Strategic and Tactical Thinking

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| February 6, 2009 Strategic and Tactical Thinking *by Joleen Goronkin, President, People and Performance Strategies*http://www.imakenews.com/chartenews/chartenews_pic_1339578.JPG?z=0Today, because of globalization and the enormous amount of information to which we all have access, we are experiencing more competition. This has brought about important changes in organizational leadership strategies and practices. Over the coming decade, this challenging economy could very well accelerate the changes that business leaders will be expected to make. These new expectations of leaders will create challenges for HR professionals. But they may also provide new opportunities for us to demonstrate our own abilities to lead at a strategic level. As these competitive pressures mount, no single leader will be able to manage every aspect of organizational leadership. This will create a need for effective team-based leadership at all levels. Human Resource strategies are central to developing the kind of organization that leads from the bottom up. We will be asked especially to help develop and implement changes that will encourage mutual dependence and cooperation between units, as well as strategies to communicate organizational values.The way a leader thinks will also be increasingly more important. As the pace of change speeds up, how leaders think through problems and how they make decisions will be key to their success. This is important to HR leaders as we source and hire new leaders.Furthermore, it won’t just be leaders in top positions that will count. Leadership at all levels will matter more and more. The younger generation entering the workforce has a more diverse, less traditional makeup and the needs and wants of the different generations working side by side will need to be addressed. HR will be centrally involved in meeting this challenge by redesigning recruitment and retention efforts as well as spearheading training initiatives that attempt to bridge all skill gaps.NEW VISION FOR TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENTAccording to current estimates, 80% of today’s instruction is still executed by live teachers and trainers. There is a move to start offering computer-based training, and web-based training is not far behind. We need to leverage the different modalities depending on learner needs, location and the skill being taught. The new emphasis on training is to provide a range of solutions including: in-depth assessment; training alternatives like coaching, planned change consultations and interventions; facilitated planning sessions; and large group processes. This is a much more holistic approach. Organizations need to think very strategically about their training and development offerings, making sure that each offering really supports the business goals. This is nothing new in our industry – time is money. And “just-in-time” training is on the rise. However, we do need to be careful and balance the current business needs and goals and “just-in-time” training with the needs of the organization and the employees in the future.There is a trend for HR and training departments to provide a solid ROI for programs and resources. Other functions in the organization – operations, marketing and finance – all have hard metrics. There is a push – and the right one – for organizations to demand hard metrics to demonstrate a return on a training investment as well.More and more organizations are realizing that succession planning must be pushed down to the front lines. Succession management has been happening at the executive level for some time, but it is imperative that organizations use a succession planning model at the management level that has direct contact with our guests. This will help to ensure the organization has bench strength in all key positions.Today’s training and development experts recommend that leaders interact with employees to learn their individual needs and then develop a custom plan to support these needs. Gone are the days in which training efforts were merely a catalog of courses.ALIGNING VISION AND MISSION WITH OBJECTIVESThe first task is to gain a clear understanding of the goal a particular strategy is intended to accomplish. In smaller organizations, you may be the one with the sole responsibility to establish the goal. In larger organizations, you will be expected to know and fully understand the goals that have already been established by others. This is often difficult given today’s fast-paced environment. What often happens is that one acts quickly and makes decisions that are not tied to the organizations’ long-term vision and strategy.It is important to determine your organization’s vision, mission and objectives: Vision: A vision statement describes the organization in a future successful state. When developing a vision statement, answer this question: If the organization were to achieve all of its strategic goals, what would it look like 10 years from now? An effective vision statement creates a mental image of this highly desirable future state of the organization.Mission: This statement describes the company, what it does and its overall goal. The mission statement’s primary function is to communicate the organization’s purpose and direction to its employees, customers, vendors and other stakeholders. Internally, a mission statement creates a sense of identity for employees.Objectives: These are the strategies, the broadly defined four or five key approaches the organization will use to accomplish its mission and drive toward the vision. Goals and action plans usually flow from each strategy. It is important when thinking strategically to look at all of the factors that impact your goals and objectives. IMPORTANCE OF STRATEGIC THINKINGIt’s important to have a systematic process for making decisions and managing work to guide us toward our desired outcomes. We need to make decisions with an awareness of the future and its implications; organize teams and individuals to carry out those decisions; and measure the results against expectations. Remember Pareto’s Law: 20% of your activities will account for 80% of your results. Strategic thinking, then, is the ability to step back from day-to-day activities and develop a long-term plan for sustained growth and development. This involves the ability to evaluate and understand the competition, keep a close eye on industry trends and have a strong grasp of basic business concepts. Strategic thinking is called for when considering company goals, management plans, staffing issues, career planning and the long-term development of people. Using strategic planning allows you to systematically and efficiently plan for the company and team. People often confuse strategic thinking with tactical thinking. Strategic thinking is focused on the long term; tactical thinking on short-sighted “urgent” action items. Strategic thinking is the big picture, it challenges the status quo, looks at the future payoff and takes into account the preparation needed to reach the long-term goal. Tactical thinking, on the other hand, is “in the moment”, often the safe and conservative solution, it looks for the immediate payoff and involves automatic and routine execution of a task, the immediate “what to do and how to do it”. STRATEGIC PLANNINGWhen planning strategically, it is important to look at both internal and external factors that might impact the organization, both positively and negatively.Internal/Positive: These are considered the organization’s Strengths, what the organization is doing well Internal/Negative: These are the organization’s Weaknesses, what the organization could be doing better.External/Positive: These are Opportunities, what are the organization/s biggest prospects for growth and success.External/Negative: These are the Obstacles, the organization’s roadblocks to growth and success. You can do what I call a S.W.O.T. (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis to evaluate your organization. This analysis specifies the factors that are favorable and unfavorable relative to a specified objective. When used in conjunction with the specified objective, it can help define a strategy and this can be a business plan. Here’s a breakdown of a S.W.O.T. analysis: Strengths: Attributes of an organization that are helpful to achieving the objective, These should give an organization a competitive advantage. Ex.: Patents, brand names, reputation, resources, creativity, cost advantages from experience.Weaknesses: Attributes of an organization which are harmful to achieving the objective, the absence of certain strengths. Ex.: Lack of patents, weak brand names, poor reputation, high cost structure.Opportunities: External conditions which are helpful to achieving the objective, a change in the market that should provide profit and growth. Ex.: Unfulfilled guest needs, new technologies, market trends and changes.Threats: External conditions that are harmful to achieving the objective, may represent a threat to a firm. Ex.: Change in consumer tastes, new competitors, Here’s an example of a S.W.O.T. analysis: Strengths (Internal/Positive)High quality foodExcellent staff trainingClean restaurantsMystery shops in companyWeaknesses (Internal/Negative)Orientation inconsistenciesLimited menuHigh turnoverInexperienced ManagersOpportunities (External/Positive)Finding “A” sitesHiring experienced ManagersClose to hundreds of office buildingsAffluent NeighborhoodThreats (External/Negative)High minimum wagesLimited labor forceHeavy indirect competitionAffluent neighborhoodEconomic conditionsThe strategies that one might come up with to respond to this S.W.O.T. analysis might be to:Strategies Tactics¬¬¬¬¬¬¬¬¬¬¬¬¬¬¬¬¬¬¬¬¬¬¬¬\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 1. Update Hiring Practices A. Sourcing from local College B. Offer a referral incentiveC. Attend community events and local job fairs2. Decrease turnover 10% A. Training certification processB. Action oriented performance reviewsC. Offer a 90 day retention bonus3. Effective and consistent A. Formal orientation procedure outlined and followedOrientations B. GM should conduct all orientationsC. Orientation checklist completed, signed and in personnel fileAn organization needs both strategic and tactical thinking to be at its best. Use your skill in each area to be your best in a time when every organization is looking at ways to improve their people, sales and profits.  |

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