

# Preface

Mention business strategy to most managers, and this conjures up images of an army of high-priced MBA consultants with fancy charts and PowerPoint presentations. Strategic planning meetings, often cloistered in far-away places, generate binders full of grand schemes and sometimes little else. At some companies, strategy is shrouded in mystery, discussed in hushed tones, and left as the exclusive domain of top management. This book is about changing these images of what strategy is, what it should be, and how strategy should be developed.

First and foremost, strategy is the way we decide to achieve our long-term objectives. Strategy answers the question “How do we best accomplish our goals?” Strategy is therefore about decisions and actions that will contribute to your business success. But where do the good, new strategic ideas come from? The answer is that good business ideas can come from anyone in the organization. Exceptional companies want all their employees to be engaged in searching for, and implementing, innovative ways to improve the business. The main purpose of this book is to provide a resource for all managers to assist them in contributing to the formulation of strategy for their companies.

Strategy development involves three principal questions:

- Where is the business today?
- Where do we want the business to go?
- How are we going to get there?

Throughout this book, you’ll find concepts, tools, insights, and examples of business strategy in the making. From setting and communicating goals, evaluating current performance,

exploring the business environment, knowing your customers, and creating strategic choices through implementing new ideas, the goal is to arm readers with the capability to make a difference for the better in their own organization. If you are passionate about your business, this book strives to provide to you a guide to understand and add to the strategic decision making of the company.

Many companies deal with strategy once a year at a strategic planning retreat. Truly successful companies recognize that strategy development is continuous, and iterative. Continuous because things change; interest rates move up and down, technology changes, and customers' needs vary. Strategy is iterative because competitors, suppliers, and customers act in response to our strategic decisions. So we need to anticipate these responses, or react to them. By preparing all managers to think strategically, the organization is in a much better position to sustain a successful operation.

Sports analogies are used often in business, and also in this book. One of the best images I know for business strategy in action is the sight of a University of Wisconsin varsity eight-crew boat on Lake Mendota in Madison. The power of a boat is not determined by the strength of any individual rower, but rather in the power of every oar working together in unison, committed to the leadership of the coxswain. So too in business, the more each manager works in concert with the strategic direction of the company, the more successful the company will be in reaching its goals. Furthermore, I firmly believe, and experience bears this out, that as each manager contributes to defining the strategy of the organization, the easier, and better, strategy can be implemented and communicated throughout the organization.

In the final analysis, excellent business ideas are the fuel for the long-term success of a company. By giving all managers the factors, process, and tools of strategy, we hope that they will develop, and execute, more and better business ideas to the benefit of all stakeholders.

## Special Features

The idea behind the books in the Briefcase Books Series is to give you practical information written in a friendly, person-to-person style. The chapters are relatively short, deal with tactical issues, and include lots of examples. They also feature numerous sidebars designed to give you different types of specific information. Here's a description of the boxes you'll find in this book.



These boxes do just what their name implies: give you tips and tactics for using the ideas in this book to intelligently undertake strategy development and implementation.



These boxes provide warnings for where things could go wrong when you're thinking about strategy and what might work for your organization.



These boxes give you how-to and insider hints for effective strategic planning.



Every subject has some special jargon, including strategy development. These boxes provide definitions of these terms.



It's always useful to have examples that show how the principles in the book are applied. These boxes give you the specifics from a variety of companies, large and small.



This icon identifies boxes where you'll find specific procedures you can follow to take advantage of the book's advice.



How can you make sure you won't make a mistake when planning your strategy? You can't completely, but these boxes will give you practical advice on how to minimize the possibility of an error.