



The Real World

Seeing Your Blind Spots

I have noticed a troubling pattern.

Despite how intellectually bright executives are at the top of the house, they seem to be suffering from one or more blind spots that color their view and inhibit their judgment.

This seems to be playing out in their inability to see what the actual obstacles are, so they remain hidden. As a whole, the organization struggles or never develops the ability to work around these impediments. To frame this discussion, I have chosen a graphic originally created by the Total Quality Institute.

It may appear obvious that every for-profit organization should be interested in developing loyal customers and great business results, but I challenge you to examine your effectiveness in all the areas that should naturally feed those desired outcomes.

On the graphic, we see strategy at the top. As I consult with organizations that range in size from multi-millions to multi-billions, it seems that many organizations are lacking a disciplined approach to revisiting their strategy and building true business plans.

Too often, it is either relegated to an exercise in pure imagineering or becomes a mundane computation arrived at using last year's results. "Take last year's results and multiply them by 1.05. There. Good. We've set this year's goals." Sound familiar?

With the speed of available information estimated to be doubling every nine minutes and the number of hungry competitors growing around the world, can we afford to be complacent about the marketplace even for a short time anymore? I don't think so.



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A flawed plan makes it harder on everyone in your company to compete, even if it is only with the business across the street. Peter Drucker said, "The job of an executive is to think, change, and operate." How much time does your executive team spend thinking versus changing and operating?

Once the strategy has been truly vetted, it's time to take a hard look the next point on the star: your organizational structure: is it geared up to execute the strategy? One question I routinely ask is, "If you were starting your business today and could fully use what you know of your strategy, is this the way you would structure it?" Usually, the answer is no. The executive admits that legacy issues have crept in over time and that he or she has been putting off having a difficult, but much needed, conversation with key managers.

Next, ask yourself about the last time both production processes and business processes were closely examined and assumptions tested. Smart operators do this regularly to ensure speed, reduce unnecessary internal costs, and help maintain a competitive advantage. They want to ensure they don't burn out their best and brightest people. Your best

people are not motivated to come to work so they can struggle mightily against all odds just to get a fair day's work out the door.

Keep the following adage in mind: "When good people are in a bad process, the bad process usually wins." Bad process sets people up to fail in their quest to provide great customer service, whether internal or external. Frustration drives them to their breaking point, and they leave your organization. Nice of you to provide this well-trained and -developed human capital to your competition.

Satisfied, loyal customers are cultivated by caring, competent people that feel they are well lead and managed. Is your reward and recognition system rewarding and recognizing the attitudes, skills, and behaviors necessary to achieve your current strategic direction, or is it mired in a bygone era? For example, you might need a collaborative, team environment but only be rewarding a small number of individual performers.

Companies only thrive when each of the organization's leaders are truly committed to excellence in all of these areas. In addition to better business results, employee engagement is an outcome that money can't buy. It is the culmination of the right things being done in the right way by the right people at the right time for the right reasons.

Doug Brown is CEO and chairman of Paradigm Associates, LLC, based in Cranford, NJ. This national firm specializes in strategic and executive leadership development processes that create Breakthrough Thinking For Your Real World. Visit www.ParadigmAssociates.US or call (908) 276-4547 for more information.