

Why leaders don't do enough strategy – Part 2

- How to get out of the day job? -

In the last article I discussed how to think more strategically by raising your eye-line to make longer-term plans. One of the common questions I've received about that has been 'how on earth do I find the time to do that?!' So how do you achieve a better balance between what is needed right now, and the actions you need to start taking immediately so that you get where you need to be in the future? Here are two practical and immediate tips.

1. Not everything can get done

This may seem really simple, yet I meet many leaders where the inability to accept this truth is truly holding them back from greatness. You may have got where you are today by pulling all-nighters, and by motivating your team to go that bit further. That did indeed get you here, that brought success – then. Now you need something else. At the leadership level, simply put there is not the time to get everything done.

For those of you who are interested in explorations and possibilities, you will have to accept that some options will not be explored. You will have to turn down some truly interesting ideas and opportunities – or you won't actually achieve anything. If you want to travel to somewhere interesting you will have to leave behind opportunities to travel to somewhere else in the opposite direction.

This is also tricky for those of you who got where you are today through really hard, conscientious work. You will have to accept that at your level and above NOT EVERYTHING CAN GET DONE. If you attempt to keep doing everything, not only will you be unable to develop your strategic awareness, you will also burn out in your current role. So, for you this means that some tasks will remain incomplete. Prioritisation will help you of course, but so will the next skill:

2. Just say No.

Yes, say no. It's a key skill for aspiring leaders to learn to say No. It's difficult, because saying yes and getting 'stuff' done no matter what is what got you to a management position in the first place. And it's what's going to keep you there, in the same position. If you want to move onwards or upwards you have to learn to say No.



Saying yes to everything and getting it all done is only a viable strategy when you're at a level in the organisation where everything *can* get done. But now you have to show your value in a different way. One key way to demonstrate your value is in identifying, analysing and prioritising what is adding the strategically important and then influencing others to gain agreement.

I actually find that leaders who say no to their boss in the *right way* actually get more respect. So what's the right way to say no?

1. With respect
2. Managing your emotions
3. Using good feedback techniques
4. With a clear focus on your 18-month timeline.

When you fully implement these skills you will be able to say 'No' to the right things, in the right way, gaining both respect now and kudos in the future as you deliver on what is needed in the longer-term.

There's a theme here

Assuming you can get everything done, or always saying 'yes' are what I call leadership traps. These traps are so dangerous and so difficult to avoid because they are appealing. It's appealing to rely on what you have done to get where you are today, to get you to where you want to be next. It doesn't work that way. You have to learn, to adapt, to learn new skills and to grow as a leader. Trying to get everything done or always saying yes are leadership traps. They are so appealing because up to now they have been successful. They got you where you are today. So you think that's what you have to do now, in this new position. It doesn't work that way.



Apply these tips to train your mind to focus at the strategic level. This won't happen overnight, after all you're un-learning ingrained habits that were often very valuable to you in the past. That was the past. Once you accept that working at a more strategic level is like learning how to perform in a new role then you will be able to enhance deliver at this level, by giving more attention and energy top the areas that will have the greatest impact on thinking strategically.

By applying these tips, you will be able to train your mind to focus at the strategic level. I'm not saying this will happen overnight, you're un-learning habits that were often very valuable to you. So be acceptant that you too are learning, and that by putting more attention and energy to these areas you will improve.

What can you do right now?

1. Identify something that you're going to say 'No' to.
2. Decide on what isn't going to get done.
3. Identify an exciting possibility that will remain unexplored.

I hope you've found these tips useful in helping you to look at how to raise your eye-line and think more strategically.

About the Writer

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