

Report on *The Art and Discipline of Strategic Leadership* by Mike Freedman with Benjamin B. Tregoe published 2003 by McGraw Hill.

The book was the subject of the June 2018 North Book Club.

The Art and Discipline of Strategic Leadership is a handbook for developing a Strategic plan and mindset for corporations. It begins by describing the critical nature of strategic planning by stating that it trumps vision. It is first of all a discipline that must be the child of the executive team. Without this commitment from the very top, strategic thinking will not work.

The author(s) then describe what is behind a successful strategic plan, that is what strategic leadership is all about. There is first of all the definition of a strategy, secondly one must choose a model of strategic planning that will ask important question of the entire corporation, finally there is a process needed to develop and flesh out the plan. A team must be assembled to do the work, and the leadership of that team must not be delegated to lower executive or management levels.

Data is an important input to the process, but it is only data until interpreted. Well understood data leads to wisdom. One must ask the right questions, gather and analyze strategic intelligence. It is critical that the right questions be asked and that the answers be clear. Everyone on the team must have a stake in the building of the resulting database. This information will help in determining what projects must be undertaken to advance the corporation. During the monitoring phase, they will help to identify evolving opportunities that were uncovered while building the intelligence.

The executive team must then develop a set of basic beliefs about the corporation. These may already exist, but they must be codified. The reason that these are so important, is that they affect all communications in an organization that sincerely adopts them. And communications must be aligned with a strategic vision. The entire corporation will march to the same beat.

The corporation must understand its driving force. This is different than a basic belief, in that a driving force determines how a company perceives itself in the market place. The author(s) offer the most common of the driving force:

- Products (or Services) Offered
- Markets Served
- Return/Profit

There are others including low cost production, technology, resources, method of sale, operations capability, and return/profit.

The driving force is important as the team will *select* the driving force either as the way that the corporation sees itself today or as an alternative future. The strategic plan now has a basis on which to act.

From the driving force, the strategic plan process now leads to the development of a product/services roadmap. The book covers tools to elicit this roadmap (matrix).

Then its on to implementation and the creation of a master project plan which describes all that must be done to achieve a coherent corporation that is a reflection of the strategic plan.

The remaining chapters deal with the time frames of implementation and maintenance. They discuss the things that might go wrong, including a failure to drive the strategic plan deep into the conscience of the corporation. (It cannot be an executive project only).

The authors wrap up with some *Lessons for Strategic Leaders*.

- Leaders must recognize the dual nature of leadership – art **and** discipline
- Leadership demands great CEOs
- The future belongs to future leaders – it is imperative to pass on strategic art and discipline to those leaders
- Process is an anchor in setting and implementing strategy – it's hard work, but it **is** systematic

They also raise some warning flags – a few of which are listed here.

- Losing focus
- Being distracted by minutiae
- No clear process for strategy implementation
- Not acting the part of the strategic plan

As with other Kepner-Tregoe inspired publications, this book is a management consulting handbook. Unfortunately, much of what this book teaches is beyond the scope of control of most PMs. However, it is an important and enlightening read. It helps each of us to understand how our companies (or customers) stack up in the world of other serious competitors. *Is my company evolving?* Perhaps we can make better choices about the projects we are given or even the companies or customers that we work for once we have an answer to that question.

The team rated the book as a four.