

Another Aspect of Leadership

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If senior leadership has fulfilled their role and provided a clear vision for the organization (the university, company, agency, society), then who has the responsibility for creating the strategies that actually make things happen? This is a recent topic of discussion among those who consult with leaders. Of course the object of planning is to help the organization realize a better future. It makes sense that if it is clear what the organization is to be and what the major goals and deliverables for the future are then everyone working in the organization can help realize the vision. I would suggest that everyone in the organization is responsible for creating and executing strategies on some level, and most important, our strategies need to be in sync within the context of the strategic plan.

Strategic plans are created with input and participation across the entire organization, or at least they should be. However, ultimately, a few leaders pull the ideas together into the overall vision and goals. It can be difficult for others in the organization to understand or appreciate fully all aspects of the vision. A recent study suggests that while senior management are enthused with the results of their strategic planning, most employees are disconnected and few have a real understanding of the plan. Thus, those of us who were not part of the team that created the strategic plan and on the front line of getting things done, often make our decisions based on the specific tasks we are asked to do—and we are not always in sync with the plan. Real success is highly dependent on everyone in the organization—at all levels—understanding the plan and making good decisions.

Senior leadership needs to maintain a high level of two-way communication that is effective at engaging employees and promoting buy-in at all levels. Employees need to be open to this communication and make an effort to understand where the organization is going. All employees need to think in terms of how their efforts support the overall progress toward goals. It is possible to do good work that does not help the organization achieve its vision. Recognition and incentives for employees should reward achievements toward the plan, not just good work. When the organization moves forward as one,

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successes can be celebrated by everyone in the organization.

The strategies, creativity, productivity, and a sense of being part of the organization are important to our sense of who we are and feeling good about what we do. The strategies and innovation that achieve organizational goals happen deep in the organization. If there are those in the organization who do not fully understand and believe in the strategic plan, it is unlikely that goals will be achieved.

It is the responsibility of senior leadership to provide a clear vision, goals, and deliverables. This is a large and never-ending task. Moreover, they need to make sure that the organization has the right talent on board and that they are provided with sufficient resources. Senior leadership is responsible for monitoring progress and making adjustments if needed, but leadership needs to keep out of the way of strategies created throughout the organization and not micro manage strategy creation or how the goals are achieved.

Successful strategic plans are living documents that are constantly updated to remain relevant as the environment changes and opportunities arise. As employees, if we understand and believe in the vision, we also will have the context for our strategies and decisions. We will then have the opportunity to be engaged with others in the organization to achieve greater successes and satisfaction. ■