

The Entrepreneur: Leader and Strategist

As you can see, this column appears in a section of The Signal called the Entrepreneur's Corner. If you are an entrepreneur, you realize that the vast majority of entrepreneur led businesses have less than 200 employees. In that case you are likely all too aware of the fact that in an entrepreneur led business, the leader, the strategist and the strategy communicator is the same person. As your company's leader/strategist, are you up to the task?

How about a little Q&A to rate both your leadership and the company's strategy? I'll even provide the correct answers.

Q: Do you have a strategic plan? A: Yes.

Q: Does your strategic plan sit on the shelf for 11 months a year gathering dust? A: No, it guides our everyday actions.

Q: Have you updated your strategic plan in the past twelve months or less? A: Absolutely.

Q: Have you the leader / strategist clearly communicated the company's strategy to your employee base in an understandable manner? A: Yes, and regularly.

Hopefully you scored 100 percent! But if you think that your company is too small to need a strategic plan, you should think again. You wouldn't start out on a business trip to a far away and unfamiliar location without a map or GPS system now would you? So why do you think your team members know where you plan to take the company if you haven't formulated and communicated a strategy to get there?

Your small business needs a strategic plan because: 1) It sets the direction of the business using clearly defined priorities; 2) It aligns the effort of departments and functions; no breakaway or misdirected contributors; 3) It establishes a reference to test new ideas and avoid efforts that are not aligned with the strategy (yet can consume company resources with little return!); and, 4) It facilitates clear, consistent communication of company direction and priorities to staff and customers who all have a vested interest in your company's success.

One point of clarification is that a business plan is not a strategic plan. Chances are that you created a business plan when your company was just starting. Most assuredly you needed a business plan the first time you sought a loan or equity capital from other individuals or organizations. But a business plan is focused on new directions or new opportunities. It details how a new opportunity, already deemed to align with the strategy of the company, will be executed in a who, what and when type of format. For example, a business may have a strategy to expand sales by offering a new product — the how of the product addition being specified in the new product introduction business plan.

It's important to remember that strategy is not a destination, it is an ongoing journey. Your company's strategic planning needs to be continuous planning. As the leader of the organization, you are always thinking about it. You assure that as the world around you changes, your strategy is still in line with the

reality of the external environment. Your strategy needs to be consistent over time to provide a sense of stability to the organization yet remain flexible enough to allow for minor course corrections to accommodate changes in the environment as driven by the actions and expectations of your customers, competitors and suppliers and the economy in general.

Enlightened and successful companies know how to capture the benefits of a strategic plan that is well thought out, broadly communicated and relentlessly executed. Make sure that your company's success is enhanced by effectively utilizing this important business tool.

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