



What Can I Do NOW? Game Changing Strategies May Not Be The Answer

In 1927, in the little town of Brownwood, Texas, the coach of a small school for orphaned boys revolutionized the game of football. Rusty Russell, coach of the Ft. Worth Masonic Home & School Mighty Mites, invented the spread offense. The objective of Coach Russell's offense was to open up multiple vertical seams for both the running and passing and force the defense to spread itself thin across the field to cover everyone. The new offense enabled the Mighty Mites to defeat much larger, established competitors by exploiting their speed and by leveraging all players to strike quickly to capitalize on opportunities to score. Over the next 80 years, Coach Russell's offense was adapted at the high school, college and eventually the pro level. The game of football was changed forever.

(Source: MarketBridge Whitepaper: The Changing Partnering Game)

I was working with a client recently and I could tell that this client was particularly frustrated. Nothing seemed to be happening fast enough, and every potential solution we came up with seemed to be too complex. She was confident that she would never be able to implement any of our ideas into her firm. Before proceeding, it should be noted that this client has been in business for just over 20-years. By her own admission her firm, and her employees, are set in their ways. At this point in her evolution, asking her key employees to make any kind of change was a “risk” she was unwilling to take. The cart was truly driving the horse.

Business improvements are, for the most part, iterative. Sometimes you can have a “game changing” event like a new football offense. But for most businesses, this kind of complete and total change would be fatal. People will inherently resist change. A total remake of a company is a rare thing for a reason. So how can you control change and ensure that the changes you put in place have a positive outcome in your organization?

“It's not small people with limited ideas that get in your way, it's those with big ideas and a limited capability for delivering on those ideas that hold you back. Surround yourself with people that share a common vision and avoid those that plan to save the world.”

Geoff Ashley

You Want to Know What You Can do NOW...

If you are the Principal, Owner or Executive (POE) within your company, then you are the one that is ultimately responsible for some pretty significant realities within your organization, division, department or team. As the POE you:

- Create (or perpetuate), manage and nurture the **culture**. Is it a culture that embraces growth? Can the culture handle change? Does the culture enable bad habits?



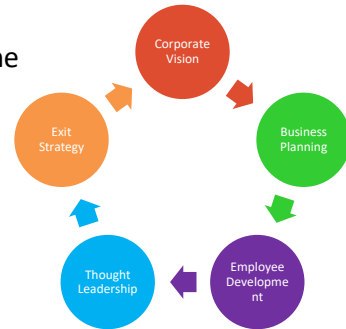
- You are the one that will determine if your people hold themselves accountable or not. It could be argued that **accountability** is one of the most important aspects of your corporate culture. If you are lacking accountability, it will be very hard to succeed over time.
- The POE sets the **Values, Vision & Mission**: I was rereading one of my business books. It was a Tom Peter's missive of more than 800 pages. Tom devoted about two paragraphs to the idea of Vision and Values. Here are his final words on the subject: "Values? Vision? Can't live without 'em in today's world, which won't tolerate those hefty [employee] manuals. Can't live with 'em either." Gee thanks Tom. I take significant issue with this approach as will be discussed in the final paragraph.
- As the POE, you are responsible for the plan. Whether it is an organizational, divisional, departmental or team plan, the **business plan** is an essential part of your responsibilities as the visionary. If the organization is not meeting expectations, one of the first things to evaluate is the plan.
- When was the last time you audited your position descriptions? I can't tell you how many times I have seen the negative outcomes of a failure to manage the position description. How can an employee meet or exceed expectations if they don't know what they are being managed against? How can employees exceed expectations if their incentive plans incent the wrong behaviors! And this is just the beginning. As the POE, you are ultimately responsible for the entire **employee development** environment. What is the work/life balance like in your organization? What is the employee attrition rate? Is it too high? Are you losing institutional knowledge which is exceptionally hard to replace?
- Are you a thought leader? In my more than 40-years working with business leaders, I have only met a few, true, thought leaders. Even I cannot make the claim of being a thought leader. I am trying! An interesting fact: The Harvard Business Review did research on companies that were led by someone who could be honestly defined as "thought leader". In **100%** of the cases, businesses that attain **thought leadership** status succeed. In all cases, if you can reach thought leadership, you will succeed. It is beyond the scope of this document to go into how you obtain thought leadership status. But I can say this – being a thought leader is a *deliberate decision* requiring very *deliberate and focused actions and activities*.
- Finally, as the POE you are responsible for the **exit strategy**. Even if your exit strategy is to "die at my desk", you need to make sure that your organization is equipped to meet that goal (This was an actual exit strategy of a consultant I spoke with in Louisiana). Can your organization survive without you in it? Most people view the exit strategy as the final component of business planning or thinking. I believe it is the **FIRST** component of successful business planning. You start with the end in mind. Otherwise, how will you know when you get there?



**Geoff Ashley
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The paragraphs above represent a set of responsibilities that I call the POE Continuum. As the leader of the organization, you have some very specific responsibilities. If you don't manage them, they don't get done. This, more than anything else, is why the owner mentioned at the beginning of this article was so frustrated. There are things that need to be done, they aren't getting done, and they are never going to get done.



“What is the appropriate timeframe in which a company should expect to accomplish great things? Is it five years, ten years or more? The timeframe is now. Success is deliberate and it begins by deciding to do the right things today.”

Geoff Ashley

Be Who You Are:

Why is it that some POE's are unable or unwilling to live up to their responsibilities? In many cases it is due to the fact that the POE gets confused as to who they are. Are they an entrepreneur? Are they a manager? Are they a technician? Do they want to lead or would they rather “do”? Did they work to get into the role they are in, or did they get appointed to the role? Have they had any formal education in leadership, being a role model, building a team, creating and managing a plan?

There is an interesting reality for those of you that own your company. Being a POE does NOT mean you have to be the one to work within the POE Continuum. Many Geoff Ashley & Associates clients have benefitted from an understanding of this concept. If you don't want to lead don't. BUT... if you don't, you have to find someone that can! The roles & responsibilities listed in the continuum must still be completed. The obligations still exist. The employees still need a leader. If you are CEO, and you hire a COO to run the company day-to-day, you are free to work on other very worthy projects (like thought leadership). There are a couple of key issues you have to resolve, however:

1. Are you a micro-manager? If so, this kind of division of labor will most likely fail.
2. Can you afford this option?
3. Can your ego allow for someone else to manage values, vision and mission?

Finally, I want to go back to the Tom Peter's comments regarding values, vision and mission statements. First of all... he is just wrong! Human beings have always done better when they have something to rally around. Think of the United States the very day the World Trade Centers were attacked. Prior to that day, you could argue that the United States was going about its business with little to no interest in some group called the Taliban. But after that fateful day, would anyone disagree with the comment that there was not any force on earth that could have stopped us when we were all focused on the SAME GOAL? Think of the Boston Marathon bombing. Look how quickly they identified, captured and ended



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that entire episode when everyone readily participated towards the same goal. There was nowhere for the terrorists to hide!

Values, vision and Mission statements can act in the same way. If you create and USE them? They should become part of your culture. They are not dusted off once per year, they are the first slides in every presentation. When you reward employees, you reward them for how their actions demonstrate the corporate values. Everyone benefits from positive momentum. Values, vision and mission help to create, drive and motivate. As such, they add to momentum. They create a rallying point. They FOCUS disparate visions. They help companies scale beyond their current resources. And they cost you nothing but a little time. Don't listen to the talking heads that try and boil everything down to the business theory de jour. The new theory that will sell the next book. Consider that Tom Peters included Enron, Fanny Mae and many others as businesses to emulate. I suggest that lack of values demonstrated by these organizations was a primary reason for their demise.

You don't need game changing strategies. You need fundamentals. You need to excel at those things that have always been a part of the best run companies. You need to work within the POE Continuum. Some things stand the test of time.