

Strategy Is Easy, Execution Is Difficult.

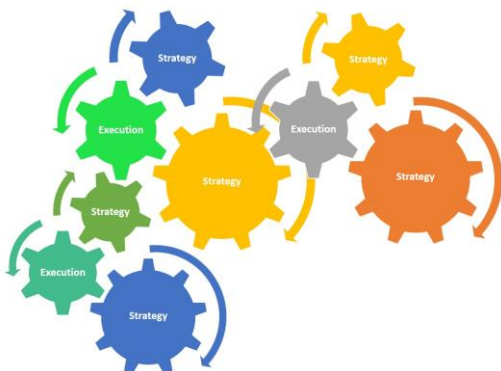
Really? Who does your strategy for you? Who executes the strategy that is formulated, either formulated by yourself or by somebody you've given the task to? Is there really such a dichotomy between what people like to call **Strategy** and what people like to call **Execution**?

Right off the bat, let's get a few things straight.

1. Strategy is simply deciding how to do what you want done, or how to get where you want to go. It is about winning the war even if you have to lose a few major battles, and not losing the war **despite** winning all the battles.

2. Execution is simply making things happen; getting things done. Some people put it under the purview of Tactics. Execution is the realization, the actualization, of whatever strategy you happen to be executing. There is no such thing as great strategy and poor execution. If execution is poor because your leadership sucks and your dream team is actually a nightmare, then you simply picked the wrong strategy or you actually developed a bad strategy thinking it was good. The fact that your sucky leadership and nightmare team would have sunk any ironclad strategy anyway is of course conveniently tucked into some file and hidden where no one will find it.

3. I know the iconic Peter Drucker said that "Culture eats Strategy for Breakfast." This has been quoted more times than you'd care to poke a stick at. Do people actually know what Drucker meant? Culture of course determines the quality and the style of execution. So, if you have incredibly great culture, culture to die for, does that mean you can eat any bad strategy that comes along and trust that, just because you have such a fantastic culture, things will still be all right, that profits will still be made, that life will go on as usual? Think about the proverbial highly efficient, highly effective, road construction company that started building a great highway from City A to City B, and having to build that great highway through a thickly forested area. Remember the Engineer who one day climbed a tall tree to get a better look and immediately hollered for everyone to stop by sounding the alarm "Wrong Way!!" Well that's what happens when you quote Drucker with a smirk. Stop doing that.



Strategy and Execution are iterative processes. Each influences the other in certain ways. You might have started on Strategy A, by being a market follower, being the second-best, but also being noted for trying harder, like Avis. As time went by, your great execution actually put you at the head of the pack. You're not the follower any more, you just outpaced the leader, and now you're it. Do you still stick stubbornly to your great strategy, the one

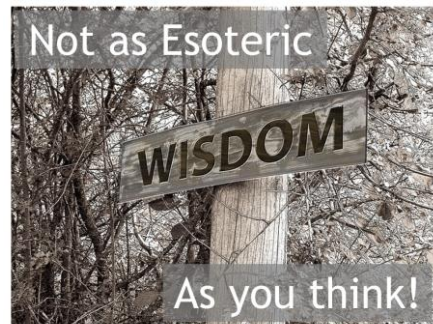
of being the follower, and that put you in first place? You do? How? Transact less business so you can slip back to second place? Not likely. Then, Strategy B went up in smoke because it was product-oriented and technology has produced something that sent your car back to the equivalent of the Flintstones' garage. Caveat. The new

technology or innovation doesn't have to be something that blows your mind, just something that rewires it. What do you do about Strategy B, then, frantically get Operations to work harder so that Strategy B remains "relevant"? No! You ditch Strategy B in favour of Strategy C or D or whatever. You know this. So why aren't you doing it? Simple. You're dehydrated. You're not getting enough WATER and your functions aren't functioning because they can't.

Water is a wonderful thing. It gives life. Life as we know it would not be possible without water. Water wears away at the hardest rock and dissolves almost anything, given enough time. It flows around obstacles and changes the shape of the terrain it traverses. Water finds its own level and can even exist in three forms at once if the conditions of temperature and pressure are right. Great strategy is like water. Let's look at what water comprises in the context of this article. I'm going to assume that the execution is great, and that the execution is simply the manifestation of the strategy.

W is for Wisdom.

Just as innovation is applied creativity, wisdom is applied knowledge and understanding. There is at least one reason why juveniles are generally not entrusted with strategy formulation. They have not had the time and opportunity to fill their storehouses of knowledge sufficiently yet. Even if we "hothouse" them and transfer our current knowledge and wisdom to them via our touching palms whilst sitting in lotus positions, that would still be insufficient. It would be insufficient because they would need the time to exercise with whatever we've given them. They would need to own the entire storehouse and express it in their own right. It takes time and effort to get wisdom, and whatever wisdom you manage to actually get is highly perishable.



Whom are you entrusting with your strategy? Are they old enough? Old not simply in terms of chronological age, but old in terms of integrated knowledge and experience. Old in terms of being a "Zoomer", having the ability to see the "Big Picture", but also knowing how and where to zoom in where necessary? How are you cultivating a culture of wisdom in your company, so that even if you lose a few key sages, all is not lost and you can recover at least some of the lost wisdom?

Wisdom is the Principal Thing if you want to be able to consistently formulate great strategy. How is your Wisdom Growth and Retention Plan coming along?

A is for Alertness.

Peripheral vision is something to be highly valued. We spend too much time exalting the cones responsible for colour perception in our eyes. That's ok and natural. We like colour. We just tend to neglect the rods. Yet it is the rods which play such an important role in peripheral vision. Peripheral vision allows us to detect what is out of the ordinary. It informs us when we might need to commence planning for unfolding opportunities no one else has realized. It tells us that we might need a course change,

not a course correction. The latter has to do with continuing to the current destination. The latter means we've decided to go somewhere else.

When the winds of change begin to softly blow, would we be aware of it? When the ocean swell takes on a different pattern, are we able to sense it? Would we then have the presence of mind to recognize that we need to do something different, start making plans, send probes out to gather more information? What is our level of Alertness?

T is for Thoroughness.



Thoroughness is a quality not prized by many because they have been led to believe that the devil is in the details. No, he's not, he's into Slothfulness. You know who's actually in the details? Diligence, that's who. Simplicity, ease of execution, no-brainers and so forth are actually the results of the diligence of those who care enough to put in hours and hours of painstaking work. Those who zoom in and zoom out again and again in order to make sure

that their work works from any known angle. Those who make things simple for others by paying attention to all the intricate details. Those who design complex structures so well that they aren't complicated to maintain. I'll always remember a Financial Adviser in a networking group I was part of. His tag line was classic: Let the complexities be mine and the simplicity yours to enjoy. That's a pretty good way for all of us to do business, methinks. How thorough are we when we formulate our strategy? Are we thorough enough to permit flexibility?

E is for Endurance.

Endurance isn't simply going for what you want against all odds. It's staying the course and yet being nimble as we relentlessly pursue what is true, right and just. It is getting up again when we've been knocked down. It's getting back on course when we've been blown off it by a storm. It is demonstrating determination to increase the value of intended outcomes by being willing to drop everything and go back to the drawing board if it does come to that. Do not continue to pursue a strategy that has ceased to serve your purpose, thinking that by doing so you are displaying true grit. Have the fortitude to build another one and the willingness to see it through when that becomes necessary. A networking evangelist I know found that the organization he was originally with wasn't helping him fulfill his objectives of promoting businesses that delivered reciprocal and increasing value over time. He left that organization he had built up over the years and took a different course. If your strategy isn't working, endurance is being able to tear it up and plunge into the labour of crafting another one.

R is for Resourcefulness.

Resourcefulness is one of the pillars of strategy. It implies being familiar with the resources you already have. It means being willing to both deploy and employ those resources in ways that no one might have thought possible before. It is being willing to do things like making bags out of old T-shirts. It is being willing to rent out surplus space instead of uprooting and moving to another. Or it could be a willingness to use

serviced offices, warehouses or similar facilities if maintaining your own infrastructure doesn't make sense. It is being willing to use local rubber wood for furniture if teak doesn't work too well in that local environment. It is taking the time and effort to source for local materials and establishing reliable suppliers instead of shipping from overseas. Besides being familiar with the resources you already have, Resourcefulness constantly seeks out ways of getting fresh supplies from local sources and finds new ways of achieving the same or better results with new materials. Is Resourcefulness infused into your Strategy?

Like to have Strategy and Execution come more easily? Drink water. Helps a lot.

