

ACCENT

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MIDAMERICA NAZARENE UNIVERSITY

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MNU Develops Strategic Plan for the Future

MNU and its Board of Trustees are building a comprehensive strategic plan with the guidance of Credo, LLC, a higher education consulting firm focused on holistic assessment and action (www.credohighered.com). All employees have had the opportunity to have input in the plan, and a cross section of the MNU community serve on committees that have further developed objectives of the plan based on campus-wide input.

"We are about 75 percent through this initial planning phase," says Provost Mary Jones, PhD. "This plan will address specific ways that help us at MNU continue to transform lives, strengthen academic excellence and build resources for the future."



Tammy Ogren, adjunct professor of business

Your Organization's Strategic Management

By Tammy Ogren ('04, MBA '06)

Strategic planning is the GPS system of business. Just like the GPS in your car, your strategic plan should be a guide that helps your business find its way every day. To be effective, the plan needs to consider two things: Where are you now and where do you want to be? You, like the GPS, have to define how you will get there. There are always multiple paths you can take. Deciding the right one and staying on it, while preparing for detours, is key to successful strategic planning.

EVERY ORGANIZATION IS UNIQUE

Strategic planning is about identifying and leveraging competitive advantage, and it is different for every organization. Asking the right questions will help you hone in on the best components for your strategy:

- What are *your* unique strengths as an organization? Do you need to protect these core competencies?
- Have your customers changed? Do they still have the same needs? Do they have any pains or needs that are not being met?
- Are there new ways to use the same product in a new market?
- What is your competitive advantage for the future?
- Do you need to change internal processes to be more efficient and competitive?
- Should your organization *stop* doing anything?

The answers to these questions must be an honest representation of market demand and internal resources. Without honesty from everyone, the plan runs the danger of being driven by one person and can reflect his or her blind spots, preferences and fears, which may or may not be attuned to external opportunities and threats.

Diversity in the planning committee helps bring strength to your plan.

IMPLEMENTATION HAPPENS IN THE HALLWAYS OF THE ORGANIZATION

Implementation is where most plans run into difficulty, because the strategic plan is often treated like a special project instead of being integrated into the daily tasks of every person in the organization. Your best effort at success in strategic planning requires a clear understanding by each person of how his or her work implements the plan.

Every person in your organization should be able to see immediately whether work he or she does supports the strategy.

COMMUNICATION IS ESSENTIAL TO SUCCESS

A robust communications plan is essential to ensure the success of any strategic plan. Communicate routinely about status and lessons learned. It's invaluable to staying on track. Keep your plan explanation simple: Every person in the firm should be able to describe the strategy to a stranger in one or two sentences. It may seem daunting to boil down your strategy into such a compressed space, but here's a great example: *Edward Jones is dedicated to serving individual investors by providing branch offices across the U.S. in the locations where people live and shop. Each branch has one manager who works within the local community to serve investors who do not have the time or inclination to manage their own investments on a daily basis. They are acutely aware of who they serve as well as who they do not.*

Your strategy should be expressed simply and understood easily, but it will take time and regular reinforcement.

ACCOUNTABILITY KEEPS THINGS MOVING

While senior managers may have a clear understanding of their accountability to the plan, it can be more difficult for employees to relate the strategic plan to daily work.

Management and Departmental level – Each department head should define top level goals to support the organization's objectives *and* to support each other's goals. They should be shared within the organization. Aligning daily work with the plan's top objectives and to the goals between departments will ensure accountability to each other and to one strategic objective.

Individual – Each person in the organization should know how individual goals support the firm's strategic goals. This is where strategic plans are either fully implemented or derailed.

Strategic planning helps people at all levels make daily decisions with the same roadmap. Instead of using only the information and knowledge at hand, a plan's strategic objectives bring consistency to each area within an organization.

TAKEAWAYS

- Communicate simply so everyone is clear on the destination and how to get there.
- Each person should be able to connect work to the support of the strategic plan.
- The real work of implementing a strategic plan happens in the hallways and in the cubicles each day—not in the boardroom.
- Pay as much attention to communication and implementation as planning, so every day brings your strategy to actuality.