

# Whether check #2

It is important to check on whether the overall direction of an organization is headed toward prosperity. High-performing organizations develop a belief set containing statements of purpose, missions, values, shared vision and customer profiles. These are the first critical "whether check" items. Once a review of direction is satisfactorily completed, it's time to turn attention to a strategy review.

Strategy helps keep an organization agile and responsive to current conditions yet on track toward the shared vision already established. Five elements of strategy are critical: scenario, advantages, standards, products and services. While the belief set overarches the entire organization, strategies are likely to apply to some portions of the organization but not necessarily to all departments.

The scenario is the foundational element of strategy because it creates a vivid description of the conditions within which the workforce must operate to be successful. When organization scenarios are shared across boundaries, understood and supported by all departments, it goes a long way toward minimizing dysfunctional competition and setting the stage for potential synergy. If the accounting department sees a bleak financial situation ahead, yet the marketing department believes the future is bright, these two scenarios are likely to be divisive.

Advantages that are identified for the organization or advantages that can be achieved for the organizations' customers can be powerful initiatives that yield profits and potential growth. When advantages are identified that fit within the framework of multiple scenarios, the strategy satisfies a strong business need. Finding a viable temporary market for less-than-perfect "seconds" may keep production high while redesigning processes to achieve improved quality in the long run. This temporary advantage has created an interim strategy.

All organizations engage the workforce within the limits of established standards. These standards define what is expected to achieve success individually and collectively. Engaging a strategy of flextime satisfies a workforce need for increased flexibility as well as a broad window in which essential collective work can be accomplished. When it becomes desirable to engage such a standard, coupled with the advantages of workforce satisfaction, a powerful strategy emerges - longer business hours for customer service.

Even businesses that are service-

oriented provide products that make their service a tangible in the eyes of their customers. A service without a product is often perceived as more of a favor. Certainly some favors are appropriate, but businesses will grind to a halt if that's all they deliver. Even in the heavily service-oriented business of consulting, products abound as tangible reports that include written recommendations. Many service providers send a tangible follow-through mailing as evidence of the service they delivered. Customers want and deserve something tangible.

At the heart of value-added is the service provided. A product alone can usually be purchased at a lower price if price is the most important criteria. Today, some customers are probably passing by your business because they prefer the service someone else provides even though your price may be less. Not always, but more often than not people buy through a favored relationship - the service element!

These threads of scenario, advantages, standards, products and services create strategies that pull an organization in the direction it wants to go. A workforce that understands these strategic initiatives and how their individual and collective efforts advance the organization is more invested in helping achieve that future. Organizations that inform their workforce of these strategic initiatives are better than those who don't. Better yet is the organization that engages the workforce in the formulation of strategies.

This is the fifth year for the Best Places to Work in Hampton Roads. The best organizations create opportunities for involvement in charting a course toward increased opportunity and prosperity. There is little margin for error in being the best - sincere involvement in finding and solving organization problems that result in sterling customer service and engaging workforce collaboration.

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