



Value in Strategic Planning | Extraordinary Business

So you have had your business for a number of years and you are successful for all intents and purposes. You have an excellent product, you have an active client base that purchases from you regularly. You know how and where to get new clients and how to keep the ones that you have. Your team is pretty stable; you have a low turnover rate. Question is: what is next?



Well, that is not necessarily an easy question to be able to

answer. While many businesses might take a gut-check approach, this is similar to the spaghetti marketing approach, wherein you try a bunch of things and see what sticks. It isn't very efficient and you are likely to have more successes than failures. This probably isn't the best approach.

Following the market has limited shelf life and often narrow profitability. You could attempt to do the same thing, but do it better, but without a full understanding of your costs, market expectations and what they are willing to pay – how they ascribe value, you may find that you are once again barking up the wrong tree.

Some companies try franchising and licensing. Others simply open additional locations or expand some other type of way. While these are certainly ways to grow, they all require significant investment in time and research in order to do them correctly. Even if you simply increase your company's capacity – the ability to produce more goods or services, or expand your reach and visibility through various business development techniques, without an understanding and a plan for how to respond to changes as they occur will put your company at risk.

The value in strategic planning is multi-faceted. While it may simply seem like a simple theoretical exercise, going through the process forces business leaders to look and think differently about their business and how it exists in the marketplace.

1. Strategic planning should provide you with market, competitor, industry and other intel so that you can discover opportunities that you may have not considered or address threats that you were unaware of.
1. Strategic planning will allow you to identify strategic advantages that you can use to grow your company. Imagine identifying an underserved market segment that needs what you are offering. How valuable is that? How valuable is being first to market for that market

segment?

1. Strategic planning will help you to see the big picture of your company. It will answer the question: if the demand for products and services increases by xyz%, the company will need to increase capacity by abc%. At the same time, there will be economies of scale the company can take advantage of, that will reduce costs by lmn%.
1. Strategic planning will force you to create a vision for where the Company is going that you can share with your stakeholders. Giving people a vision of where the Company is going and empowering them to individually contribute to that vision will increase loyalty, decrease turnover, inspire innovation and align your stakeholders with the goal.
1. Strategic planning will help make change more efficient. By exploring different opportunities, you will be able to see what to do, in what order to do it, what resources will be necessary, what pitfalls and threats exist and what synergies you might be able to take advantage of.

A company, not too long ago, was invited to begin the strategic planning process. While the process was under way, the leadership scoffed at it and decided to keep doing what they were doing. They expanded quickly to meet marketplace demand, hiring staff and making other investments.

Suddenly, they ran into trouble with delivering their offerings to their clients and maintaining client satisfaction. Clients began leaving faster than new clients were being brought in. The resulted in reduced revenue and reduced personal income for the leadership team. The leadership team began making last ditch efforts to go out and get no business, but had never developed a process nor the tools to do so, so finding new clients became increasingly difficult.

Worse, yet, they found that they had been allocating too many resources to their projects, over-promising and under-charging their clients, resulting in poor cash flow.

Had they walked through the strategic planning process, these items would have been addressed ahead of time and the leadership wouldn't have been reeling as a result of the changes that occurred. Furthermore, perhaps they wouldn't have lost or under-charged their clients. For them, the value of strategic planning would have been immeasurable and they would be a far larger company.

If your interest is in building or maintaining an extraordinary company, consider investing in strategic planning at your company.

Rick Meekins is the Managing Consultant at [Aepiphanni](#), the trusted advisor for business leaders who are seeking forward-thinking solutions to help them plan for and navigate through the challenges of business growth. Our entrepreneurial multidisciplinary team works with clients to develop differentiating solutions and provide direction focused on lasting, strategic results. We exist to help our clients CREATE | DESIGN | BUILD extraordinary businesses.

We would love to hear from you. Please share your thoughts and comments below. If you are seeking advice on how to grow your business, streamline systems and processes, implement software or overcoming challenges to growth, please contact us, directly or submit a request for a complimentary [Coffee & a Consult](#) to learn how we can help you CREATE | DESIGN | BUILD an [extraordinary](#) company.



Value in Strategic Planning | Extraordinary Business

So you have had your business for a number of years and you are successful for all intents and purposes. You have an excellent product, you have an active client base that purchases from you regularly. You know how and where to get new clients and how to keep the ones that you have. Your team is pretty stable; you have a low turnover rate.

Question is: what is next?

Well, that is not necessarily an easy question to be able to answer. While many businesses might take a gut-check approach, this is similar to the spaghetti marketing approach, wherein you try a bunch of things and see what sticks. It isn't very efficient and you are likely to have more successes than

failures. This probably isn't the best approach.

Following the market has limited shelf life and often narrow profitability. You could attempt to do the same thing, but do it better, but without a full understanding of your costs, market expectations and what they are willing to pay – how they ascribe value, you may find that you are once again barking up the wrong tree.

Some companies try franchising and licensing. Others simply open additional locations or expand some other type of way. While these are certainly ways to grow, they all require significant investment in time and research in order to do them correctly. Even if you simply increase your company's capacity – the ability to produce more goods or services, or expand your reach and visibility through various business development techniques, without an understanding and a plan for how to respond to changes as they occur will put your company at risk.

The value in strategic planning is multi-faceted. While it may simply seem like a simple theoretical exercise, going through the process forces business leaders to look and think differently about their business and how it exists in the marketplace.

1. Strategic planning should provide you with market, competitor, industry and other intel so that you can discover opportunities that you may have not considered or address threats that you were unaware of.
2. Strategic planning will allow you to identify strategic advantages that you can use to grow your company. Imagine identifying an underserved market segment that needs what you are offering. How valuable is that? How valuable is being first to market for that market segment?
3. Strategic planning will help you to see the big picture of your company. It will answer the question: if the

demand for products and services increases by xyz%, the company will need to increase capacity by abc%. At the same time, there will be economies of scale the company can take advantage of, that will reduce costs by lmn%.

4. Strategic planning will force you to create a vision for where the Company is going that you can share with your stakeholders. Giving people a vision of where the Company is going and empowering them to individually contribute to that vision will increase loyalty, decrease turnover, inspire innovation and align your stakeholders with the goal.
5. Strategic planning will help make change more efficient. By exploring different opportunities, you will be able to see what to do, in what order to do it, what resources will be necessary, what pitfalls and threats exist and what synergies you might be able to take advantage of.

A company, not too long ago, was invited to begin the strategic planning process. While the process was underway, the leadership scoffed at it and decided to keep doing what they were doing. They expanded quickly to meet marketplace demand, hiring staff and making other investments.

Suddenly, they ran into trouble with delivering their offerings to their clients and maintaining client satisfaction. Clients began leaving faster than new clients were being brought in. This resulted in reduced revenue and reduced personal income for the leadership team. The leadership team began making last-ditch efforts to go out and get no business but had never developed a process nor the tools to do so, so finding new clients became increasingly difficult.

Worse, yet, they found that they had been allocating too many resources to their projects, over-promising and under-charging their clients, resulting in poor cash flow.

Had they walked through the strategic planning process, these items would have been addressed ahead of time and the leadership wouldn't have been reeling as a result of the changes that occurred. Furthermore, perhaps they wouldn't have lost or under-charged their clients. For them, the value of strategic planning would have been immeasurable and they would be a far larger company.

If your interest is in building or maintaining an extraordinary company, consider investing in strategic planning at your company.

Rick Meekins is the Managing Consultant at [Aepiphanni](#), the trusted advisor for business leaders who are seeking forward-thinking solutions to help them plan for and navigate through the challenges of business growth. Our entrepreneurial multidisciplinary team works with clients to develop differentiating solutions and provide direction focused on lasting, strategic results. We exist to help our clients CREATE | DESIGN | BUILD extraordinary businesses.

We would love to hear from you. Please share your thoughts and comments below. If you are seeking advice on how to grow your business, streamline systems and processes, implement software or overcoming challenges to growth, please contact us, directly or submit a request for a complimentary [Coffee & a Consult](#) to learn how we can help you CREATE | DESIGN | BUILD an [extraordinary](#) company.



Grow From Here to Success

How to make sure your business has everything it needs to grow

When I was a younger guy, whenever I would get a gadget, while I might have enjoyed it, I always thought about what the toy will be like in the future, perhaps with the same anticipation as many people have about the next generation of mobile technology. One of the things that always bothered me was the question of why things weren't designed to be used with the next generation of products.

For example, with a computer, you might be able to upgrade the amount of memory, how fast it runs, and swap out different components, but yesterday's computer probably may not be able

to run tomorrow's software as effectively as tomorrow's computer will. Yesterday's computer lacks true forward compatibility.

From a producer perspective, a producer could probably get consumers to believe that there are huge changes in the same old product in a different box and sell it again – every year in some cases. This, of course, is what drives revenue. But I digress...

The Problem

As a business owner, the question begs to be asked: how have you designed your company for the future? I don't mean – how have you thought about it, or what kind of planning have you done, but rather, what are the actual activities or tactical decisions you have made that will prepare the company as it grows toward the future.

For example, with your accounting system: do you have a formal accounting or financial management process that goes beyond collecting all of your receipts, dumping them in a shoe box along with bank statements and handing them to your bookkeeper each month/quarter/year/whenever you think about it? Do you think that there might be better ways to manage your finances so that you can see how your company is performing at any given time? In doing so, don't you think it would be easier to hand off financial management as your company grows?

Of course. At the end of the day, it will probably cost you a lot less to keep things organized, help you understand where your cash is going and where you might need to cut back or invest. Poor management is one of the top reasons small businesses fail.

The Solution

1. Start with your company vision – where you want your

company to go. Is it a single location with 100 employees, or multiple locations with offices both domestically and internationally?

2. Develop a mission – why you do what you do. Your mission will help to dictate how you get to the vision and will keep you and your decision-making on track
3. Develop a plan to get there – use stages and start very high level, then
4. Look at the components of your business – sales, marketing, finance, products and services, Human Resources, management and IT – and determine what these will look like at each stage.
5. Determine what resources will be required to support each function at each level.

Look, for example, at business management – how to manage the business. One of the things that has plagued small businesses is the idea that not all software solutions play well together. So we would end up with an email service that doesn't communicate with the CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system, which doesn't talk to the bookkeeping system, none of which interact well with the marketing system. Ideally, they should all play nicely together so that those using the system don't have to update five systems manually in order to get an idea of what the big picture looks like!

So in planning for the future, we would want to have a system that either has native integration between the systems (they are all built into one solution), have a tool custom built that will enable all of the systems to work together or use an online service that will do the same.

In any case, when a business is young and has very few contacts and things can be done manually, it doesn't seem to be a top priority for the business. However, when the business is in a growth stage, it can sometimes be too late or very expensive to make the necessary changes...which can be the case with each component of the business.

So if you are planning on building a business that is extraordinary, think in terms of where your business is going, versus staying completely focused on where it is. Sure – you will need to take one step at a time and not tie up all of your resources in assets that you cannot use. Rather think strategically – in terms of how the business will operate the most efficiently at each stage and plan for it as you invest and grow.

Rick Meekins is the Managing Consultant at [Aepiphanni](#), a Business Consultancy that provides Management Consulting, Implementation and Managed Services to business leaders and entrepreneurs seeking to improve or expand operations. We are the trusted advisor for business leaders who are seeking forward-thinking solutions to help them plan for and navigate through the challenges of business growth. Our entrepreneurial multidisciplinary team works with clients to develop differentiating solutions and provide direction focused on lasting, strategic results. We exist to help our clients CREATE | DESIGN | BUILD extraordinary businesses.

We would love to hear from you. Please share your thoughts and comments below. If you are seeking advice on how to grow your business, streamline systems and processes, implement software or overcoming challenges to growth, please contact us, directly or submit a request for a complimentary [Coffee & a Consult](#) to learn how we can help you CREATE | DESIGN | BUILD an [extraordinary](#) company..

[Share](#) |

Fearless | Extraordinary Business

Noting your greatest fears and moving forward anyway.

Starting a new company is not for the faint of heart. As a matter of fact, many entrepreneurs including myself could probably tell you many stories that might shake you to your core if you are unfamiliar with the landscape. The risks are high, there are many unknowns, the demands can be crushing and the work endless. But people do it every day...and many do it again.



An interesting quote by Malcolm McLaren, below, speaks of being fearless of failure.

What matters is this: Being fearless of failure arms you to break the rules. In doing so, you may change the culture and just possibly, for a moment, change life itself.

-Malcolm McLaren

In business, our goal is to sell whatever product or service we feel the market will purchase, and do it enough to build a sustainable company. In doing so, there are several types of people:

- those that pave their own way – breaking the rules – in order to do something that is extraordinary,
- those that scramble on top of the hard work of others in order to cash in on a market in demand, often with something cheaper or of inferior quality – or perhaps less often, with marginal improvements at an equal or slightly higher price.
- The last type of person is the one who simply follows the rules. They follow the market and sell more of what everyone else is selling with no real change or improvements, perhaps because it is safe, or perhaps because it is just the way things are done.

One might suggest that it is the first – the one that paves their own way that are the ones that understand the fear and proceed anyway. If we think about some of the most successful companies in the world, that is precisely what they did: Bill Gates decided that computers could be small enough to fit on peoples' desks and that everyone could have one. Other companies scoffed at the idea; IBM thought it was a fad that would go away. Several years ago, someone began to talk about wearable tech – a relatively new industry that resulted in someone simply breaking the rules. Now we have products like sport watches, POV cameras, smart watches, headphones and other products.

Rule breakers.

So what rules will you break? What chances might you take to start a new movement, new industry or way of doing things? Will it be in your marketing or the way that you sell or in the people you hire? Will you embrace your fear and build something extraordinary?

We hope so.

Rick Meekins is the Managing Consultant at [Aepiphanni](#), the

trusted advisor for business leaders who are seeking forward-thinking solutions to help them plan for and navigate through the challenges of business growth. Our entrepreneurial multidisciplinary team works with clients to develop differentiating solutions and provide direction focused on lasting, strategic results. We exist to help our clients CREATE | DESIGN | BUILD extraordinary businesses.

We would love to hear from you. Please share your thoughts and comments below. If you are seeking advice on how to grow your business, streamline systems and processes, implement software or overcoming challenges to growth, please contact us, directly or submit a request for a complimentary [Coffee & a Consult](#) to learn how we can help you CREATE | DESIGN | BUILD an [extraordinary](#) company..

[Share](#) |



Fearless

Noting your greatest fears and moving forward anyway

Starting a new company is not for the faint of heart. As a matter of fact, many entrepreneurs including myself could probably tell you many stories that might shake you to your core if you are unfamiliar with the landscape. The risks are high, there are many unknowns, the demands can be crushing and the work endless. But people do it every day...and many do it again.

An interesting quote by Malcolm McLaren, below, speaks of being fearless of failure.

What matters is this: Being fearless of failure arms you to break the rules. In doing so, you may change the culture and just possibly, for a moment, change life itself.

-Malcolm McLaren

In business, our goal is to sell whatever product or service we feel the market will purchase, and do it enough to build a sustainable company. In doing so, there are several types of people:

- those that pave their own way – breaking the rules – in order to do something that is extraordinary
- those that scramble on top of the hard work of others in order to cash in on a market in demand, often with something cheaper or of inferior quality – or perhaps less often, with marginal improvements at an equal or slightly higher price.
- The last type of person is the one who simply follows

the rules. They follow the market and sell more of what everyone else is selling with no real change or improvements, perhaps because it is safe, or perhaps because it is just the way things are done.

One might suggest that it is the first – the one that paves their own way that are the ones that understand the fear and proceed anyway. If we think about some of the most successful companies in the world, that is precisely what they did: Bill Gates decided that computers could be small enough to fit on peoples' desks and that everyone could have one. Other companies scoffed at the idea; IBM thought it was a fad that would go away. Several years ago, someone began to talk about wearable tech – a relatively new industry that resulted in someone simply breaking the rules. Now we have products like sport watches, POV cameras, smart watches, headphones and other products.

Rule breakers.

So what rules will you break? What chances might you take to start a new movement, new industry or way of doing things? Will it be in your marketing or the way that you sell or in the people you hire? Will you embrace your fear and build something extraordinary?

We hope so.

Rick Meekins is the Managing Consultant at [Aepiphanni](#), a Business Consultancy that provides Management Consulting, Implementation and Managed Services to business leaders and entrepreneurs seeking to improve or expand operations. We are the trusted advisor to those seeking forward-thinking operational and strategic solutions to help them plan for and navigate through the challenges of business growth.

If you are ready to discuss how Aepiphanni can help you with business strategy, overcoming challenges to growth or any number of business solutions for your business, whether a

small, growing or established company, contact us directly or submit a request for a complimentary [Coffee & a Consult](#) to learn how we can help you CREATE | DESIGN | BUILD an Extraordinary company.

[Share](#) |

Stone Faced | Extraordinary Business

How to make sure that you are doing the things it takes to grow your company

Growing your company – or any business, requires change. But that change has to enable the company to move toward a specific goal. Beyond creating a strategic plan, doing more marketing, advertising, hiring great people, here are seven things that you have to do:



“But this is what we have always done!” is a comment that probably resonates with a lot of people. Especially those who have created processes and systems and invested a lot of time and energy into certain activities. Some might call it the “comfortable spot” while others might harbor on “what if change is wrong?”

Here's the thing: there may be some things that do get you, as a business leader, the results you are looking for every time. Every day, your results are hit out of the ballpark and you couldn't be more thrilled. But that doesn't mean a) you shouldn't evaluate it to see if it could be done *better*. or b) there aren't other ways to accomplish the same thing *faster, better and at a lower cost!*

Here's what happens: while you are sitting back, proud of your accomplishments, your competitor comes across this technology that you have ignored, incorporated it into their business and is now taking away your customers. This means that your cost to do business suddenly increases because a) it costs you more to get and keep customers and b) lower revenue means that you may have to resort to doing things like lowering your prices, offering extreme discounts or increasing the cost of your offering – each of which makes it harder to cover your monthly fixed costs.

Yow. Insult and injury? Check.

Growth requires change. That is foundational. If you want to grow from a child to an adult, you will go through change. If you want to grow a plant, it will change. If you want to grow a business, *it requires change!* Being stuck doing the same thing day in and day out without much change, without much forethought, being reactive with your decision-making will not result in the type of company you want to have.

Here is what I am thinking – generalizations about your company and why you are in business:

- Your goal is to build a successful, sustainable (not on life support) company that allows you to have a certain lifestyle, to reach some level of power or notoriety or to simply provide some exchange of value to businesses, consumers or the communities so that you can feel good about it while keeping food on your table.

- You probably don't want to be "self-employed," meaning that your company and your customers run you. You would rather be running your company so that if you take days or weeks off for whatever reason, you can continue the business when you return, either because employees have been running it or because your customers will be there when you return..
- You probably don't want to work until you fall over. While it that might be attractive to some, there are probably some negative outcomes there.
- You probably believe that the harder you work, the greater your returns will be. Better said, perhaps, if you don't work, you won't accomplish anything. You can work yourself crazy, but if you aren't doing the right things, you won't accomplish anything. Promise.

Here is the question: what kinds of things – strategically thinking – are you doing to ensure that you are running the type of company you truly want to run? Certainly, there are everyday things you are probably doing, thinking in terms of finding new customers: making or overseeing production, networking, developing content, advertising, developing new products or offers, etc.; but to what end? Where do all of these things lead? Is it more of the same: "fishin' in the same hole" with the same or fewer results as more people enter the pond?" or are you thinking about how to move up the channel to fresher waters.

In growing your company, you will need to have a one track mind – be stone-faced, and embrace the idea that growing your company requires diligent, strategic change. You and your team need to understand where you are, why you do what you do and where you are going.

"I am in Georgia. I want to visit my family. I must travel to New Jersey."

If that is my goal, the activities that I do must contribute to getting to that goal. Anything that I do outside of it will deter me from the goal. If I don't plan my route, jump in a vehicle and head northward and eastward, I could end up anywhere from Ohio to anywhere along the Eastern seaboard. If I don't make sure I have enough cash or reliable transportation (resources), I could end up stuck halfway.

"Who builds a tower without first determining the cost?" – King Solomon of Israel

On the other end of the spectrum, if I get stuck in planning and thinking mode, I will never move. So I have to have a happy medium and get moving. Quickly. Stone-faced.

So, how do you make sure that everything that you are doing is focused growing your company? Here are seven things that you will want to do.

1. Make growing your company very intentional. Set aside time, regularly, daily or weekly, to focus on growing your company. The more time you can contribute without hurting your organization, the better.
2. Embrace a culture of innovation..not just in yourself, but with your entire team. Find ways to motivate them to contribute, authentically, on every level.
3. Make sure that your mission, vision and values are memorable, relatable, understandable, potent and practical. If nobody gets it, if no one remembers it, if no one can understand it, it is useless. Throw it out and start over.
4. Make sure that you and everyone in your company not only *knows*, but *embraces*, your company's belief statements: its mission, vision and values. To quote G.I. Joe – knowing is half the battle! (Doing is the other)
5. Evaluate what you are doing/selling/offering/producing. Repeatedly. On a schedule if necessary. Get feedback

from everywhere: your customers/clients, from employees and other stakeholders. Look at things, yourself. How can this be better? Does it provide value for customers? other stakeholders? Can it be improved? Can it be done less expensively without compromising on quality or value?

6. Always be innovating. Not innovating for the sake of innovative, but rather, to achieve a specific goal. For example, if your mission is to provide a best in class experience for your guests, through all of the tactics listed above, you will constantly be learning how to make things better. If you don't, someone else will.
7. Stay on task. If you think about the stone monuments around the world, they face one direction and don't change, which how you need to be with your growth goals. Activities that deviate from your goal will only slow your progress. Your failure to stay on task may mean that you never arrive at your destination. If something in the environment changes, make your adjustment and get back on course.

Growth doesn't happen by accident. Only a very small percentage of businesses are "lucky." Those that aren't lucky will require stone-faced focus on where they want to go and an undying commitment to get there.

Rick Meekins is the Managing Consultant at [Aepiphanni Business Consulting](#) an Operations & Strategy Consulting Firm dedicated helping business leaders CREATE | DESIGN | BUILD extraordinary businesses. For nine years, we have helped our clients create and pursue [extraordinary](#) goals for their companies, by leveraging what they already do and strengthening their marketing & sales, product delivery, productivity and financial management.

We would love to hear from you. Please share your thoughts and comments below. If you are seeking to take your business to the next level, we would love to meet with you to discuss

your plans. Please join us for a [Coffee & a Consult](#) to learn how we can help you move your company from existing to extraordinary.

[Share](#) |

Stone Faced | Extraordinary Business

How to make sure that you are doing the things it takes to grow your company

Growing your company – or any business, requires change. But that change has to enable the company to move toward a specific goal. Beyond creating a strategic plan, doing more marketing, advertising, hiring great people, here are seven things that you have to do:



“But this is what we have always done!” is a comment that probably resonates with a lot of people. Especially those who have created processes and systems and invested a lot of time and energy into certain activities. Some might call it the “comfortable spot” while others might harbor on “what if change is wrong?”

Here’s the thing: there may be some things that do get you, as

a business leader, the results you are looking for every time. Every day, your results are hit out of the ballpark and you couldn't be more thrilled. But that doesn't mean a) you shouldn't evaluate it to see if it could be done *better*. or b) there aren't other ways to accomplish the same thing *faster, better and at a lower cost!*

Here's what happens: while you are sitting back, proud of your accomplishments, your competitor comes across this technology that you have ignored, incorporated it into their business and is now taking away your customers. This means that your cost to do business suddenly increases because a) it costs you more to get and keep customers and b) lower revenue means that you may have to resort to doing things like lowering your prices, offering extreme discounts or increasing the cost of your offering – each of which makes it harder to cover your monthly fixed costs.

Yow. Insult and injury? Check.

Growth requires change. That is foundational. If you want to grow from a child to an adult, you will go through change. If you want to grow a plant, it will change. If you want to grow a business, *it requires change!* Being stuck doing the same thing day in and day out without much change, without much forethought, being reactive with your decision-making will not result in the type of company you want to have.

Here is what I am thinking – generalizations about your company and why you are in business:

- Your goal is to build a successful, sustainable (not on life support) company that allows you to have a certain lifestyle, to reach some level of power or notoriety or to simply provide some exchange of value to businesses, consumers or the communities so that you can feel good about it while keeping food on your table.
- You probably don't want to be "self-employed," meaning

that your company and your customers run you. You would rather be running your company so that if you take days or weeks off for whatever reason, you can continue the business when you return, either because employees have been running it or because your customers will be there when you return..

- You probably don't want to work until you fall over. While it that might be attractive to some, there are probably some negative outcomes there.
- You probably believe that the harder you work, the greater your returns will be. Better said, perhaps, if you don't work, you won't accomplish anything. You can work yourself crazy, but if you aren't doing the right things, you won't accomplish anything. Promise.

Here is the question: what kinds of things – strategically thinking – are you doing to ensure that you are running the type of company you truly want to run? Certainly, there are everyday things you are probably doing, thinking in terms of finding new customers: making or overseeing production, networking, developing content, advertising, developing new products or offers, etc.; but to what end? Where do all of these things lead? Is it more of the same: “fishin’ in the same hole” with the same or fewer results as more people enter the pond?” or are you thinking about how to move up the channel to fresher waters.

In growing your company, you will need to have a one track mind – be stone-faced, and embrace the idea that growing your company requires diligent, strategic change. You and your team need to understand where you are, why you do what you do and where you are going.

“I am in Georgia. I want to visit my family. I must travel to New Jersey.”

If that is my goal, the activities that I do must contribute

to getting to that goal. Anything that I do outside of it will deter me from the goal. If I don't plan my route, jump in a vehicle and head northward and eastward, I could end up anywhere from Ohio to anywhere along the Eastern seaboard. If I don't make sure I have enough cash or reliable transportation (resources), I could end up stuck halfway.

"Who builds a tower without first determining the cost?" – King Solomon of Israel

On the other end of the spectrum, if I get stuck in planning and thinking mode, I will never move. So I have to have a happy medium and get moving. Quickly. Stone-faced.

So, how do you make sure that everything that you are doing is focused growing your company? Here are seven things that you will want to do.

1. Make growing your company very intentional. Set aside time, regularly, daily or weekly, to focus on growing your company. The more time you can contribute without hurting your organization, the better.
2. Embrace a culture of innovation..not just in yourself, but with your entire team. Find ways to motivate them to contribute, authentically, on every level.
3. Make sure that your mission, vision and values are memorable, relatable, understandable, potent and practical. If nobody gets it, if no one remembers it, if no one can understand it, it is useless. Throw it out and start over.
4. Make sure that you and everyone in your company not only *knows*, but *embraces*, your company's belief statements: its mission, vision and values. To quote G.I. Joe – knowing is half the battle! (Doing is the other)
5. Evaluate what you are doing/selling/offering/producing. Repeatedly. On a schedule if necessary. Get feedback from everywhere: your customers/clients, from employees

and other stakeholders. Look at things, yourself. How can this be better? Does it provide value for customers? other stakeholders? Can it be improved? Can it be done less expensively without compromising on quality or value?

6. Always be innovating. Not innovating for the sake of innovative, but rather, to achieve a specific goal. For example, if your mission is to provide a best in class experience for your guests, through all of the tactics listed above, you will constantly be learning how to make things better. If you don't, someone else will.
7. Stay on task. If you think about the stone monuments around the world, they face one direction and don't change, which how you need to be with your growth goals. Activities that deviate from your goal will only slow your progress. Your failure to stay on task may mean that you never arrive at your destination. If something in the environment changes, make your adjustment and get back on course.

Growth doesn't happen by accident. Only a very small percentage of businesses are "lucky." Those that aren't lucky will require stone-faced focus on where they want to go and an undying commitment to get there.

Rick Meekins is the Managing Consultant at [Aepiphanni Business Consulting](#) an

Operations & Strategy Consulting Firm dedicated helping business leaders CREATE | DESIGN | BUILD extraordinary businesses. For nine years, we have helped our clients create and pursue [extraordinary](#) goals for their companies, by leveraging what they already do and strengthening their marketing & sales, product delivery, productivity and financial management.

We would love to hear from you. Please share your thoughts and comments below. If you are seeking to take your business to the next level, we would love to meet with you to discuss

your plans. Please join us for a [Coffee & a Consult](#) to learn how we can help you move your company from existing to extraordinary.

[Share](#) |

Two for Tea? | Extraordinary Business

Considerations for successful strategic partnerships

Have you ever noticed or read about companies such as Google, HP and Facebook and their ability to simply consume smaller companies, seemingly for their technology or other resources? These acquisitions are often in the millions, if not billions of dollars. Oddly, in some cases, it doesn't seem as though the parent company is much better off – which, unfortunately, is often the case.



The truth is, just like starting a business, most of the time when two companies merge, under whatever circumstances, neither company is better off as a result. Inc. Magazine reports in an article that a third of Google's acquisitions have failed. Forbes reports about the [failure of HP's recent acquisition of Autonomy](#); one would think that a company of this size, achieving its status through acquisitions, would

have expertise with the process, as Cisco Systems has demonstrated.

As a business leader, you probably realize that there are two ways to expand your capabilities in the marketplace – grow it at home or go fishing for it. While growing it at home will ensure that the product conforms to the way that your company operates, a company that is already delivering the solution may be appealing because they typically have expertise in delivery and a market that they are selling to.

A strategic partnership – in its true sense – allows your company and your strategic partner to benefit from a shared vision to deliver a product (service) to the marketplace that combines both of your expertise. It would be like a private school working with an internet broadcasting company to offer online home school. Both companies would benefit as a result of the partnership.

The challenge, it seems, finding the company to work with that will be a great partner for your company. It goes back to the saying, “just because it looks and quacks like a duck doesn’t mean it is a duck.” A company that appears, on the surface, to be a good strategic partner may not share your vision, which may result in a lopsided partnership that only benefits one company or the other. This can be the foundation for everything that goes wrong in the partnership.

Like in Mergers and Acquisitions (M&A), there are a number of factors which you will want to take into consideration as you are building the relationship:

1. Share the vision – both companies need to have a shared vision for what the goals and outcomes of the partnership should be. Here is the thing – that means that all cards must be on the table, and you must be honest with one another. If communications fail, the partnership will fail. If vision isn’t united, walk

away.

2. Be realistic – there may be a great opportunity to work together, but as mentioned, there is a great chance that the relationship could fail. You need to determine how much you can afford to invest (read – are willing to lose) into the partnership. If you cannot commit enough for the partnership to work, walk away.
3. Set your framework – Your framework, for all intents and purposes, your framework defines what you need to accomplish and under what parameters they can be accomplished. You are thinking strategically about your business; your new partnership needs to contribute to your company strategy. There will be all kinds of opportunities that will take your eye off the goal – which could potentially put you into a place where you are unfamiliar, which could ultimately lead to your failure.
4. Be committed – Certainly – life and business continue, and you typically can't get off the bus for a little while to work on the partnership. However, if you wish to accomplish something, you must move, intently, toward making it happen. At the same time, you need to get that from your partner. Keep in mind that different personalities have different “paces.” Answer for yourself “can I work with this person?”
5. Exit strategy – know under what circumstances you will need to walk away. This might look like a revenue, profit, product delivery, market reach or any number of criteria. This goes back to understanding the risk. One activity that continues to make businesses impact personal lives is when business leaders don't know when to retrench, take a step back, then move forward with a more strategic approach.
6. Have an agreement – While the legal community would call it a CYA policy (Cover Your Assets) – which it may contain, having an understanding of roles and expectations written down provides accountability to

each company to a) provide structure and b) to help to measure the success of the venture.

7. Plan to learn – success or failure of the engagement will provide an opportunity to learn more about your competencies, refining your capabilities as a strategic partner and refining your ability to choose a great partner.

Strategic partnerships can be extremely beneficial to helping your company expand capabilities and increase market share. They shouldn't ever be gone into haphazardly. As an [extraordinary](#) company, finding new ways to serve and reach your market is your primary goal and responsibility.

[Aepiphanni Business Consulting: The Business Strategy People](#) is an Atlanta, Georgia based Operations Management and Business Strategy Consulting Firm dedicated to serving the needs of small to medium sized business leaders. We help business leaders DESIGN | CREATE | BUILD extraordinary businesses. We support our clients with financial management, product and service production and delivery, outsourced services management, sales & marketing and business growth. We provide them with a number of flexible solutions to help them reach their goals.

Join us for a [Coffee & a Consult](#), to learn more about Aepiphanni and how we might help you move your company from existing to extraordinary.

[Share](#) |

Technorati Tags: strategic partners,partnership,strategy,vision,extraordinary busienss

Two for Tea? | Extraordinary Business

Considerations for successful strategic partnerships

Have you ever noticed or read about companies such as Google, HP and Facebook and their ability to simply consume smaller companies, seemingly for their technology or other resources? These acquisitions are often in the millions, if not billions of dollars. Oddly, in some cases, it doesn't seem as though the parent company is much better off – which, unfortunately, is often the case.



The truth is, just like starting a business, most of the time when two companies merge, under whatever circumstances, neither company is better off as a result. Inc. Magazine reports in an article that a third of Google's acquisitions have failed. Forbes reports about the [failure of HP's recent acquisition of Autonomy](#); one would think that a company of this size, achieving its status through acquisitions, would have expertise with the process, as Cisco Systems has demonstrated.

As a business leader, you probably realize that there are two ways to expand your capabilities in the marketplace – grow it at home or go fishing for it. While growing it at home will ensure that the product conforms to the way that your company operates, a company that is already delivering the solution may be appealing because they typically have expertise in delivery and a market that they are selling to.

A strategic partnership – in its true sense – allows your

company and your strategic partner to benefit from a shared vision to deliver a product (service) to the marketplace that combines both of your expertise. It would be like a private school working with an internet broadcasting company to offer online home school. Both companies would benefit as a result of the partnership.

The challenge, it seems, finding the company to work with that will be a great partner for your company. It goes back to the saying, "just because it looks and quacks like a duck doesn't mean it is a duck." A company that appears, on the surface, to be a good strategic partner may not share your vision, which may result in a lopsided partnership that only benefits one company or the other. This can be the foundation for everything that goes wrong in the partnership.

Like in Mergers and Acquisitions (M&A), there are a number of factors which you will want to take into consideration as you are building the relationship:

1. Share the vision – both companies need to have a shared vision for what the goals and outcomes of the partnership should be. Here is the thing – that means that all cards must be on the table, and you must be honest with one another. If communications fail, the partnership will fail. If vision isn't united, walk away.
2. Be realistic – there may be a great opportunity to work together, but as mentioned, there is a great chance that the relationship could fail. You need to determine how much you can afford to invest (read – are willing to lose) into the partnership. If you cannot commit enough for the partnership to work, walk away.
3. Set your framework – Your framework, for all intents and purposes, your framework defines what you need to accomplish and under what parameters they can be accomplished. You are thinking strategically about your business; your new partnership needs to contribute to your company strategy. There will be all kinds of

opportunities that will take your eye off the goal – which could potentially put you into a place where you are unfamiliar, which could ultimately lead to your failure.

4. Be committed – Certainly – life and business continue, and you typically can't get off the bus for a little while to work on the partnership. However, if you wish to accomplish something, you must move, intently, toward making it happen. At the same time, you need to get that from your partner. Keep in mind that different personalities have different "paces." Answer for yourself "can I work with this person?"
5. Exit strategy – know under what circumstances you will need to walk away. This might look like a revenue, profit, product delivery, market reach or any number of criteria. This goes back to understanding the risk. One activity that continues to make businesses impact personal lives is when business leaders don't know when to retrench, take a step back, then move forward with a more strategic approach.
6. Have an agreement – While the legal community would call it a CYA policy (Cover Your Assets) – which it may contain, having an understanding of roles and expectations written down provides accountability to each company to a) provide structure and b) to help to measure the success of the venture.
7. Plan to learn – success or failure of the engagement will provide an opportunity to learn more about your competencies, refining your capabilities as a strategic partner and refining your ability to choose a great partner.

Strategic partnerships can be extremely beneficial to helping your company expand capabilities and increase market share. They shouldn't ever be gone into haphazardly. As an [extraordinary](#) company, finding new ways to serve and reach your market is your primary goal and responsibility.

[Aepiphanni Business Consulting: The Business Strategy People](#) is an Atlanta, Georgia based Operations Management and Business Strategy Consulting Firm dedicated to serving the needs of small to medium sized business leaders. We help business leaders DESIGN | CREATE | BUILD extraordinary businesses. We support our clients with financial management, product and service production and delivery, outsourced services management, sales & marketing and business growth. We provide them with a number of flexible solutions to help them reach their goals.

Join us for a [Coffee & a Consult](#), to learn more about Aepiphanni and how we might help you move your company from existing to extraordinary.

[Share](#) |

Technorati

Tags:

strategic

partners,partnership,strategy,vision,extraordinary busienss