

Are you focused on **Winning?**

Today's business environment is all about possibilities, promise and potential, and sometimes a lot of other stuff gets in the way.

Are you ready to win?



each year

contains
365 days
8,760 hours
525,600 minutes
31,536,000 seconds

How will you spend them?

Will you be focused on winning and moving towards it each day, celebrating milestones along the way? Or will you be playing to not lose, worrying about the past, talking constantly about what went wrong, stewing about how tough markets are these days, why you can't do something or why customers just won't X, etc., etc., etc.?

Today's business environment is all about possibilities, promise and potential. But making all those dazzling possibilities turn into a reality requires a real focus on and a commitment to winning.

When an organization lacks a clear destination, it usually has many ill-defined ones. Employees feel unmotivated and uncommitted. Time, talent and resources get wasted on products and projects that go nowhere. And people end up working on their own personal agendas rather than doing what's best for the company. They think they are doing the right thing, but directions changed and someone forgot to realign them.

Having a clear definition of winning provides focus and clarity at the individual, team and organizational level. It gets everyone aligned and moving in the same direction. And it motivates and inspires people to perform at their best. When employees know where they're going and what they need to do to get there, it becomes much easier to reach your destination.

That's why your #1 job is to create a compelling vision of winning, then keep yourself and everyone else in the organization focused on it with laser-like intensity.

Start by getting clear on your vision of winning. Pause to think about what really matters: what does winning look like for you? What do you need to do - as individuals and as an organization - to win? What will it look like when you have won?

Answer these questions with as much specificity as possible. For example, identify the key operational and financial metrics that you will have achieved. Paint a picture of what your workplace and culture will look and feel like when you have won - what attitudes, beliefs, and core values will the organization be living by?

Identify the skills, knowledge, tools, technologies and abilities you will have acquired or enhanced in order to win. What organizational structures will be in place? What new products or services will you have brought to market? What new customers will you have acquired? How will you have leveraged the customer relationships you already have?

Once you have this crystal clear picture of winning, **share it with everyone in your ecosystem**. Not just employees, but customers, vendors, suppliers, partners, alliances - anyone that has a stake in helping you win.

Don't share your vision of winning like you're giving a quarterly financial report. Use it to inspire people. Talk about why winning is important to you personally, and why you feel so passionate about where the organization is going. Link your vision of winning to the bigger picture by letting people know how they will have made a difference in the world when you have won. At the same time, point out what's in for them when the organization wins.

To stay focused on winning, **also get clear on what you will not do**. Then make sure those things don't sap your time, energy and attention. Make a list of all the major initiatives and big projects that no longer fit your definition of winning and shut them down.

Most leaders know intuitively when a project no longer makes sense because the goals have gotten out of sync with changing market realities. Yet they still cling to the belief that they can somehow squeeze some mileage out of a dead horse. Don't let outdated assumptions and thought bubbles prevent you from getting those obstacles to winning out of the way!

Help your organization stay focused by setting clear individual goals that link directly to the organization's key strategies for winning. Then give ongoing feedback on how they and the organization are doing. You'll know you're communicating enough when every employee can answer these questions without hesitation:

- What are my top priorities?
- What are the three primary objectives I need to achieve this week/this quarter/this year?
- How will I know I have been successful after I have worked so hard this week/month/quarter?
- How will we know when we have won – as a team, as an organization?

As the leader, you set the tone for your entire organization. Does your language and behavior reflect a relentless approach to winning? Or does it reflect a willingness to settle for just not losing, being second best....or less?

The Strategic Agility Framework

Using the framework as a guide, you'll engage with your team to answer critical questions. You'll sketch out your destination model (what winning looks like) and the incremental, substantial, and transformational steps it will take to get there. You'll learn how to determine the areas of focus for your organization and how to keep everyone on track.



Determine An Approach

The process of strategic planning is critical to the quality of the results and requires more than a linear progression through typical phases.

It is important to determine your approach to strategic planning before you dive in!

When employees are all involved in determining the components of the plan, there is generally deeper understanding of what they mean as well as greater buy-in and alignment for achieving them. However, due to time, financial and other resource constraints, this is not always possible. There are a variety of approaches for setting organizational goals. Each approach, like most things in life, has its advantages and disadvantages.

Approach	Overview	Advantages	Disadvantages
Proclaiming	<p>Most components of the organizational goal setting are established by a small group of company leaders or even a singular individual.</p> <p><i>"This is what we are doing. Get excited and get on board."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be done with clarity. • Appropriate in a crisis or urgent situation where there is no time to engage others in the process initially. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Somewhat authoritarian approach can backfire. • Does not allow for input, collaboration or discussion, which can stifle innovation and engagement with the mission, strategies & goals.
Persuading	<p>Most components of the organizational goal setting are established by a small group of company leaders.</p> <p><i>"This is how we will succeed. Isn't this great?"</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If employees believe it is good for them, they will typically sign on. • If there is trust in place, employees want to believe the organization will be successful, so will engage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieving compliance is easy, getting commitment is not and may be hard to discern. • Going overboard on the 'sales speak' may come off as insincere and shallow.
Testing	<p>Components of the organizational goal setting are established in draft form and then leadership seeks input.</p> <p><i>"Look what we have come up with. What do you think?"</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those closest to your customer can express themselves. • An initial draft provides some focus for the feedback. • If I have input, I feel valued and am more likely to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The approach can take a lot of time depending on how much input and how many employees participate. • If input is not incorporated into the final version, employees may be angry and resentful.
Collaborating	<p>A framework and process is put in place, input is sought, compiled and distilled from all levels of the organization.</p> <p><i>"This is where we believe we should go. We are in this together."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The framework and process provide structure. • Employees like to share their opinions and input, and usually feel more valued when they can do so. • If employees create it, they get it and often try harder to live it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This approach is lengthy and requires numerous resources including time, facilitation, and analysis. • Ongoing input is hard to manage and incorporate.



Consider the following in determining which approach you will take:

Your current business conditions

- Is there a need to quickly change? (You are near bankruptcy, an investor pulled out, a new competitive product made yours obsolete, board pressure, etc.)
- Has your market suddenly shifted dramatically? (New regulations, breakthrough products, etc.)
- Are there competitors that have recently had a significant impact on your success and/or future?

Your leadership credibility and trust levels

- Is there trust in the organization?
- Are employees generally engaged?
- Have you recently experienced a disruptive event such as a merger or acquisition that caused some confusion?

Resource availability

- How much time and money do you have to invest in the process?
- Can you afford not to invest in the process?
- What will you give up and what will you get?

Your leadership & management style

- Do you really want input or are you so clear that you don't have the tolerance for others' ideas?
- What is your most comfortable style? If you are a 'natural' salesperson, it will be difficult to sincerely lead a process without using those skills.
- What skills do you need to develop to do an effective job with your chosen approach, and how will you get them?
- How often and from whom will you get feedback on how well the entire process is going?

Ask The Right Questions Throughout

As a business consultant, behavioral scientist, and keynote speaker, much of what I talk about runs counterintuitive to conventional leadership thinking.

I constantly urge business leaders to slow down to go fast. Unlearn to learn. Stop making stuff up (or at least be aware when you are). Regularly challenge what you think you know about your customers, your markets, and your industry.

Here's another one: stop trying to have all the right answers and start focusing on asking the right questions.

A generation ago, when the world didn't move so quickly, leaders had ample time to gather information, analyze the data, and make informed decisions regarding the strategy and direction for our organizations. But the increasing speed and complexity of our world now makes it impossible to have all the information we need to make fully informed decisions. That's why today's leaders must develop the critical skill of asking questions rather than having all the answers.

The trick is coming up with the right questions.

Too often, leaders ask questions that keep people focused on problems and obstacles rather than on solutions. For example, suppose your company has set a target of 20% sales growth but the numbers keep lagging behind the goal. The typical approach involves asking the sales team questions like: Why aren't you selling more? Why can't you work together more effectively? What are you going to do differently to sell more and catch up to plan?

On the surface these seem like reasonable questions. However, they usually produce negative outcomes because they focus everyone's thinking on problems rather than solutions. They also cause the sales team to feel attacked, which puts them on the defensive. This, in turn, causes them to look for scapegoat answers that have nothing to do with achieving the goal.

"Customers aren't buying right now. We're in a down economy. Our competitors keep undercutting our price." The litany of excuses goes on and on. If you hammer the sales team hard enough with these kinds of questions, sales may go up. But more likely you'll end up with continued sluggish sales and a demoralized sales team.

How do you ask the right questions?

It starts with a process I call "success visioning." This involves focusing on where you want to go (your target destination) and then picturing what it looks like when you get there. Not *if* you get there, but when you get there. Once you have a clear picture of what winning looks like for your organization, ask a series of future, active, past-tense questions that presume the target has already been achieved.

For example, ask "When we have achieved our sales growth rate of 20%:

- How did we conduct outreach to our customers?
- What channels did we use?
- What products did we sell most effectively?
- What words or phrases did we use to clearly differentiate ourselves?
- Who did we build the strongest relationships with in the market?
- What does our brand mean?
- What systems did we use to track and support our progress?
- What testimonials did we leverage?
- How did we deepen our contacts at each client?
- How did we monitor and respond to changing market conditions?

See the difference?

Asking people why they aren't selling more focuses their brains on the problem. Asking future, active, past-tense questions focuses their brains on filling in the blanks of what they did to achieve the goal.

Success visioning, coupled with future, active, past tense questioning works because it shifts your attention from what is stopping you from reaching your destination to what you are doing when you have gotten there. Your brain then begins to fill in with all sorts of options on how to achieve success. So first get crystal clear on what winning looks like for your organization. Then use open-ended questions to get people thinking and acting like your future desired state is already happening.

In a world where you can no longer predict the future with any degree of accuracy, the success of your business may hinge upon your ability to ask the right questions at the right time. What are the right questions for your business, and when do you plan to ask them?

Define why you exist (your mission)

Think about and consider the following when developing your mission statement

- Aspirational: Is it big and compelling?
- Brevity: Is it brief and to the point?
- Clarity: Is it easy to understand?
- Specific: Does it reflect our unique characteristics (our passion, what we can be the best at, our economic engine)?
- General: Is it broad enough to include evolving business needs?
- Pride: Are you glad to be a part of the effort?
- Inspiration: Does it compel you to want to achieve it?

A mission statement should be your stake in the ground. It is a picture of the future you seek to create, described in the present tense, as if it were happening now. It will tell others why you exist, why you provide value and what you are trying to do.

A sampling of company mission statements:

We are a company focused on solving some of the world's toughest problems.

We are the leading global provider of travel experiences by inspiring travelers everywhere.

We exist to benefit and refresh everyone it (our product) touches.

To bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world. (If you have a body, you are an athlete.)

Our business is discovering, developing and delivering novel medicines and vaccines that can make a difference in people's lives.

We provide relief to victims of disasters and help people prevent, prepare for, and respond to emergencies.

To unleash the potential and power of people and organizations for the common good.

We are the firm that consistently exceeds the expectations of our clients and our people.

We are ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen.

Organizing the world's information and making it universally accessible and useful.

Helping businesses and people throughout the world realize their full potential.

Do research and exploration

What do we need to know?

Typical areas covered in the research phase include the following:

- Competitors
- Latest technologies in the sector/beside the sector
- Partners/alliances
- Regions (geographic or demographic)
- Customers/consumers (history, trends, etc.)
- Complimentary services & products
- Similar and dissimilar business models (franchises, global, subscription, services, etc.)

Have non-experts do at least some of the research. Putting on a fresh pair of glasses enables us to see things in new ways.

Ask yourself: Where else can we look? Who is incredibly successful in current markets? What business models are new? What products have been best sellers in the past twelve months? What new needs or wants do consumers/clients have? If money/other resources were no object, who would beat us?

Structure the 'expert' presentation:

- General approach
- Data found
- Recommendations & key points
- What do you believe possible
- Outstanding questions

Your value proposition defines the significance you have to your stakeholders (both internal and external).



Clarify how you will behave (your values or guiding principles)

- Real: Is it achievable and realistic?
- Hierarchy: Do you need to establish a hierarchy of values so that when conflict occurs, you can be clear on what behavior is expected?
- Guiding: Does it create clear guidance on what to do and how to behave?
- Measurable: Can you define it so that it can be measured and continuously improved?
- Pride: Is it an attribute you are proud of?

Guiding principles or values describe how you will behave with each other as well as with other stakeholders. They note what you will do when faced with difficult situations or challenges. They are excellent benchmarks to refer back to and measure against on a continuous basis to ensure you are achieving your goals in a way that you believe is best.

Get clear on who your key stakeholders are and what they expect from you.

These are the phrases you want customers or clients saying about you if asked why he/she purchases your services/products. The statement can help make it clear what differentiates the company/group/division from others and what value you have externally.

- Consistency: Is it consistent with the mission statement as well as the guiding principles/values?
- Compelling: As a stakeholder, does it make me want to engage? Is the value clear to me?
- Specific: Does it provide enough details to do a level of measurement?
- Flexible: Is it flexible enough to include evolving stakeholder needs?
- Pride: Are you glad to be a part of the effort?
- Inspiration: Does it compel you to want to achieve it and others to want to 'buy' it?

Sample introductory verbiage for a value proposition:

As an indispensable business partner, we provide superior...
As a trusted source, we provide the best experience and expertise to...
As the leader of innovation in X, we establish the standards and...

Your destination statements, sometimes called your vision, describe where you are going. The more clarity you can create on what it looks like at the end state, the more likely you are to get there.

Determine what it looks like when you win

Establish your destination points

In today's fast paced times, destination statements generally encompass a three-year or less timeframe. Beyond that, you are likely just guessing as to what is possible.

The statements note what it looks like when you arrive at your destination. [A destination statement paints a vivid picture for everyone and generates ongoing motivation to get there.](#) It provides cohesion, direction and behavioral guidance. It tells everyone what you will be when you get to where you want to go. Specificity is critical. Consider creating destination statements for each area of your organization. The following categories are a good starting point:

Categories	What it looks like when we get there...
Key operating achievements (the big three or four) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Revenue (organic vs. acquisition)• DCM (operational efficiency)• Growth (organic vs. acquisition)	
What products will be in market What products will be in development	
Who will our customers be How many will we have (# of subscribers, ARPU, etc.)	
What skills/knowledge/abilities will exist <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Business Unit or Division Level• Company-wide	
What organizational structures will be in place <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Business Unit or Division Level• Company-wide	
What tools, systems and technology are necessary <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Internal vs. External	
What work processes & metrics will be used	
Who will our competitors be/what types of companies will we compete against Greatest competitive advantage/ threat	
How will we be known What will our brand represent	
How the workplace culture will be including the attitudes, beliefs, values, and operating principles	

Determine what it looks like when you win

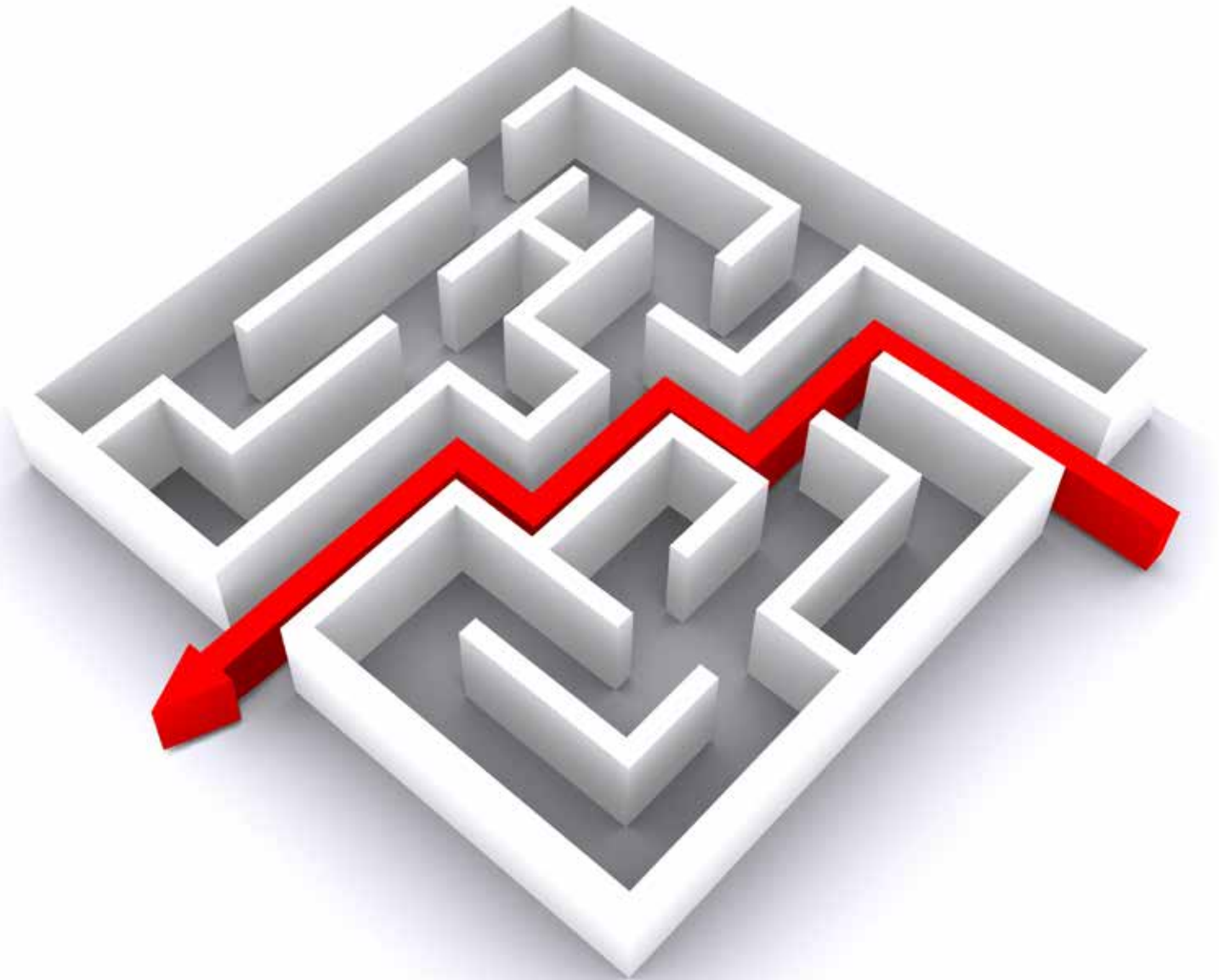
Once you have completed your destination model, check the statements against the following criteria:

- Consistency: Is it consistent with the mission statement?
- Clarity: Is it easy to understand? Is it easy to tell what is in and what is out? Does it tell you what you need to do (directionally)?
- Specific: Does it provide enough details to initiate some level of measurement? Does it paint a picture I can relate to and a place I can envision?
- Flexible: Is it flexible enough to include evolving business needs?
- Pride: Are you glad to be a part of the effort?
- Inspiration: Does it compel you to want to go there?

Maintaining commitment and action is challenging in any organization. It is common for organizations and managers to lack follow-up processes, to lose focus on the long term goals and to be driven by non-productive daily activities. Additionally, the past is often comfortable and compelling for employees because people think they understand what happened and why. It is important to make sure that the future is more compelling than the past. Your destination statement(s) should support addressing these challenges.



Once you are clear where you are going, look at where you are



For most companies, conducting a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities & threats) analysis is an integral part of the strategic planning process. And it can be very helpful because an accurate identification of SWOTs plays an important role in determining subsequent steps in the planning process.

For those not familiar with SWOT, strengths are those areas where we excel that are not easily copied by others. Weaknesses are the risks or limitations that get in our way. Opportunities

represent possibilities that we can capitalize on or leverage. And threats consist of things in the external environment that give us cause for concern. For example, what are our current competitors likely to do, and where might unexpected competitors come from?

A SWOT analysis offers a powerful strategic planning tool. But only if you use it to move forward rather than get stuck in the past.

For example, when considering your organizational strengths, ask questions like:

- Where have we really been able to excel?
- Is there something we have that we don't use/do enough?
- Is there something we can develop quickly that we can leverage?
- What do others consider our greatest strength?

When considering weaknesses:

- What has gotten in our way in the past?
- How do we get in our own way?
- What processes do we have for identifying weaknesses in the organization, and how well do these processes work?
- What processes do we have for addressing these deficiencies, and how well do these processes work?

When used properly, a SWOT exercise is a powerful planning tool. Unfortunately, many companies misuse it by getting stuck in old patterns of thinking about problems and threats rather than looking ahead to where the company needs to go and focusing on winning.

A primary goal of strategic planning is figuring out what you can do, not what you can't. However, rather than looking for new and better ways to add value to their customers, many companies use the SWOT process to focus on blaming competitors, the economy, or other external factors for things they can't control. As a result, they end up spinning their wheels rather than gaining any real traction to move the company toward its destination.

The key to using SWOT effectively is not just identifying your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. It's asking the right questions and using the information that gets uncovered in an appropriate manner.

When identifying possible opportunities:

- Is there a product, a customer relationship, or a market presence that we can better leverage?
- Is there something we would pursue if we had more resources (people, dollars, time, etc.)?
- What are our competitors most worried we will do? Should we?
- What signals are critical to assessing our relationships with our market and customers?

When considering threats:

- What are we most concerned about?
- Are new or different competitors likely to emerge?
- Is there a potential supply problem?
- Do we have good relationships with employees, vendors and customers?

It also pays to analyze and review how you conduct the SWOT process itself. Not just after the fact, but as you're engaged in the process. For example:

- What proportions of our organization's resources go towards maintaining and enhancing the status quo?
- How much time do we spend leading and nurturing new directions?
- What new efforts have we started in the past year?
- What efforts have we stopped?
- Is our long-term thinking focused on the few critical things that matter? Are we vigilantly avoiding the many possible diversions?

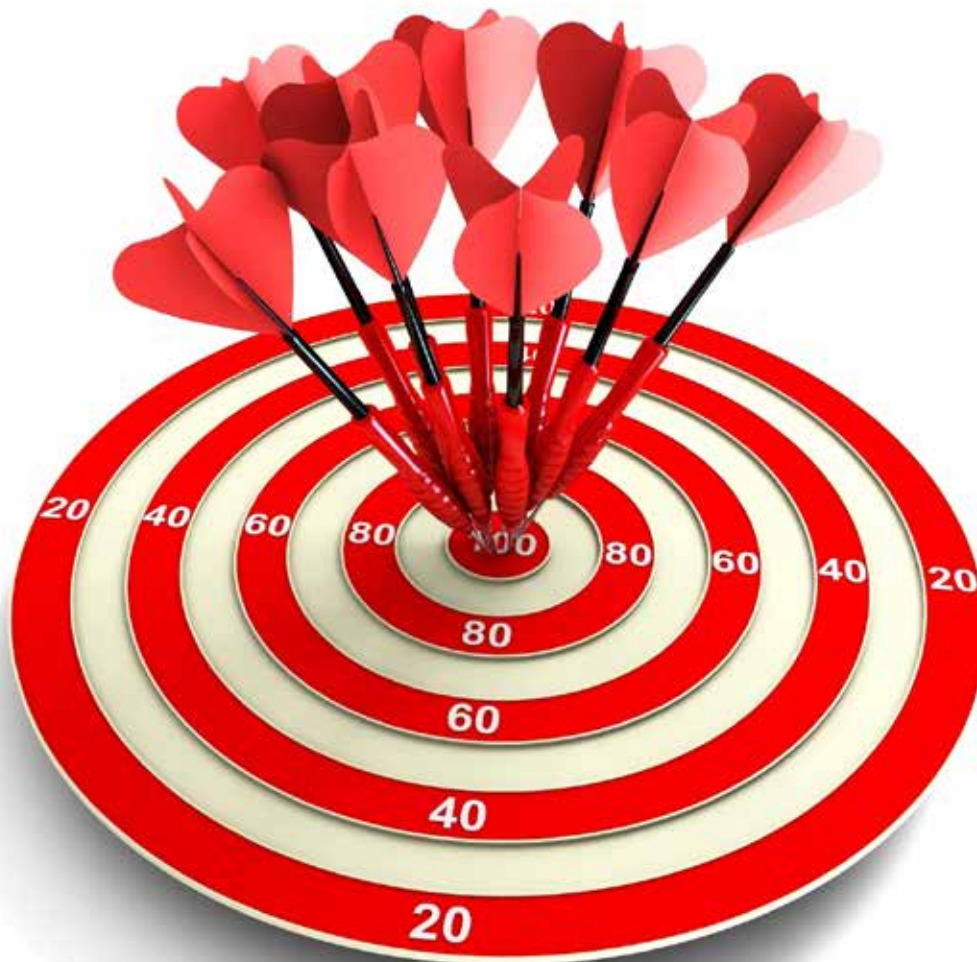
A SWOT analysis can help you achieve strategic agility, but only if you use the information to break away from old patterns of thinking and make strategic decisions based on where you're going rather than where you've been.

Determine areas of focus across the organization

Narrowing to three to five strategies greatly assists in achieving focus and alignment throughout the organization. Employees should be able to tell you what the core strategies are in the company at any given time.

What are the three to five areas everyone should be focused on to get to the destination?

- What cuts across several destination points?
- Where should the majority of energy be focused?
- What must everyone keep in mind as they make investments in people and other resources?
- What guides us on what to do and not to do?



Operationalize your strategic plan

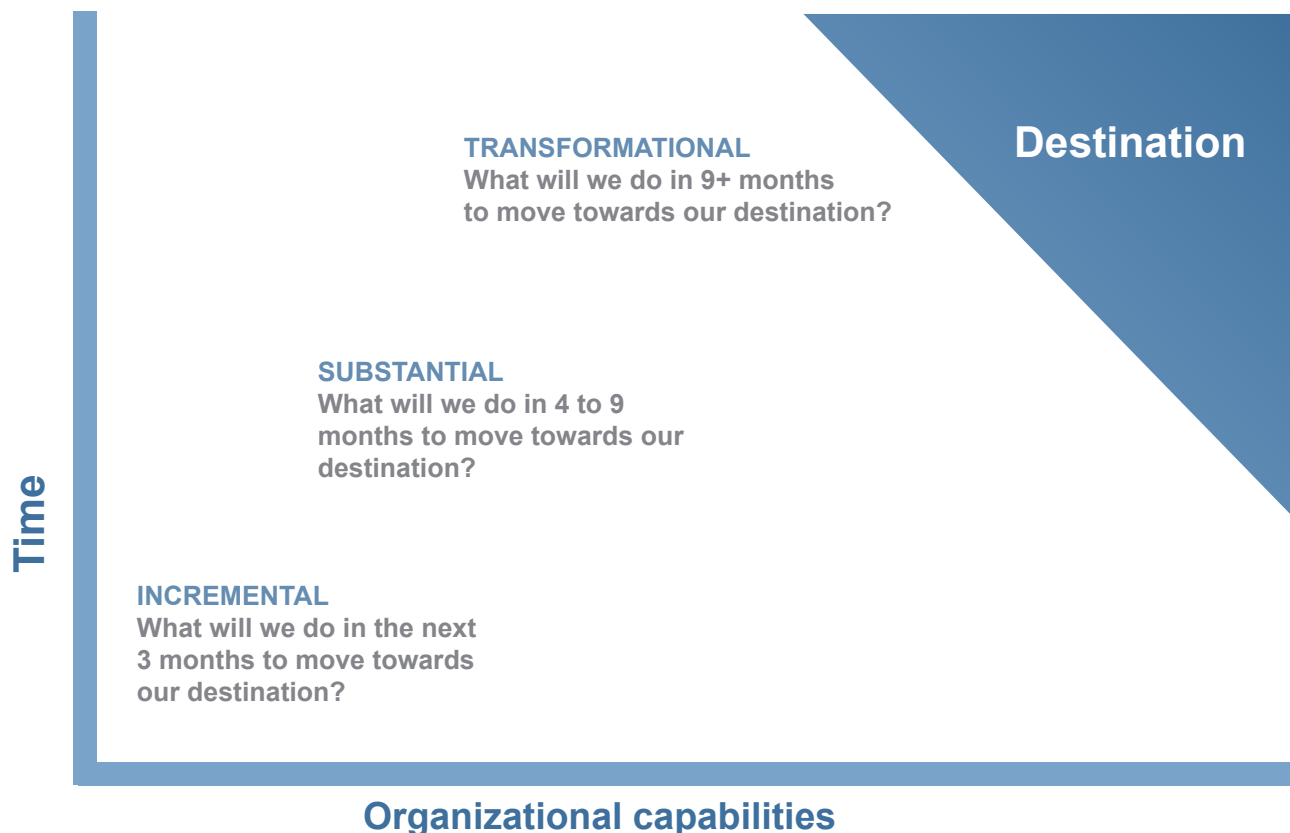
Creating a Breakthrough Model

It is valuable to begin to think about getting to the destination in manageable steps. The process of noting what you will do broken down by time and the organizational capabilities required to do it forces you to think through how much you can accomplish in what timeframe. Be aggressive but realistic with goal setting.

An effective goal setting process is really about change. Effective change depends on employees, leaders and managers altering how they think, what they believe to be so about the organization, and changing the status quo. To achieve these sorts of adjustments, explicitly outline what will be different in each time period. Consider whether current organizational processes and ways of working are aligned with the goals and strategies or whether they are in the way. Additionally, evaluate if you typically get off track easily.

Do short-term problems and opportunities frequently preempt longer term plans and undermine your progress? Who will stay focused on executing the long-term plans and keep others aligned? Is follow-up something you and your organization are generally good at? Are there consequences when commitments are not met?

Always think through both the 'what' and the 'how' your goals will be achieved, and address both. To assist in truly determining what it will take to get to your destination, following is a model to support you in outlining each step. The breakthrough model is designed in two parts. The first part is a broad swipe at the significant initiatives or projects that you will do broken down by time and resources. Once you believe you have this done, you can then move to a more detailed level of planning.



Current Reality

Operationalize your strategic plan

Your breakthrough model outlines what you will do. The focus is on action. Remember that all the best thought-out plans and goal setting processes in the world do not make a difference if you do not act on them. Once you have completed your initial draft of your breakthrough model, think through the following:

- Does it seem like it will be easy now you have created your initial plan?
- Are you prepared to deal with changes that may become necessary as you execute these plans?
- How often have your plans worked out like you intended? How often have your successes happened exactly as you planned?
- Does your plan rely on things occurring exactly as you anticipate? What if this does not happen?
- Do you have a process for monitoring the marketplace so that you can adjust when necessary?
- Is the plan created so that you can take advantage of new market developments, including unexpected opportunities?
- How will you make regular reality checks of what is going well and what is not?

Becoming a leader in today's chaotic markets requires fast, flexible and highly adaptable organizations. Ones that anticipate and plan for change rather than react it to after the fact.



Bring it to life in your organization



If your plan sits on a shelf or in a drawer, you've wasted a lot of time and energy! Bring your plan to life by creating team and individual goals all linked to the company's strategies and destination. Then **Inform**, **Inspire** and **Engage**™ everyone in your ecosystem.

Informing is the first step in aligning employees and getting buy-in. It starts with sharing the why, what and how of your strategic plan. Then discuss and get clear on individual roles in meeting the goals necessary to achieve the plan.

Today's employees want to believe that their work is making a difference in the world.

To inspire:

- Share a compelling vision of what tomorrow looks like. How will that vision make the world a better place and improve their lives?
- Constantly discuss the aspirational components of your model. Why should employees aspire to achieve the goals of the organization?
- Share why you believe the destination is compelling. What is it about where the company is going that inspires you?
- Communicate with enthusiasm and passion.
- Ask employees what the vision means to them. Share their responses via multiple channels.
- Share positive customer feedback. Give people reasons to feel good about what the company does.
- Celebrate achievement of milestones. We all want to be part of a winning team, so recognize the progress and success along the way to your goals.

And finally...

Measure what matters

Remember the old adage, what gets measured, gets done? Well, what does not get measured may still be getting done in your organization as well. Unfortunately, it may not be what you want done or what gets you to your destination. You must constantly help employees gain clarity on what they should still be working on. Organizational needs are constantly changing. Goals that were set in January may be out of date by March if significant external or internal forces have created a new environment in which you operate. As changes happen, managers and leaders must work with employees to stay clear on the current priorities. Just because a project was announced and set as a top priority in February does not mean it will remain that way for an entire year or several years.

MEASURE THE RIGHT THINGS.

When effective strategic planning and goal setting is done, combined with a method to track progress and identify obstacles, it contributes to success and bottom line results. Regularly tracking progress against performance goals and objectives also provides the opportunity to recognize and reward employees, contributing to job satisfaction and productivity. Employees want to feel successful, to do well at their job and feel they are making a valuable contribution.

In order to ensure this, you must track progress and constantly communicate it.



Use your breakthrough model as the basis for creating an ongoing tracking and measurement system. Your organization will continually provide clues and cues as to whether or not individuals and teams are on track. The most obvious will be in the results achieved and/or milestones met. But do not focus solely on results. The how of getting there is equally important. However, you will only notice your progress if you have measures in place and they are getting looked at on an ongoing basis.

Remember to measure to standards of excellence and to the desired state. Clearly note in your destination points what it looks like when you get to where you are going. Plainly define what behaving in the desired manner looks like. What would others see if they observed the company going about its day to day work? If you want everyone in the organization focused on customer retention, measure retention versus customer turnover or churn. If profits are important, measure profitable revenue growth versus revenue alone, measure employee retention versus employee turnover.

MEASURE THE RIGHT NUMBER OF THINGS



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