



# Staying on Strategy

## INTRODUCTION

Because it is difficult to keep an organization strategy focused, strategy motivated and strategy educated leaders must have an array of tools in order to accomplish the implementation.

Getting a coherent and sound strategy conceptualized is a difficult and challenging task. Obtaining concurrence from the staff, board, investors etc. is another essential step. Then the real work of implementation begins. Because it is difficult to keep an organization strategy focused, strategy motivated and strategy educated leaders must have an array of tools in order to accomplish the implementation.

## TOOLS FOR STAYING ON STRATEGY

The most powerful tool for staying on strategy is the compensation system. When designed to drive strategy the behavior of the followers will support the strategy.

In addition to compensation, however, the activities of the leader also have a major impact. There are a number of commonly used tools for keeping an organization on strategy. Each tool is impactful but each has some associated shortcomings.



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In addition to the widely practiced search for off strategy behaviors, leaders have to scan the environment for examples of behaviors that actually drive strategy.

The leader can frequently remind people about the strategy in order to keep them focused. This has to be said frequently and repetitively. As a matter of fact the leaders have to say it so often that they get tired of saying it. Followers get tired of hearing it as well. As a result, there is sometimes not sufficient repetition in order for the strategy to be firmly embedded in the minds of followers.

Followers can easily drift into activities that are off strategy. These off strategy activities are interesting or easy and thus people are quite tempted by them. Leaders have to monitor these off strategy behaviors and reorient people. This reorientation often results in resistance and defensiveness on the part of those who are off strategy. The leader can be experienced as excessively critical even though such corrective management is necessary.

Sometimes a lack of knowledge about the specific behaviors needed to drive the strategy is the major reason for the off strategy behaviors. Followers need to have their knowledge expanded about the specific behaviors that are needed. The leader has to devote significant amounts of time to such teaching and would benefit from having more people do the teaching.

Are there any other additional strategy driving tools available to a leader and especially ones which overcome some of the weaknesses inherent in the aforementioned tools?

## AN ADDITIONAL TOOL: SHOWCASING

Showcasing is one additional tool and involves exposing the organization to specific examples of strategy enhancing behaviors. It is positive in tone, elevating rather than correcting, and occurs without continuing personal involvement on the part of the leader. Showcasing requires the following steps.

In order to use showcasing, leaders have to reorient themselves in terms of how they scan their environments. In addition to the widely practiced search for off strategy behaviors, leaders have to scan the environment for examples of behaviors that actually drive strategy.

With this additional scanning in place leaders will discover experiences and accomplishments that illustrate the exact behaviors needed in order to drive the strategy. The leader can have the follower who did this work share it with the rest of the staff. As the individual shares the experience it is important for the leader to inquire about the specific behaviors that were manifested. By so doing others can learn how things were specifically accomplished. It is also important to focus on significant points during the work where certain obstacles were overcome or where important learnings are available.

The strategy of a materials company was to expand the use of one of their major materials. This material had some unique properties that could solve a multitude of manufacturing problems. The strategy required the sales organization to explore the manufacturing processes of different customers in order to find new applications for this material. The leaders in the company were having difficulty driving the behaviors needed to implement this strategy. They began looking for successes and making sure that these successes were showcased. They invited sales representatives who discovered new applications for the material to staff meetings. During these presentations the individual described with great specificity exactly what they did and how they did it. In so doing strategy driving behaviors were showcased and learned by the rest of the sales organization.

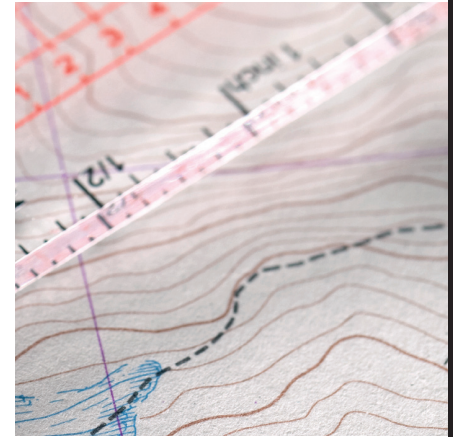
Showcasing of experiences provides a prime opportunity for others to learn the behaviors needed for implementation. The strategy is articulated in a way different than having the leader say the same things over and over again and have the followers become bored. This additional articulation of strategy comes from somebody different and comes in a form that is both interesting and educational. This showcasing can be repeated across situations and individuals. Persistent showcasing is a key to success and learning is maximized by hearing about different situations by different people.

Leaders are likely to encounter initial resistance from followers. The typical response about being asked to share a piece of work is something along the lines of “Oh, it wasn’t that important to share.” The leader then has to strongly encourage and maybe even demand that the individual share the example. As the benefits of showcasing become more apparent, followers become more willing and even eager to share their experiences.

Once people become comfortable with sharing positive experiences it is then easier to move into an examination of failures. As with successes, behavioral analysis of failures can be effective in teaching others. In regard to failures it might be wise for the leaders to go first and present some of their own failures as a way of modeling the benefits that come from such examination.

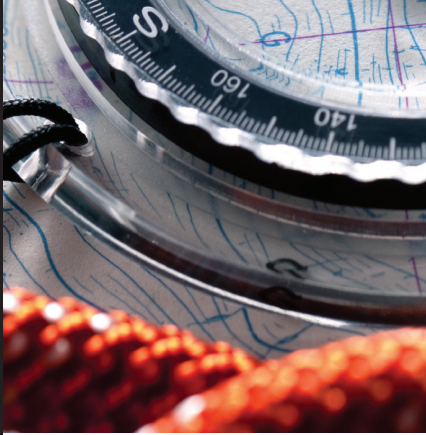
Such sharing of successes and failures begins to set the tone for the always valuable “continuous process improvement” that is prevalent in all high functioning organizations. These showcasing examples can be cascaded down throughout the organization so that the maximum number of people can learn from them.

Over time, groups are likely to become more self initiatory about showcasing successes and failures. As people become more comfortable and learn from experiences they are then much more self motivated to keep the learning going. The leader then has to do less prompting and the organization becomes self improvement oriented on its own.



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## OUTCOMES

Showcasing provides the opportunity for the strategy to be repeated without boredom or excessive repetition. Strategy articulation is done by a variety of people and across situations. It allows the leader to go beyond being critical of what is not being done and move into opportunities to demonstrate what can be done.

The process is also highly educational and impactful about the specific behaviors needed to drive strategy. Done well showcasing has a constructive tone to it. As a result there is less need for people to get defensive.

Enhanced team work is also an outcome of showcasing. As people share their work experiences with others a bond forms. People wind up being supported and educated by their peers and greater team cohesion results.

Lastly there is also increased respect for the leader. The aforementioned benefits occur because of his or her wisdom in using an additional tool that is a sophisticated, impactful and respectful way to drive strategy.

## CONCLUSIONS

Showcasing overcomes some of the weaknesses inherent in the activities typically used by leaders in driving strategy. It can be a powerful tool when added to a leader's repertoire and can drive the organization to be strategy focused, strategy motivated and strategy educated.



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