

## Is Your Strategic Plan DOA? Answer These Five Questions to Find Out



Yikes! It's the end of the year, and we're all supposed to have a bunch of stuff done by now – like writing our strategic plans.

But the deadly temptation with strategic plans is just to “git-er-done” so we can “git-er-out-the-door!”

You see, simply getting it done and out the door doesn't mean much if the plans never actually materialize. If the plan

isn't executed, then we've only checked a meaningless box, and we would have been far better off spending our time at a John Belushi film festival (not a bad idea, anyway).

In our business, we see the things that strangle strategic plans, the things that keep clever ideas from turning into results. Here are five questions that will help you to know if this year's plan is dead on arrival. If you answer “No” to any of these questions, you might want to get out the gurney.

### **1. Did the senior team do the heavy lifting?**

“Run along and write our strategic plan.” Planning staffs get orders like that all the time. Unfortunately, much like asking your travel agent to tell you where you're going, asking your planning staff to write your strategic plan is an absurd request. If you're lucky enough to have a planning staff, use them to *facilitate* the planning process, not to do it for you. Don't try to delegate strategic thinking or personal involvement.

### **2. Are your strategic goals excruciatingly clear?**

Fuzzy goals are easy to agree on but hard to complete. Fuzzy goals can look pretty on paper, but they suck up time and resources because interpretations of goal achievement can vary so widely.



We gave away our secret sauce for clear goals in [“Are Goals Dangerous?”](#) so we won't repeat ourselves here.

### **3. Have you assigned strategic goals to individuals?**

You know the old saying, “If we're all accountable, then no one is.” This is true. Like clarifying goals, clarifying accountability can generate a few moments of discomfort, but that beats the heck out of simply hoping someone will pick up the gauntlet.

### **4. Did you state *meaningful* strategic assumptions?**

All plans are based on pivotal assumptions about the future, but many plans fail to spell out those assumptions. Instead, they either state obvious but non-pivotal assumptions (e.g., “The economy will be uncertain”), offer plans masquerading as assumptions (e.g., “We assume we will need to invest more in training”), or simply don't address the topic at all.

Agility is the prize for plans that show clear relationship between assumptions and their resulting strategies. If you've done that right, then you can change your plans when an assumption doesn't pan out. That beats waiting until a strategy doesn't pan out. It's your early warning system.

See [“Strategic Assumptions – A Prerequisite to Great Strategies: 10 Tips”](#) for more on this topic.

### **5. Are regular execution review meetings on your leadership team's 2013 calendars?**

Eisenhower famously said, “Plans are worthless, but planning is everything.” We wouldn't agree that plans are worthless, but his point about planning is right. In fact, planning is so important that the leadership team must not stop doing it just because the plan has been published. Execution-focused leaders continue to meet regularly with the plan in front of them to address questions such as:

- How well is each of us meeting the commitments we agreed to in the plan?
- Who among us needs help, and how can we help them?
- Are our assumptions still correct?
- What unforeseen opportunities or problems should we reflect in our plans?
- Are we smarter about our strategies today than when we first wrote the plan? If so, how should we update our direction?

Monthly execution review meetings work best for leadership teams that want rapid change. Bi-monthly or quarterly meetings work well for everybody else.



But when leaders revisit their plans and performance less often than that, those leaders become disconnected from their plans, and their plans become disconnected from reality.

If you didn't like your answer to any of these questions, just know that most of these problems can be fixed. Doing so just requires focusing not only on your plan's publication, but also on its execution.

Self-promotional note: **Want strong execution management going into 2013? The ELG team can help. Inquire at [info@elg.net](mailto:info@elg.net)**

