to support getting there?

During this phase, take into account how much change your organization can absorb without getting off track. Pay close attention to what it will take to increase the skills, knowledge, and competency levels to reach your destination. And if new systems and processes need to be created, how long will it take to implement them?

Next, identify what you will do substantially different to move closer to your goal. In other words, what needs to happen after the first six months and prior to your first 18 months of progress? Again, look at the operating goals and strategies you can achieve during this time frame, and what new skills, resources, capabilities, systems or processes will be required to achieve them.

Finally, identify what you will do that begins to achieve the type of transformational goals you set during the initial strategic planning process. What will happen after the first 18 months of progress? What operating goals and strategies can you achieve in that time frame? What capabilities must be in place to support getting there? Keep in mind that a lot may have happened since you first embarked on your journey. So make sure to build as much flexibility into this phase of the plan as possible.

In today's chaotic markets, nothing is more critical than figuring out where you need to go as an organization. Once you do, put away your magic wand and invest the time in creating your incremental, substantial, and transformational action plans. These will ensure that all your hard work during the initial planning phase doesn't go to waste.

Magic may rule supreme at Hogwarts. But in the real world, hard work, discipline, focus, and manageable action steps win every time.



Holly is the CEO of THE HUMAN FACTOR, Inc. (www.TheHumanFactor.biz) and is a highly sought after and acclaimed speaker, business consultant, and author. Her unique approach to creating strategic agility, helping others go slow to go fast, will change your thinking.

Labels: [Holly G Green](#), [Leadership](#), [Management](#), [Planning](#), [Strategy](#)

www.BX.Businessweek.com