

“Strategic Heart: Fostering Sustainability Through “Love” of the Mission”

by Debra Thompson
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Love is “an intense feeling of deep affection.” Most of us don’t use the words “love” and organizational sustainability in the same sentence. However, to not only survive but thrive in today’s complex, chaotic environment, we must recognize that that board and staff members need “strategic hearts.” This ability to embody “love” for the mission and those we serve (colleagues or customers) is a critical success factor for sustainability, and is a healthy “resolution” to embrace at the start of this new year.

When operating with a “strategic heart,” each individual is “alive with ideas and pushing hard, using the organization’s resources and leverage in the marketplace to make something worthwhile happen...acting to be effective now and, moving themselves and those around them toward new challenges. This attitude of the soul is the absolute basic and primary condition for the emergence of ...growing, driving organizations.”

Are your board and staff members:

- “infused with a “relentless restlessness”— that often uncomfortable urge for constant innovation, driven by the nagging feeling that things are never quite good enough” or are you “stuck” with management or the board focused on being “rational,” or on the mechanistic or only on the “bottom line”?
- finding ways to stoke emotions to fuel tangible and desired actions or simply making a rational argument as to why people ought to increase their productivity?
- acting as if they are knee deep in a manageable mess and reveling in the fact that “by considering the right decisions, following the right principles, and drawing on their skill and common sense, they will have some control over their collective fate and be able to crank up their odds of success” or are they bureaucratic, expecting to run like a machine?

Many of my colleagues over the years have balked at the idea that we should embody love in our work, arguing that



we should act professionally and keep emotions out of the workplace. Yet, the most successful businesses are far from rational places. “They exude emotion: people trust one another and look to one another as resources that can be counted on. People hug, they cry, they talk about their feelings about work. People up and down the organization make decisions and respect others’ decisions based on emotional concerns. They are also fun places...where there is an opportunity to experience and share with others elevated and uplifting energy and action.”

Our focus “to create healthy communities” makes us similar in many ways to our non-profit and faith based clients. We exist because of a “compelling cause” that draws us to action or because the founders outwardly expressed “having a calling” to make a difference in the world. And (believe it or not), “for profit” companies are really not much different. According to the book **Daring Visionaries: How Entrepreneurs Build Companies, Inspire Allegiance, and Create Wealth**, true entrepreneurs don’t go into business simply to make a lot of money – they go into business to make a difference in

(continued on page 2)



the world either directly through their mission (i.e., Microsoft's Bill Gates) or through their profits - what they do philanthropically (i.e., Andrew Carnegie). Regardless of tax status, all organizations essentially deal with the same reality: the price of sustainability is generating enough cash for the next strategic investment, recognizing that "success depends on the will and skill of people at every level of the organization."

How do you foster a "strategic heart" culture?

- Challenge assumptions, especially when new ideas evoke the reaction "we can't do that" or "we can't afford that." Make one small change after another to deliver greater value and look for opportunities to solve problems and recommend solutions. Allow yourself and others to ask and answer the question, "What would we do if we really LOVED these people?" The answer to this question is often very different and much more meaningful than our typical decisions.
- Create a compelling shared vision that reflects the core values and "cause" so that each individual understands their role and can "act like an owner." While it takes time to engage and involve all aspects of the organization, slowing down to move faster by engaging the hearts and minds of employees can pay huge dividends.
- Expect "completed staff work," a term coined by one of my former bosses that describes the mindset of moving quickly, understanding customer needs and interests, exploring innovative ideas and alternatives, and taking action in the context of the "big picture." It is much like the Facebook mindset described in Scaling Up Excellence: "if you want people to move fast and fix things, they'd better feel safe to break some stuff along the way. When it comes to developing the site, going slow and trying to do things perfectly is taboo at Facebook. As engineer Sanjeev Singh explained, if you keep waiting for people to tell you what to do, don't ask for help when you get stuck, and won't show others your work until it is perfect, "you won't last long at Facebook."
- Build innovation and "return on investment" into performance expectations. When focusing only on bottom line results, many fail to recognize that strategic investment is required to produce innovation, and don't work to acquire the resources necessary to achieve their vision.

Over the past several years, our work has evolved into organizational development efforts that teach and coach these skills in the context of strategic planning. Creating a "healthy" culture takes time and effort, but when everyone brings their "strategic heart" to work, organizations can achieve amazing, transformational results. (For examples of transformational organizational development efforts we have been a part of, please see the testimonial videos at http://www.getstrategy.com/testimonial_videos/)



Debra Thompson is founder of Strategy Solutions Inc., an organizational development firm with the mission to create healthy communities. For over 20 years, Debra and her team have provided research, planning, training and project management support for organizations and communities who want to grow and thrive. She is an adjunct faculty member in the Duquesne University Master of Organizational Leadership program and is a consultant, trainer and peer reviewer for the Standards for Excellence: An Ethics and Accountability Code for the Nonprofit Sector. She can be reached at the Strategy Solutions Erie Office, 8425 Peach Street, Erie, PA 16509; 814-480-8000; debbie@getstrategy.com; or through the website [getstrategy.com](http://www.getstrategy.com).

Founded in 1998,
Strategy Solutions, Inc., is
dedicated to facilitating
creative solutions to ensure
the sustainability of public,
private and nonprofit
organizations and create
healthy communities.

Our unique process
of combining analytical
research capabilities,
group process techniques,
and planning tools blended
with enthusiasm, energy,
and total dedication to
each client's success has
resulted in hundreds of
clients who have achieved
remarkable outcomes.

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