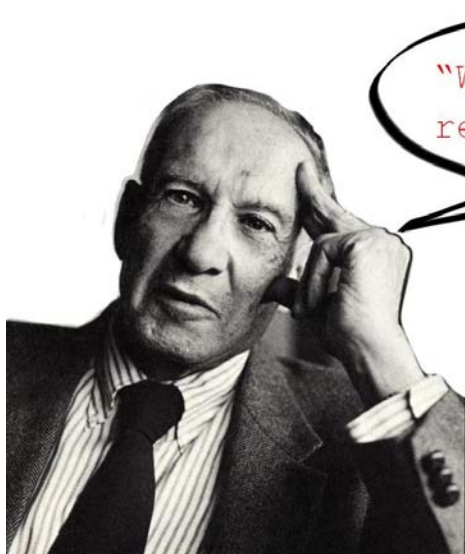


What Do We Want To Do?

The third stop on our Seven Key Strategy Questions is to get the client to ask, “What do we want to do?” At first there is never one single answer—so many answers come forth. And often all the answers are correct to some degree. Organizations with high levels of trust have conflict and debate. Dysfunctional organizations avoid conflict and debate. Debate and conflict is good, for it uncovers the core answers hidden among all the other answers. Sometimes the client provides only one answer, with no debate. The “boss” makes the decisions. When there is only one voice answering this question, the voice of the “boss”, the organization is dysfunctional.



“Where the results are.”

Peter Drucker teaches us in *The Practice of Management* that most of the effort that the executive leadership team should focus is on the external orients of the company, the market (customers and competition) and innovation. He called it “Where the Results Are.” Executives should decide the strategy and communicate the strategy. They work to assure that the rest of the company understands the strategy, and assure that the tactics support the strategy.

Tactical development is important, and is the role of divisional levels of management, following the strategic direction of the executives. The tactical managers work to assure that all each tactic addresses at least two strategic goals. The decisions of how to execute is the role of the front line managers and workers. Drucker believed that there should be no more than 3 layers in an organization, Strategic, Tactical and Execution.

When executives take a front line role – and get involved in execution – they create more harm than good. The role of the executive is to make decisions, and to train the tactical and front line execution managers how to make decisions. Tactical and Execution managers must lead – must decide the best tactics to get the job done. They must make decisions and get the workers to make decisions..

Decision-making has five distinct phases of effort:

1. Defining the problem;
2. Analyzing the problem;
3. Developing alternative solutions;
4. Deciding upon the best solution; and
5. Converting the decision into effective action.

Drucker teaches us that each phase has several steps. Defining the objective—answering the question, “What do we want to do?” is a key step in defining the problem.

Objectives should always focus on business performance and business results. Therefore, objectives must be measurable. The objectives should always balance and harmonize the immediate and long-range future. They should always take into account the business as a whole and the activities needed to run the business.

Our goal in asking “What do we want to do?” is not to completely rework the strategy or mission of our client’s company. Our objective is to learn more about the principles, policies, and rules of conduct the company follows. Spelling out the rules is necessary because, in many cases, the right solution will ultimately require management to make a decision to change currently accepted policies or practices. We want to understand the policies and practices so that, working closely together we can thoughtfully engage company management in a clear examination of the situation and encourage them to critically think through what they want to change and why.

By engaging our clients in this exercise early, we help the client discover activities and decisions made deep in the process, sometimes far removed from where the problems appear, are where the root causes live. This discovery often happens in the course of the debate about the objectives.

Defining “What we want to do” is a key function of leadership. Too often the burden of that definition falls on the shoulders of the business owner or the CEO. The idea of the “one-man chief executive” is a fallacy. There will always be too many activities in the chief executive’s job for any one person’s working day. The chief executive’s job comprises activities that are too diverse to be competently performed by one person. Therefore, the chief executive’s job cannot be organized as the job of a single person. A team of several people must act together to provide leadership to a business of any significant size. Decision making skills allow management throughout the enterprise to help in the process of answering the question “What do we want to do?”

This brings us back to the point of debate. A healthy team will always have conflict as they identify problems, analyze those problems, develop solutions, choose the best solution, and execute that solution. Highly functional teams, built on a foundation of trust and comfortable with debate and conflict, lead highly functional organizations.

Frankly, it would be wonderful if all of our clients were examples of highly functional organizations. The truth is that highly functional organizations are rare, and we feel blessed when we get to work with one. As for the rest, we're still blessed to work with them, because we help them to find the meaning of what they want to do.

