



Making Strategy Work



This is the first in a series of brief articles that offers best practices in strategic planning. As a leader in your organization, the development and successful implementation of long-term strategy is one of your key responsibilities.

Foundation

How would you answer these questions:

- What is our organization's big dream?
- Why would the best people want to work here?
- Do our mission, values and vision motivate our team?

Too often mission, values and vision are a set of platitudes that hang on office walls. They represent something to "check off" before moving to the real meat of strategic planning, and we miss a big opportunity if we fail to get them right.

Mission uses action verbs to state the purpose of the organization – what we do, for whom, and why. Values describe the organization's beliefs, guiding principles, and rules of conduct. Vision is the

image of the desired future.

As the questions above suggest, the right mission, values and vision are powerful tools for attracting and motivating the best people. Without a doubt, the words themselves mean little if we don't follow through and "walk the talk." Strong leaders and successful companies know that great people are interested in more than a paycheck. They seek a significant role in an organization they believe in.

Creating mission, values and vision as a team can be a laborious process. Yet input leads to ownership, and ownership is indispensable. So at the risk of some inefficiency, allow your team to wrestle with these foundational elements, and, in the process, their motivation will grow as they have the opportunity to participate in defining the culture and future for your organization – and for themselves. Nothing matters more than ownership of the vision.

One of Straight Path's clients, a software developer, has invested considerable time refining mission, values and vision. The entire leadership team has been involved in the process. And, yes, it has been hard work. While other aspects of strategic planning are moving ahead in parallel, the CEO wants to ensure that his team has ample opportunity to contribute to this foundational part of the company's overall strategic plan. As a result, the team is more aligned and motivated.

Next time we will discuss how to ensure the right strategic focus.

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Here are five questions to consider in the process of developing your strategic plan:

- 1. Do we have the right planning team (key decision makers, diverse representation, creative thinkers)*
- 2. Does our planning process include a strong customer voice?*
- 3. Is it fact-based (properly grounded in research and analysis)?*
- 4. Is there room for creativity and innovation?*
- 5. Does our process ensure organization-wide buy-in?*

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