



You've spent 3 days in an offsite, perhaps 3 months in total crafting the plan. You took the right amount of time to frame your current position, you laid out a vision that was compelling and aspirational, and, if you used the Driver's Model™ from Leadership Strategies, you have identified strategies that deal with the reality on the ground and give you a great shot at moving the needle on your objectives. But unless you are a one man show, the success of your strategy is now in great peril. It's time to hand over the plan to the people who are most responsible for implementation, the managers and directors that will operationalize the strategies and ultimately, deliver the results you are hoping for. Harvard Business Review cites that some 60-90% of strategic plans never realize the intended results. While there is an argument to be made that the plan itself may be the problem, in my 25 years of helping clients create and implement strategic plans that work, I've found that there are some key reasons why even the best plans end up going nowhere.

- 1) **Lack of Inclusiveness** – if your plan hasn't engaged the people who are responsible for implementation early enough in the development of the strategies, you are relying on your staff to "do what they are told". This flies in the face of all we have tried to establish with our workforce, empowering them, listening to them, and instilling an ownership mindset. You need to find ways to engage those people in activities that demonstrate the anticipated benefits of the plan, and how the benefits will accrue to them individually.
- 2) **Lack of Accountability** – does your plan clearly indicate the opportunity for an owner to step up and put their mark on the organization? This has 3 important and separate parts:
 - a. **Development Opportunity** - Does the project(s) offer growth opportunities to those you are counting on to implement it? Why would someone take this on in addition to their daily work? Is it exciting because

it is a high visibility project? Is there the opportunity to work with or be mentored by someone influential in the company's growth? Find a reason to make the project something that develops your people. In the end, you will end up with not just a completed project, but also people or a team that is excited and better prepared to take on the next one!

- b. **Success Potential** – Explicitly or implicitly, we all consider a new project through the lens of “what is my likelihood of success?” For some projects, detailed analytical modeling is necessary to understand relevant influences in an influence or causal map, but for most of the plans I’ve seen work, it’s enough to know that the important barriers and critical success factors to an initiative have been considered. One often identified, but rarely dealt with is commitment of management. In a study from the American Society of Training and Development, researchers found that if you commit to someone outside yourself, you have a 65% chance of completing a goal. But if you have a specific accountability check-in with the person you committed, your odds of success increase to 95%.
 - c. **Monitoring** – perhaps the most intimidating and yet the easiest to get right! How have you determined to stay on top of your strategic implementation? If you are trying to fold it into the ongoing meetings with direct reports, you are likely to miss the opportunity to carve out the importance of strategic implementation from all the other activities that demand our daily attention. Setting up a monthly monitoring meeting, that pulls people together to focus only on the strategic initiatives will reinforce the idea that this work is not just important, but urgent. And, no, you don’t need a fancy program or an OKR monitoring system, although you can use those if your organization likes them. Excel spreadsheets work just as well and can feel less intimidating and more accessible to your teams.
- 3) **Lack of Clear Objectives** – Is it clear what success looks like? Have you defined the finish line clearly enough that people agree that finishing looks different than where you started? This may sound trivial, but it isn’t. Many times, I’ve had people tell me that they are clear on deliverables, when really, they have defined activities. *Pro tip: If the description begins with a verb, it’s an activity, not a result.* And, once you have deliverables, are you done? Probably not. Defining the expected benefits when the project is over is often overlooked because everyone assumes they are clearly understood; we know better. Until everyone can sit down and articulate the benefits to each other, it is unlikely that you can consider the objectives *clear*.

The excitement of generating the plan and even getting approval pales next to the realization that the plan has the buy-in and the critical elements to succeed. Professional facilitators can help you clear *the pathway for great plans to be realized*. Through dynamic facilitation and coaching, master facilitators will help your organization create plans that harness the power of your organization and develop the necessary tactical

Minding the Gap between Strategy and Implementation

approach and critical buy-in that will have you discerning the very changes you hoped for when you began your strategic planning effort.