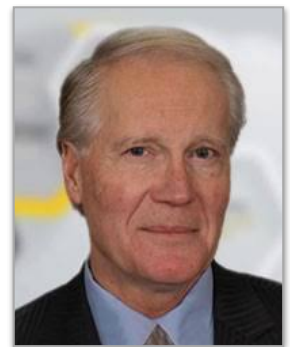


15 Steps to Transforming Yourself to a Strategic Leader



A Brief Summary

BY DR. TED MARRA

If you to begin a search for ‘Strategic Leadership’, where would you begin? First, you would need a definition of your terms to guide your search. To me, ‘Strategic Leadership’ is, unlike most of the materials written on ‘leadership’, has application to both organizations as well as members of the leadership team of that organization. It is, in both cases, distinctly **‘outcome’** oriented as opposed to the typical preponderance of literature on leadership that attempts to define what leadership is or should be to be effective and efficient. In fact, the attempt to define leadership has been going on as long as I can remember, and it started before I began my career 44 years ago with the likes of well-known gurus such as Peter Drucker in the 1950’s. Even then, however, Peter Drucker saw that leadership was much more about ‘doing the right things’ for an organization as opposed to ‘doing things right’. To me, Strategic Leadership, in one aspect at least combines these to say, ‘doing the right things right’ for the organization.

For over 50 years academics, consultants and business leaders pondered – wrote about, studied and discussed leadership with what I would consider new insight and a lot of repetition. We will discuss some of this briefly below. While ‘Built to Last’ by Collins and Porras is a timeless classic and one from which I derived even more on my second read than my first as well as the **outcome of strategic leadership shown below** based on its thoughts, ideas and examples; the next, and probably even more notable classic was ‘Good to Great’ by Collins around 2001 or so after a multi-year research effort by a significant team of people. It was this book was somewhat of a breakthrough which introduced the 5 Levels of Executive and one which I shall use as a starting point to reach toward Strategic Leadership.

In ‘Good to Great’, Level 5 was defined as: ‘Builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical combination of personal humility and professional will’. The challenge was that many executives failed to understand exactly what this mean or if they did, they were unsure what actions were required to get there. However, it went on to say that there were certain actions performed by Level 5 leaders which separate them from the rest of the leaders and senior executives.

- The first step is their ability to identify and include right people with them towards achieving goals. Unlike the traditional method of building strategies and then looking for the right people to carry them out, they take a different route. It's about getting the right people on board and then deciding on the destination.
- They also do not shy away from facing and accepting brutal truths and realities of data, numbers and situations but at the same time they do not lose hope of a better future.
- They also strive towards aligning consistent efforts towards a goal, rather than giving one massive push. They believe in small but firm pushes to bring in the momentum.
- They also exercise their judgment to understand an aspect, in depth and thoroughly, rather than burdening themselves with myriad information.
- They practice and encourage a disciplined approach towards their work life and as visionaries use carefully identified technologies to give their businesses strategic advantage.

All good things, no doubt. We will soon address what I consider to be the requirements to not just be Level 5, but to be an even more relevant, powerful member of the leadership team – one which engages in Strategic Leadership. But again, a good question to always ask yourself is, 'Who would want to be led by you and why?'

First, allow me to say that if one considered the quality of leadership in much the way one considers the quality of many other products we purchase – somewhat of a stretch, but maybe not as much as you think, the result would be that on average Level 5 leadership represent approximately 1.9% of all leadership. Not a lot. Then you read in 'Good to Great' that of the 1435 companies evaluated in the study by Collins and his team, only 0.5% of leadership fit into Level 5!

You may say that the answer is the need for education – for knowledge, yet study after study by such prestigious organizations as the CIPD in the U.K. have time and again shown that the M.B.A./E.M.B.A./Executive Development knowledge provided by academics is disconnected from the real needs of their organizations. Other research has shown that despite the billions of dollars or Euros spent annually on executive development, there is no indication at all that the quality of leadership around the world has improved! Harvard Business Review surveys of the world's best CEO's show that as many as 75% of them possess NO M.B.A. or E.M.B.A. As a consequence, one must question if **knowledge acquisition** is the right answer or trying to define the characteristics of leadership as a well-known business school has done below in the sample presented. Often consultancies in the 360-degree instruments do the same thing!

1. Judgement
2. Critical faculty
3. Creativity
4. Planning
5. Perspective
6. Learning-Oriented
7. Conceptual thinking
8. Adaptability
9. Integrity
10. Stress tolerance

And **35 others!** In my opinion, not overly helpful. Even Superman on a good day would be unable to measure up! Strategic thinking (as much of a talent as a skill); being intensively intuitive; visionary; systems thinking; and many others which, from my experience I would include, are obvious by their absence.

As my going away present, allow me to state my empirical evidence, confirmed by many expert practitioners such as myself around the world, which says simply that in 90%+ of the situations when you see even a good organization under-perform or fail, the failure is one of leadership.

My strong belief is that what is needed is a strong focus on **knowledge application, asking the right questions** and the **outcomes** which should be sought by leadership. In the latter, leadership should be guided by the behaviors and practices which are going to produce the following **ultimate Strategic Leadership organizational outcome**:

You, as well as the members of the leadership team, collaborating as ‘all one team’, ‘doing the ‘right things right’ for the organization

- *builds the organization so it **endures** the test of change, time and turbulence through continuous introspection, reflection and re-invention;*
- *consistently sets the **standard for excellence** in their industry (and possibly outside their industry);*
- *continuously produces **results** which are the **benchmark** in their industry (and possibly outside their industry); and*
- *has an unwavering commitment to ensuring ever increasing **value***

*is created and delivered to all stakeholders in ever more **innovative ways**.*

So, just how does one go from where you are today as a member of the leadership team or a leader of tomorrow or as someone who believes strongly they have potential – have talent that they have not yet been motivated or able to release or which, even when it is, often goes unnoticed in your organization, evolve from even a Level 5 to becoming a member of the Strategic Leadership team? Where should you focus attention? Where should you relentlessly pursue investing your time and energy to develop the right way? Allow me to offer some suggestion based upon my 44 years of experience. Here are what I believe ‘count most’ in getting you to the top of your game and the top of your league.

Strategic Leadership possesses some if not all of the following traits and talents which act as catalysts to cause the **outcomes** desired – the **outcomes** indicated in the above ‘**ultimate Strategic Leadership organizational outcome**’:

1. An Inspired Workforce

- a. If you are looking for ‘cause and effect’ look no further than these three vital factors to get you 80%+ of the way there:
 - i. A vision which is truly ‘visionary’ – one that excites people and makes them passionate in its pursuit

- ii. An organizational Purpose which not only attracts and retains talent, but energizes people to be their very best in remaining true to that reason why your organization exists
- iii. Role model behavior and practices by a leadership team that is a team – being exemplars and living the values of the organization, encouraging people to achieve their full potential and reinforcing the vision, purpose and values of the organization at every opportunity enabling and motivating people to follow their example

2. A Leadership Team that is, in fact, a ‘team’

- a. The unfortunate fact is that while we often refer to the ‘leadership team’, no such ‘team’ truly exists as the C-Suite executives too often do not understand or practice the tenets of effective teamwork nor do they very often, unless compelled, collaborate as they could or should for the benefit of the organization.
 - i. Being anti-role models for the workforce does little to encourage their teamwork or collaboration.

3. A Leadership Team which routinely exhibits their relentless pursuit of ‘doing the right things right’ for the organization.

- a. To me this is all about remaining true to your purpose at all times and testing every project, initiative and investment against the vision to ensure it will move the organization closer to achieving it. It goes without saying only the highest standards of integrity and transparency are acceptable.
- b. The continuous pursuit of excellence is also another one of the vital legs to achieving this ultimate Strategic Leadership organizational outcome.

4. Exceptional Stakeholder Relationships

- a. Ensuring the workforce from the factory floor or frontline to the C-Suite have the requisite skills and use them to build exceptional **internal working relationships** and/or where appropriate exceptional **external stakeholder relationships** with customers, suppliers, partners and others which are critically important to the long-term success – competitiveness and profitable growth of your organization

5. A Release of the Full Creativity and Innovation of the Organization

- a. Establishing appropriate forums such as ‘Creativity Labs’ designed to turn even your worst performers into superstars in terms of generating commercially viable innovations which deliver value to all key stakeholders.

- b. Clearly a **culture** of creativity and innovation must be nurtured as well as ensuring an **innovation management system, Human Resources systems** which reinforce the behaviors and practices desired as they relate to creativity and innovation, value creation measured in terms of 'benefits' – recognized and appreciated by stakeholders and that is just the 'shortlist'.

6. An Organization aligned around its Vision

- a. This is an organization that behaves as 'all one team' focused on the common goal or achieving the vision, everyone - department, function, division and business unit clearly understanding and being capable of making their specific contribution to successful achievement of that vision – no distraction, hidden agendas or pulling in opposing directions or being at cross-purposes with one another.

7. Value is Being Continuously Created and Delivered to all Key Stakeholders

- a. It is my firm belief that underneath the stated or explicit purpose of any organization worth its salt, there is an implicit purpose and that purpose is the continuous creation and delivery of value to all key stakeholders
- b. Value is one of the most important strategic concepts of the past 20 years and is a vital source of differentiation and competitive advantage as well as the foundation for secure and exceptional stakeholder relationships.
- c. Value should be defined as any intangible or tangible benefit which the competition or alternate provider is either unwilling or unable to provide. There are some 11 sources of value I have identified in my 44 years of work around the globe, but most organizations focus on only 2-3 and don't do a particularly good job with those!

8. An Exceptionally Agile Organization

- a. As we know, the only constant is change. Change is coming faster, having greater impact and is occurring more frequently than ever.
- b. Being agile means being able to identify, assess and act (e.g., make a decision and execute) on an opportunity or counter a threat better and faster than a competitor or other provider.
- c. Two of the most important critical success factors for becoming agile are (1) having a world-class 'sensing system' and (2) Hyper-Decision Making.
- d. Agility together with the 'sensing system' described below and Hyper-Decision Making, are also requirements for an organization to be exceptional at 'adaptation' to change where adaptation is the anticipation or rapid and appropriate response to changes in the external operating environment.

9. *Establish a World-Class (among the best) ‘Sensing System’*

- a. Like the ‘whiskers of a cat’ without which its judgement would be impaired, so it is with organizations without a world-class ‘sensing system’ which is comprehensive and integrated and captures all **vital** data and information – including the ‘vital few’ Key Performance Indicators at the right level to be sensitive to changes internally within the organization as well as externally in its operating environment – not just the standard market share, EBIT, profitably types of KPI’s! In fact, a new generation of balanced scorecard is now required as we move further into the future to account for the increase in critical parameters that can impact an organization’s long-term or enduring success and competitiveness.

10. *Evolution of Your Organization to a State of Hyper-Decision Making*

- a. Taking the discussion above regarding ‘change’ to heart has one huge implication and that simply is the absolute need to make more **optimal decisions faster** than ever – a state of Hyper-Decision Making where not only are the key strategic positions within the organization identified and filled with the most talented people as the decisions made in those positions can make the difference between winning and losing in the marketplace, but they have been trained and are coached in decision-making. No longer is decision-making taken for granted or considered a zero-sum game as the consequence is too costly to your organization.

11. *Strategy Execution and Appropriate Patience and Support*

- a. Research has shown that while many CEO’s, in fact nearly 85%, are pleased with their strategy being correct, only 14% believe their organization has done well executing that strategy.
- b. Often times I have seen a lack of patience – a need for instant gratification on the part of senior management otherwise the strategy is scrapped and replaced with a new ‘supposed’ silver bullet. Eventually people lose energy and interest as their organization becomes a member of the ‘program of the month club’.
- c. In addition, many times there are so many key business objectives, all #1 priority of course, that there are not enough resources to gain traction. Proper support is not given because no effort was made by senior management to properly prioritize the key business objectives let alone align them with the vision!

12. *Design of the Right Organizational Business Model and Keeping it Refreshed Through Time*

- a. Controversy reigns supreme over what a business model is or isn’t. The fact of the matter is that there are 8 components to a business model including the leadership team whose role it is to **synergize** the other 7 components.

- b. One of the most critical of the components**, although they are all critical to enduring success, is '**renewal**' which is the seamless integration of adaptation, creativity & innovation and continuous learning. It is this component, more than any other that keeps an organization's business model fresh and in step with the changing business environment as organizations has been the case with such organizations as Proctor & Gamble, Johnson & Johnson, Google and a select number of others.

13. Achieve Human Performance Excellence Breaking the Barriers of Tradition and Thinking Outside the Box

- a. One-day senior executives will awaken to the realization that it is their people more than any single factor which either enables their organization to succeed or causes it to fail – the latter being a case where senior management is often an unwitting co-conspirator in the debacle.
- b. Recognizing that your organization may well be over-managed and under-led and now evolving it to one identified as having inspirational leadership and talent attraction and retention can be a long road, but if you hope to ever reach your full potential as an organization, it is an essential road to follow.
- c. The key words here are: **engage** (i.e., strengthen the emotional bond between your people and your organization; as well as to listen, learn and act on what was learned), **enable, empower, inspire, ensure participation**, have regular 2-way **communication – total transparency**, build and maintain **trust**, make them passionate and energized about what they are doing to succeed and help their organization be successful. Start with that and you will be amazed at the transformation your organization undergoes!
- d. Always remember that if you ever have to choose between world-class processes and mediocre people or world-class people and mediocre processes, always choose the latter!
- e. Release the creativity of everyone in the organization** – stop holding it captive! This includes senior management each one of which should possess and complete weekly and '**Idea Book**' in which there are 7 key questions designed to stimulate creativity and innovation which adds value. These ideas should be shared monthly at Management Committee meetings.

14. Make Strategic Customer Relationship Management an Organizational Competency

- a. Literally ensure that relationship mastery as referred to above and human performance excellence together with processes which make it easy for customers to do business with you and enable you to be more responsive than the others in your sector or industry are in place, are literally woven into the fabric of your organization's culture – making it a competitive advantage and ensuring your organization is intensely customer focused

15. Stop Engaging in Practices which are Damaging Your Organization

- a. As part of my Doctoral Dissertation, I conducted research to identify the behaviors and practices of senior executives which could cause their organization to under-perform or fail. These I referred to as 'The 7 Deadly Sins of Management'. For example, one of these was 'too much focus on the numbers' which among other damage created to an organization, this practice destroys teamwork and collaboration.

The above represent what I would consider the top 15 outcomes you should be considering if you have any hope of reaching the ultimate Strategic Leadership outcome stated near the beginning of this document. There are others, but possibly less impactful on your organization's performance.

What we are reaching for at [The Global Risk Academy](#) is ***providing you with insightful programmes which focus on best practice applications learned over years of experience around the world – not just knowledge acquisition. This knowledge application is designed to enable you to achieve the above outcomes above and more. It's a journey worth taking!***