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BUILD THE MODEL ORGANIZATION OF THE FUTURE: STOP PLANNING AND START PIONEERING

BY JIM WHITT

Strategic planning is often used as a means to delay action. Change your thinking to keep your company successful into the future.

Before you invest time and money in traditional strategic planning, consider this: only 5-10% of strategic plans are ever implemented. The reason most organizations engage in strategic planning is to reduce anxiety. It's like taking a couple of aspirin for a headache. In this case, the headache is the future. The aspirin is a couple of days locked in a room, putting checkmarks in the appropriate boxes. Mission statement (yada, yada, yada): check; SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats): check; long-range goals (3-5 years): check. Ah, that feels better. And like the aspirin bottle, the plan is put on the shelf. But the future, like the headache, keeps coming back. As Dr. Phil likes to ask, "How's that working for you?"

Even if you try to implement a plan using this process, it will be flawed. Think back five years ago. It seems like only a millisecond has passed, doesn't it? If you look no further ahead than five years, you'll see the future as an extension of the present. You'll be trying to solve tomorrow's problems with yesterday's solutions. If you really want your organization to succeed in the future, you need a *pioneering* process instead of just a planning process. Instead of looking ahead 3-5 years, you need to look a *generation* ahead.



...instead of starting at the present and trying to work your way forward, you are starting at the future and working your back.

To get started, assemble key people in your organization to be part of your pioneering team. How many and who you choose will depend upon the size and structure of your organization. Break them into small groups, and then have them select a facilitator and a recorder for their group. The following questions should be asked, one at a time, giving the group time to share and record their answers. After each question, have the groups share their answers with the rest of the team.

1. What did the world and your industry look like 30 years ago? This question primes the pump. Once you've compiled a list of the monumental changes that have taken place in the last 30 years, you understand there will be monumental changes that will take place in the next 30 years.

2. What will the world and your industry look like 30 years from now? While no one can accurately predict the future, remember that Jules Verne was writing about a trip to the moon 100 years before it happened. Don't limit your thinking. Tell your team to be as futuristic as their minds will let them.


3. What will your organization have to be, do and look like to succeed in the future you just described? You are not bound to the form or model of your current organizational structure. Borrow a page from *Star Trek* and "dare to boldly go where no man has gone before."

4. What will you have to do to help the organization get there? Planning for an organization's future requires collectively creating a picture of our future in which we'll find meaning and purpose – not just as a group, but as individuals.

The collective answers to these questions provide the information your team will need for the next assignment: a major newsstand business magazine has selected your organization as "The Model Organization" in the year

2040. Have each team member write an article describing what happened in the three decades between *then* and *now* that enabled you to become that model organization.

These articles are a matter of engaging your team in a process of writing tomorrow's history *today*. Everything you need to do to succeed in the future is contained in that history. You'll identify your organization's purpose, operating philosophy, business models and structure. You'll identify goals and objectives and the people who need to be responsible for their completion. Your history will have everything you need to develop a *real* strategic plan. Implementation then becomes a matter of living the history. What makes this process effective is that, instead of starting at the present and trying to work your way forward, you are starting at the future and working your way back.

Of course, this is a condensed overview of the pioneering process. It takes a genuine commitment of time and energy. If you simply want to reduce your anxiety about the future, take the road *most* traveled and use the traditional "check the boxes" method. But if you want to succeed in the future, you have to go beyond traditional planning and do some serious pioneering. Pioneering has never been for the faint of heart. It's for those who want to lead rather than follow, thrive instead of just survive. Pioneers take the road less traveled. Which road will you choose? 

JIM WHITT

For more than 20 years as a speaker, consultant and author Jim Whitt has provoked people and organizations to reach their full potential. He is cofounder of Purpose Unlimited which is in the business of transforming lives, leaders and organizations through the power of purpose. To find out more about his speaking and consulting please visit www.PurposeUnlimited.com or call (918)494-0009.