

Strategic Intent

How to create an obsession for winning in your organization

Do any of these issues sound familiar in your business?

- Do you have stagnant or slowing growth?
- Are you in need of an inspiring direction for the people in your company?
- Is your competitive advantage slipping?
- Or is there a large gap between your resources and your ambitions?

We have some good news for you: all of these can be addressed by establishing a clear strategic intent for your company. Strategic intent needs to be the beginning point for strategy development. Once you've decided this, then the rest of your strategic planning can be accomplished with this end in mind.

The differences between strategic planning and strategic intent

Companies must create tomorrow's advantages faster than competitors can mimic today's. This requires the management provide a stable view of the company's long term strategic intent that focuses the organization and creates an obsession with winning for the employees.

Strategic planning generally starts with this year's plan – it's more focused on what are the line of sight steps and actions that we can take next year and where are the niches that we can take advantage of with the competencies we have today.

With strategic intent though, you're setting forth on a forward-looking path to future market leadership. Your focus will be on creating new advantages and this is going to be a stable path over multiple years. This also allows for much more creativity to find new ways of doing things and it really engages people on a more significant level.

There are multiple opportunities that will be unlocked by having a clear strategic intent. In the process of analyzing the foreseeable path of the marketplace and technology, you'll fold the future back into present. You'll define the new skills that are going to be needed for you to compete for those future opportunities.

However, you can't do all these steps at once; they have to be done in a sensible order and in a fashion that the organization can digest them.

By doing it that way, you will be building your foundation one step at a time and doing this over a multiple year timeline, aiming towards that strategic intent. The intermediate challenges inspire very innovative thinking by all the employees who have to wrap their heads around them, as they have to figure out how these apply to their jobs and how they can contribute towards the accomplishment of the strategic intent.

Case Study

Apple is the best example of this approach in the current world. In 1996, they were just a 4% market share player in the PC business. In 2000, Steve Jobs came back as CEO and set the intent for Apple Computer to become great by being “the hub of your digital life”.

He saw the future trends involving the internet, the computing power available in one pc and the new digital forms of media that were emerging for use by individuals – and Jobs wanted an Apple computer to be at the epicenter of everyone’s digital universe.

Following this intent, the company first focused on updating the iMac platform, but following that, iTunes and then iPods hit the market to transform personal digital music and the iPhone came later to allow mobile computing access on one device, and the rest is history.

Apple had to create many new competencies over the last 15 years in order to achieve this intent – hardware design, software, touchscreens, etc. The result of this obsession to win at achieving their strategic intent is that now they’re the world’s most valuable company and brand!

Jumpstarting strategic development

You should always start strategy development with strategic intent. As Stephen Covey, who is the author of “7 Habits of Highly Effective People” said, “we should begin with the end in mind.”

A strategic planning activity is generally an exercise in futility without a compelling strategic intent because it’s going to be resource constrained, only line of sight, focused on known competitors and it’s going to miss seeing the industry dislocations that are coming that create huge opportunities.

So set a strategic intent, create an obsession for winning in your business, and your business can be a market leader for years to come!

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- Apple and Strategic Intent