

NANO TOOLS FOR LEADERS®

BECOME A MORE STRATEGIC LEADER

Nano Tools for Leaders® are fast, effective leadership tools that you can learn and start using in less than 15 minutes — with the potential to significantly impact your success as a leader and the engagement and productivity of the people you lead.

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THE GOAL:

Follow a six-step roadmap to integrate strategy and leadership and apply them together.

NANO TOOL:

Strategic leadership, the integrated application of both strategy and leadership, has become more important than ever before — and thus more vital for managers to master. It involves mastering the elements of strategy and leadership both separately and as an integrated whole, applying them together, and continuously drawing on both as markets morph, disruptions occur, and openings arise. In framing strategy and leadership as a single unified discipline, you'll be able to apply both components consistently and completely. Just one or the other will not suffice.

Each element of the following list is vital. Mastery of one or two elements will not accomplish much, but taken together these six items form a firm platform for developing and applying strategic leadership. Becoming a more strategic leader is a tall order, but concentrating on your personal development in each of these areas will give you a distinct advantage as you move ahead in your leadership career.

ACTION STEPS:

- 1. Integrate Strategy and Leadership.** Master the elements of strategy and leadership both separately and as an integrated whole. Consciously reflect on, address, and strengthen your ability to answer two key questions: How is our organization positioned to meet a given strategic goal? Do we have the right people and architecture in place to meet that goal?" It is also important for managers to ensure that their teams can effectively address these questions.
- 2. Learn to Lead Strategically. Learning to become a complete strategic leader is a lifelong endeavor.** Pursue your education in three ways to develop an integrated understanding of strategy and leadership. First, engage in formal development programs with strategy and leadership components to strengthen your strategic thinking and execution skills. Second, find opportunities to receive guidance and feedback from mentors and professional coaches to improve your strategic leadership. Third, seek instructive experiences by taking on varied and increasing responsibilities and learning on the job what is most essential for thinking and acting strategically.

- 3. Ensure Strategic Fit.** Not every strategy can be led by every leader. When filling a new position, gather data from others who are familiar with the position and create your own summary of the strategic and leadership imperatives of the job. Then separately, conduct a similar assessment of the strategic and leadership capacities of the prospective candidates. Finally, match the two assessments to pinpoint priorities and ensure a good fit.
- 4. Convey Strategic Intent.** The senior-most leader must communicate the organization's strategic agenda with complete clarity while refraining from detailing how strategy should be implemented. Let go of micro-managing the execution and allow those responsible to develop their own plan and execute it to meet the strategic agenda outlined.
- 5. Layer Leadership.** With the enterprise's strategic intent conveyed by the most senior leader in the organization, it is then the responsibility of the managers populating the next tier to convey the same message downward, and for their own subordinate managers to do the same in turn, with strategic leadership cascading down the company pyramid in what can be termed layered leadership.
- 6. Decide Deliberatively.** Ensure that your leadership decisions are informed, analytic, and far-reaching by gathering data and insights from others, and focusing attention on both short- and long-term consequences. The multiple perspectives (from a variety of people, data sources and short/long-term consequences) can help you avoid two dangerous critical thinking errors: status quo bias, when managers fail to make any changes because the high costs of initiating a new strategy can be seen as outweighing any gains, and *availability bias*, a myopic view in which managers tend to focus on the recent past in judging the likelihood of future events.

HOW LEADERS USE IT:

- President and chief executive of the Estée Lauder Companies, Fabrizio Freda, says "Strategic leadership is about setting a clear vision and making choices of where to play and how to win, prioritizing goals, and ensuring you have the capabilities necessary to achieve those goals. If these elements are all in the discussion, this is strategic leadership, but if one is missing, success is limited."
- When PepsiCo chief executive Indra Nooyi was asked how she managed the stepping stones that a rising financial executive should take on the way to becoming a CEO, she replied, "You pick three or four people you think can be moved along and give them broad experiences. Not necessarily running a business, but put them in charge of big transformational projects or send them overseas. Give them experiences they would never have in the traditional CFO job and have them open their minds to all kinds of experiences, give them the ability to shape an agenda."
- A comparative study of the strategies of Apple, Intel, and Microsoft by researchers Michael Cusumano and David Yoffie revealed that the firms under the leadership of Steve Jobs, Andy Grove, and Bill Gates drove their enterprises by setting distant and ambitious objectives. They expected company managers to work deliberately back from the distant goals to the present to identify the decisions that were required now to reach those future points. This obliged leaders at all levels to "look forward and reason backward," a leadership precept that others have termed "bringing the future into the present."

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- [*The Strategic Leader's Roadmap: Six Steps for Integrating Leadership and Strategy*](#), Harbir Singh and Michael Useem (Wharton Digital Press, 2016). Presents an actionable plan for leading strategically, drawing on the experiences of some of the world's most successful leaders.
- *Making Strategy Work: Leading Effective Execution and Change*, Lawrence G. Hrebiniak (Pearson Education, 2005). Offers a practical, process-driven guide to successful strategy execution.
- Nano Tool: Mauro Guillen: [*Four Global Trends Every Leader Must Consider*](#). Outlines four key trends to help organizations position themselves for rapid growth in the future.
- Nano Tool: B. Cade Massey: [*Make Better Decisions Under Uncertainty: Taking Charge of Chance*](#). Provides five actions steps for improving your success rate on risky decisions by accepting uncertainty and adapting your decisions to the "logic of chance."

ABOUT NANO TOOLS:

Nano Tools for Leaders® was conceived and developed by Deb Giffen, MCC, Director of Innovative Learning Solutions at Wharton Executive Education. It is jointly sponsored by Wharton Executive Education and Wharton's Center for Leadership and Change Management, Wharton Professor of Management Michael Useem, Director. Nano Tools Academic Director is Professor John Paul MacDuffie, Professor of Management at the Wharton School and Director of the Program on Vehicle and Mobility Innovation (PVMI) at Wharton's Mack Institute for Innovation Management.