

Strategy and Shared Values

An Essential Piece of the Puzzle

by Jon Craighead

This article is the fourth and final in a series that studies the different roles of strategy in today's business environment. Strategy is the lynchpin in the system that drives the activities needed for organizational success.

Organizations cannot prosper in today's marketplace with a limited few guiding the enterprise. It requires teamwork. The importance of teamwork and working together toward a common vision is well understood. And, we can appreciate that teamwork allows a group of previously unconnected people to attain uncommon results. A constant challenge to success is creatively inspiring people to commit themselves to a consistent level of excellence in their daily work. This domain of inspiration is best accomplished with the establishment of shared values. The purpose of the shared values system is to encourage everyone at all levels of responsibility toward a greater ownership and accountability for the organizational goals.

Today most organizations spend valuable resources searching for qualified and capable personnel. One consistent prerequisite is the prospect's ability to think and create. Fortunately there is no shortage of job seekers who can fulfill these requirements. Yet many managers express widespread dissatisfaction with employees they believe are not living up to their full potential. From my experience I can agree this is often the case; however, I see the reasons for this situation differently from many managers.

People want to be an integral part of their environment, and this is especially true of their workplace, where they spend more of their time than any other part of their lives. Their participation uplifts them, and in the process the enterprise is strengthened as well. This effect is lost when employees feel shut out of the decision making process. Therefore it is essential that employees are included in the process of creating the organization's strategy. This fosters greater ownership and accountability and makes full use of their considerable talents.

It stands to reason that when people feel they have taken a part in creating their future, they will take on greater responsibility to ensure that future is fulfilled. We can find many examples of this, particularly in the highly successful technology industries. These organizations have mastered the phenomenon of demanding high levels of participation, accountability, and productivity and incorporated discretionary work

rules that respect the maturity and commitment of their employees. Failing to do so would be like driving a high-performance sports car at ten miles an hour.

So if you want to promote maximum output and participation from your employees, the smart thing to do is to get them deeply involved in the visioning and planning of your organizational goals and objectives. Then provide all the support they need and let them go – you’ll be pleasantly surprised by the positive outcomes. The methodology in realizing these outcomes relies heavily on trust, transparency, and authenticity. Those of you who have read my other articles know that I am very big on these values. I’ll restate them because of their relevance and importance in this conversation.

Trust: Stephen Covey said it best: “There is one thing that is common to every individual, relationship – one thing which, if removed, will destroy the most powerful government, the most successful business, the most thriving economy, the most influential leadership, the greatest friendship, the strongest character, the deepest love.... That one thing is trust.” The tragedy when a trust is broken is the fact that it can never be repaired at the level at which it existed originally.

Transparency: Full, accurate, and timely disclosure of information. I realize some portion of knowledge must by law be restricted or limited. However, the withholding of information is more often a power play for authority. More importantly, lack of transparency is brain candy for inventing one’s own interpretation of events. Transparency eliminates the necessity for creating these mythological fantasies.

Authenticity: Provides the foundation for sound partnerships. It ties in all the human characteristics we look for in each other all the time. Straightforward and honest consistency is a stabilizing force; it allows us to anchor ourselves to a reliable reality, which in turn allows us to take risks.

The evidence leaves no doubt that a workforce that is fully integrated in the design and implementation of an organization’s strategy brings a higher level of ownership and responsibility. This is the direct result of the shared values system, and it makes a critical difference in achieving success.