

Excellence. NO EXCUSES!

Excerpt:

EXECUTION

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Overdoing “Strategy” Per Se/Dealing (in the Real World) With Strategic Disruption

“Amateurs talk about strategy. Professionals talk about logistics.”—General Omar Bradley

Great 12/28/13 *Financial Times* book review: *Britain Against Napoleon: The Organization of Victory*. Chalk up the win as due to superior management/logistics.

Former McKinsey MD to team, on over-emphasizing strategy: ***“Don’t forget the implementation part, boys. It’s that all-important ‘last 99%.’”***

Jack Welch on “strategy”: “Pick a general direction and then implement like hell.”

TP: Could we call it WTFWUT* rather than “strategy”? [*WhatThe F*** We’re Up To] Strategy is too grand a word for me.

Glen Taylor: “Like sports—your competitors already know your strategy Success = focus on execution needed to win.”

Clay Christensen [and his obsession with disruption] be damned; message for you and me: **FIRST**, get so frigging good at something that you have reason to worry about being disrupted.

If you spend your life worrying about disruption, you won’t have time to get good enough at anything worth disrupting.

*“Amateurs
talk about
strategy.
Professionals
talk about
logistics.”*

—General Omar Bradley

Conrad Hilton, at a gala celebrating his career, was called to the podium and asked, *“What were the most important lessons you learned in your long and distinguished career?”*

His answer (**in full!**) ...

*“Remember to tuck the shower curtain inside the bathtub.”**

*You get 'em in the door with “location, location, location.” You keep 'em coming back with the tucked-in shower curtain. (NB: Profit rarely comes from visit/transaction #1; it is a byproduct of coming back/transaction #2, #3, #4 ... #44.)

(FYI: I usually start **ALL** my presentations with Mr. Hilton and the shower curtain—and the abiding centrality of execution.)

“In real life, strategy is actually very straightforward. Pick a general direction ... and implement like hell.” —Jack Welch

(“When assessing candidates, the first thing I looked for was energy and enthusiasm for execution. Does she talk about the thrill of getting things done, the obstacles overcome, the role her people played—or does she keep wandering back to strategy or philosophy?”—Larry Bossidy)

*“Costco figured out
the big, simple things
... and
executed with
total
fanaticism.”*

—Charles Munger, Berkshire Hathaway

The “Vision Thing”: Problems Therewith

Royster: “Being good at the bare substance of a job has little 2 do with leading people. Need vision + skills.”

And, frankly, if I were forced to choose between the two ...
I’d put skills 1st.

Royster: “‘I’d put skills 1st.’ At first blush I’m surprised!”

Leadership, like most everything, has discrete components—helping/listening/MBWA/hiring/promoting/evaluating/etc. Master these & you’re 80 yards down the field.

In addition to prior tweet, I’d add that I think “vision” is overrated. E.g., I have no idea what it means.

David D’Souza: “Vision? I see it when people lack it.”

“Somethin’ we really really give a shit about” is great by me. But “vision” has always struck me as woo woo.

David D’Souza: “You genuinely only miss vision when it’s not there. If you have any then achieving it matters more.”

Well, I’m a babe of 71. Maybe I’ll find that vision one of these days.

Goin’ for a walk right now. Gonna overturn every rock lookin’ for that vision. I’ll give you a report.

Tim Walker: "...as opposed to getting mired in shorter-term details to the expense of the longer term."

I worry about getting mired in the long term and shortchanging Execution Fanaticism.

**“IMHO,” the #1 secret to [big] success is ...
SURPRISE. Get goin’ and see
what pops up. Great ... FUN.**

**Speak, please, for yourself. I believe in
getting mired in the
present, figure out what I
think later.**

**What part of “No” don’t you understand? Some things
I “really really really give a shit about”? Yes! “Vision”?
Whatthefbethat?**

**On The Ball Theory (Twitter I.D.): If you don’t call it vision, what’s appropriate?
Future state? Goal? Objective? Isn’t some target required?”**

Don't ask me. I'm only **71.**

Robert Kopacz: **“Vision is something invented by consultants, for consultants. Has little to do w/reality of running a biz.”**

Jeffrey Cufaude: **“No idea what vision means? A concise and compelling description of the future you want to create.”**

I believe the most successful individuals and orgs embrace change and make it up along the way.

Stephen Denny: **“Never sure about ‘vision’--always been a huge fan of ‘having a point of view,’ tho. Brands/co’s are dynamic, moving things.”**

Poifect, bro!

Jeffrey Cufaude: **“Agree, but along the way to what? That’s the vision, the end of the journey you’re making up.”**

100% disagree: **Have no idea where where is 'til we muddle around and get there by which time where will have moved to elsewhere.**

Passionate invigorating contagious point of view? 100 times yes! Vision? Thanks but no thanks.

Jeffrey Cufaude: “Disagree back 100%. Without some initial destination, individual talent will wander all over.”

Then we indeed will have to disagree to disagree 100%.

Speaking personally, I have never had a goal and am appalled by the very idea.

Look, let’s boil it down. I’m passionate about excellence and wow but it ain’t no vision. I simply despise the word vision.

Jeffrey Cufaude: “I thought @tom_peters had a vision of a world where excellence & Wow mattered. Apparently, he doesn’t believe in the value of vision at all.”

Why does it have to be a vision? “Vision” to me is mystical woo-woo for which consultants charge a bloody fortune.

Nimish Dubey: “The problem with ‘vision’ is that it is **patronizing by nature**. Reeks of ‘I can see something you cannot’ superiority.”

Jeffrey Cufaude: “I respectfully suggest that this is baggage you have with a term that for others carries great meaning and utility.”

Fair enough.

Spent several hours handcutting brush today. Mini-project inventing itself as it unfolds. I think I just like doin' stuff and mucky hands. I am **(very)** bloody but **(very)** content.

F.A. Hayek & I are on same page. His term describing

capitalism: **“spontaneous
discovery process.”**

Sends chills down my spine!

I don't think I hate “vision” as much as Peter Drucker hated “charisma.” Ah, “charismatic visionary.”

PJ: “Risks tarring all with one brush, perhaps? Many small businesses need a hand with vision, since ‘differently-abled.’”

If they are restaurant owners, they mostly need help with cleaning the loo.

Way back when, when I started my biz, I mostly needed help at 1AM when the Xerox machine went kaplooeey. (Client presentation @ 7AM.)

“Vision Thing”: Part II

Rather than pontificate about a “vision,” I'd prefer to offer clients grubby, do-today suggestions that don't smack of scaling Everest: **“Just get goin'” is my mantra.**

My “vision”: Excellence is NOT an “aspiration.” Excellence IS the next five minutes. Or NOT.

Re “vision”: NOTHING on earth matters to me except the quality and intensity of my effort in the next fifteen minutes.

GM: “I think ‘start with why’ rather than how or what is a good approach.”

I, on the other hand, think ... **start with start.** “Why” is an emergent property.

**Earthshaking goals ...
EMERGE. They are
rarely pre-ordained.**

Re “vision”: I just discovered my signature McKinsey project has lasted 37 yrs. so far. **Never occurred to us it'd live to the end of the month!**

The best news was the total surprise that the game has lasted 37 years

GM: “Can’t disagree; it’s easier to turn a moving car, but till u know why, you’re just a hamster.”

That’s extreme. I’m with Jack Welch, “Pick a general direction, then implement like hell.”

I go toward ... something. But it's the doing per se that defines the project. Best world: End up some place you couldn't have imagined.

Clever Trout (Twitter I.D.): "Understand the theory, but doesn't this lead in practice to short-term ONLY thinking? Ex: managing to qtr numbers only."

I'm not CEO of a giant company. And those guys only employ 5% of us. Live for the day--best work imaginable.

A "vision" disconnected with everyday reality "in the trenches" is far worse than no vision at all.

“Vision Thing”/Part III: A Heated Exchange

Shelley Watson: “Undirected effort w/o a purpose seems wasteful. Why not vision & effective, quality work as a pair? I wouldn’t use one w/o other.”

That’s a binary choice. Not “undirected.” Jack Welch: “general direction.”
**“General direction” is far less intimidating than
“vision.”**

“Headin’ thisaway” is just fine. But grandiose “vision” is too constraining.

J. Fararoo: “But quality, intensity of my effort in next 15 mins depends entirely on my vision and understanding of the whole picture.”

Whatever works for you. **I’ve never seen more than a little corner of the picture, and even that’s muddy.**

S. Watson: “Sorry, I’m just not intimidated by vision. I understand if others are though.”

How about “pretentious”?

How about: **My vision is to un-vision my vision and be open to 180-degree “adjustments”?**

Ross Perot: “Ready. Fire. Aim.”

Herb Kelleher: “We have a strategic plan. It’s called ‘doing things.’”

U.S. Grant: “Just keep moving.”

J. Cufaude: **“For someone who preaches the power of listening, you seem 2B pretty dismissive of others’ take on this topic.”**

I am not dismissive. This is a 40-year-old hot button issue for me. It’s as close to black & white as I get.

D. Patterson: “I try to phrase it as, ‘No one forced you to come to work today, but you did. Why?’”

Great!

Grant. Patton. Nelson. They were not “clever.” They were ...

RELENTLESS. (Hint: “Relentless” is my favorite word.)

N. Dubey: “‘Dogged.’ Nothing beats being there. Nothing is as inspiring as a person who refuses to waver.”

C. Price: “I like tenacious, but relentless works for me. :)”

M. Lauter: “It’s a little of the lean startup idea. Fire, aim, fire, aim, fire, aim ...”

S. Watson: “Perhaps starting by defining ‘vision.’ esp what’s so disturbing about it to you, would have been better. If I missed it, my bad.”

I did. I said I had no idea what a vision was other than high-price consultant fantasy.

You call a person “visionary” after his whatever scored bigtime. Others w/ same “vision,” poor implementation are long forgotten.

It’s all very simple (of course nothing is): Great visions are a dime a dozen. Great execution is priceless—and rare.

P. Slater: “Disagree. True vision provides the framework for decision making. True vision = strategy.”

T. Johnson: “Every time someone starts talking about vision, I start looking for a new job.”

R. Harrison: “Relentless is good so long as you are doing the right thing. Relentlessly doing the wrong thing leads to trouble in the end.”

If you are truly relentless, the “wrong” thing frequently ends up being the right thing.

K. Hollamby: “Without vision it’s like being in a vacuum. No vision. No direction.” I would argue that “true vision” is an after-the-fact label.

I have spent the last 37 years of my life locked in mortal combat with the visionistas. Ain’t about to throw in the towel.

C. O’leary: “Vision = Value. Simple as that.”

Or: Vision = A slip of paper.

J. Durham: “Execution without Vision is a rudderless boat ...”

I’ll take it over grand strategists who wouldn’t know an oar if it were ...

M. Leibman: “There is strategic value in movement per se. A wrong course of action often beats no course of action.”

M. Leibman: “If 2 parties pursue different ideas—and are both wrong—one who quits first won’t ever stumble upon right idea.”

In the real world, **“stumble upon”** is a gorgeous phrase!

M. Birt: “Orders (in part) given to Eisenhower: ‘**You will enter the continent of Europe...**’ ‘**Vision**’ never appears to launch D-Day planning.”

PZPower: “See it. Do it. Do it well. Do it so well it works. Vision is only as good as what comes between seeing & successful doing.”

AND ... the seeing only happens when you’re in the field, not in the ivory tower or C-suite maximum security prison.

R. Harrison: “Sometimes, not always. Thinking is key. How you think dictates how you act. If thinking is flawed being relentless is flawed.”

We’re 180 apart on that: **It’s the action that gives birth to the thinking.**

T. Johnson: “I get your point, but vision is cheap. And the self-importance of dwelling on one’s vision is a tell.”

[Comment: Primacy of vision redux redux.]

Utter nonsense: **Get out into the field. Chat people up. From thence cometh direction!**

T. Johnson: “In the wrong hands, vision is an excuse for inflexibility. That which doesn’t conform can not be explored.”

“Explore” is a beautiful word!!!

In Search of Excellence was
in effect the antidote to too
much “vision” and
“strategy” at McKinsey &
Co. circa 1977.

The battle rages on ...

D. Dinger: “[You offer] a classic tech roadmap: ‘Real’ is now box, ‘plan’ is next box, ‘vision’ is the box after that—subject to change.”

Without action, there ain’t nothin’ to think about.

S. McGavin: “Vision without action is a dream: action without vision is a nightmare.”

Here’s to nightmares!

All it takes is one “idea”: **Get-the-
f-out-of-the-office.**

R. Harrison: “Our mindsets and assumptions limit the actions we take. Argyris was right about that IMHO.”

I can fix your “assumptions”: Blindfold you. Drag you out of the office. Dump you into the distribution center at **3A.M.**

Comment: Think. Act. Think.

Respectfully disagree: **Act. Think. Act.**

J. Algrov: “**‘Stumble Upon’ is like ‘To Find’ rather than ‘To Seek’ in Hermann Hesse’s *Siddhartha*.**”

“Stumble upon”: Nice. Very nice.
Very very nice.