

Strategic Planning Process

Winning Edge Group's strategic planning process **VASST**TM was designed to provide the consultant and the client an ongoing process for Strategic planning and implementation. This process is a reiterative one that frequently checks back on previous conclusions and planning items to validate consistency and uniformity. The process follows these basic steps.

Vision Mission Statement, Values, Objectives



Assessment Customers, Employees, Investors, Competitors



Strategy Development



Strategy Implementation



Time Management, Measurement and Control

VASST provides a clear outline for the development of a strategic plan. Five important requirements for a strategic plan is that it be definable, communicable, implementable, measurable and span the whole organization. Many organizations create strategic plans and then put them up on the shelf, only to be gathered once again next year for a quick meeting to see how they did. An ongoing Strategic plan requires routine reporting of the progress the team is making. That reporting must include details on progress made against major milestones and performance measures. Strategic Planning's success is a function of the commitment of the management team to making it happen, constantly reminding themselves of that need and showing a

willingness to hold organizations accountable for implementation.

The Process

Every organization has a culture which is shaped over time through a series of internal and external forces. Those forces can be subtle or they can be aggressive and gut wrenching. As management teams change and market forces begin to define the environment that a team must work in, Vision becomes an important rallying cry for the executive team. The first step in this process is to work with the executive team to review the current vision. A corporate vision is typically expressed through a mission statement and a statement of values. Winning Edge will walk the executive team through a review of the mission statement, values and objectives to see if they need to be created or changed. There is a reiterative process here that causes the team to circle back and make sure that modifications are complimentary. It is very important that the executive team put together a solid set of measurable stretch objectives for the organization to work to.

The Assessment phase of the strategic planning process is critical to its success. During this phase, the executive team is asked to provide an objective view of the perception of the company. Assessments will come from 4 areas: investors, customers, competitors and employees. A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis will be done on each. In many cases, the executive will not have enough information and assignments will be parceled out to gather data. The assessments require the executive team to be open and honest about the perception of the company. The strategy development phase will be focused on addressing those assessment issues that are standing in the way of achieving the objectives.

The strategy development session is a very critical piece of this whole process. During these sessions, the executive team will be faced with the task of identifying the strengths and weaknesses in the company, its products, processes, people, service level, etc. Once fully understood, the team can begin the process of laying out suitable action items for the business. They will also be forced to prioritize the strategic priorities against the availability of human and capital resources. At this point, there is a reiterative step which causes the team to go back and assess the validity of the vision based on the reality of the previous step and resources. This may cause the team to modify its objectives. The objectives set by the executive team need to be aggressive enough so that the organization will stretch itself to accomplish them, without being so aggressive that they aren't attainable. They must also be measurable. This activity requires the first step of a well thought through communication plan. It is at this time that the strategy is communicated to the organization in broad terms.

The implementation process is fairly straightforward. The Executive team will assign teams to break each objective down into actionable segments. Each segment will have a time frame for implementation along with a list of actions and the people or organizations responsible for them. Each action must also have a timeframe

associated with it so that there is no mistake about when an item is to be done. At this point, a process called Hoshin planning (cascading objectives) is introduced to complete the planning process.

Throughout the whole business, each organization identifies objectives it will accomplish that contribute to the overall objective. It is important to note that every organization can contribute to overall strategic objective. Each organization then creates a measurement against each objective to provide themselves and the executive team with a visual way to assure progress on a monthly basis.

The last step of **VASST** is the time management and measurement section. Routinely, plans are made that have broad visions, but aren't broken down to each level in the organization. As a result, they aren't achievable, actionable or measurable. The executive team must decide that they will be clear champions of the strategy, provide themselves opportunities to remind the organization of the importance of the strategy and to hold people accountable for achieving the stated objectives in a timely fashion. This requires time management for both the leaders and the doers. A well thought through reporting mechanism (such as monthly or bi-monthly reports) should be implemented so that there is an easy way for everyone to see what progress is being made. Every staff meeting should have an agenda item to report on the status of strategy implementation.

The **VASST** doesn't contain anything new. It is a basic process that clearly defines the steps an organization is required to undergo in order to achieve *strategic change*. There is a lot of planning that needs to go into this process and Winning Edge Consultants can walk the executive team through this process.

About the author:

Jim Gitney is the founder of Winning Edge Group Consulting. During the last 25 years he has honed his planning and execution skills in companies such as GE and Black & Decker. He brings a broad expertise to the planning process and works equally as well in the board room as on the shop floor.