

Strategy Execution

Go with a complete program.



by Gary Harpst

HOW CAN YOU CONSISTENTLY execute your strategy? You need a complete program. Piecemeal attempts don't last. Sustainability, the capacity to maintain the necessary balance between strategy and execution, and doing so while overcoming hurdles, requires a program consisting of four elements:

1. Repeatable methodology to drive learning and understanding. To balance strategy and execution, you need to have a well-defined, repeatable methodology that includes strategy, planning, organizing, execution, innovation, and learning. The purpose is to accelerate the continuous learning of proven best practices. Without a step-by-step approach, learning becomes an endless process of missteps, trial and error, and firefighting.

2. Accountability coaching to nurture and nudge and stay the course. Accountability is required because someone needs to be off the field to be objective about what's going on. The need for coaching never stops. Coaches help people improve the details and direction of their performance.

An accountability coach is trained and certified in the repeatable methodology and guides its use. The coach provides insight on where to start, how fast to go, and what to do next; the coach also provides encouragement and advice, and brings a broader perspective, drawing on years of experience working with other teams.

The law of entropy holds that any closed system will eventually decline or become disorganized unless more energy is put into the system. Disorganized companies drift into entropy, lacking strong self-discipline and a systematic approach. They need the benefit of some outside energy: an experienced, veteran coach who provides accountability and perspective.

Accountability coaching is most effective when it's done face-to-face. We believe this is because successful coaching relationships are based on a high level of trust. This must be someone who you believe has your best

interest at heart and will tell you the truth. This kind of relationship is only developed over time and in person. This view is absolutely contrary to the trend in today's Internet world, toward increased self-service, or a do-it-yourself mentality.

3. Execution system to engage everyone, everyday, in real-time alignment. A well-defined approach with the right people in the room produces high engagement among the leaders. But those who are not involved in the strategic planning process aren't nearly so engaged. As we experimented with ways for increasing total engagement, we realized that everyone needs to be involved in the planning (to an appropriate degree) and connect his or her activities with the strategic plans of the company. We realized that we could use technology to help workers make real-time decisions about what work they should do, in what order, and how to prioritize interruptions and unexpected requests for their time and attention. An execution system provides a process for marrying company plans with individual management of daily activities.

4. Community learning to share and reinforce best practices and accelerate learning. This element helps address the breadth of expertise and the economic barriers required for implementation. Community learning derives its synergy from the other three elements. The rate of learning accelerates when a group of people share a repeatable methodology, use the same terms and techniques, and when accountability coaches pool their experiences in applying the methodology to different business scenarios.

The goal of these four elements is to engage every worker, every day, in proactively making more aligned decisions, rather than relatively fixing misalignments later. This, too, is a learning objective for the entire company. Each function becomes a type of learning community inside a larger community.

Repeatable methodology is a blueprint for adopting best-practices. *Accountability coaching*, *execution system*, and *community learning* are how the organization implements and sustains practice of the methodology. These four components form the complete program for *growing your capacity to execute strategy*. **LE**

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ACTION: Execute your business strategy.

Onboarding Tips

Learn these from great leaders.



by Howard M. Guttman

HOW DO YOU KEEP UP the momentum for high-performance in the face of the rapidly revolving door? About one in four employees departs for other pastures every year—and that doesn't include those who are fired. Add to that the number of internal transfers and the repercussions of mergers and acquisitions, and churn becomes a major challenge.

One way to keep the revolving door from spinning out of control is have an exciting long-term strategy and business prospects, with effective operations, and progressive HR policies. Even so, you can't stop turnover, since high-performers are targets of headhunters.

Turnover puts high priority on finding the best way to bring in new players and integrate them into the culture. Onboarding within a high-performing culture is challenging. Newcomers tend to feel as if they're entering a brave new world in which all the axioms that worked for them in hierarchical organizations are suddenly up for grabs.

Alignment is not only about reconstituting the performance context—strategy, goals, roles, accountabilities, and ground rules for decision making—but about reshaping business relationships. The alignment process creates a powerful, shared experience in which leaders and players learn to show up “for real”: to be candid, depersonalize, confront one another, and hold one another accountable.

Take These Four Tips

Here are four tips from leaders who have met the onboarding challenge:

1. Start at the beginning with the interview process. Let candidates know what to expect. In his initial contact with candidates for executive positions at Chico's, CEO Scott Edmonds explains the horizontal model and the company's commitment to it. He tells them that working at Chico's will differ from their past experience: that they will be held accountable by both their leaders and peers, that they'll be expected to deliver on commitments or explain why they can't, that a big part of their

compensation is based on teamwork. He then probes for “fit and feel.”

The mindset of great players includes: thinking like a director, putting the team first, embracing accountability, and being comfortable with discomfort. Use these attributes to screen candidates. To what extent do they measure up? Does their background reveal clues to how successful they’ll be? Question carefully. For example, ask, “What is the biggest mistake you have made professionally?” If the answer comes back, “I’m an overachiever,” or “My standards are too high,” be wary. A candidate who substitutes disguised strengths for weaknesses may not accept accountability—much less hold peers and leaders accountable.

2. **Stay close** to new hires by putting in place a weekly feedback session to answer questions and address needs and concerns. Include new hires in their team’s reassessment and skill development sessions. At Chico’s, all employees who have joined the company in the preceding half year attend an off-site meeting devoted to continuing the horizontal integration process.

3. **Role-model.** Years ago, a team of sociologists studied the behavior of straight-out-of-the-academy police officers. They were brimming with pride and enthusiasm; however, this quickly turned to cynicism once they joined the police force. The behavior role-modeled by supervisors and peers was decisive in their change of heart.

David Greenberg, senior VP of HR for L’Oréal, notes: “When you join our team and see all members role-modeling certain behaviors, you quickly see how to do it. You see that everyone has a voice, that disagreement is okay, that conflict is dealt with by depersonalizing. If someone is marching in a different direction, you see them being held accountable. This sets up and makes clear what the expectation is.”

4. **Provide mentors.** Mars Inc. finds mentoring to be effective in bringing new hires into the performance culture. Each member is “adopted” by another player, who takes responsibility for daily reinforcement of high-performing behaviors. In another organization, senior leaders are paired with up-and-comers.

Bringing on new talent regenerates an organization by importing new talent, skills, perspectives, and energy. Harnessing these “gifts” early is a challenge. Manage this resource-for-renewal effectively to achieve standout performance. **LE**

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ACTION: Improve your onboarding of new talent.

Creative Leaders

Their followers say, “Let’s go.”



by Mary Jo Huard

PROACTIVE, CREATIVE leaders often recognize opportunity, step into it, use public media, keep the message simple, and repeat it often to set a change agenda. *Leaders don’t merely study people—they change their lives, mixing them up in new ways, pushing them into new arrangements, persuading them that they can transcend their limits.*

We recognize their leadership, but how do we account for it while recognizing their differences? Some are calculating; others are free spirits. Some seek power; others seek service and experience. Some want to reorder society according to their plan; others seek to discover societies and learn from them. Consider these five principles.

Principle 1: We recognize leaders by their followers. We identify people as leaders because of how others behave. We have seen others falling into step behind these leaders—to adopt their goals, follow their plan, cite their ideas as the right ones, and make choices for themselves based on what the leader has said or done.

Principle 2: Followers give permission to lead, not superiors. Some leaders aren’t appointed to their positions of leadership—they are chosen. Their ideas on various subjects—culture, learning, change, growth—are accepted by those who follow them.

Principle 3: Since leaders are chosen by followers, they may be found anywhere. We may find them in any profession or occupation. Leaders are found not just in managerial suites but anywhere one person has a chance to influence others. Leadership doesn’t even require face-to-face contact: leaders can influence through arts and media—television, books, music, dance. We must help people understand whether and how they may want to lead, what kind of leadership is needed in a situation, and how selected leaders currently perform. We can support a chosen or aspiring leader in achieving outcomes that benefit all of us. We can encourage the person, provide feedback, share the

effort and mentor and offer opportunities for the person to lead.

Principle 4: Leadership needs are met to the extent the group capitalizes on its own diverse talents and interests. The more diverse a group, the more likely it is to succeed. When diversity is valued, the group openly accepts contributions from all members, and leading and following are seen as equally important roles.

Principle 5: Putting people first means letting people lead. It means inviting, recognizing, celebrating, and rewarding leadership and followership all the time—not looking at leadership as a static set of traits or style. The “command and control” mentality of the pyramid structure is collapsing. Until we clearly understand the dynamic, relational and multi-dimensional aspects of leadership, our “decision-makers” will remain barriers to developing the effective leaders and committed followers. As Warren Bennis said: “Management is getting people to do what needs to be done. Leadership is getting people to want to do what needs to be done. Managers push—leaders pull. Managers command—leaders communicate.”

Wanted: Creative Leaders

To maintain world leadership, you must reconceptualize your business. Better quality and service are essential, but they are not enough. Creativity and innovation are the only engines that will drive last-

ing success. Using a set of proven tools can advance creativity and innovation. Edward de Bono coined the phrase *Lateral Thinking*, defined as “A way of thinking that seeks the solution to intractable problems through unorthodox methods or elements which would normally be ignored in logical thinking.”

TQM and downsizing—doing more with less—are necessary but insufficient. You need creativity to find better ways of doing things. When you have wrung out all the fat, excess, and expense, you won’t get any more benefit out your efforts without creativity.

Investing in creativity is inexpensive compared to anything else—and the results will be dramatic. As Edward de Bono said, *Ideas are the currency of success—they separate you from your competition.* **LE**

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ACTION: Invest in creativity.