

How To Be A Strategic Leader

In a February 2015 WSJ report on C-Suite Strategies, Herminia Ibarra, a chaired professor of leadership and learning at Insead asks the question: What does a leader do first thing in the morning in order to be more strategic?

She notes that while it's easy by comparison for leaders to perform operational duties, which come with prioritized to do lists, effective strategic behaviors involve longer time frames and ambiguous feedback about what will ultimately pay off. Ibarra's research shows that there are four practices that can help make a leader develop their strategic abilities – both in thought and action.

Bring the Outside In

Strategic leaders need a network of well placed contacts outside the company who can help them understand the bigger context in which they operate. Strategic leaders make it their business to go beyond their operational and personal networks. They typically leverage all their contacts to connect people, ideas and resources that would not normally bump into each other. The goal is for the leader's outside-in connections to lead to new business opportunities and partnerships.

Balance External and Internal Demands

For today's leader, the demands of the job require navigating a large and diverse group of stakeholders, which increases their time commitment exponentially. It becomes crucial to find the right balance between what is important – building key strategic relationships and shaping the leader's public image – and what is optional – commitments that could be useful but aren't directly related to core company goals.

Control Your Strategic Agenda

Leaders often find themselves responding to a large number of strategic initiatives, many of which are strategic in name only. To discern which initiatives deserve active involvement and which ones can be backed more perfunctorily, make a list of every strategic initiative you are being asked to support and rank each according to key criteria to force prioritization.

Collaborate at the Top

It's important for leaders to collaborate among themselves and invest the time in building relationships with others on their management team. By definition, C-suite leaders are interdependent and are meant to provide leadership to the entire organization.