A PRACTICAL APPROACH TO VISIONING AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

(Generic Sector Edition)

“If You Don’t Set Your Own Goals, Then You Will Become Part of Someone Else’s”
-Bienati

“Vision Determines Our Destination Values Guide Our Direction”

“Vision Without Action is Merely a Dream Action Without Vision Passes the Time Vision With Action Can Change the World”
-Joel Arthur Barker

“Control your own destiny or someone else will”
-Jack Welch

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Dear Student of Strategic Planning:

This article is a journey of organizational excellence. Prepared after 30 years of research and practice implementing strategic plans for over 200 clients in the private, public and non-profit sectors, this article presents a practical roadmap for the organizational leader. I prepared this article in the generic sense to capture some core concepts applicable in all organizational sectors. While the measures of success may differ in private, public and not for profit sectors, the approach to a successful visioning and strategy process for an organization remains universal in preparation, application, execution, commitment of senior leadership and engagement of staff in “enabling the vision.”

Organizations “built to last” recognize that having some type of planning or “anticipation of future events” remains a key business practice. Additionally, an understanding of constituency needs, stakeholders and key business partners are but a few factors in developing a successful strategic plan. Moreover, it is becoming more prevalent to create a shared, collaborative vision to best serve the needs and expectations of the stakeholders served. Today, it is mission critical that the visioning and strategic planning process involve “the collaborative input” of both internal and external partners for long-term success. The emphasis of my work is on simplicity, practicality, flexibility and achievable success. Too often, we get lost in the management fad of the month, the theory of the moment and fail to realize the time-tested fundamentals for long-term success.

This article presents the following:

- A discussion of the common elements (the template) found in a strategic plan
- A listing of typical questions most strategic plans will answer (appendix A)
- A sample strategic plan (appendix B)
- A process for facilitating a successful planning session (appendix C)
- An employee survey designed to solicit feedback in developing a successful strategic plan (appendix D). We know that a key discriminator in a successful strategic plan encourages involvement and input from all stakeholders in the organization.

I hope you find this article helpful in building your organizational vision. In the words of Henry David Thoreau:

“If one advances confidentiality in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life in which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put foundations under them.”

Nothing could better capture the essence of the visioning and planning process. Remember a vision is of no value without finding a way to make it real for the front line employee. A good leader can relate and align the vision all team members in a synergistic organization.

Good luck on your journey and stay in touch at www.onestophr.com or call us at 1.800.483.7153 and share your story and let is know how we assist you! Go forth, do good and leave an enduring legacy!

Lawrence M. Bienati, Ph.D.
Lake Tahoe, California
January 2010
KEY NOTES ABOUT STRATEGIC PLANNING

“Leadership is an art. The effective practitioner has the unique ability to apply the various tools--both scientific and behavior--to maintain a motivated, satisfied and productive team. Effective managers are in a constant learning mode and recognize that management excellence is a journey and not a destination. In the 21st century, the management leader will emerge as the facilitator capable of identifying, developing and empowering the responsible employee. This style of management will be the foundation for quality management excellence.”
-Larry Bienati

“All too often, new management innovations are described in terms of “best practices” of so-called leading firms. While interesting, I believe such descriptions can do more harm than good, leading to piecemeal copying and playing catch-up. I do not believe great organizations have ever been built by trying to emulate another, anymore than individual greatness is achieved by trying to copy another “great person.”
-Peter Senge, The Fifth Discipline

“The future ain’t what it used to be.”
-Yogi Berra

“In times of drastic change, it is the learners who inherit the future. The learned usually find themselves equipped to live in a World that no longer exists.”
-Eric Hoffer

“There is only one boss: the customer. And he can free everybody in the company, from the chairman on down, simply by spending his money somewhere else.
-Sam Walton. Founder of Wal Mart

“What is obscure, we eventually see. What is obvious, usually takes a longer time.”
-Edward R. Murrow

“The difference is not one of skill or education or experience. It’s a matter of values. To be customer-oriented is not be self-oriented.”
-Max Dupree, Herman Miller

“Service is just a day-in, day-out, ongoing, never ending, unremitting, preserving, compassionate type of activity.”
-L.L. Bean

“To serve the people at no cost to anyone, we the unwilling, led by the unqualified, to do the unnecessary, for the ungrateful.”
-Group of employees who experienced the management flavor of the month
Research has shown successful organizations that engage in some form of formalized visioning and strategic planning consistently and substantially outperform and exceed stakeholder expectations. A recent study by the Center for Public Communication, Inc. disclosed that in the 21st Century, the single issue that will most likely cause the demise of emerging organizations is their inability or failure to plan or think strategically (Truelson).

**What is Strategic Planning?**

Strategic business planning is creating a vision of the future, analyzing the organization and its environment as it is today, and then developing a formal program for guiding its development and success tomorrow. For most organizations, the strategic plan normally addresses a 3 or 5-year period into the future. Current practice however suggests that the present environmental contingencies suggest that a strategic plan may need review and adjustments every 6 months to ensure relevance. Many public sector agencies face the challenge of changing priorities with public officials and appointments occurring as often as every two years. This lack of stability poses planning challenges and limits effectiveness of a long-term strategic plan. Therefore, these realities should always be factored in the planning process.

**Why Do Strategic Planning?**

An overriding purpose for strategic planning is to create and place the organization at a competitive advantage in the future. Specific reasons for doing strategic planning include:

- Defining in measurable and objective terms what is most important and needs to be achieved by the business. For the public sector organization it may be the agency’s purpose or charter;
- Anticipating problems and to taking positive steps to eliminate them;
- Building commitment and orientation to a common purpose among the members of the senior management team, aligning governance and staff support functions and conform to stakeholder expectations;
- Charting a clear direction and furnish “marching orders” for the organization and its employees to follow;
- Ensuring consistency in decision-making and to allocating resources most effectively and efficiently in areas such as: people, equipment, facilities, product/service changes;
- Establishing a firm basis for evaluating performance, both organizational and individual;
- Providing a management framework which can be used to facilitate quick response to changed conditions, unplanned events and deviations from plan;

**How is Strategic Planning Done?**

As with strategic plans themselves, there are a variety of methods or techniques that can be employed in doing strategic planning. A variety of position levels are involved as well. Basic steps a top management team may consider in implementing a strategic planning approach include the following:

1. Diagnose the Business/Stakeholder Situation
2. Develop a Vision Statement
3. Develop a Mission Statement
4. Develop Core Values
5. Develop Goals
6. Develop Action Plans
7. Determine Impact on the Organization and Deliver Superior Execution
The seven steps on the preceding page are advantageous to the organization and can be implemented separately. However, they are also interdependent on each other and when implemented in concert they can have a great impact on both the organization and the team’s effectiveness.

1. **Diagnose the Organization’s Situation**

An organization should begin its strategic planning process by taking a critical look at itself and the environment in which it operates. This situational diagnosis (often referred to as a SWOT analysis) entails looking at the organization internally and externally and identifying the strategic issues/decisions confronting the business. *The internal examination involves defining the following organizational issues:*

**Strengths:** Positive features of organization and factors that differentiate it from the other private and public sector organizations as appropriate. (What is the value proposition?)

**Weaknesses:** Growth areas of the organization or areas of concern based on constituent needs.

**Opportunities:** Areas for process improvement, re-engineering and organizational effectiveness re-structuring and human resource deployment.

**Threats:** Negative trends such as: morale issues, political issues, economic changes, diversity issues, incentive problems and capital investment issues.

*The external examination is done to identify organizational:*

**Strengths:** From the point of view of stakeholders, the positive features which affect quality customer service.

**Weaknesses:** Again from the point of view of the stakeholders, the negative impacts on customer service or doing business with the organization that may be limiting growth or opportunities.

**Opportunities:** Positive conditions such as new market openings, and population shifts that present new potential to the business model.

**Threats:** Challenging conditions such as government regulations, market segment decline and changing economic climate that pose challenges to the business.

Usually the data collection process is conducted using a survey form or interview process similar to what I provide in Attachment D of this document. At the conclusion of the strategic diagnosis, the senior management team and the governing board should agree upon those issues that are most critical to the success of the organization. These issues serve as a template for building the strategic plan. The gap analysis is the basis for establishing the strategic building blocks in the plan. When I prepared this article some 15 years ago, I did not fully appreciate the magnitude of the governance process in the strategic planning process. As a private profit or non profit sector organization the senior leaders are accountable to a Board of Directors. In the public sector, the executive staff is often accountable to a Governing Board, City Council, Commission or Special District Board. We often think the lines of authority and responsibility levels are clear under the distinction of “governance” versus “operations” expectations. *These lines are often blurred and it is becoming more important to engage the governing board in some aspect of the strategic planning process to the extent possible.* In the best run organizations, the executive team works in concert with their governing board to ensure alignment of vision, mission, goals, appropriate strategies and clear rules of engagement and decision making levels. The board determines “ends.” Meanwhile, the executive team is accountable to determine “the means” and drive execution of the strategies, success metrics in the strategic plan. This unification of vision and clarity of roles is a mission critical activity. Please refer to my article/power point on the Carver Governance Process, 2009.
2. **Develop a Vision Statement**

Visioning into the future has become an increasingly important element of the management-leaders role. The organization, drawing on as many participants as logistics allow, should draw a word picture of the firm 3 to 5 years into the future. The more participants involved in the visioning process the higher the level of commitment and teamwork. The vision statement should respond to how we see the organization in the future. A *vision statement* describes in graphic terms where the goal-setters want to see themselves in the future. It may describe how they see events unfolding over 10 or 20 years if everything goes exactly as hoped. Features of an effective vision statement may include:

- Clarity and lack of ambiguity
- Paint a vivid and clear picture
- Describing a bright future (hope)
- Memorable and engaging expression
- Realistic aspirations, achievable
- Alignment with organizational values and culture, Rational
- Time bound if it talks of achieving any goal or objective

In order to become more effective, an organizational vision statement must (the theory states) become assimilated into the organization's *culture*. Therefore, *Leaders* have the responsibility of communicating the vision regularly, creating narratives that illustrate the vision, acting as role-models by embodying the vision, creating short-term objectives compatible with the vision, and encouraging others to craft their own personal vision compatible with the organization's overall vision. How about this vision?

"We will be recognized as Greatest American City by the year 2015 and will be known for providing the highest levels of safety, customer service and “quality of life” for our citizens."

********************************************************************************

How about this one—this is the vision statement for COPIA, the American Center for the Wine, Food and Arts in Napa, California. For years this organization struggled trying to define itself and agreement from its Board of Directors and key partners. After going through this exercise, here is what happened:

**COPIA, Vision Statement, Circa 2011**

“Our vision of COPIA is of a lasting legacy to our founders, Robert Mondavi and Julia Child, by which COPIA embodies their lifetime achievement and dedication in bringing the beauty and pleasures and the cultural significance of wine and food to the American public. We envision a future in which COPIA is widely acknowledged as the preeminent center for wine appreciation, discovery and education. We see COPIA’s campus as the centerpiece of a vibrant Oxbow District that is a Mecca for the Wine Country visitor and a gathering place for the community - a unique village, rich with activities and experiences including hotels, shopping, a cooking school, restaurants, a public market, residential and other amenities representing the best of the incomparable beauty and bounty of our region. We envision COPIA as the essential key to a more complete and satisfying Wine Country journey. As such, the daily visitor will consistently be greeted with warmth and hospitality, be delighted by the compelling programs and offerings and will leave with a desire to return and bring their friends and family. We see COPIA, in collaboration with our winery partners, inspiring a much broader segment of society to enjoy a healthy lifestyle that includes wine, in moderation, as their preferred meal time and leisure time beverage, through a comprehensive series of educational programs and experiences.”

3. **Develop a Current Mission Statement**
Many people mistake vision statements for mission statements. The Vision describes a future identity and the Mission describes how it will be achieved. A Mission Statement may define the purpose or broader goal for being in existence or in the business. It serves as an ongoing guide without time frame. The mission can remain the same for decades if crafted well. Vision is more specific in terms of objective and future state. Vision is related to some form of achievement if successful.

As part of the organization’s self-examination, it should develop a concise statement describing the current mission of the business. This statement is important because it expresses and communicates the basic intent of the organization. The mission statement should answer the following questions:

- What business are we truly in? Why do we exist? What is our purpose?
- What are our environmental, social responsibilities and key stakeholder imperatives?
- Who are our customers? Who are the key constituents? How are we perceived by them?
- What are the key social issues we must deal with based on constituent need—To improve safety, health, quality of life? To provide security and employment to others? To fulfill a social mission? Have we done homework and engaged the parties at the table?

The standing mission statement should be reviewed periodically for relevance. It should include a purpose statement, an identification of the goods and services provided, a description of the customers, the geographical boundaries if any and if appropriate any commitments to employees, society or the environment. Mission statements can also be augmented by adding stated financial/budget goals. In some cases, visions and mission statements can be combined or aligned for simplicity. See the sample we helped develop for CalTrans in this handout, a major transportation agency in California. A mission statement provides a path to realize the vision in line with its values. These statements have a direct bearing on the bottomline and success of the organization. For example, "We help transport goods and people efficiently and cost effectively without damaging environment" is a mission statement. Ford's brief but powerful slogan "Quality is Job 1" could count as a mission statement. (Wikipedia source)

A mission statement can resemble a vision statement in a few organizations, but that can be a grave mistake. It can confuse people. The vision statement can galvanize the people to achieve defined objectives, even if they are stretch objectives, provided the vision is SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timebound).

4. Develop Core Values and Guiding Operating Principles

Mission and values work in tandem. To make the mission statement effective, it needs to be aligned with the prevailing culture of its stakeholders, organization, market and political sphere. A lofty mission statement means nothing if it is not in congruence with the values practiced by the organization. A statement of values provides guiding principles when ethical issues related to realizing the Vision, and undertaking the Mission, arise.

The vision/mission statement defines direction. The core values help the organization stay on course. Values are held beliefs, codes of ethics, and ways of doing business. These commitments hold all stakeholders accountable. These principles reflect the true culture of your organization. Mission statements may change from time to time but core values—which maintain the rightness of your vision—should seldom change and represent the fiber of your organization. Some of the best organizations have never wavered in their core values since their inception—all hiring and all decisions are measured against these core values. It is desirable to measure your core values yearly through some type of survey instrument. Examples include: Integrity, Honesty, Superior Client Service, Teamwork, etc. They must be real and unique to the organization. Successful value systems should be specific and measurable. Enlightened organizations striving to "walk the talk" should survey the employees yearly and measure "commitment to values." These values should reflect the soul, the heart and the character of the organization. They serve as the “red thread” to bind collaboration among the various partner relationships in government. Let’s review a few Samples on the next pages…
Here are some sample vision, mission and core value statements shared by some of our clients over the years in various organizational sectors. Organizations built to last and integrity-driven remain passionate about their core values as guideposts to measure the rightness or wrongness of their vision if you will. It is the fiber of their integrity.

**Sample #1: State of California Consumer Affairs Department**

*Vision:* Protect consumers by ensuring that examination programs meet the highest standards of practice and utilize state-of-the-art technologies.

*Mission:* Provide examination services to the ________________ occupational licensing programs to help ensure that licensed persons are qualified to practice.

*Governing Values:*
- Respect the value of team members and clients.
- Foster a work environment that promotes self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Maintain constructive relationships with co-workers and clients.
- Take initiative to improve quality.
- Provide leadership by example.
- Ensure that work makes a difference.
- Focus on the situation, issue, or behavior.
- Consider human diversity issues.
- Balance needs with standards of practice.
- Utilize current technical, professional, and legal standards

**Sample #2: Frogs Leap Winery**

Frog's Leap will make a difference.

We will produce wines that deeply reflect the thoughtfully chosen soils and climates from which they emanate. We will respect our surroundings, maintain good stewardship of the land, uphold our commitment to the principles of sustainable farming and seek a deeper understanding of the natural living systems around us.

We will be ourselves, constantly professional, balanced with humor and an exuberant passion for life. As a wonderfully diverse family we will come together to share ourselves with honesty and genuine hospitality.

We will hold our position as leaders in the Napa Valley wine community with the utmost regard. Our responsible and generous nature will precede us in all our endeavors.

We will succeed as a business, measuring our success with unique criteria. We will both respect and challenge conventional wisdom, growing our company the way we grow our vines. We will enhance the quality of our lives and the lives of those who work with us, never forsaking our belief that wine is a wonderful part of life, not life itself.

**Sample #3: California Department of Transportation**
One Vision/One Mission

Caltrans Improves Mobility Across California

The California Department of Transportation strives to be the highest performing transportation agency in the country. In pursuit of our mission, we continue to build a talented and diverse team and to strengthen ties with our partners. To keep California moving, we commit ourselves to these goals:

- RELIABILITY -
  Reduce traveler delays due to roadwork and incidents

- PERFORMANCE -
  Deliver record levels of transportation system improvements

- FLEXIBILITY -
  Make transit a more practical travel option

- PRODUCTIVITY -
  Improve the efficiency of the transportation system

- SAFETY -
  Achieve the best safety record in the nation

Sample #4: Rodney Strong Vineyards

MISSION STATEMENT:

“We are dedicated to crafting world-class wines with complexity and varietal expression that capture the essence of Sonoma County.

COMPANY VALUES

1. We are proud to be part of a successful, privately owned, family winery.
2. We treat each other with dignity, respect and equality.
3. We operate with integrity at all times.
4. We contribute to a dynamic yet stable workplace.
5. We constantly seek to build and maintain an open, honest, and trusting work environment.
6. We strive to achieve 100% customer satisfaction.
7. We quickly identify and solve business problems.
8. We aspire to conserve and protect the environment in all our operations.

These values are the foundation of our actions, conduct and mutual accountability.
Sample #5: Major Law Enforcement Agency

Goals, Strategies, and Performance Measures

The Strategic Plan for is based on efforts to achieve four departmental goals that are connected to the Department’s mission and to the over-arching vision of the Governor. Those goals, and the strategies approved by top management, are listed below.

**Goal: Prevent Loss of Life, Injuries, and Property Damage** – To minimize the loss of life, personal injury, and property damage resulting from traffic collisions through enforcement, education, and engineering. To enforce the provisions of the Vehicle Code, and other laws to prevent crime.

**Strategy:** Focus on enforcement of PCFs through visible, proactive patrol utilizing proper deployment of resources and public education.

**Performance Measures:** The performance measurements chosen to gauge success of this goal and associated strategy are:

- Fatal collisions
- Injury collisions
- Property damage only (PDO) collisions
- Unbelted fatal victims
- Truck-at-fault collisions (fatal, injury, PDO)
- DUI PCF collisions
- Speed PCF collisions
- Number of public education events
- Although not associated with a targeted outcome, enforcement citing safety belt/child restraints will also be reported as a gauge of overall officer activity.

These measurements will be compared to a prior three-year average (2003 – 2005) and the Department will seek a statewide reduction of 5 percent during the life of the Strategic Plan through 2009.

Sample #6: Major Consulting Engineering Firm

The Kleinfelder organization consists of The Kleinfelder Group, Inc. and subsidiaries. We are consultants in the engineering, science and construction services industry. As an independent, employee-owned (ESOP) company, our people are our strength. The integration of individual skills into team efforts and continued personal development are keys to our success.

**Our Vision**
Our vision for the future is to be a legacy company for our Employees, provide value for our Clients, and contribute to our Communities.

**Our Mission**
We will perpetuate the firm by:

- Having the leadership, the right people and financial strength
- Empowering employees to provide exceptional client service
- Capitalizing on opportunities to add value, grow and improve the company
- Being leaders in advancing our professions, industry and communities

**Our Core Values**

- Honesty and integrity
- Exceptional client service
- Commitment to quality
- Respect for the individual
- A safe and enjoyable work environment
- Respect for profit
- Remaining fiercely private
5. Develop Strategic Objectives (Building Blocks)

The top management team should use the strategic diagnosis findings to set the strategic goals for the business. These goals spell out what the organization wants to accomplish over the next 1 to 3 years to reach its vision.

The team should set objectives for each critical issue area pinpointed as a result of the strategic diagnosis. Ordinarily, this means that the business will have somewhere between three to six goals. These objectives are the result of opportunity and weakness areas identified in the SWOT analysis exercise. These objectives should be viewed as the "critical activities" that must be achieved to realize the vision and mission.

Each goal should be written to be as measurable and precise a statement of what is to be accomplished within the strategic time frame as possible. A formula for writing a goal follows: What is to be done? By whom? Within what time frame? What quantity is to be achieved? What quality is to be realized? And, at what cost? How will success be measured and rewarded?

The reality check for any objective: Is it SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time bound). For example:

Strategic Building Block #1: Process all customer-related complaints within 24 hours of receipt by notifying the consumer the complaint has been received.

Studies therefore suggest that most strategic plans focus on 3 to 4 goals only and do not try to conquer the organization’s issues in 12 months or less. They focus on the critical few areas versus the trivial many. They keep strategic plans to 3 pages or less in some cases. The goal is practicality and focused execution.

6. Develop Supporting Action Plans

After the firm’s strategic objectives have been developed, the management team should develop a set of tactical action plans that describe the methods to be employed to accomplish each goal. For each goal in the strategic plan, the team should specify:

- Action steps to be taken
- Persons responsible for completing the step
- Time frame for performance of the action
- Resources/assistance required to take the step
- Success measurement

See samples on next page of an effective action plan and execution process.
**Goal 1: Achieve Competitively Sustainable Rates Through Prudent Business Practices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Success Measures</th>
<th>Performance in Achieving Success Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1.1 Control Costs Responsibly   | - Maintain sustainable long-term combined water and wastewater rates as the lowest in the Tri-Valley.  
- Limit average expenditure growth to 75% of the combined customer growth and inflation.  
- Limit unaccounted water to less than 6%  
- Become lowest cost water and lowest cost wastewater service provider in Tri-Valley with consideration given to appropriate benchmarks to others agencies (source of water supply, method of wastewater disposal)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 1                                        |
| 1.2 Conduct Long Range Planning | - Implement six-year planning and budget model, including staff projections.  
- Maintain Ten-Year Plan for Capital Improvements Projects.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 1                                        |
| 1.3 Manage Systems Effectively and Conserve Resources | - Become recognized as “Best of Public Agency” through awards and recognition from outside organizations.  
- Continuously improve business processes to achieve efficiencies of operation.  
- Participate in regular peer review processes of the District’s management and operation.  
- Link compensation to the performance of the District.  
- Perform regular evaluations of consultants to ensure that the District continues to hire the best consultants for the job at hand.  
- Be a prudent steward to our natural resources by implementing cost effective and effective water conservation practices.  
- Respect the environment in which we live and work by prudently planning, designing, building and operating facilities to minimize disruption.                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 1                                        |
7. Determine Impact on the Organization (Create a culture of superior execution!)

The last step in the strategic analysis process consists of reviewing the newly defined vision, mission, goals and strategies to assess the demands that they will place or the effect they will have on the business. Areas to be considered include.

**Resource Requirements:** What will total plan implementation cost? Budget allocations?

**People:** Are human resources adequate? Added staff required? Proper training systems at this time?

**Facilities/Equipment:** Is the production capability sufficient? What changes will be necessary?

**Organization Structure:** Is the structure correct? Are processes properly organized to meet the mission?

More often than not, it is the lack of development of specific action plans (with individual or departmental accountability for completion of those actions) that makes most strategic planning exercises precisely that: exercises and not effective systems for managing an enterprise. It is our strong recommendation that action plans be developed and revised on a quarterly basis. Creating and maintaining an ongoing quarterly plan/review process is the single most effective means of marrying the longer-range planning process with the ongoing management of the firm.

The purpose of defining the planning process is to ensure a common understanding of the various elements to facilitate the organization’s planning activities. It should again be noted that planning is a constant management process. Events take place that can alter any element of the planning process and require the firm to change its future goals, or even its mission/vision.

Every element in the planning process is interdependent with the other elements. Short-range objectives and action should be consistent and supportive of long-range objectives, which in turn should be consistent with and supportive of the strategic goals and the firm’s mission and vision. The following model is an example of successful strategic plan.

The plan is not a frame on wall. Successful leaders live and breathe the strategic plan in their daily, weekly and monthly agenda. As the old saying goes, "You developed the plan, now work the plan."

Good luck on your journey and re-visit your plan at least quarterly. Please examine the documents in the appendices for a complete presentation on how to develop a successful strategic plan. They are intended to offer a practical process for building a successful strategic plan.
How Does Your Organization Rate?

Harvard Business Review in the June 2008 article, “The Secrets to Successful Strategy Execution” (Neilson et al) identifies fatal flaws that most organizations fail to consider in the successful implementation of a strategic plan. When a company fails to execute its strategy, the first thing managers do is restructure. Research shows the fundamental element of good execution starts with clarifying the decision rights and making sure information flows where it needs to go. If you get that right the correct structure and motivators will become obvious. Here is a checklist to consider when measuring the success or fail of a strategic planning execution strategy from a survey of more than 26,000 people in 31 organizations in order of strategic important in a strength index of 100.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Organization Trait</th>
<th>Strength index</th>
<th>Building Block</th>
<th>Your Current Assessment?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Everyone has a good idea of the decision and actions for which he or she is responsible</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>Decision Rights</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Important information about the competitive environment gets to headquarters quickly</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Once made, decisions are rarely second guessed</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Decision Rights</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Information flows freely across organizational boundaries</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Field employees usually have the information they need to understand bottom-line impact for their day-to-day choices</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Line managers have access to the metrics they need to measure the key drivers of their business</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Managers up the line get involved in operating decisions</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Decision Rights</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Conflicting messages are rarely sent to the market</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Decision Rights</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The individual performance appraisal process differentiates between high, adequate and low performers</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The ability to deliver on performance commitments strongly influences career advancement and compensation</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Motivators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>It is more accurate to describe the culture of this organization as “persuade and cajole” than “command and control.”</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Decision Rights</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>The primary role of corporate staff here is to support the business units rather than to audit them</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Decision Rights</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Promotions can be lateral moves (from one position to another in the same level of hierarchy)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Fast track employees here can expect promotions more frequently than every 3 years</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>On average, middle managers have five or more direct reports</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>If the firm has a bad year, but a particular division has a good year, the division head would still get a bonus</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Motivators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Besides pay, many other things motivate individuals to do a good job</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Motivators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TYPICAL QUESTIONS ANSWERED IN A STRATEGIC ANALYSIS
(Most Organizations)

I. What challenges do we face today and in the foreseeable future for our organization?

II. Where do we want to be in 1 year? 3 years? 5 years? What is our key success measure?

III. What do we do well?

IV. Where are the inherent weaknesses in our organization?

V. What opportunities are we missing in the sectors we serve or should be serving?

VI. What do our stakeholders need? How do we know these needs are accurate? How do we engage them in the conversation?

VII. Customer Service Strategies:
   - What should our strategic focus be for the next 1 to 5 years?
   - What is the role and responsibilities of the senior staff and management in customer service?
   - How do we develop customer/client service plans and programs?
   - How do we implement the plans?
   - How do we confirm follow through?
   - How can we improve our information coordination/communication?
   - What segments should we target given our resources and strengths?
   - What is the private sector doing?
   - How do we ensure that each employee understands our capabilities? How do we know when an expressed customer need matches with our capabilities?
   - Do we know what our customers think of us? Are we doing client satisfaction monitoring?

III. Staff motivation: What steps can we take to attract, retain and motivate quality people?
   - How effective are our hiring, coaching and performance management systems?
   - How do our leaders treat staff? How do we ensure a safe, respectable and productive work environment for our people?
   - What steps have we taken to prepare for the future in succession planning systems?

IX. How do we improve and expand our sharing of resources intra and inter department?

X. Is there a way to improve our efficiency? What processes are broke and need fixing? What type of quality control systems do we have in place to ensure quality and innovation?

XI. Do we have administrative paperwork overload, system problems, and, if so, how do we make improvements? Job setup? Invoicing? Financial management reports? Are they effective?

XII. How should our operating department be organized (is there a need for departments)?
   - How should we set up management responsibility?
   - Are we structured right? How does the real organization function?

XIII. How do we celebrate success? Reward accomplishments? What should we be doing?
   Is this a fun culture? Are we staying true to our values?

Developed by Larry Bienati to Educate the World.
A PUBLIC SECTOR ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT
STRATEGIC PLAN 2008-2012
Version 1

Does this meet the criteria of a good strategic plan? What is right about it? What needs improvement?

I. INTRODUCTION

Where do we want to be? To be recognized by our clients and employees as the leading construction management support organization as measured by high quality, superior service and dependability.

Our Mission Statement

Why do we exist? To provide successful solutions for our clients’ construction management needs.

Guiding Values For Our General Office

Keeping us on course.

| Listening   | We exist to meet our client’s needs |
| Ethics      | We strive to do the right thing, consistent with our clients expectations, the standards of care and personal integrity |
| Quality     | We strive to be correct, complete, on-time and on-budget |
| Initiative  | We display a compelling sense of urgency in all relationships |
| Ownership   | We believe that people tend to support what they themselves create |
| Truth       | We communicate in an open, honest and “no surprise” environment |
| Balance     | We measure our personal success by balancing work, personal, family and spiritual needs |
| Innovation  | We strive to be on the cutting edge of technology and scientific solutions |

Accountability: We measure these guiding principles yearly through our 360 degree reviews.

II. PRIMARY OPERATING OBJECTIVE FOR FY 2009

To bring all CM projects to a 99% under stated budget efficiency levels for the department.
III. STRENGTHS & WEAKNESS ANALYSIS (SWOT)

**WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS OF TransDot**

- Leader in public works and construction management
- Leader in Q.B.S
- Strong technical skills
- Strong database for airport, public works, networking, MIS
- Continuity with agency clients
- Good drilling capabilities
- Good project management
- Well respected within engineering community
- We are among the top 10 public sector agencies
- We have a strong network
- Good ethics
- Good communication between departments

**OPPORTUNITY/WEAKNESSES OF TransDot**

⇒ Need for improved project management measuring systems.
⇒ Staff at turnover issues
⇒ The standard, published fee schedule may be higher than the private sector
⇒ In the past, a bit over-staffed: low multipliers
⇒ Poor planning—but improving
⇒ Project managers need training/confidence in marketing skills
⇒ Lack of knowledge on what services, skills, people we have internally
⇒ The “loyalty bond” needs work with two agencies
⇒ Technology/Internet lacking in some technical systems
⇒ Competition for good people
⇒ Get going on the Mentoring Program with technicians
⇒ Motivation—staff not involved in decision making process
⇒ We need to get organizational charts/annual reports of clients up front
⇒ Variable rate fee schedules as needed
⇒ Find our clients’ “hot” buttons
⇒ Develop personal relationships with clients
IV. STRATEGIC BUILDING BLOCKS

How do we get there?

1. Achieving Excellence: We must strive to produce excellence. We have to stay ahead of the market and provide the high quality, superior service that our clients expect and deserve. Otherwise we will only be average. Each of us must know what and react to what is going on around us in the community, at work, in our profession.

2. Systemic Marketing: Plan your work, then work your plan.

3. Develop/Refine our Project Manager Skills: Our project manager is the keystone of our operations. We must continue to develop/refine our project manager skills.

4. Successful Coordination Between Departments: For our office to survive, we have to coordinate/talk amongst ourselves so we can keep everyone utilized, our expenses low, our billing on cycle and the morale high. We work enough hours through the week so we might as well enjoy it too. We have to be able to take care of each other and our equipment.

5. Technological Innovation: To reach our goal of excellence, we must strive to keep on the edge of technology.

6. Effective Leadership: Someone has to row the boat, someone has to steer the boat, someone has to fix the boat. We all have certain jobs to do. The goal is to work together so we can get to the next place in a straight line.

V. ACTION PLANS (framework only and not inclusive of typical supporting detail found in most plans)

1. Achieving Excellence
   - Create/maintain a sensible business plan
   - Check with HR and establish a progressive recruitment strategy
   - Track and share our financial information with all staff
   - Implement a plan to deal with current turnover issues

2. Systematic Marketing Plan
   - Create/maintain a good database of past, present and potential clients. Invest in Access technology.
   - Evaluate history and determine the 80/20 approach to marketing
   - Facilitate a marketing summit and develop a strategic plan for new services
   - Provide valuable information to client
   - Carefully select project opportunities (develop go/no go checklist)
   - Provide marketing updates at weekly meetings
   - Develop an incentive system to reward marketing success
   - Smart teaming arrangements with other consulting firms
   - Call client weekly for updates and project checks
3. Developing/Refining Project Management Skills
   By Whom | Date Due
   - Perform needs analysis of current training needs
   - Identify key mentors in project management areas
   - Implement a CQI based project management systems
   - Implement a client satisfaction system
   - Senior consultants should review all projects (QA/QC)

4. Successful Coordination Between Departments
   By Whom | Date Due
   - Set realistic project management goals
   - Set-up a cross-training program with new technologies
   - Monthly luncheons. Have each department present what they do
   - Establish a formalized staff meeting agenda

5. Technological Innovation
   By Whom | Date Due
   - Research T³ (Technical Training Topics)
   - Apply for ISO 9000/14000 certification
   - Implement a LAN/WAN System
   - Reward certifications (ICBO, NICET, ACI, P.E., C.E.M., etc.)
   - Publish papers and reward employees with a bonus
   - Create a learning organization through an on-site training system
   - Facilitate SHRP and Asphalt Research
   - Upgrade CADD/GINT systems
   - Develop innovation quotient in all appraisal systems

6. Effective Leadership
   By Whom | Date Due
   - Implement 360 reviews for managers
   - Implement management-leader training
   - Link bonus system to managerial excellence
   - Measure “walk the talk” against core values of the firm
   - Identify leadership pipeline of the firm

VI. MEASUREMENT & REVIEW
   - Once a month at each meeting, go over the previous month’s budget
   - Maintain utilization goals each week
   - Review the strategic plan at every staff meeting
   - Use the purchase order system
   - Get client feedback--project by project and discuss results with staff
   - Perform temperature checks--quarterly
   - Meet with staff and link personal actions to the strategic plan
   - Meet formally at end of each quarter to review/plan financial goals
   - Meet once at mid-year to update Strategic Plan (same time as financials); then again right before the beginning of the next fiscal year
   - Actually take the time to write and discuss each employee’s performance review.
Appendix B—Version 2

Adapted by Larry Bienati, Ph.D.;
This is an overview of a strategic planning format that has proven very successful

Strategic Plan Template

2010 - 2015

Note: This is page one and has a cover that represents the organization.
Our Mission

*Provide a clear presentation of the mission statement?*

Our Vision of Success

*Outline the clear themes of the future state?*

Our Values

*Outline the core values that will be the basis to measure the effectiveness of the vision and the practices the organization must embrace?*

How We Conduct Strategic Planning

*Normally, I like a separate page devoted to how we engage in strategic planning; we need to emphasize the role of employee participation, etc....and how we engage our stakeholders.*
Setting our Sights on Transformation

It is desirable to have a piece respecting the history and success of the organization. This is an inspirational piece that solidifies the vision of the future, captures the best of the past and builds on future success. Tell story. It may overlap with the vision of success as outlined below.

Our Organization

It is desirable to present information on the Board of Directors or the Governing Body. Offer a brief outline of the organizational structure, the management team, the culture, etc.

Our Vision of Success

Optional section. Some clients like to highlight the key aspects of the vision as outlined in the first page; this is manifesto of sorts.
Our Strategic Goals, Strategies, and Key Success Indicators

Our Vision of Success drives the other fundamental components of our Strategic Plan, which are:

- Our strategic goals, which define where we are going;
- Our strategies, which define how we will get there; and
- Our key success indicators, which describe how we will measure our progress along the way.

Our Strategic Goals:

Goal #1:
Goal #2:
Goal #3:
Goal #4:
Goal #5:

This is a terrific intro page. Again, I know the best plans focus on 3 to 5 goals, supporting strategies and supporting measures.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Goal #1:</th>
<th>This continues for each goal...</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategies:</strong></td>
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<td>1.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>7.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Success Indicators:</strong></td>
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</table>

This is the flow we follow for the ensuing goals.
For the last section, I provide an accountability matrix that charts, by fiscal year, the strategies we follow. This accountability matrix is very powerful to assure focused execution. Sample of a recent matrix for a client:

**Appendix A**  
**AGENCY X STRATEGIC PLAN ~ INITIATIVE MATRIX**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal/Initiative</th>
<th>SFY 10-11</th>
<th>SFY 11-12</th>
<th>SFY 12-13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expand access to services and information</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Internet DE 2501</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Interactive DE 2501</td>
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<tr>
<td>Telephone Continued Claim Filing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enhanced Referral Services</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Promote Customer Service</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Remote call monitoring and recording to improve call quality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop a formal Customer Satisfaction measurement system</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organization X Call Center</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrate telephone calls currently handled in five</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Claims Processing Offices into the Customer Service Centers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>HIPAA Compliance</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Improve the integrity, consistency, accuracy and speed of the claims management process</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Centralize claim intake and workflow management system</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide reference manuals on line</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implement a Quality Assurance Program that includes objective reviews to improve systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perform a Blueprint project to better improve processes and system delivery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enhance automated medical yardsticks and improved duration control strategies</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Create a formal program of medical specialists/trainers in Medical Directors Office and in the field offices</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Edex (Data base link with WCAB)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Build a strong organizational culture</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Reference manuals on line</td>
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<tr>
<td>Branch Strategic Training Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Career Development and Succession Planning</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Enhanced automated medical yardsticks and improved duration control strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Medical specialists in Medical Directors Office and field offices</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formal annual survey to measure performance in relation to employer of choice criteria, etc…</td>
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</table>
Galileo once said, “You can’t teach a person anything; you can help him/her discover it in themselves.” Taken further, the one lesson learned about strategic planning is that successful leaders practice two things uncommonly well: 1) the art of managing discovery, and 2) the art of enlisting organizational commitment and stakeholder commitment through understanding and acceptance.

There are many self-professed strategic planning experts who write books about strategic planning. They fail to understand the time constraints and “reality based issues” that most leaders face daily. Perhaps Andy Grove, former CEO of Intel was right when he said, “only the paranoid survive.” Most strategic plans have a time horizon of one year and generally experience evolution at quarterly intervals. Most important, good leaders have a compelling ability to articulate a vision, remain steadfast to values and involve their team in shared accountability. Leaders eat, drink and sleep the strategic direction of their team. It has a lasting presence and is a constant agenda item.

As you approach your strategic planning experience, I have enclosed a few tools that will help you achieve these desired objectives. Here is a suggested process:

1) Have a kick-off meeting to introduce the strategic planning experience at least 4 weeks prior to the retreat.

2) Distribute both articles, “A Practical Approach to Strategic Planning,” and “The Strategic Planning Exercise: A Team Experience.”

3) Encourage the team members to read the article on Strategic Planning first. Next, ask the team members to complete “The Team Exercise” to the best of their ability. Encourage creative, yet realistic thinking. Require that these be returned at least 5 days prior to the planning session.

4) Summarize all the contributions by question area and prepare a master document that will be used as a basis for building your strategic template.

5) Distribute the summary report at least 3 days prior to the retreat and ask each team member to find common themes in each question area.

6) Open the retreat by clarifying the ground rules of communication and agreeing on expectations and communication goals.

7) Employing an easel chart or a group recorder, ask each member to share one significant outcome they hope to achieve during the retreat. These outcomes should be visited regularly ensuring that all expectations matter. It should also serve as a form of aligned expectations at closure.

8) With ground rules understood, and expectations shared, review each section of the strategic plan summary document and draw closure on a common vision, mission, values and strategic objectives. Your goal is to set the vision, mission and values first. This will generally take you through the first 4 hours of the meeting. Break for lunch.
9) Your next step is to now agree on the 4 or 5 building blocks (goals) that your team must improve upon in order to achieve the established vision or mission of the organization. At this point of the meeting you may decide to break people in teams and have each focus on providing input and action steps necessary to achieve these building blocks.

10) Your next task is to place structure to the building blocks (goals) by providing the level of detail (see examples) in order to measure and validate progress of goals. It is not uncommon to leave the first retreat with an agreement of goals and strategies. Assign an owner to each goal and appropriate strategy. The owner should return with precise success metrics to ensure achievement of strategies that meet the SMART test (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time bound) discussion early.

11) With template in hand, the manager now returns to fine tune the strategic plan document based on the team input.

12) A meeting follows in the coming two weeks where the formal plan is first presented to the management team for final adjustments and commitments. The result should be the development of an execution matrix described in this document. You need to appoint a Czar of sort to drive the implementation of the strategic plan. It should be on the agenda every staff meeting!

13) Finally, a meeting occurs with all employees in the affected unit to unveil the plan and the various roles, responsibilities and outcomes.

The key management lesson learned is...

Most strategic plans fail because leaders forget to stay focused on the plan. The plan should be a part of every staff meeting. The leader is almost an evangelist for measuring, correcting and rewarding progress. If you are not committed to implementation then you are wasting time, dollars and most important, destroying your credibility. Good luck and let us know how it goes. We realize that there are more than 13 steps, but these are a good start toward success. Remember:

If you don’t set your own goals then you will likely become part of someone else’s—Bienati.
Appendix D

The Strategic Planning Experience
A Team Collaboration Exercise
By Dr. Larry Bienati

Your Expectations

Your feedback is critical in helping the facilitator develop a successful vision and strategic plan for your organization. You will be asked to offer your input in framing the strategic plan. We ask that you answer each question and assume you are in the role of Director of your organization for this brief moment in time. Once you complete the questionnaire (names are optional) the facilitator will summarize the input of the participants. This input will then serve as a basis for developing the strategic plan during our scheduled retreat. Thanks in advance for your input. Return all questionnaires to:

____________________________________________________
Due Date: __________________

1. Describe what your organization will look like in the next 3 to 5 years. Imagine that you have been asked to write an article for a leading industry publication in your industry in the year 2015. It is the story, your legacy and your unique value proposition. Describe in 1 or 2 sentences what you want your organization to be, to look or how the story will unfold? The dictionary definition of vision: “An Image of the future we seek to create.” Write a vision statement…

2. What is the purpose of your organization? In a sentence why do you really exist when the day is done? The dictionary definition of mission: “purpose, reason for being; also, an inner calling to pursue an activity or perform a service.” Write a mission statement…

3. OPTIONAL QUESTION: How Can we best facilitate a collaborative relationship with our stakeholders? Who are they in your view? How do we best engage their support and commitment?

4. **Core Values or Principles.** It has been said that vision determines destination and values keep you on course. What values should your organization hold sacred in the way you perform your business. Values reflect the way you hire your people, treat each and do business with your customer. Identify at least 5 core values critical to your organizational success. Please use a sentence to define this value. If there is a way this value can be measured then please indicate the way to ensure “the talk is walked” in the organization.

*For example: Integrity—we are reliable in meeting client commitments. We will measure this value by regular client satisfaction checks.*
5. **The SWOT Analysis.** Take a hard look at our current organization and answer the following questions:

   - **Strengths**—what we do well?

   - **Weaknesses**—where we need to improve?

   - **Threats**—what keeps you awake at night about the way our organization currently operates?

   - **Opportunities**—Where is the untapped potential for our organization in the next 3 years? (Use backside if necessary)
6. **Strategic Building Blocks.** You have just performed a gap analysis of the organization and you recognize that certain issues or processes need improvement if you intend to realize your vision, mission and stated financial objectives. The gap between where you are and where you want to be represent a possible building block. In theory, if you execute the building blocks (strategic objectives) well then your vision will hopefully be realized.

   A. Strategic Building block #1______________________________________________

      1. Why Important?

      2. Key Action Steps (For each action step list the action to be taken and how it will be implemented or measured)
B. Strategic Building Block #2

1. Why Important?

2. Key Action Steps and Measurement

C. Strategic Building Block #3

1. Why important?

2. Key Action Steps and measurement…
8. **Resources and Support Systems**

Some strategic plans have more than 3 building blocks. Don’t feel limited. What resources and support systems are necessary to achieve the plan?

9. **What are the key obstacles** that will prevent this organization from fully implementing this strategic plan? Be honest. How do we overcome these challenges?

*My level of commitment to achieving this plan: (Circle the response)*

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<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(No desire)</td>
<td>(Skeptical)</td>
<td>(Wait and see)</td>
<td>(Committed)</td>
<td>(Blinding desire)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

32