

Why leaders don't do enough strategy – Part 3

- 3 More Traps for Strategic Leaders -

In the last two articles I've looked at how to become a more strategic leader by raising your eye-line and looking to your 18-month plan. In this third article in the series I'm going to look at three more traps that are waiting to get between you and the longer-term focus required of great leaders.

Trap 1 - Nobody does it better

Anyone who's really tried it knows that delegating can be fraught with problems, but it is fairly easy to get someone else to do something if you know they do a better job of it than you do. For example if you don't like using Excel and you've got someone on the team who's a real wizard, it's a joy to pass them the spreadsheet. What's really tricky is delegating to someone when you know they won't do it as well as you would.

For many managers and leaders the reason that you're in the position you are is because you are better at doing things than other people. Plain and simple. There's no need to be shy about your skills. Where this trips you up is that in order to raise your eye-line and focus on the future you have to let go of some tasks. The people that you delegate these tasks to, will often not do it as well as you would have. This is the first thing that you have to accept. This is the truth to come to terms with.



Once you accept that it's OK that they are not as good as you, then you can begin to create a learning journey that will get them to where you need them to be. If, however, you are unwilling to accept anything less than "immediately as good as me at my best" then you will never create time to put your attention where it should be. You will never be the leader that you need to be.

So, how do you sharpen your delegation skills?

1. Accept that it's OK if they don't do it as well as me *yet*.
2. Plan a learning journey that gets them from where they are now, to where they need to be.
3. Share your timeline and ambition for where you see them getting to.

Trap 2 - Things change

What's the point of making a plan if it's all going to change? After all if you'd made a great 18 month goal, you certainly would have changed it this year! Even in a good year you might make a great plan only to have your boss change everything as soon as the new budgets arrive.

These are good points. It is indeed frustrating when your goals have to change. So find a way to deal with that frustration, because that's going to happen. A lot. I don't think there's a single one of my clients who didn't have to throw out their 18 month plan in 2020. The best of them made it through the first few weeks of the crisis and then made a new plan. Your organisation needs leaders who will raise up their eyes and ask 'what does this mean for the next 6, 12 and 18 months?'



So how do you think strategically when the ground is shifting around you?

1. Accept that change will always happen.
2. Understand your own reactions to change and learn to manage these.
3. View your 18-month goal as a rolling perspective rather than a set series of boxes that must be ticked no matter what.
4. Allocate time regularly to review and update given what you know today.

Trap 3 - Comfort tasks

Comfort tasks are things that we know we do well, that we enjoy doing, and at which we are no longer adding sufficient value given our current role. Dealing with comfort tasks is different to the challenge of delegating seen above. It's not that you don't think anyone else can do this better, it's just that you really, really want to do it yourself! I frequently see this in leaders from technical or engineering backgrounds where they still love to do the 'real' work of getting their hands dirty in the designs, coding or building. I've also seen it many times in sales teams where a brilliant sales person becomes the leader of the sales function, yet wants to spend their time getting out and closing deals.



If you do feel that your 'real' work is the stuff that you used to do, then you should seriously consider whether you want to lead, or if you'd rather become an expert individual contributor.

Now there is an important difference here between letting go of comfort tasks, and managing your energy levels. Leadership roles involve incredibly high, sustained levels of energy. Great leaders know how to maintain their energy levels. The question to ask yourself is: am I doing this task because it energises me, or am I doing it because it makes me feel like I'm doing real work? If it's energising alone, then use it sparingly. If it's a comfort task then delegate it, or seek out a role with more contribution and less leadership.

In closing

These three leadership traps are there and waiting for everyone. Pretending that they don't exist doesn't help you. We can only learn new skills when we admit that there are things we still must learn. What you're looking for is the skill that will get you from your current leadership level to the level that where you want to be.

What can you do right now?

1. Choose a task that you will delegate to someone who is not yet as good as you are.
2. Create a learning journey that plans out how to get from where they are, to where they need to be.
3. Find a comfort task and delegate that. Use the time you free up to look at your 18-month plan.
4. Reflect on how you react to unexpected changes. (I'm sure you can think of some recently).

5.

About the Writer

Gareth English is a Business Psychologist who has worked with leaders all over the world for the last 20 years to help them to grow faster to achieve their goals.

He is the author of [*The Power of Personality*](#).

