TOP THREE MISTAKES IN ACTIVATING STRATEGY

"The strategy is finished! Now it's time to execute it." Sound familiar?

You've spent a ton of time (and money) developing your new strategy. It's right. You feel good. But now you have to activate it. And this is where fatigue sets in and errors are made.

Leaders make three common mistakes that prevent a successful strategy. Avoid these mistakes and you'll be on your way to bridging the gap between strategy creation and strategy activation, and on to achieving those all-important strategic results.

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Mistake 1 – Executives Aren't Aligned on the Strategy

If you don't have total alignment, clarity, and conviction at the executive level, your employees will know; this will hinder acceptance and likely keep your strategy from succeeding. In fact, we often find that change efforts are an intellectual activity for executives but emotional activities for everyone else. Your people need to know that the executive team is clear and aligned and that it has undergone a similar discussion and experience. In short, the executives must become the change they want to see in others.

When managers and employees on the front line are asked about their confidence in a new strategy, they often respond with uncertainty and disbelief that leaders will change their behaviors to bring it to life. Leaders must be transparent with their own behavioral change to set the pace for the rest of the organization.

What to Do

According to a 2013 Booz & Co. survey, 54% of executives don't believe their company's strategy will lead to success. To avoid this, leaders must develop an accurate view of the business's current situation, identify the barriers to success, define a shared view of the future vision to create strong conviction, and recognize the cultural changes that will drive strategic success across the organization. Alignment is about creating so much clarity that there is little room for confusion, disorder, infighting, and other distractions. It enables unprecedented accountability and leadership rigor that can't help but drive success.

Mistake 2 – One-Way Communications

PowerPoint presentations, roadshows, emails, and town hall meetings don't inspire people. Your people want to have conversations about your business because – let's face it – they'll tolerate leaders' decisions and conclusions, but they'll ultimately act on their own. If you aren't leading them in those discussions, who is?

When have you ever completed a task with passion and vigor when someone else commanded you to do it? Probably never – or not very often. One-way communications allow for a lot of error; people can choose to ignore the communications and keep doing things the way they always have while they wait for the next "flavor of the month."

What to Do

Use all learning styles – visual, auditory, and kinetic – to engage your people in the story of your strategy. Everyone should visualize the exact same thing when they see the prize (strategy), and they should be in lockstep on how to achieve it.

Dialogue is the oxygen of change. Creating methods to enable ongoing discussion at all levels of the business ensures that the strategy activation is successful. This brings greater clarity to what's working and what isn't. These conversations need to be continued and reinforced.

Potential ways to sustain these conversations include team huddles and manager meetings. Focus on asking questions such as "How's it going?" and "What needs do you have that we haven't thought of?" Alternatively, if it works with your business model and company culture, some organizations set up an online forum for people to share ideas and ask questions.

Mistake 3 – No Sustainment Mechanism

Leaders have short attention spans. If you aren't achieving your desired results, they're likely to pivot quickly – and often. The irony is, most organizations tend to ignore the sustainment portion of a strategic rollout. Because it's after the "big bang" strategy activation event, that the real work begins –to make it stick. Leaders needs to spend more time thinking about and planning for what come after the initial change announcement. One key area is managers and their role in sustaining change.

Managers are critical to keeping employees happy and productive. Managers are also, unfortunately, the most overlooked group in an organization when it comes to developing talents – particularly, the skills that make the difference between change failure and success. Managers are the infliction point of an organizational structure. Unskilled and ineffective managers are chokepoints for your strategy.

What to Do

Managers must understand the strategy and translate it in a way that is relevant to every employee. Every manager should receive the tools and knowledge to truly understand the business, including what changes are needed and why. They need to know their role; it's not about projects and processes, but people. They must be able to connect their teams to the business to help them understand the why and how of their job. Finally, they need to understand how their team delivers results and how it affects the strategic outcomes that the organization is driving toward.

Keep It Up!

As a strategy rolls out, you'll have some successes that you'll want to replicate quickly (at both an organizational and individual level). To do that, capture those successes and communicate them broadly. Convert the early wins, no matter how small, into success stories that people can understand. These stories let people know what you want more of in the organization and allow others to reflect on whether they could do anything similar. These stories also reinforce that small contributions really do matter.

Do these mistakes sound familiar? Are you having difficulties overcoming these three common mistakes on your own? Root's strategy experts will partner with you to help you achieve your goals. Let's start a conversation and get you on the path to strategic results!

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