

the one page strategic plan

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A strategic plan defines how a business (or business unit) will achieve its goals. It provides a framework for decision-making. By creating a one page document, you can avoid common pitfalls and facilitate the communication and execution of a company's strategic plan.

Typical Scenario

It is early fall and the CEO and members of the senior staff have come together to begin the strategic planning process. The previous plan was emailed to everyone along with a reminder of the importance of strategic planning and the need for innovative thinking. One or more consultants are present to facilitate the meeting and to provide structure and a framework for discussions.

The consultant leads the group in a process that generally follows these steps: (see page 4 for chart)

Typical Strategic Planning Process

1. The CEO and senior staff create or revise the Vision, Mission, and Core Values statements.
2. The group brainstorms and lists all of the external factors that are currently affecting the business.
3. The group determines a strategy based upon a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis of the business.
4. The group outlines the programs and budgets necessary to implement the strategy.

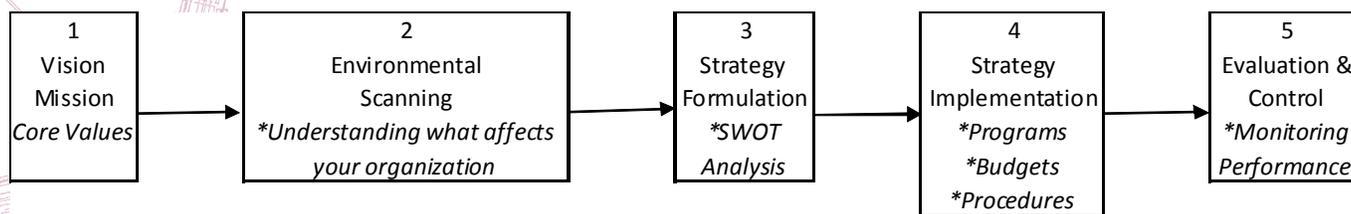
5. The group plans for contingencies. The management team subsequently monitors performance and implements corrective action as needed to stay on track following the planning stage.

The entire process generally takes from a few days to a week to accomplish.

Typical Shortcomings

There are several shortcomings to the traditional strategic planning process. Senior leadership teams often work together, live in the same city, and are exposed to similar news and reports. The issue here is the risk of groupthink (the pressure to preserve group harmony and teamwork) that may compromise debate and the expression of conflicting views. The leadership team may not be aware of new

Typical Strategic Planning Process



trends in technology, social-economic changes, or pending legislation.

Outsourcing the identification of environmental factors to a capable research team can eliminate this danger. Pick one with access to a university or research library to compile a situational analysis report who will summarize the latest economic, social, political, technology, and ecological trends. The report would also include industry growth rates, success factors, and risks that can be found from US Census Bureau data. Using this objective data for consideration rather than the brainstormed opinions of a small leadership group has obvious advantages for strategic planning.

Another shortcoming of traditional strategic planning is the reliance upon a SWOT analysis to determine strategy. In a SWOT analysis, internal strengths of a firm are identified and treated as a differentiator or advantage to strengthen the company against competition. But just because a company has a strength is no guarantee that it is something that the market actually wants. Many firms have been led astray by focusing upon an internal strength and seeking to maximize its

advantage instead of seeking customer segments and their needs.

The biggest pitfall of strategic planning is not that plans are poor but rather that plans are all too soon forgotten. Generally, once the senior leadership team has updated the strategic plan, it is communicated to managers and employees. Programs and objectives are developed. Budgets are derived. Specific goals trickle down to all levels of the organization. However, even carefully planned rollouts with all-staff assemblies and colorful posters may fade from the minds of the workers. One underlying cause of this frequent occurrence is that many plans are too complex. Without a brief and easy-to-digest document, it very well may be that the next time the plan will be referenced may only be a few days before year end performance reviews. Mark Twain famously said "I didn't have time to write you a short letter, so I wrote a long one." There is power in simplification.

The One Page Strategic Plan

The solution to communicating a complex strategic plan and keeping it in the minds of

employees is to create a one page document that succinctly summarizes it. Post this in conspicuous places (such as above a copier). The intention is for the one-page strategic plan to become part of daily life of the firm. Strategic decisions and supporting programs became part of the everyday conversation. The one-page strategic plan will impact employees' decisions and behaviors.

Getting to One Page

1. Evaluate the strategy to determine what areas of the business (functions, budgets, or programs) are impacted. If it seems that the overall plan contains too many strategic elements, abstraction may be required to roll up initiatives into broader, higher level strategies. The goal is to end up with 3 to 5 major strategies.

2. Identify the key programs or tactics that will be used for each element. These are action-oriented items that focus on the key steps to achieve the overall plan.

3. Reduce the number of words used to describe the strategy and tactics. Break longer statements into their core meanings.

4. *Weed out repetition and overlap from the list. If an item shows up in two places, pick the one most appropriate place. Repeating an item does not make it more important, it just makes it redundant.*

5. *Parse each statement to remove adjectives, adverbs, and superlatives. Identify static nouns and replace them with action verbs.*

Presentation

There is no simpler way to express this important step except to say that “design matters”. Once the strategic plan is distilled to its essence, a graphic designer may be helpful to create a layout that expresses the plan simply. The use of color and shape, font, and even the spacing between letters (kerning) can help convey the full intent of the plan. Dieter Rams, industrial designer at Braun, said, “Good design is making something intelligible and memorable. Great design is making something memorable and meaningful.” The design of the one page strategic plan should create something that has meaning to every member of the organization. It is the company’s road map to success. It should be clear, concise, powerful, and beautiful.

Elements to include in the one page strategic plan:

1. **Brand:** The brand represents who and what the company is about. This piece should be designed with all elements of the brand including logo, colors, fonts and tag line.

2. **Mission and Vision:** It is always desirable to reinforce the company’s mission and vision with

employees. Putting these declarations in the one-page plan will reinforce the importance of the strategic plan in achieving the envisioned future for the company and how the vision will be achieved. Mission and Vision serve as guiding light statements that influence how the strategic plan should be interpreted.

3. **Core Values:** Clearly stating the company’s core values constrains the many choices that may be available for realizing the strategic plan. It is helpful to define those few positive values that are most important for the company.

4. **Plan Statement:** This is a very short statement that encompasses the spirit of the plan. One company’s battle cry was “pursue growth markets, be internationally recognized, and be profitable.” The plan statement was simple and to the point.

5. **Major Strategies:** List the major strategies as concisely as possible.

6. **Outcomes:** The tactics that will be employed for each strategy should be written as future outcomes. For example: “Build a consistent team and reduce turnover.” These outcomes are the signs of success in each strategic area. (see page 6 for example)

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