

LEADERSHIP Excellence

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Little Big
Things

Ask Seven
Questions

Making Strategy
Personal

Andrew Blum
The Trium Group



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—WARREN BENNIS, AUTHOR AND
USC PROFESSOR OF MANAGEMENT

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Personal Strategy

Start taking five actions.



by Andrew Blum

STRATEGY AND EXECUTION don't occur in a vacuum. They require people to act in concert, remain in dialogue, and adapt as needed to reach a common, intended destination.

Yet in our practice at the intersection of strategy, leadership and culture, we often see even leading organizations fall short of efficient, effective, and sustained strategy execution. And while the particulars vary, depending on the business and sector dynamics, the root cause is often the same: individuals inside the organization are disconnected from its broader strategy. Or, individuals say they're fully connected to the strategy, but their actions or attitudes demonstrate that they are not.

As a leader you need to make strategy personal for everyone.

After all, people don't come to work because they want to advance corporate priorities presented to them via PowerPoint. And few are excited to execute against divisional or functional imperatives, even those that are big enough to generate headlines. No, people get up and get in because they are personally inspired to make a contribution to something that they believe in and believe they can personally, positively impact.

When we discuss this idea with CEOs, we see lots of head nods. Then we ask how to bring this personal connectedness to life. With this question in mind, I offer five tangible *How To's* to make your macro-strategy personal, so everyone takes meaningful, aligned action to support the broader cause:

1. Connect goals and strategies to context and direction. Ensure everyone knows *where the organization is coming from and where it aims to go*, as well as *what the road ahead looks like and what metrics or other outcomes will clearly indicate success*. It's not enough for people to say, *we understand and are aligned with these details*—the “we're aligned” expression is much abused. They also should be able to clearly articulate and answer questions about them.

2. Help people see themselves in the strategy. A strategy that does not resonate, connect, inspire or enlist a high level of personal engagement has little chance of success. On the other hand, if you and your management team invest the time and energy to help people see how they fit into the strategy—and this may require you to be very explicit about how individual and team responsibilities and expected outcomes directly support the broader aim—our experience tells us you will get much more out of them.

3. Ensure people understand “What's in it for me?” Make sure people understand what they as individual players will gain from organizational success. For example, achievement of the end goal could mean individuals will receive greater compensation, or the opportunity to take on motivating new challenges, or be able to save jobs that would otherwise be lost. Regardless of the payoff, the more tangible a picture you can convey, the more likely people will be engaged to pursue it.

4. Make big change incremental. You don't just “put a man on the moon” or “become a customer-centric organization.” Instead, when the challenge is complex or the greater vision is far from the current reality, you owe it to your people to help them see the journey as a series of manageable steps, with the most immediate step being short-term and achievable. This greatly increases the perception (and reality) of attainability and also fits with many people's natural desire to achieve quick wins.

5. When strategy changes, leaders need to change. New strategies inevitably require new leadership behaviors. These new behaviors must be carefully explored, consciously identified and put to use with open discussion of gaps between current leadership capabilities and those capabilities that will be required for future success. You can choose to resist change or to see the new strategy as a developmental inflection point for leaders including yourself. Remember, whichever path you choose, others will follow your lead. Making strategy personal always starts with *You*. **LE**

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ACTION: Make strategy personal.

