

dition to burning themselves out, t on them and underdeveloped." Sometimes does happen if leaders of putting the strategic plan into e in his book, *Leadership Beyond* a leader on the end of a rope to to empower the stakeholders in the plan. Dr. White begins his of a group of followers hanging id of the metaphor, the leader as ing the responsibility of holding e path towards excellence. That on. The strategic plan is not the : is it the leader's plan alone. It n. When all pull together, great ation and its stakeholders.

Some leaders don't understand that the strategic plan is a guide, not a barrier, to continuous improvement and change. As I mentioned earlier, the process I will be discussing has been modified through trial and though the process seemed to

flourish. It appeared the plan was being implemented very effectively. I called the leader to see how things were progressing. He said enthusiastically, "Great! Every time someone comes in to ask to do something, I just pull out the plan. And I say, 'So, if it's not on the plan, we won't be doing it.'"

Obviously, this leader had to be mentored further! He had to learn that the goal of a strategic plan is not to limit what a company can do; it should just set the minimum level of progress for improvement. Now each time I lead an organization through this process for the first time, I try to impress upon them that planning is a minimum standard of success, not a maximum. The plan should be a springboard to improvement not a finish line for completion.

The Strategic Plan: A Model

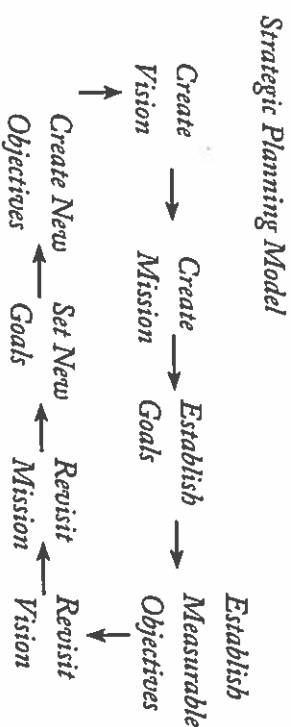
If the reader can imagine a body of water with no banks, you can imagine a company, family or organization without a strategic plan. There may be many good things in the water, but without boundaries and direction, the water becomes essentially a swamp. We equate swamps with stagnation; very little of anything positive comes from them and the water goes nowhere.

If, however, you put banks around that same water and give the water direction, it begins to move. Flowing water is active and productive. It can generate electricity, provide nourishment to wildlife, become a habitat for fish and other animals, provide people opportunities for recreation to people, etc. So it is with companies, families, and organizations. They can be much more productive if given the direction of a strategic plan.

Appendix I of this book contains an example of a corporate strategic plan, as well as a personal strategic plan. These plans

are from a *real* company and a *real* person. After you have read the specific sections of the Strategic Planning Model below, go to the appendix and read the corresponding elements in the real-life examples.

The Strategic Planning Model below flows in a circular direction. As those who have studied or completed a strategic plan realize, a circle never ends. To be effective, a strategic planning process must be ongoing—constantly being updated to assure that the individual or organization is on track for continuous improvement. The following model is understandable and easy to apply:



This model builds on itself. As you will read later, each section goes together like a puzzle and if one is not accomplished the picture of success will not be complete.

Let's examine the individual components of the model to see how you or your organization can readily adapt this model to your particular circumstances.

Vision: How Do You Want to Be Remembered?

As the model shows, the first action in a strategic planning process should be the creation of a *vision*. In his discussion of

visions in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, author Stephen Covey suggests thinking of how you or your organization *wants to be remembered*. In this light, the vision should be long term and should address what the company or individual ultimately wants to become. A company should think five to ten years out, asking itself: If we could design the "perfect" situation ten years from now, what would this company look like?

Each company or individual may have different ideas about what a vision should contain. The vision should custom fit the individual or company. But certain elements are common to all visions:

1. It should be relatively brief and written in future tense.
2. It should be based on an analysis of the company's current status and goals.
3. It should be believed and disseminated from the top of the organization.
4. It should set the long-term direction of the entire company.
5. It should be able to be internalized by all.

What a Vision is Not

The description above seems succinct, uncomplicated, and to the point, doesn't it? However, you would be surprised at how many *visions* are really *missions*. The key difference is that a mission contains no long-term thinking. Many of the visions I've read do include some of the elements above, but they are so lengthy and cumbersome that stakeholders cannot "connect" with the vision. If those who are supposed to be striving toward

a vision cannot embrace it, the vision will lack credibility and will not encourage people to action and improvement.

It is also readily evident that many so-called visions are simply catch phrases or clusters of motivational sayings meant to inspire those already toiling on a daily basis to toil even harder, without clearly addressing the purpose of their efforts.

An example of this in daily life would be a family going on vacation and deciding when they are going to leave, but never deciding on a destination. They are all excited and happy. They get in their car, but after a few days of traveling with no idea of where they are going, they begin to get a bit frustrated. The same frustration will happen in an organization without clear direction.

Analysis is Key

To customize a vision to the particular concerns of an organization, the vision must be based on a thorough analysis of the company's infrastructure. Leadership books abound with analysis techniques. Three of the best analysis techniques I've found are:

1. SWOT – an acronym derived from analyzing a company's **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, and **T**hreats
2. Beliefs Audit – analyzing a company's core values
3. Stakeholder Analysis – identifying any person or group who will be affected in any way by the organization.

These three kinds of analyses make the planners think about whom they serve, what they believe, and what they need to do to

become the very best they can be. In writing your vision, before you can plan where you ultimately want to go, you need to analyze where you have been and where you are at present. It is extremely important for the primary leader to be involved in this vision-setting process, because if the leader doesn't totally agree and buy into the vision, the strategic plan will not succeed.

After many years of developing plans using these analysis tools, I have learned the importance of each and how to use them in the successful design of a strategic plan.

S.W.O.T.

By using chart pads and group interaction, the facilitator can quickly gather input and insight into the organization for which he/she is helping develop a plan for improvement. The strengths and weaknesses are generally internal points of reference while the opportunities and threats are generally external. Once this exercise is completed and the input is displayed in a place of prominence, the planners can use the input when developing the vision and mission as well as the goals and objectives. Once the plan is completed, it is especially helpful to check how many of the weaknesses should be an area of emphasis in the final plan development.

It will be interesting and quite acceptable to find some of the same issues coming up as both areas of strength as well as areas of weakness. Often a specific example often times comes from staffing issues. Some may say the stability of staff is a strength while some may say that same stability is a weakness. This seeming conflict is fine at this stage of the input process because both conclusions may be correct.

It is imperative to let all who want input to have an opportunity to do so. No judgements of right or wrong are allowed in this process.

Beliefs Audit

The beliefs audit is a straightforward activity that helps those in the strategic planning process gain an insight into what they and their organization believe about what and why their organization exists and what their organization attempts to do for the client(s). When completing this analysis tool, I usually just start with a blank chart pad and write at the top, "We believe..." Then we just begin to fill in the thoughts of those in the group planning process. The results of this analysis technique provides a very simple and an applicable way to develop goal statements. Most often there is a direct correlation between the beliefs audit and what the group believes they must do to make their organization better.

It is important to allow each participant to have input, even though some disagreement may exist. What will normally happen is that the facilitator can group some of the beliefs into goal statements and include most everyone's idea or at least lead the group to consensus on priorities.

Stakeholder Analysis

In order to make this analysis, the facilitator will make another chart. On this chart the group will list any person or group affected by the operations of this organization. Again this is a straightforward technique to get the group thinking about who they serve and why. A simple list of all people and groups

affected by the operation gives a framework for the thought process of plan development. When the plan is finished as well as while it is being developed, this list of stakeholders gives structure and direction for those developing the plan. Once the plan is thought to be complete, the facilitator can bring the group back to this list and ask how many of their identified stakeholders have been addressed in the plan. This serves as a check on the completeness of the plan.

It is imperative to allow the group developing the plan to think beyond the four walls of the organization. It is amazing how many ideas for improvement and even business expansion can come out of this single technique.

Start Your Engines!

As I write this chapter of the book, it is May in Indiana. Naturally, many Hoosiers are excitedly anticipating the Indianapolis 500. Let's imagine a young driver coming up the ranks of open-wheel racing. He is serious about making a career of racing. With this in mind, let's help this driver establish a strategic plan for his career.

VISION: *I will become the next great Indianapolis 500 race driver and be remembered as one of the best race drivers of all time.*

With the vision in place, the next step in the process is to establish the mission.

Mission: Focusing on Present Tense

Just what exactly is a *mission*? A mission is what an individual, organization, or company is about today. It answers the question, "On a daily basis, what do I (or what does the organization/company) actually do?" Like the vision, the mission should be fairly short in length, easy to remember, and easy to embrace. All too often, however, I've seen missions that are paragraphs long and cumbersome. Full of well-intentioned statements, they miss the mark of what a true mission should express: the ongoing, daily activities of the company. The mission should flow logically into the vision. The pivotal thought is this: "If I fulfill my mission daily, I will ultimately achieve my vision."

Keep It Specific

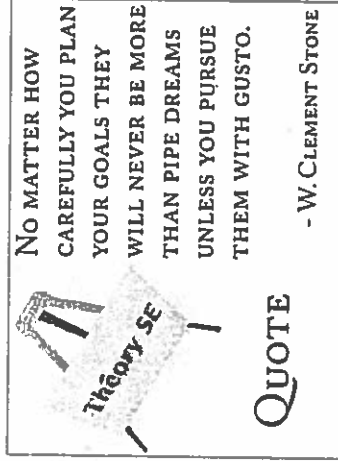
Much of the work entailed in establishing a vision can be used in establishing a mission. This includes the analysis of the company's purpose. However, the mission's focus is of shorter term and should be more specific. It reflects the process from vision to objectives; i.e., going from very general to very specific principles. The mission should also be reevaluated each time the strategic planning process takes place, whether semiannually or annually or even more often.

While the vision is expressed in future-oriented language, the mission should be in present tense. It should reflect where the company, individual, or organization is today, not where it wants to be.

Let's look at our race driver's mission and see if it meets the criteria above.

MISSION: *I am an open-wheel racer who is practicing, competing, and learning about my sport each day, continuing to improve my skills as a racing driver on my way to participating in the Indianapolis 500.*

The questions we must now ask are these: If this driver continues to fulfill his mission, can he ultimately fulfill the vision? Does this mission logically flow into the vision? If it does, then it is an acceptable mission.



Goals: Aiming for Success

After the company has established its mission, it needs to

direct its attention to setting *goals*. When facilitating this process with companies, I encourage them to avoid being overly aggressive the first time through in determining goals. Establishing three to five goals during the first planning session is sufficient to activate the mission and move it toward achieving the vision. The goals should flow logically from the mission and be in line with the analyses completed earlier during the vision planning session. Goals should be based on the corporation or individual's areas of need or emphasis. Achieving the goals will enable the organization or individual to continuously improve, fulfill the mission, and move toward the vision. Many times when helping a company establish goals, I use the results of the

beliefs audit to custom fit the goals to the company's mission. Basing goals upon core beliefs is not only a natural progression but is also quite logical and pragmatic.

Let's return to our Indy driver. During the beliefs audit, he made this statement, "I believe that to be a 500 champion, you must 'pay my dues' coming up." We can assume the driver has been "paying dues" for some time and is ready to take the next step toward the vision. If that is the case, we can phrase a goal as follows:

GOAL: *I believe I can pass my rookie test.*

As you have probably already surmised, the next question is this: If the driver fulfills this goal, will that help to fulfill the mission which, in turn, will ultimately help to achieve the vision?

If so, the goal is acceptable. If not, the goal should be revised to make sure it *does* flow logically. If the goal is acceptable, the next step is to create objectives to help reach the goal.

Objectives: Measuring Success

Objectives are the real meat of the plan. The objectives describes the action necessary to complete the goal. Items which will be evaluated to determine progress. Establishing objectives involves setting guidelines or rules, just like we did when conducting the vision, mission, and goal-setting sessions of strategic planning. When I facilitate this process with companies and organizations, I try to form a template that can be used through the entire process.

In building objectives, I look at two aspects. First, I gener-

ally preface each objective with something like this: "I (we) will . . . (action to take place)." Second, I establish a timeline, clearly indicating how long the objective will take to complete.

These two parts, the action and the timeline, give a concrete way to evaluate whether or not the objective has been met. That is the single most important aspect of the objective. It *must* be measurable. We do not just say an objective has or has not been completed. We ask, "What are the specific measurements of success?"

Just as I encourage companies to avoid being overly aggressive in establishing goals, I also encourage them to be a bit conservative in establishing objectives. Usually three to five objectives for each goal are plenty to handle the first time through the strategic planning process.

Creating more objectives than can reasonably be accomplished may cause the planners to become frustrated and sense failure. On the other hand, the objectives should stretch the company as well as the individuals in the company to move towards the fulfillment of the stated goal.

In looking at our driver's goal, let's set some specific, measurable objectives for him to achieve in order to attain that goal . . . which will help to fulfill the mission . . . which will help to achieve the vision.

OBJECTIVES:

1. By June 1, I will obtain a full-time ride for the remainder of the race season.
2. I will qualify and participate in four IRL races before May 1, of the next calendar year.
3. I will test at Indy in October of the present season.