

Leadership Barometer 134 Strategic Thinking

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



The number one rule of strategic thinking is to be **current**. In the past three years, the world of business has changed so dramatically that we should examine anything written before 2020 carefully to ensure the key points are still valid today. That means getting out in the world to understand how organizations actually operate now.

Thinking Ahead

You cannot survive by studying the business models of the past. You must be thinking ahead of the power curve so you at least have an accurate view of the environment in which you are trying to thrive.

What is the benefit of reading books that outline great details about models for strategic planning? The benefit is that the process of strategic thinking and the mental steps you take are fixed and really do apply, even in vastly different environments.

A Real Example

Let me illustrate with an example. There is a concept called "Segmentation Strategy." This is where an organization slices and dices the market into chunks that use slightly different tactics depending on the characteristics of each chunk. This segmentation idea could work whether you were making and selling wood stoves in 1900 or some kind of personal vapor heating body envelope concept in the year 2040. Even though the world operates quite differently over time, the fundamental thinking process in trying to laser focus marketing efforts on the precise segment you are trying to reach is a valid one.

Focus on Principles Rather Than Specific Tools

As you read and think about the various strategic tools, try not to get caught up on the specific tools and examples the authors use, because the logic in examples illustrates the time when they occurred. Rather, think about the overarching principles involved in

the techniques. These will not change much regardless of the current world and technological conditions.

Painting a New Picture

The artistic part of strategic thinking is that you get the chance to paint a new picture every day. The canvas is there for you, and you can select not only the brush and colors to use but also the subject you wish to paint. The only stipulation is that you need to produce a viable idea out of your effort.

It reminds me of the story of the coal miner. Someone asked him if he became bored down in the mine. He said, "Bored? No way! I enjoy being down in the mine. I like the lack of restrictions. I have absolute freedom to do anything I want down in the mine, provided I get hold of two tons of coal every day."

Conclusion

The old models of business do not always apply in today's conditions. The strategic process to analyze markets and opportunities are still valid, but you must refresh your thinking to be relevant in today's competitive landscape.

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