STRATEGIC PLANNING

FOR

KINGDOM BUSINESSES

How to Get from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be

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Strategic Planning for Kingdom Businesses: How to Get From Where You Are to Where You Want to Be

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INTRODUCTION

"A man's heart plans his way, But the Lord directs his steps"
(Proverbs 16:9 NKJV).

Have you ever driven a car that had engine problems? Although the car was moving forward, something seemed to be holding it back. Even with the accelerator fully depressed, it moved forward sluggishly. It felt like the car wasn't firing on all cylinders. You didn't know what was wrong, but you knew your car should be capable of going much faster and more efficiently with much less gas and coaxing on your part. Have you ever felt the same way about the performance of your company?

Perhaps you have been trying a lot of things to break out of the pack and distinguish yourself from your competition but few of them have worked. It seems like you were throwing spaghetti at a wall and very little of it was sticking. In the next chapter, I will show you why this popular method of throwing spaghetti at a wall seldom works. You would think a lot more effort would produce better results, but as you have already discovered, that is not necessarily true.

If you are reading this book, you are probably the person responsible for setting the direction in your company and navigating your business to success through a market environment that is anything but predictable. You have probably achieved a certain level of success in business but are stuck at a plateau. Just like the car analogy above, you know your company can perform much better if you could get everyone in your company firing on all cylinders and staying focused on getting to your destination as quickly as possible.

Although you may have looked into strategic planning and strategic plans, you shudder at the thought of spending time and resources on a process you feel is confusing, time-consuming, and overly convoluted. Perhaps you have even tried strategic planning before, and the overall effort failed to produce fruit and didn't achieve your financial objectives.

On the other hand, you know you are stuck in a rut and the definition of insanity is to keep doing the same things and expect different results. Perhaps it is time to take another look at this management tool called *Strategic Planning*.

The purpose of this book is to help you get unstuck and move your business forward by focusing your time and resources on those tasks that have the greatest probability of getting you from where you are, to where you want to be in the next three to five years. My goal is to combine the simplest and most effective industry best practices from my management consulting background with a Kingdom of Heaven paradigm and show you how to have laser-like focus on reaching your objectives.

Although the target audience of this book is the Christian CEO, the principles shown here will work for anyone and any company. A non-believer who is an expert in strategic planning could not refute the methodology espoused. This strategy will work regardless if you are a $1 million company or a $1 billion company. You will have the advantage of looking at everything not only from an internal and external company perspective, but to look at your decisions from God's perspective. This will give you the believer's edge!

Although I have a significant background in management consulting, instead of trying to make things sound complex and convoluted, my goal is to demystify the process of strategic planning. I want to make this so simple and straightforward that you will have confidence that you and your team can do this together.

Throughout the book, whenever a concept is brought up, I will explain the term in both layman and management consulting parlance. More importantly, I'll explain *why* the concept is important. What happens if you don't do this? I've learned that people will quickly forget the *who, what, where,* and *when,* but they will remember the *why* long after they've forgotten everything else.

I will also explain some alternatives to the strategic planning process and alternative strategic planning frameworks. What happens if you choose not to employ strategic planning? Unfortunately, you are already familiar with many of the alternatives, and I think you'll find this approach the one that will give you the greatest chance of achieving your goals with the least amount of time, pain, and resources. If I did not believe this, I would not be writing this book.

Why Am I Passionate About Strategic Planning?

In order to explain my passion for Strategic Planning and helping you succeed in life and business, let me explain my background and how the Lord brought me here.

I was born into an Irish-Catholic family in New England. My parents were devout Catholics and sent their children to parochial grammar school. For eight years, I studied religion one hour per day, five days per week. During my early years, I believe I had a personal relationship with the Lord. However, by the time I had finished grammar school, I was very religious with little evidence of a relationship with the Lord.

After finishing public high school, I decided to pursue a degree in Electronics Engineering at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. During college, I received a two-year Navy ROTC scholarship and after graduation was commissioned as an officer in the Navy. I am very grateful for the many leadership and management lessons I learned during the five years I served as a Surface Warfare Officer on two destroyers, and the incredible men and women who served as role models for me.

When I left the Navy, I went to work for a large Government contracting company. I started as a Systems Engineer working on Navy projects and quickly realized that the way to advance in these companies was to bring in new business to the company. It was important to do the work we were under contract for, but more important to bring in new business. As it turned out, business development and strategic planning became some of my strengths.

Through the grace of God, I was often assigned to work on proposal development teams. Although this was an assignment everyone hated, I enjoyed and thrived at writing proposals. I was always able to write well, and the idea of being able to strategize on how to describe our companies "themes and discriminators" was a challenge I relished.

These themes and discriminators are also known in the management consulting parlance as Unique Selling Propositions or Competitive Advantage, but their purpose is always the same. They are intended to answer the consequential question, "Why us?" Why should our customers or prospects buy from us rather than our competitors? In the government contracting arena, it is not unheard of for several hundred companies to bid on the same contract solicitation, so we needed a succinct message to answer the prospect's question of why they should choose us.

In my early years, I benefited from working with some great business development and proposal writers who knew how to write winning proposals and learned the difference between writing responses from a contractor's perspective and writing from a customer's perspective. The prospect was far less interested in who we were and what we did than they were in finding out if we knew who they were, what they did, and what their needs were. I would find out later in my career that not everyone had the benefit of learning this important business perspective.

In strategic planning, we will discuss decision making from both internal and external perspectives. Those perspectives will include yours, your customer, your employees, your internal operations, and most importantly, God's perspective. Although you are probably looking at strategic planning from a *where you are* to *where you want to go* perspective, God is far more interested in *who you are* and *who you are going to become*. Therefore, from God's perspective, the strategic planning process is more of an identity issue than a financial growth issue.

While doing business development, I met some people in the commercial sector and started working with Fortune 500 companies doing management consulting. I liked this work better than Government contracting. I liked working with people who knew where they were going and were motivated to get there. I liked working on projects where the wisdom God had given me to solve problems would be embraced and utilized. Although I loved the management consulting industry, I knew the Lord was leading me to something much bigger, but it would take a while to figure that out.

About the time I left the Navy, I started dating a woman training to be a Methodist minister. We had many theological and philosophical discussions about God, the Bible, and religion. I tried to explain my position as a person who professed to be a Christian but was more agnostic in beliefs. I explained to her the inconsistencies I perceived were in the Bible and the religion I grew up with. When she realized I had never read the Bible, she gave me one for Christmas that year and encouraged me to read it. In complete arrogance, I agreed to read it. I was going to show her where she was wrong, and I was right.

For the next three months, I read the Bible from cover to cover. I was captivated while reading it. Most of what I had learned from my Catholic religion wasn't even in the Bible. Most of what I was learning from the book, I had never heard before. Not during five hours per week of religion class in parochial grammar school or at Mass on Sunday. When I was finished, she asked me if the Bible had answered all my questions. I told her that it had not, but I had realized that most of my questions really weren't that important. I was ready to be sold. However, either due to her lack of experience or the closeness of our relationship, she never tried to lead me to the Lord. That would come a couple of months later.

One Sunday evening, I was sick at home and trying to find something on TV. There wasn't anything worth watching. Every time I did a channel check I found myself stopping at a station that featured a woman TV evangelist. I knew from my Catholic upbringing that all TV evangelists were a bunch of crooks out to take your money. Yet, there was something charismatic about this woman. It wasn't her appearance or demeanor. I couldn't put my finger on it, but every time I did a channel check, I found myself stopping and watching this woman.

Finally, I decided to make a game of it and watch the show. If the woman said something that I knew wasn't in the Bible, that would be my opportunity to change the channel. After all, I had just finished reading it a couple of months ago. When the show ended fifty minutes later, she gave an altar call and there I was, down on my knees in my one-bedroom apartment giving my life to the Lord.

I'd love to say that my life instantaneously and dramatically turned around, but that wouldn't be true. I was still hanging out with people who were “sowing to the flesh.” It would take six years of slow growth in my Christian walk before finally joining a full gospel church. It would take another two years before I would hear the Lord directing me to get involved in church ministry. But over the next seventeen years, I would be involved with most church ministries including ushers, greeters, altar workers, men’s ministry, prison ministry, intercessory prayer, van ministry, children’s Sunday school, and deliverance ministry. What I didn’t realize during those church ministry years was that God was going to use all that ministry experience in a different type of ministry outside of the church. My *work* was going to become my ministry!

During the early 2000s, the Lord started downloading a plan for a Christian management consulting company. This type of marketplace ministry would provide the type of ministry services I had been doing in the local church but to business leaders. God was showing me a way to combine my love for business success with my love for Him and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Thank you, Jesus! Sozo Services was born in 2006. The word *sozo* is a Greek word and means saved, delivered, healed, and made whole. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we come alongside business owners and leaders and make them whole.

In my book *Kingdom Business Success*, I stated that most well-intentioned Christian business leaders struggle or fail in their business for one of three reasons:

a) They are in the **wrong business** (the wrong Kingdom assignment).

b) They are in the **right business** for the **wrong reasons** (not operating under a Kingdom paradigm).

c) They are in the **right business** using the **wrong business model** (doing the right assignment the wrong way).

This same statement applies to all companies, and the strategic planning framework enclosed will address all three disorders and help you get your company unstuck and on its way to your God-inspired vision. God wants you to be successful and fruitful in your business. This book will help you get there. I promise.

Organization of the Book

Here is an outline of the process I will use to walk you through the strategic planning process and help you develop your own strategic plan. I have even included a checklist of activities with time estimates to give you a sense of how long it will take to develop your own strategic plan. I have also included a sample strategic plan for a fictional company entitled Heavenly Metal with a project schedule of activities to allow you to see what your finished plan should look like.

The sample completed plan is included in Chapter 9 and is also available to download from our site. Instructions for downloading and the required product code are given in Chapter 4. I suggest you start your strategic planning process by looking at the sample completed plan. Hopefully, it will give you confidence that this is not a complex management tool but something you and your team will be able to accomplish with some dedicated effort.

Chapter 1: Strategic Planning—What is it and Why? Defines corporate strategic planning and strategic plans and explains why they are so important to achieving success. The Pareto Principle is used to explain why strategic planning works and why "trying a lot of things" does not. Alternatives to achieving financial growth without strategic planning are also examined.

Chapter 2: Different Perspectives. Examines the importance of looking at your business and products through the lens of the many stakeholders and explains that your perspective is not the most important. There are at least two perspectives that are more important than your own—God's and your customer's.

Chapter 3: Excellent Execution of Best Practices. Defines industry best practices (IBPs), where they come from and how to identify and implement them. Although IBPs are important, it is the excellent execution of the IBPs that differentiates companies. Excellent execution of IBPs can be a strategy in itself.

Chapter 4: Current State. Here we present the various components of your strategic plan that define who you currently are. These include your mission and values statements, culture, target customer, business model, competition, organizational structure, and revenue/profit profile of your current products, services, and customers.

Chapter 5: Future State. As important as it is to understand who you are, where you are, and how you got here, it's more important to understand who you are called to become, where you are going, and what it will look like when you arrive. In this section, you are documenting your vision, Kingdom assignment, and your competitive advantage—why customers should buy from you versus your competitors. You will also define the important assumptions you are making about your strategic plan, your future organizational structure, and pro forma financial statements to understand the return on investment (ROI) you are expecting to achieve through your strategic plan.

Chapter 6: The SWOT Matrix Framework. Using a collaborative team environment, you will develop your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) matrix that will serve as the framework for determining how to get from your current state to your future state with the highest probability of success. Additionally, you will validate your matrix against your past successes and failures to allow you to predict the future success of new prospective opportunities.

Chapter 7: SWOT Matrix Analysis. After analyzing and prioritizing the top five strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of your SWOT matrix, you will start extrapolating the implied needs or urgent imperatives that will form the basis of the strategic initiatives of your strategic plan. These will become the high-level activities of your strategic plan.

Chapter 8: Strategic Goals and Tasks—Completing Your Strategic Plan. Here you will break down your five strategic initiatives into smaller goals and tasks and identify Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), milestones, start and end dates, and assign responsibilities for each task to generate a schedule or project plan for your strategic plan.

Chapter 9: Sample Strategic Plan. Here we present a sample strategic plan for an industrial metal fabrication company called Heavenly Metal to illustrate what your strategic plan should look like. This sample plan, as well as the project plan schedule in Excel format, is available to download from our site.

Chapter 10: Managing Your Strategic Plan. Here we discuss those things that you need to do to ensure that your team accomplishes everything you said you were going to do in your strategic plan. These are things you must do to guarantee your success. In the end, your success will be based upon how well you implemented your strategic plan. The use of business intercessors to create the right atmosphere and ensure success is addressed.

Chapter 11: Step by Step—How to Create Your Own Strategic Plan. Here we present a step-by-step schedule to breakdown the process of creating your own strategic plan and provide realistic timelines involved in all phases of the planning effort.

Appendix A: Competitive Intelligence (CI). Since most companies are unfamiliar with the CI process and do a poor job of performing CI on their competitors, this appendix will describe how to create your own CI program to identify and implement IBPs and determine your competitive advantage.

Appendix B: Analysis of Other Strategic Planning Frameworks. This appendix defines the strategic planning framework used in this book and examines the pros and cons of other popular strategic planning frameworks used today in corporate America.

My prayer for you is that through this process, you and your business will achieve the fullness of the destiny that God is calling you towards. During this process you will unearth many identity issues including yours, your mission, your customer, your employees, your products, and your industry. You will start looking at everything from different people's perspectives, especially God's perspective. You will have greater clarity regarding your future and a new level of excitement about getting there. As you embark on developing your own strategic plan for success, I pray that you have fair winds and following seas.

CHAPTER 1

STRATEGIC PLANNING – WHAT IT IS AND WHY?

"The steps of a man are established by the LORD, And He delights in his way" (Psalm 37:23).

Imagine you are Tom Brady—one of the best quarterbacks in history. It is late in the playoff game, you are down by four points, and only three seconds remain on the clock. You have the ball on the 5-yard line. So close to the end zone, you can smell it. You only have time for one more play. If you get the ball into the end zone, you win the game. If you don't, you lose and have the rest of the off-season to rethink your decision. What play are *you* going to call?

You could call a trick play—something the opposition is not expecting. The problem with trick plays is that teams seldom have experience using them in game scenarios. You may end up fooling your teammates more than your opponents. You could try something new and draw up a play in the dirt, but same drawback. You would be betting your season on a play that is not your proven strength. So, what play *do* you call?

If you are Tom Brady, you will most likely go to your strength. You will have several options. Your first choice is to post up Rob Gronkowski in the end zone. He is a big, strong tight end. He can bull his way and setup wherever he wants in the end zone. Brady then throws a perfect jump pass to him. Few defensive backs can compete with Gronkowski in his vertical leap and ability to pull the ball down. This play was one of Brady's favorites and practiced and performed successfully over and over again.

In the unlikely event that Gronkowski gets mugged on the way to the end zone, Brady will look for his second read, one of his receivers crossing over the middle. Brady is an expert at positioning the ball away from defenders in a place where only his receiver can reach it. Last of all, if everyone else is covered, Brady will dump the ball off to his running back Leonard Fournette and hope he can bull his way into the end zone.

If you understand this football scenario, then you can understand the purpose and basic concepts of strategic planning in business. Strategic planning is not about "trying something new." It's not about "shooting for the stars and landing on the moon." As the quarterback of your team, you are attempting to achieve a very specific objective, which always involves some kind of financial goal, in a definitive time frame.

If you fail to reach your objective, you may not be out of business or lose your job as the CEO, but that could happen. Additionally, should you fail, it might be just as demoralizing as losing the big game and make it harder to get your team to rally together to pursue new strategic objectives down the road. After all, who wants to play on a team that can't seem to win the big game? There is no Miss Congeniality prize in either football or business.

In the strategic planning process, you are looking for the play that will give you the greatest chance of success. Unlike the end zone, which is clearly defined, your success will require you to reach your corporate vision, which is where you want to be in the next three years. As part of the strategic planning process, you will clearly identify your end zone and how success will be defined.

Unlike the 5-yard line, which is clearly defined, you will need to define who you are and where you are on the playing field. After all, in order to get to your destination, you need to know where you are starting from. You will need to understand your strengths and weaknesses and competitive advantages, which is what you do better than anyone else. You will need to understand your corporate values and culture. You can't be calling plays that are not in harmony and compatible with your team's values, culture, and capabilities.

When you call the play, you need to effectively communicate and inspire this play to each teammate. Through your leadership and management skills, you need to convince them that this is the play you will run, and it *will* work. There cannot be any misunderstanding as to which play you are running or the snap count. Your only chance of success is if every player is 100% committed to this play and executes it to the best of their ability.

What makes this scenario really challenging is that as soon as the ball is snapped, the field will look totally different than when you called the play. As the defense shifts from its pre-snap to post-snap scheme, twenty-one players will be moving in different directions, many of them unplanned and unexpected. You will need to react in a moment to the changing field environment and adjust your play. Similarly, no matter how well you develop your strategic plan to get to your vision, you will need to monitor and adapt to the constantly changing environment in your market and industry.

But enough football analogies. What is corporate strategic planning, and why is it important? What are the alternatives to doing business without a strategic plan? How is it done, and how much effort does it take? Once the plan is developed, how do you ensure the plan is implemented and achieves the objectives you are trying to achieve? We will answer most of these questions in this chapter and the remaining ones throughout the book.

What is Strategic Planning?

Strategic planning is the process of deciding where you want your organization to be in the future. Generally looking out three to five years in advance and then developing a detailed plan that will get you from where you are to where you want to go. The importance of understanding where you are is that any plan to get you to your destination needs to be congruent with where you are currently, your history, strengths and weaknesses, corporate values and culture, your competitive industry, and the dynamic factors of your market.

This can be simplified to say that strategic planning is the decision-making process of determining how to get from your current state (where you are) to your future state (where you want to be). The strategic plan is the document that captures the relevant information about your current and future state, as well as the activities or tasks that will be performed. The strategic plan describes in detail *how* to get from your current state to your future state. The terms strategic planning and strategic plan are sometimes used interchangeably, but planning is the process of creating the plan. The plan is the finished document that captures everything and serves as a tool to monitor the success of the plan.

There are as many formal definitions of strategic planning as there are methodologies and frameworks. For those who want to compare the strengths and weaknesses of the different methodologies and frameworks and have a clear understanding of the methodology we will be using and why, I have placed that discussion in Appendix B. I know most CEOs are not interested in MBA discussions on corporate strategy; they simply want to get to their destination as quickly as possible, with the least amount of time, pain, and expenditure of resources.

A question often raised is, "How do strategic plans differ from business plans?" That's a fair question since there is some overlap between their contents. Both will probably contain a description of your:

- Mission statement
- Vision statement
- Corporate values
- Target customer
- Products and services

- Business model
- Competitive market analysis
- The opportunities that exist in your market and industry
- Competitive Advantage or Unique Selling Proposition
- Pro-forma financial spreadsheets forecasting the next several years

The similarities appear to be numerous, but the differences are also significant.

The business plan is a static view of the future. Although a business plan is often used to validate a business idea or the pursuit of a new product or service for a startup business, it can also be used to validate the addition of new products, markets, or industries for an existing business. It tends to answer the question, "Will this work?" If all the assumptions in the business plan are correct, and you sell as many products or services as proposed in the plan, then the business model for the business should be viable and sustainable. Therefore, the business plan describes a future state, not the current state. Lacking in the business plan are the details on how to make the business plan work.

A strategic plan is a management tool for existing companies that have already shown themselves to be viable and sustainable. The strategic plan looks at both your past and current state in order to make strategic decisions or choices as to the best way to get to your future state. Whereas the business plan tends to be a static view of the future, the strategic plan is a dynamic plan that takes into account your corporate history of successes and failures, your corporate values and culture, and your strengths and weaknesses. A strategic plan acknowledges and monitors the dynamic aspects of your industry and market, your changing competitive environment, and internal and external factors that affect your success.

Perhaps the greatest difference is that strategic plans include detailed goals and activities, and responsibilities to measure, report on, and hold people accountable for getting to your destination. Like a project plan, it will include the necessary information to illustrate how activities link to initiatives and goals, how different activities impact or affect other activities, track your progress, identify costs associated with the plan, identify responsible stakeholders, and measure your success.

There are no guarantees in football, and there are no guarantees in strategic planning. However, if you execute everything in your strategic plan, you are almost assured of achieving your vision. Just like Tom Brady calling the play that gives him the greatest chance of getting into the end zone, your strategic plan will give you the highest probability of reaching the success defined by your vision.

When strategic plans fail, they generally fail for one of two reasons: 1) You didn't do all the things you said you were going to do in the plan, or 2) The underlying assumptions made as part of the strategic plan were not valid.

As I write this book, the country is recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. Very few people saw this coming or understood the significance it would have on disrupting the continuity and sales cycle of the business market. But since the strategic plan is a dynamic tool, every CEO should already be adjusting their plan based upon this change to the market and altering their course to intercept their future.

In order to understand the importance of strategic planning as a management tool, it's probably a good idea to look at the alternatives to using a strategic plan. Arguably the most utilized business growth plan is "Try a bunch of things and hope that some of them work." This is sometimes referred to as the machine gun approach to success. The theory is that if you fire enough bullets, you are bound to hit something. I call this the "throwing spaghetti at the wall model." Similarly, if you throw enough spaghetti at a wall, some of it should eventually stick.

However, there is a serious problem with the spaghetti-at-the-wall model. It is based upon two incorrect assumptions. To understand why those assumptions are incorrect, we need to first look at the Pareto Principle and how it applies to strategic planning.

The Pareto Principle

I am sure you have heard of the Pareto Principle, also known as the 80/20 rule. This principle was noticed and publicized by Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto in 1896. Pareto noticed that 80% of the land in Italy was owned by 20% of the population. This led to more observations of economics and life that concluded that *80% of most effects come from 20% of the causes*. In some instances, the 80/20 rule might look more like a 90/10 rule or a 70/30 rule, but the principle remains the same. Let's see how the Pareto Principle applies to the strategic planning process.

Let's assume you have one hundred salespeople in your company. The Pareto Principle says that 80% of your sales are coming from twenty of those salespeople. Let's call the eighty salespeople who are producing 20% of your results, the **average salespeople**. Let's call the twenty salespeople who are producing 80% of your results the **high-producing salespeople**.

Question: How much more money is a high-producing salesperson worth compared to an average salesperson? Let's assume their value is a direct multiple of how much more productive the 20% group is compared to the 80% sales group.

Since the high-producing salesperson accounts for 4% of your sales (eighty sales divided by twenty people) and the average salesperson accounts for 0.25% of your sales (twenty sales divided by eighty people), the high-producing salesperson is *sixteen times more productive* than your average salesperson (4% divided by 0.25%). Don't tell them this, but if life was fair, you would be paying your high-producing salesperson sixteen times as much as your average salesperson!

However, since the Pareto Principle applies to all groups, including subgroups of itself, of the twenty high-producing salespeople, four of them (20% of 20%) are producing 64% of your sales (80% of 80%). We will call these four salespeople **super salespeople**. Using the logic explained above, these four super salespeople are *sixty-four times more productive* and more valuable than the average salesperson (sixty-four sales divided by four salespeople divided by 0.25 sales). Don't lose these highly productive people!

These numbers also work backwards. Suppose you give the same sales lead to an average salesperson and to a high-producing salesperson. In that case, the Pareto Principle says that the odds of the high-producing salesperson closing the lead are sixteen times greater than the average salesperson. However, the odds of the super salesperson closing the same lead compared to the average salesperson are sixty-four times higher!

I promised you in the Introduction that I was going to show you why the spaghetti at the wall model does not work, or at least why it doesn't work well. Let's look at what the Pareto Principle says about achieving success by "trying a bunch of things." This is what the spaghetti-at-the-wall model is portraying.

Let's assume you have a pot of spaghetti containing one hundred strands and are throwing strands at the wall and hoping some of it sticks. Each piece of spaghetti represents one new idea that you are trying out. Using the numbers from the sales analogy above, the Pareto Principle says that the odds of a piece of spaghetti sticking to the wall are about 1:16. For every idea you try, you will find that about one in sixteen will actually work.

Just because you tried something new and it worked doesn't mean that the idea had a significant impact on your business. Many companies try new products and services, but how many of those new products and services have a significant impact on the company's bottom line? How many new products do companies develop that are actually subsidized by their existing products?

Therefore, not all spaghetti pieces that stick to the wall will have a significant impact on your company. So, what percentage of strands of spaghetti will actually stick to the wall *and* have a significant impact on the company? As per the Pareto Principle, that would be 1:64. That means for every idea you try, about one in sixty-four will both work *and* achieve a significant impact on your company's bottom line. Perhaps this explains the results you have seen. Of the many ideas you have tried with varying levels of success, very few of them actually moved you closer to your financial destination.

As a general rule, the strategy of "trying a bunch of things" doesn't work because it is based on two invalid assumptions. Those assumptions are: 1) Each idea you try has an equal chance of working, and 2) Each idea that works has an equal chance of impacting your bottom line. As the Pareto Principle illustrates, neither of those two assumptions are valid.

What if there was a way to analyze the pieces of spaghetti *before* you threw them? What if there was a way to determine ahead of time which piece of spaghetti had the greatest chance of sticking to the wall? What if there was a way to determine ahead of time, which piece of spaghetti had the greatest chance of both sticking to the wall *and* having a significant impact on the company? If there *was* a way, then you could focus your time, efforts, and resources on those pieces of spaghetti and achieve greater success. It turns out there is!

That is what the strategic planning process will do. It will help you identify your validated strengths and weaknesses and look at the highest-yielding opportunities that exist in a dynamic market. It will help you make the best decisions as to which projects you should spend your time and resources on to give you the greatest probability of success. Certainly, much better odds than throwing spaghetti at a wall! Your strategic planning process will help you *strategically* make the best decisions regarding where to invest your limited time and resources to ensure you have the greatest probability of success, achieve your goals, and arrive at your destination within the expected time frame.

Alternatives to Strategic Planning

Hopefully, you are now convinced that strategic planning is the way to go to achieve your vision by allowing you to focus your limited time and resources and provide your company with the greatest chance of success with the least amount of frustration, time, and resources. You may be thinking, "What are my other choices?" That's a fair question. Most business leaders want to examine all options. What are the other options for achieving business growth and how do they compare?

Try a Bunch of Different Things—This is probably the most popular alternative choice to strategic planning and the one I refer to as the spaghetti-at-the-wall method. One could argue that since the strategic planning process requires change and introduces strategic initiatives and tasks, what's the difference between the things that are tried in the spaghetti-at-the-wall model and the things that are incorporated in the strategic planning model? That is a great question, and the answer shows the superiority of the strategic planning model.

Before choosing the strategic initiatives, goals, and tasks that are part of the strategic planning model, each initiative is not only analyzed against the company's strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures, and the company's corporate mission, vision, values, and culture, they are *validated* by extrapolation of the data. You may be trying something new, but at the same time, you are systematically determining your needs and matching your proven strengths against carefully chosen opportunities for which you have some level of success. Using playing card parlance, you are stacking the deck in your favor.

Stay the Course—You could keep doing what you are currently doing. After all, it has worked and brought you to your current position in your market and industry. Some would argue, "If it ain't broke—don't' fix it." This stay-the-course approach requires the least amount of thought, time, and resources. You could hope and pray you stumble into continued success. In fact, a certain amount of your success to date has probably been achieved through God's grace rather than brilliant strategic planning. You may not be growing, but you feel you are maintaining your position in the market. You could decide to stay the course and maintain your market position.

The downside to staying the course is that maintaining your position in the market and industry is a myth. It is the nature of life and business that you are either growing or dying. If you feel you are maintaining your position, you are probably decaying but haven't noticed it yet. Your market, industry, competitors, suppliers, customers, and employees are in constant dynamic flux. If you are not changing, it's guaranteed they *are* changing. How will their changes affect your static position? This is the position that most taxi companies took when Uber came onto the scene. A few of them are still in business.

Acquisitions—It has been said that there are only two ways to grow a business. You can grow organically or grow through acquisitions. Growth through acquisitions has the potential of providing a faster revenue increase than can be achieved organically. Acquisitions often provide new products, open new markets, increase your customer base, and add additional processes, capabilities, and technology. Perhaps the greatest benefit of acquisitions is that you are removing an existing competitor and adding their business to yours.

The downside to acquisitions are many. You increase your long-term debt, which affects your operational cash flow. You now have the challenge of integrating two company cultures which is challenging at best and frequently impossible. You will generally lose many talented employees from both companies who did not agree with your decision. You frequently end up with two competing products and are forced to dump one of them. In essence, purchasing the rights to a product that you throw away. Perhaps the biggest drawback to acquisitions is that after your purchase, you still have the challenge of figuring out how to grow your resultant company organically. A problem you cannot avoid.

Win on Price Business Model—The problem with cutting your prices is that you are now selling a commodity. Very few companies have succeeded by attempting to become the low-cost leader. Walmart is able to do it, but there are many complexities of their business model that most people don't understand that allow them to compete on price. No company should ever strive to be the low-price leader in their industry.

Fire the CEO—This seems to be popular with many corporate boards. It is much easier to fire the CEO and hire someone to replace them, who will then turn the company around. This sometimes works; however, the problem with a company is often not the decision-maker, but the decisions that are made regarding their products, business model, or industry. Sometimes it is just bad execution. Hopefully, the board of your company will not use this approach to solving your company's growth problems.

Finally, many CEOs feel like firemen. They spend their days putting out one fire after another and have little time for strategic planning. The only way to get out in front of the fires is to be proactive and start making changes that will take you to the place you want your company to be. Strategic planning is a proven management tool to allow you to do that.

In the next chapter, we will address the various stakeholders who influence your company and how their perspective of your company often differs from your own. You need to ensure you are giving proper weight to the opinions and perspectives that matter the most when developing your strategic plan.

CHAPTER 5

FUTURE STATE

"When there is no clear prophetic vision, people quickly wander astray"
(Proverbs 29:18a TPT).

If you have completed all the exercises, you should now have a pretty good feel for who you are and where you are. Hopefully, you did not complete the exercises in a corporate vacuum but actively sought out different perspectives from various stakeholders involved with your company. Hopefully, you spent a significant amount of time listening to your two most important stakeholders—God and your customer.

Don't be surprised if your various stakeholders had a different perspective of you and your company than you did. Don't be surprised if they were doing business with you for different reasons than you thought. Don't be surprised if you started seeing your stakeholders from a different perspective—theirs! You have probably started to see why some of your business growth efforts failed and even reasons why your successful projects succeeded.

You may be disappointed and even shocked with some of the feedback you received, but this splash of cold water on your face is going to do wonders and make you a stronger, more successful company. Through strategic planning, you will now be able to make some course adjustments to bring correction to the path and trajectory you have been on. After all, who you are and where you are, are not nearly as important as where you are going and who you are going to become.

Vision Statement

Now that you have determined who you are and where you are, now it's time to look at where you want to go and the type of company you want to become when you arrive there. Once you know *where* you are going, you can start looking at *how* you will get there.

In most discussions of strategic planning, they will discuss corporate vision statements along with mission statements during current state analysis. The problem with that sequence is it is difficult to determine how far you can go in three to five years when you don't know where you are starting from or how you arrived at your current location. Imagine someone asking you how long it would take to drive someplace without knowing your starting point? Without doing all the exercises you did to determine your current state, it is pretty hard to figure out what you can realistically achieve in the next three to five years.

How far into the future should your vision statement project? That's a great question. Some people believe you should look out five or ten years. Personally, I believe the world is in such dynamic flux that I can't see anyone accurately predicting more than three years into the future. This is why I prefer three-year strategic plans that are updated on an annual basis, always projecting three years out.

There are some who believe vision statements should represent Big, Hairy, Audacious Goals (BHAGs), which is a term made popular by the book *Built to Last*[1]. Those who believe this will quote one of the most famous BHAGs which came from President John F. Kennedy in 1961, who said, "First, I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the Earth.[2]" What these people omit is that President Kennedy had at least three things going for him when he announced his BHAG:

1. Lack of accountability—He would not be President at the end of the decade if he failed to achieve his goal. Therefore, he couldn't be fired for failing to achieve his vision.

2. Resources of an entire nation—He benefited from having hundreds of thousands of people work on this project over the decade. He could draw on the finest talent in the corporate world and academia.

3. He could print his own money—He had no financial restrictions to achieve his vision.

As the CEO, can you say the same things about your company's vision? If not, then you might want to focus on a significant, purposeful vision you can achieve in the next three years. After all, *you* probably will be held accountable for the success or failure of achieving your goal.

Your vision statement should provide a concise, vivid description of what your organization will look like in three to five years. It should be inspiring, motivating, purposeful, achievable, and memorable. Here is an example of Amazon's corporate vision statement:

> "Amazon's vision statement is to be Earth's most customer-centric company, to build a place where people can come to find and discover anything they might want to buy online."

Although many strategic plans seem to focus on the financial aspects of a company's vision, the financial aspects tend to be the fruit of success. They are the result of achieving non-financial goals. For example, what does it mean to be the biggest and the best in an industry? Companies like Microsoft become the biggest and the best by consistently providing greater value than their competitors. Value comes in many forms, but the more value you provide the less significant price becomes to the customer. Money follows value.

It has been said that necessity is the mother of invention. A vision can be inspiring to create the necessary solutions that did not exist previously. Most of the technology required to put a man on the moon and return him safely to earth didn't exist when President Kennedy made his BHAG statement. The technology was born from the vision. It took commitment to the vision to create the necessity for the invention of the technology. Likewise, your vision should inspire you and your team to go beyond limitations you had not previously conquered.

Regardless of whether your vision statement looks out three, five, ten, or twenty years, I believe there is a bigger picture to keep your eyes on, and that is your Kingdom assignment. If you have become a disciple of the Lord Jesus and have gone "all in" dedicating your life and everything you have to the Lord, then your business has become part of His Kingdom and He has a specific purpose for both you and your business. This is part of the Kingdom of Heaven paradigm described in *Kingdom Business Success,* and it's a game-changer in the way you look at your corporate vision.

A business can be successful for the wrong reasons. Non-believers who serve the spirits of mammon, greed, fear, and pride do not care why their businesses are successful. However, for those of us who serve the King and His Kingdom, to be successful, we need to understand why we are in business, what purpose our business is serving to advance His Kingdom, and who we are called to serve. We must operate our business in a way that glorifies Him and conduct our operations in a way He would conduct the business. The Lord will not be lord over our business if the reason we are in business is to serve other gods through our business.

The unique Kingdom assignment for you and your business is something you will have to seek like buried treasure. One of the most important keys to help you discern your Kingdom assignment is to understand what you are passionate about. By passion, I am talking about the type of passion that would give someone the zeal and drive to commit their entire life to a cause or project. I am talking about the type of passion that would make someone willing to die for a cause. This type of passion would drive someone to pursue a cause even if there wasn't any money to be made from that enterprise. This type of passion would cause someone to send His only Son to the cross to die for the sins of unjust men and women so they would be set free from prison. This is the type of passion I am talking about.

What are you passionate about? What are *your* deepest heart's desires? What is it you passionately desire to see and be a part of that it brings you to tears to think you might not be able to see it in this lifetime? What do you want to see accomplished so badly that the very thought of seeing that desire fulfilled in the near future brings incredible joy to your life? What do you want to accomplish so strongly that if you could never make any money from it or get any credit for accomplishing it, you would still spend your life pursuing it? Understand the answers to those questions and you are on the way to discovering your Kingdom assignment.

Your greatest fulfillment in the business world will come when you find out *where* you are called to serve, *who* you are called to serve, *what* you are to serve, and how providing this service to people serves the King and His Kingdom purposes. When that happens, all the other things you are seeking in life will fall into place. That is when you will know the true meaning of success. You will start keeping score by the number of lives you influence for Christ and the number of lives you bless by releasing the power of Christ in you, and not by your financial statements. When you do that, the Lord will add to your financial statements.

Competitive Advantage

Your competitive advantage is also known as your Unique Selling Proposition or your Themes & Discriminators. Regardless of what you call it, it answers the question of why your customers and prospects should buy from you versus one of your direct or indirect competitors. You should understand your competitive advantage and be able to explain it accurately and concisely. If you cannot, I guarantee you that your customers and prospects will have the same problem.

Your competitive advantage is normally discussed during Current State analysis. It certainly gets discussed when reviewing your strengths in the SWOT matrix. However, it is my experience that most companies do not have a competitive advantage. They never spent time studying their competitors, nor identifying what unique advantage they have over their competitors that should cause a customer to buy from them versus their competitors. However, as you determine where you want to be in three to five years, you need to be strategic in separating from the pack and developing a reason for your customers to choose you. If you cannot figure out why your customers should buy from you over the next three to five years, your customers aren't going to be able to figure it out either.

Just as two snowflakes are not the same, your competitive advantage is what makes you unique in an industry that may be loaded with companies that look alike. When you try to imitate someone else, you will always be inferior to the real thing. However, when you are being yourself and become the best at what you are called to do, no one else can be better at being you than you.

Your competitive advantage cannot be a list of your strengths from your SWOT matrix. Why? It's very likely your competitors are listing similar strengths on their SWOT matrix. Since your competitors are making the same declarations, these strengths cannot be your competitive advantage. However, once you determine your competitive advantage, it is guaranteed it will align with your strengths. If you cannot define your competitive advantage at this time, studying your strengths would be a great place to start. What you are looking for is something that you do better than anyone else.

To have a true competitive advantage, your competitors cannot be able to make the same statement at this time (e.g., “We are the number one selling shoe”). Your competitors may duplicate your advantage at some time in the future, but they cannot presently make the same statement. Hopefully, it will not be easy for them to duplicate. Hopefully, you will be able to preserve your competitive advantage.

What matters most to your customers and prospects when choosing a vendor? Your competitive advantage should be something that will attract your prospects in such a compelling way that they will be knocked over or wowed by it. I call it “That’s it!” You are describing your customers’ need or pain point better than they can describe it themselves.

A great example of what I’m referring to comes from the old Charlie Brown comic strips and videos. In one strip, Charlie Brown goes to Lucy to receive psychiatric help. He is depressed about Christmas but doesn’t know why. Lucy thinks he has a fear of something and starts reciting a list of phobias. When she reaches pantophobia, the fear of everything, Charlie Brown exclaims, “That’s it!” in such a loud voice that it knocks Lucy head over heels.

In a similar way, your competitive advantage should not simply address something you do better than any of your competitors, it should address a specific need or pain point of your customers and prospects. You might have the best product packaging in your industry, but if that’s not your customers’ pain point, it cannot be your competitive advantage. Your customers buy because of their needs and pain points, not because you have a strength in a certain area.

You should be able to describe their need or pain point better than they can describe it themselves. It’s almost as if you have the same pain yourself, and that’s why you can describe it so articulately. When you can describe their pain point better than they can, they will exclaim, “That’s it!” If you have a product or service that will make their pain go away and can describe its uniqueness in such a way that your competitors cannot make the same statement, you have found a legitimate competitive advantage.

What do you do if you don’t have a competitive advantage? First, relax. Most of your competitors don’t either. Second, find the most significant needs of your customers and prospects. What matters most to your customers and prospects? How do they see their biggest need and pain points in the area that you serve? This is why it is important to find out what your customers are most in need of. It is their perspective that matters the most, not your own.

Then, find out what your competitors do better than you. How important is that differentiation for your customers? If it's very important, then invest time and money to become at least as good as them in that area. Once you are as good, find a way to become even better than them at it. Become the leader in your industry and let your competitors follow you.

I do not like using third-party customer surveys because surveys can be manipulated to produce any result the originator wants. It is also important to ask questions in different ways and ask follow-up questions to clarify answers. This is seldom done by a third-party, and even if they did, there is a tendency to over group rather than appreciate the nuances of disparate answers. You are looking for the truth to their specific pain point and not a convenient summary.

Your best customer surveys will take place by having your people interview your existing and former customers. Prospects that didn't buy from you but went with a competitor can also provide valuable information. Take the time to talk to these people and perform the survey yourself. Find out why some didn't buy from you, and why those that did buy from you did.

Once you believe you know your customers' pain points, now look at your strengths to see what you do so well that you might be able to turn it into a competitive advantage. Find something you can promise your prospects that will help alleviate their pain, but something your competitors cannot claim, at least not presently. Here are some examples of competitive advantage statements. Notice that their competitors may be able to make the same statement at some future date, but not presently.

- **Rated #1 in Customer Satisfaction for the Last Three Years by J.D. Power**—No other company can currently make that claim or will be able to make it for several years. Notice how much more effective this is than to say, "We have the highest level of customer satisfaction."
- **Played by over 93% of the PGA golfers (former claim by Titleist)**—Since the pros can play with any golf ball and many are tempted with sponsored advertising, Titleist must be the best golf ball. Titleist currently claims 80%, but keep in mind many of the 20% are paid to use another golf ball.
- **When it absolutely, positively needs to be there overnight (former claim by FedEx)**—Think of the logistics necessary to make this claim even in the continental United States. It was no longer sustainable when FedEx started to add additional services and serve other countries.
- **"The customer is always right"** is the philosophy behind Nordstrom's successful customer experience. They understand that the customer's last experience will be the one they will use to describe you. It's all about the customer experience.
- **The wow factor**—Apple has always put the wow factor in their product designs. If the

look, feel, and features didn't wow Steve Jobs, he would not release the product. Apple customers are extremely loyal to the Apple brand and will readily buy the next version before it is even released.

Notice that cost is not mentioned in the above competitive advantages. When you have a significant pain point, how important is the cost of the medicine? Remember, you never want to be the low-price leader in your industry. You want an advantage that makes the higher cost seem insignificant to the right prospect.

The concept of a competitive advantage is extremely important for the success of any company, especially for a company wanting to become the leader in their industry. If you are not sure about your competitive advantage, now is the time to develop one. The best strategic plan will be one that is built upon your competitive advantage and strengths. Using the football play analogy again, a strategic plan built around your competitive advantage and strengths has the greatest probability of getting you into the end zone and achieving your corporate goals.

Examples of bad competitive advantages:

- We are the best
- We are the fastest
- We are the most innovative
- We have the best customer service
- We are the lowest priced

There are numerous problems with the above examples: 1.) They probably aren't true, 2.) Your competitors are saying the same thing, and 3.) The use of unsubstantiated superlatives is a turn-off to most prospects. As soon as they hear this marketing puffery, they stop listening at a time when you want them to be listening to you.

On the other hand, if you can substantiate your claims, then you *might* have a competitive advantage. If you provide the fastest network, can you show creditable third-party verification that your network has been measured as the fastest? Were your products determined as the most innovative for the last several years by a well-known publishing company (e.g., *Motor Trend* magazine)? Perhaps your competitive advantage lies in a certain geographic area (e.g., the largest health care provider by the number of doctors and patients seen in a year in your county). People may be impressed with explicit claims but never with superlatives.

Assumptions

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the number one reason strategic plans fail is due to companies not doing everything they promised to do in their plan. The second most common reason for failure is that assumptions made as part of their strategic plan were not valid. Here are some examples of assumptions made during the strategic planning process that turned out to be false.

- Not hiring the right people in a timely manner—A plan required hiring two additional salespeople to focus on sales of an existing product line. The assumption was for both salespeople to be hired in the first month of the strategic plan. For numerous reasons, only one salesperson was hired that year in the third quarter. The second salesperson wasn't hired until Q1 of the following year. Needless to say, the goals of the first year were not met. By the time the second year came around, the strategic plan had lost momentum.
- Turnover in Personnel—Similar to the situation above, a plan required hiring additional people to focus on the sales of an existing line of products with greater profit margin. While looking to hire three new people, the company lost almost ten employees for various reasons during the first quarter. They spent the next two quarters trying to play catch-up and hire new employees that would take them back to their previous starting point. By the time the staffing and revenue were back to normal, the strategic plan was a distant memory.
- Failure to purchase equipment—A plan required increased automation of numerous production systems and processes. This capital investment would require approximately $750,000. For several reasons, including failure to commit the funding, the required equipment was not purchased. New processes based upon the new equipment were never developed, and they continued to do things the way they had done them before.
- Lack of available supplies—One plan failed to note that a critical material used in the production of one of their products was apparently available from only one supplier. This should have been included in their SWOT matrix. With their supplies dwindling, the company was no longer able to expand the sales and production of that product and were forced to renegotiate their contract with the supplier and look for other suppliers that could provide the material needed in the quantities and amounts required. This was a time-consuming process that put the strategic plan on hold for over six months.

In the above circumstances, the CEOs made some assumptions about the availability of personnel, resources, money, and time. In hindsight, those assumptions were not valid. The purpose of the assumptions section is to ensure that key assumptions made during the planning process are highlighted to ensure everyone understands that the success of the plan is dependent on these underlying assumptions. The assumptions can then be monitored with the rest of the plan to ensure everything is on track for success.

Obviously, you could make everything an assumption in your strategic plan, but that's not the goal here. You shouldn't have to document assumptions that the earth will continue to rotate on its axis, the sun will come up, COVID-19 will not reappear, etc. Your goal is to document key assumptions made as part of your strategic plan, not every imaginable assumption to continue business operations.

The assumptions that frequently come back to haunt CEOs revolve around the availability and hiring of key employees, capital investment funds available to fund the strategic initiatives, unsubstantiated viability and desirability of new products, and the market expectations of existing products. These are the type of assumptions that will frequently cause the plan to abort and fail. If these types of assumptions turn out to be invalid, expect a certain level of failure in achieving your goals.

Future Organizational Structure

As mentioned in the current state, the purpose of the future state org chart is to note the differences of what changes need to take place in the organization to meet your strategic plan. When possible, I like to merge the before and after org charts together and use different colors for the future state portions of the chart. This allows someone to visually see how the organization structure will need to be modified to meet your strategic initiatives. Sometimes you simply need to add more people to an existing department (e.g., hiring more salespeople). Other times you may need to make changes at the senior management level. These personnel changes need to be recorded and budgeted.

These organizational changes need to show up on your pro forma financial projections. It's nice to show your projected revenue and profit growth, but it's equally important to show how your *expenses* will be increasing in order to achieve your goals. The current state/future state org charts will remind the executive team that the implementation of the strategic plan comes with a cost.

Projected Revenue/Profit Profile

Similar to what you did in the current state, you will need pro forma financial statements, including projected revenue and profit charts or tables. Make sure you include all capital and operating expenses anticipated from your strategic plan. Examine the ROI to ensure that the increased expenditures from the strategic plan are generating revenue and profitability to justify your plan.

Once you know *where* you are going and what your company will look like when it gets there, you can now focus on *how* you will get there. The creation and analysis of the SWOT matrix addressed in the next two chapters will help you do that.

1. James Collins and Jerry Porras, *Built to Last* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994).

2. Excerpt from a message delivered by President John F Kennedy before a joint session of Congress on May 25, 1961.

CHAPTER 10

MANAGING YOUR STRATEGIC PLAN

"Know well the condition of your flocks, And pay attention to your herds; For riches are not forever, Nor does a crown endure to all generations" (Proverbs 27:23-24).

Congratulations! You and your team have completed your strategic planning process and are probably feeling pretty good right now. You've accomplished a major corporate objective and feel like it's time to celebrate. Hold off on pulling the cork from the champagne bottle because I have some good news and some bad news.

Now that the planning phase is pretty much over, the real work is just beginning. Your plan will only be as good as your execution of the plan. This will require constant monitoring, adjustments, and accountability. Unfortunately, many of your team members already started celebrating the victory and have started to mentally check out from the strategic plan and have gone back to life the way they know it, their normal mode of business operations. It is your job to ensure that they don't. They must stay in the game!

Going back to our football analogy and finding the best plays that will give you the greatest chance of getting the ball into the end zone, it's not so much the selection of the play that determines winners and losers; it's how well teams execute those strategic plays.

As mentioned in the Introduction, **the #1 reason strategic plans fail is due to poor execution of the plan.** People don't do what they said they were going to do! Most companies are better at planning than they are at executing their plans. According to a *Harvard Business Review* article, this accounts for over 67% of failures. Here are some other sobering statistics as to why companies fail to successfully implement their strategic plans:

- 95% of employees claim they are unaware of their company's strategic plan and can't successfully articulate it (poor communications).
- 67% of companies do not align their departmental or corporate budgets, hiring, IT, and

operations around their strategic plans (failure to integrate their plan into their business operations).

- 90% don't regularly track the KPIs of the plan (not measuring the success of the plan)
- 95% of the company's employees do not have their performance and compensation linked to the successful execution of the strategic plan (no accountability).

Here is the good news. There are some tried and true management techniques that will allow you to successfully integrate your strategic plan activities with your normal business operations and then monitor, adjust, manage, and successfully achieve your strategic goals.

Managing Your Strategic Plan

1. **Designate a Strategic Plan Manager**—Since your plan is a living document and will be updated each year, someone needs to be responsible for the life of the plan, and it can't be you. This typically falls to the CFO or COO, someone who has clout in your organization. Managing the strategic plan is like managing any other project; therefore, ensure you put someone in charge who is a good project manager. The plan manager will probably require an assistant to do the heavy lifting regarding updates to the schedule, scheduling meetings, and communications to the company. Still, the plan manager must stay on top of this plan on a weekly basis.

2. **Engraft Your Plan into Your Business Operations**—Better yet, engraft your normal business operations into your strategic plan. The strategic plan cannot become a separate project. At your weekly executive team meetings, sales meetings, HR meetings, production meetings, quality meetings, etc., managers need to review and keep updating the status of their applicable action items.

3. **Get Buy-In from Team Members Who Will Be Executing the Tasks**—Although you might limit the initial composition of the strategic planning team to senior management and selective managers, when it comes to defining and developing the strategic goals and tasks, you want to include the people who will actually be performing these activities. They will have a better feel for what tasks need to get done, how long it will take, and the resources required to accomplish the strategic initiatives you have developed. By including them up front, you are getting their buy-in on these activities they will be performing. They are less likely to come back at a later date and say, "It can't be done."

4. **Ensure the Right People are Assigned the Right Tasks**—If you find you have a team member dragging their heels or failing to accomplish their task, you must replace them with someone else as quickly as possible. They might be a valuable employee, but the

task assigned might not be their strength. Additionally, you can't afford to have rebellion in the ranks. It's a virus that will quickly mutate. It's your job to ensure that all tasks are progressing as planned, or reassign resources to keep things moving. If you don't, expect one leak in the dam to become two and three, and pretty soon, the whole wall will fall down.

5. **Lead By Example**—As you walk and talk the plan like a bride preparing for her wedding, your team will understand how important this tool is to you. If they don't hear you continually talking about and checking up on it, they will interpret your silence on the subject as an indication of indifference. Ensure your executive team is following your example.

6. **Your Job is to Sell the Vision**— "This is where we are going. This is who we are going to become. Who wants to go there with me? Who wants to be a leader in this company when we get there? If you are onboard with me, let me know. Don't just let me know with your words, show me by your actions. The people who will be leading this company when we get there will be the ones that helped us get there. Why? Because anyone who can help us get to this goal will be able to help us get to the next goal once we arrive there. If you are not satisfied with your position in the company, this is your opportunity to step up to the plate and hit a home run. This is your opportunity to prove you should be a significant leader in this company."

7. **Update Your Progress on a Weekly Basis**—Ensure your project plan or Excel spreadsheet is updated weekly and reviewed at all weekly meetings. Use your project planning tool as a dashboard to continually remind everyone where you are in accomplishing your objectives. Remember, what gets measured gets done!

8. **Speak Now or Get it Done**—During your daily and weekly meetings, make sure your managers ask your team if they are encountering any challenges to completing the tasks. This is especially important during the first quarter. If you have to readjust your plan, the time to do it is early in the year. Tell them, "Speak now, or get it done!"

9. **Ensure Expenses and Income are Budgeted**—Every city with a police force has budgeted line items for revenue from speeding and parking tickets. The city manager and the police commissioner ensure that these budgeted fines are actually collected. Similarly, ensure your strategic plan's expenses and anticipated revenue are included on all departmental and corporate budgets. Your CFO and department heads need to ensure the revenue is actually collected.

10. **Do Feared Things First**—Historically, those initiatives, goals, and tasks that have never been performed before by someone in your company are the most likely activities to fail. Therefore, you must identify those activities up front and ensure they are worked upon as quickly as possible. Do feared things first. Don't let your team push these activities to the last six months of the year, or in subsequent years. Start them right away and stay on top of them.

11. **What Gets Measured Gets Done**—Tie people's support and performance on the strategic plan into their performance reviews, promotions, and salary increases. What gets measured gets done. When people know their performance will be measured, they pay closer attention than if they believe no one will check up on the quality of their work. If this wasn't true, then every quality assurance person would be out of a job.

12. **A Picture Paints a Thousand Words**—Use as many communications channels as possible to keep the plan front and center in people's thoughts and activities. Otherwise, they will drift back to their normal way of doing business. Have your communications or marketing team create one-page pictures that illustrate the new paradigm shift and why this plan is so important for the future of the company. Incorporate the strategic plan into your new employee onboarding process.

13. **Engage Business Intercessors**—Recruit business intercessors to pray over your team and the daily execution of your plan. Your team will need God's help! Keep in mind that all your knowledge is based upon the past, but your plan speaks of the future. The only one who knows the future is the Lord. Have a team that can pray and hear from God regarding what the future holds and what changes you need to make to intercept it successfully. Factor their cost into your plan budget. They will be one of your smallest expenses and will easily pay for themselves. Contact www.sozoservices.com if you need help finding these prophetically gifted business intercessors.

14. **Influence Your Values into Their Culture**—Don't expect your team to fall in love with strategic planning—at least not overnight. It will take time to change their attitude and behaviors. It takes time to make a new behavior a habit. Help them understand that a team that can develop and successfully implement a strategic plan is capable of doing anything. This makes them more valuable to your company (i.e., promotions and pay increase) and also more valuable should they leave and go somewhere else, or start their own company. Remember, they will default to their culture unless someone influences them with new values.

15. **Integrate the Collection of CI**—Ensure the ongoing collection of competitive intelligence (see Appendix A) is programmed into all conferences/seminars attended, prospective employee interviews, and discussions with customers, prospects, suppliers,

and industry experts. Your CI is a part of your strategic plan and should be updated at least semiannually. Assign someone from sales and marketing to be responsible for maintaining your CI document, since they are the ones who have the most contact with customers, suppliers, industry SMEs, and current and former employees of your competitors.

16. **Review Your Assumptions**—At least once per quarter, review your list of assumptions. If they change, revise your plan as soon as possible. Second only to not executing your plan, **invalid assumptions are the second highest cause of failure to successfully execute a strategic plan.**

17. **Celebrate Small Wins**—Provide incentives, rewards, and recognition for achieving certain milestones and KPIs. Celebrate these small wins to build excitement. The size of the party or reward should be directly proportional to the milestone achieved. Hold a big party on an annual basis to celebrate annual achievements of the plan.

18. **Set Your Goal in Concrete and Your Plan in Sand**—Be flexible and adaptable to change your plan as necessary but beware of changing for the wrong reasons. If your team wants to change the plan, ask this question, "Which one of our assumptions was not correct? If the assumptions are still valid, then why do we need to change the plan?"

19. **Failure to Execute Will Make it Harder Next Time**—If you fail to execute your strategic plan and simply put it on a shelf, you will have a much harder time corralling your team and reselling them on this program next time. It will be harder to sell the importance since actions speak louder than words. Don't fail to execute your plan!

20. **Hold Quarterly Reviews and Annual Updates**—Once you have a strategic plan, the review and planning process gets easier each year and less time-consuming. But you must reevaluate your plan at least annually. Just like in football, once the ball is snapped, twenty-one people on the field are moving in ways that were not planned for. You must adapt as the field of your industry, customers, and products evolve. In the next chapter, we'll discuss how to perform annual reviews and updates.

A Strategic Plan Rollout Anecdote

I want to conclude and summarize this chapter with an anecdote about one company that was rolling out their new strategic plan. The rollout process is described in the next chapter but takes place after the plan is completed and before execution commences.

I was working with a multibillion-dollar financial company that had two major divisions. One division leader had just completed his strategic plan and was rolling out the plan via a conference call with about fifty of his leaders, mostly Director-level and above. After discussing where the company is, where it had been, and where it was going, he summarized the scope of the plan and explained the importance of the plan as the vehicle that was going to take the company into the future.

He then turned the floor over to five of his vice presidents (VPs), who explained each initiative, strategic goal, and responsible people in greater detail. Each VP took about fifteen minutes to explain their respective strategic initiative. After each of the five strategic initiatives had been described, the leader of the business division then summarized the 1.5-hour call, “So, if anyone comes to me and wants to talk to me about something that is unrelated to any of these five strategic initiatives, don’t be surprised if I’m too busy to talk to you!”

Was he serious? Or was he just grandstanding? It didn’t matter. He made his point! He wanted everyone to know how important this strategic plan was to him and the company, and he got his message across. My prayer for you is that you will be just as successful using your own style of communications.