

Unique Value

What are you adding?



by Howard M. Guttman

INVITE YOU TO ASK Yourself: *What unique value do I (or my team)*

add here? If a leader or leadership team (or any team) is not earning its keep by uniquely contributing to the success, why keep it in business?

The leadership team should be contributing *unique value* in three key areas:

1. Strategy formulation. Has the top management team hammered out a *unique value proposition* as the core of the business strategy? Strategy guru Michael Porter said, “Many leaders think that their job is to be the best at what their company does.” Instead, he urges such leaders to “strive to compete on providing *unique value* to a group of customers.” Top teams that do so surely make a *unique, high-value contribution*. This takes an ability to look deeply into such questions as: What’s the next generation of customer demand—and how can we uniquely satisfy it? These are difficult questions, especially since answers may not come from your customers, regardless of how “intimate” you may be with them. Recall that Sony’s customers were not exactly clamoring for the Walkman. Nor were Apple’s customers demanding the iPod or iPhone. The best way for a leadership team to demonstrate its *unique value* to business success is to anticipate future demand and craft a strategy that offers products and services with *unique value* to meet new and evolving needs.

2. Strategy implementation: Has the leadership team kept its strategy in sync with both the marketplace and the organization’s operational planning and decision making? Setting strategy enables leaders to add *unique value*—and implementing it offers an ongoing opportunity to do so. The current buzz in strategy is *adaptability*. Goodbye, five-year strategic-planning exercises. In some cases—the fashion industry and segments of telecommunications are among the fastest moving—12 months may be a stretch. Whether the strategic time frame is 12 months or three years, today’s rate of change and dislocation demand that

strategy be kept evergreen. Want to add *unique value* as a leadership team? Keep your ear to the track and be prepared to recalibrate the strategy to meet fast-changing market realities.

Also, strategy no longer remains the exclusive province of the senior team. Unless strategy drives planning and decision making, and unless it captures the heads, hands, and hearts of everyone, it will likely remain *vision* rather than *actuality*. Top leaders are in a position to add *unique implementation value* by embedding the strategy through the ranks. It can do this by ensuring that the performance system links strategic objectives to operational goals and that rewards follow longer-term strategic-goal accomplishment, not just quarterly financial reporting cycles.



Strategy implementation doesn’t stop at the front door—it must touch those on the street, such as sales personnel and customers. Before Pat Parenty was promoted to president, brands, Professional Products Division, L’Oréal, he was senior VP of the company’s Redken USA unit. When he and his team set Redken’s strategy, they made sure it touched every link in the Redken chain. Redken’s field professionals are viewed by customers not as product pushers but as *strategic thinkers* and *partners*. “We show up as long-term strategic thinkers and planners. We say, ‘Part of our year-long business plan for you is to help you achieve this goal, and here is how we’d like to work together to get there. It requires *training*, here’s what we’ll provide. It requires *promotion*, here’s our plan.’” Customers are thrilled. A frequent comment is, “You guys are all on the same page.”

3. Building horizontal, high-performing teams. Is the leadership team a horizontal, high-performing one? Results,

of course, are golden. Strategic and big-item operational results are what top teams are *expected* to achieve. But results alone don’t define a team as *high-performing*. Leaders can add *unique value* by focusing not only on *achieving* superior results, but by attending to *how* they achieve them and *how well* they prepare their team to do so. In today’s far-flung mega enterprises, leverage is key. *A high-performing senior team in an underperforming organization is not likely to survive.*

The first place to add unique performance value is within the leadership team: Is it aligned around the strategy? Are its goals and roles clear? Do its members confront issues—and one another—openly and honestly? Do team members accept accountability for results: individually, for one another, and for the leader? And do they act “horizontally” rather than as a confederation of silos and functions?

High-performance teams have *eight attributes*: 1) clear team goals; 2) right “players” in place; 3) clear roles and responsibilities; 4) commitment to winning for the business over self-interest; 5) agreed-upon decision-making/leadership mechanism; 6) sense of ownership/accountability for business results; 7) comfort dealing with conflict; and 8) periodic self-assessment.

Once the leadership team becomes a high-performing one, it is positioned to create more of the same. What better way for leaders to create *unique value* than by leveraging the talent around them? I’ve written about a formal “multi-tier process” for doing this, but, formal process aside, *role-modeling high-performance behavior remains the most powerful way to create high-performing satellites everywhere.*

For example, once INTTRA’s CEO, Ken Bloom, and his top team moved to the horizontal, high-performance model, he knew he had to role-model high-performance attributes: “Everyone is always looking at my behavior. If I don’t start meetings on time, those who report to me won’t; if I can’t articulate our commercial goal, they won’t; if I brook variation in financial strategy, I’ll see variation in implementation.”

Top teams that add *unique value* in strategy and implementation and that build a horizontal, high-performance infrastructure and culture to drive up and leverage performance earn their keep. They create *unique value* and lay the foundation for lasting results. LE

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ACTION: Add *unique value*.