



## **Write Them Down**

### **by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP**

As I visit companies of all types and sizes, I am intrigued with the number of organizations that have not committed their strategy into written form. I ask if they have values, and often they start talking about honesty, integrity, customer focus, or employee satisfaction. I get some vague statements about ethics thrown in for good measure. Then I ask where the values are written. Sometimes the leader can pull a dusty old paper out of a drawer where the items vaguely resemble what I was just told.

More often I am told the values are posted in the conference room and the break room. I go and look, and there is indeed a slightly-torn or smudged paper on the bulletin board. If I ask the employees about them, they tell me "Oh yes, we have the values posted, but "they" do not follow them." If the values are posted but not followed, they do more harm than good, because they serve as a reminder of the hypocrisy.

There are several organizations where the words are in the minds of the executives but not even written on paper, let alone implanted in the hearts of the employees where they can do some good.

The three simple rules with values are 1) write them down, 2) talk about them every possible chance, and 3) follow them. If you are missing any of these three steps, then you are forfeiting most of the power of having values in the first place.

The exact same discussion applies to the vision of an organization. If the vision is not committed to writing and included in discussions with employees, it loses its power to direct the daily activities of the population to move toward the future with confidence.

These two things are most important to write down, but I believe the entire strategy should be committed to written form. That would include the following things at a minimum: vision, mission, values, behaviors, strategies, tactics, and measures. Many organizations make a production out of generating the strategy that the resulting tome is way too heavy for the employees to lift, let alone read and understand.

I usually reduce the entire strategic framework to a single sheet of paper. On the front side we have the vision, mission, values and behaviors. On the reverse side there is neat array of the top 4-6 strategies (too many strategies defeats the purpose of focusing effort) along with a few major tactics for each strategy and precisely what measure we intend to use to track our progress for each tactic. I like to laminate the document as a way to indicate legitimacy.

Usually the entire process of developing the single sheet framework takes from 8-16 hours of interface time with a management team. That is enough time to engage everyone in the process and far less than the burdensome six to 18 month process that creates open hatred for the process among the staff.

If you drive an efficient and high energy process to create the strategy for your organization and commit the resulting framework to paper then you have a much higher chance of being a successful organization.

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