

why

how



what

# YOUR STRATEGY NEEDS A STRATEGY™

WHAT 20 YEARS OF HELPING LEADERS WIN  
REVEALED ABOUT MOMENTUM

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# Until You Get Hit in the Mouth

One of my favorite quotes is from professional boxer, Mike Tyson, widely-known as “the undisputed heavyweight champion”. During an interview, Tyson remarked to a reporter, “Everybody has a plan until they get hit in the mouth.”

Whether it is a detailed approach with charts and data, tattered sticky notes worn from scribbles, or it’s all in your head but you can explain it if asked, your strategy must answer three questions:

1. *what are you doing*
2. *why does it matter*
3. *how will you measure its impact*

When leaders are hard-pressed to articulate these answers about their strategic approach, it often feels like the proverbial hit in the mouth. So, if you are a leader and you’ve felt that sting of being hit in the mouth, then it is time to admit that your strategy needs a strategy.



As the business landscape evolved from the industrial age to the information age, and from the information age to the age of innovation, leaders have to step-up their game. They have to embrace new ways of thinking and new ways of doing, or face **the inevitability of irrelevance**. What many leaders learned about “*the business of business*” through academic channels and structured learning is scrutinized because **innovation outpaces textbooks**.

Within the pages of this whitepaper, you will not find speak, jargon, or twenty-dollar words. You will find real-talk. I’ve had the privilege of working with leaders across the globe and across industries – from entertainment to environment. I’ll share my insights about what it takes to win in your market and why I believe momentum is the imperative leaders can’t afford to ignore.

Peter Drucker's quip that, "*culture eats strategy for breakfast*," is a popular lament for certain types of leaders. When pressed to put their vision on paper and then convey it in such a way that it inspires and energizes people, these leaders come up short. These are what I call the "*either/or leaders*". These leaders will struggle with momentum time and time again because they fail to see that culture and strategy are not adversaries.

Culture and strategy are **two elements of an elegant whole**. They are complementary forces and serve as the DNA for momentum. Culture and strategy are equally vital and possess distinct, interconnected roles in shaping a company's long-term relevance. Said differently, it's not a matter of either culture or strategy; it's the assertion of culture AND strategy. Strategy does not exist in isolation from the cultural context that imbues it with purpose and meaning.



**Culture evolves. Values endure.** Culture, which encompasses espoused values, implicit values, normative behaviors, and beliefs within a company, provide the foundation upon which strategy is built. It shapes mindsets and actions and enables alignment with the company's purpose - or not in some cases. Because of changes in leadership, organizational shifting, workforce trends, and the like, over time, culture evolves. Organizational values form the ethical and moral compass that guides strategic decision-making and provides a framework for evaluating strategic options. In this way, alignment with the company's core identity or brand is ensured. In other words, values endure.

While strategy provides a roadmap for achieving organizational objectives, culture enables the agility and adaptability necessary for success in an ever-changing business landscape. A dynamic culture fosters a growth mindset, encouraging employees to embrace innovation, experiment with new approaches, and adapt strategies when needed. Culture serves as the catalyst for fostering an environment where strategy can be adjusted in real time to address emerging challenges and leverage new opportunities. When a culture enables agility, it is fertile ground for momentum.



Culture plays a pivotal role in shaping employee behavior, motivation, and engagement. A positive and inclusive culture, built on trust, transparency, and collaboration, creates an environment where employees feel empowered and valued. Empowered employees actively contribute to strategic initiatives, offer insightful and innovative ideas, and invest in the long-term success of the company. Strategy relies on their commitment and energy. Without them, there's no magic. There's no momentum.

The late Peter Drucker was a brilliant management expert and I am grateful for his contributions to modern management practices. I encourage leaders to view Drucker's remarks as a reminder that momentum is influenced by equal parts culture and strategy. While strategy provides the direction and action plan, culture shapes the mindset, values, and behaviors that bring strategies to life. Culture and strategy are intertwined forces, both necessary for momentum and success.

## STRATEGY IS A VERB™

In simple terms, strategy is executing a framework to achieve an outcome. This means strategy is executing. Executing is a verb, ergo strategy is a verb. *See how I did that?* When leaders regard strategy as a static, one-and-done concept, it reduces strategy to a theoretical exercise rooted in conventional, industrial age thinking. That line of thinking dismisses the dynamic and proactive elements of strategic design. It's akin to going to a library and blowing the dust off of an out-of-print, first-edition book. Sure, it's still readable, but is it still relevant?



Before his untimely passing, I had the privilege of speaking with Jim Horan, the founder of the One Page Business Plan Company. Jim reached out to me because he listened to an interview I gave and was intrigued by my perspective on strategy. I will never forget Jim's opening line, *"Strategy is verb? Huh. That's clever. I wish I had thought of that."* Jim's validation of my unconventional perspective was music to my ears. For years, I had only whispered my coined phrase, but now it has become my proverbial fight song. Strategy IS a verb.

Because of the dynamic nature of business, when leaders take on strategy formation, they must invite three distinct, yet equally important personas to the table. **The Architect** (the who/what lens); **The Artist** (the what/why lens), and **The Athlete** (the why/when lens).

Together, these personas contribute to an agile, balanced, and innovative output that challenges the what/why/how questions of a sound strategic approach. When an answer changes, so must the strategy. Strategy should move at the speed of business, and business is ever in motion.

Responding to market entrants, competitive threats, and buying behaviors requires an agile approach. When leaders view strategy as an action-centric process, they unlock the company's full potential, help it adapt to change, and insulate its market relevance. Strategy is what you put on paper and what you put in motion. Leaders who win understand that **strategy has a shelf life**.

## HOPE IS NOT A STRATEGY

There are some leaders who prefer to solely rely on their feelings and intuition to make strategic decisions. Sometimes that works. Most times it does not. Hope without a plan of action is insufficient for achieving meaningful success that most leaders crave. You can have hope, don't get me wrong. But that hope needs to be accompanied by strategic thinking, proactive decision-making, and a well-defined roadmap to navigate the complexities of the business landscape. **Hope is not a component of momentum.** Hope is the result of it.

Let's say you are one of those intuitive, feeling leaders and you have an ambitious goal or dream. It's been sitting inside of you simmering, but progress is slow. Consider these concepts to frame your thoughts and transform your hope into an approach.

Invite those three personas (*The Architect, The Artist, and The Athlete*) to brainstorming huddles to capture and set clear, meaningful objectives and actionable initiatives.

Dig into some data to analyze market trends across several industries, not just your own. Notice what emerges.

Review customer insights to reconsider needs, wants, and expectations.

Consider aspirational opportunities.

Align cooperative energies to maximize and accelerate concerted efforts.

Start fostering a bias-for-action mindset by encouraging employees at the appropriate level of IDCAP (influence, decision-making, control, authority, and power) to proactively pursue organizational goals, make data-driven decisions, and execute with agility.

In business, like life, there is seldom reward without risk. That's how "*hopium*" became the drug of choice for a lot of leaders. Consider that risk, exposure, and liability are not always obvious. Contingency plans are a lifeline for your strategic approach. Sometimes the question is "*what if*" other times the question is "*what now*". Uncertainty cannot be completely thwarted. Either way, momentum, not hope, often aides in the navigation of risk and uncertainty.

Speaking of risk .... In some companies, **hope breeds complacency**. Complacency is a special kind of risk. It's inertia's second cousin. Discourage family reunions.



## YOU CANNOT SOLVE IRRATIONAL PROBLEMS WITH RATIONAL THINKING

There are countless business challenges that defy conventional logic and cannot be fully understood or resolved using purely rational thinking. These issues often involve complicated human dynamics, emotional factors, and unpredictable variables that require an uncommon, perhaps even a contrarian perspective. To address irrational problems, leaders who win leverage creativity and imagination as invaluable problem-solving tools. By **expanding their mindsets beyond logical analysis**, leaders who win tap into the creative instincts of others to question convention, uncover novel solutions, and implement unconventional approaches.

It is a bold act when a leader breaks free from learned, predictable thought patterns to engender divergent thinking. But, in so doing, diverse perspectives, rich dialogue, and constructive dissent can, and often does, invite insights into the way forward. Leaders who win, expand on the presence of momentum by accessing a broader range of ideas and insights in which to tackle the irrational – and live to tell the fantastical story of how it all came to be.

In a world where complex and irrational problems frequently arise, the notion that *you cannot solve irrational problems with rational thinking* serves as a reminder to leaders to **reimagine their problem-solving toolkit**.

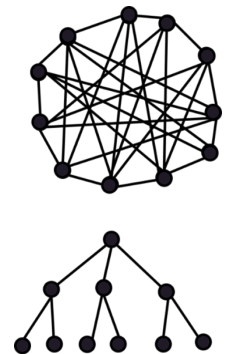


By embracing creativity, intuition, and emotional intelligence in addition to reason and logic, leaders can approach these challenges from a unique lens of opportunity that reveals innovative solutions and fuels transformative outcomes.

Balancing rationality and convention with imagination and creativity empowers leaders to navigate the complexities of the market and its plethora of irrational and unpredictable challenges. I would argue that the conundrum leaders face in this delicate balance often provides an environment for sustained momentum, especially through periods of prolonged uncertainty.

# BUILD STRATEGY FROM THE BOTTOM UP NOT THE TOP DOWN

Building a purposeful strategic framework that challenges the traditional, hierarchical approach to planning is not for the faint of heart. It takes courage for leaders to invite various perspectives into the formation of a strategy. Despite evidence to the contrary, far too many leaders still believe that strategy is best formed solely at the executive level. A belief that is antiquated at best and myopic at its worse.



Leaders inspire others to do the work. Managers get the work done through others. *Who are these others?* Individual contributors.

**Strategy is mobilized at the individual contributor level.** How the “doing” gets done is just as important as planning the “doing”.

*What if you alone are the executive level within the company?*

*What if you are the only person within the company with the IDCAP required to inspire others and get them to do the work?*

If you, as the leader, are also functioning as an individual contributor, do you really have the competencies and capabilities necessary to navigate leading, managing, and doing? You might. You might not. *Are you about to find out the hard way?*

Remember those personas, *The Architect*, *The Artist*, and *The Athlete*? If you, as the leader, represent one of the personas, then who are “the others” contributing the perspectives of the remaining personas?



There is tremendous value in empowering employees (and other stakeholders) to engage in shaping the company's strategic direction. By harnessing the collective wisdom and creativity of your team, your company can build on the fusion of culture and strategy. Fostering innovation, adaptability, and ownership will add thrust to your strategic pursuits.

The people closest to the front line (and those who have a great view of it) often possess **invaluable insights and a deep understanding** of a company's operational realities. The realities that are necessary to conceptualize, mobilize, and capitalize on a purpose-driven strategic approach. I encourage leaders to engage these people to reveal what might be hiding in plain sight. In this way, the resulting strategic approach becomes a balanced, relevant, and measurable framework.

## STRATEGY DOESN'T DIE PEOPLE KILL IT

There are many ways in which strategy can get killed-off in plain sight. The obvious ways, like uncooperativeness, combativeness, and non-support, are easy to spot. But, it's **those all-so-subtle ways** that seem to take leaders by surprise. Ironically, the subtle ways in which strategy is killed-off in plain sight is so prevalent that I've developed archetypes for them. Here are just a few:

*Hole Punch Patty/Paul*  
*That Won't Work Wilma/Willie*  
*Feedback Francine/Frank*  
*What If Irene/Ian*  
*Have You Considered Kate/Ken*

*I Don't Get It Gayle/Guy*  
*I'm Just Curious Cathy/Calvin*  
*We Can't Do That Thelma/Thatcher*  
*I'm Already Swamped Susan/Sam*  
*The Last Time Tina/Ted*

These silent saboteurs are part of a phenomenon I call the *Resistance Gap*. The *Resistance Gap* represents constructs like confusion, shame, distrust, indifference, and the like. People express resistance to interventions and disruptions in myriad of ways.

The truth is, everyone plays in the *Resistance Gap* in some way, shape, or form when presented with "new". Specifically related to mobilizing a strategy, the *Resistance Gap* is a series of **implicit, background actions** that slowly erode the energy, effort, and enthusiasm necessary to bolster momentum. In the end, there is so much "drag on the line", that thrust becomes impossible. This is the slow, painful death of strategy.  
***So, what's a leader to do?***



- Plow through the strategy using sheer will and determination?
- Water-down the strategy to the least inconvenient version?
- Start from scratch... again?

***But what if it's you?*** What if you, as the leader, are in the *Resistance Gap*? What if you are no longer inspired and excited by the strategic direction? What if your heart is no longer in it?

Well, there's only one thing to do.



# HIRE PEOPLE WHO CAN HELP YOU SOLVE TOMORROW'S PROBLEMS TODAY

One of the most impactful strategic decisions leaders can make is expanding a team. Whether expansion is achieved through hiring, contracting, advising, mentoring, or consulting; inviting outside perspectives and capabilities often yields better results faster for a company. This notion is especially true if the leadership team is a team of one. Solving tomorrow's problems today means proactively seeking and engaging contributors with the skills, mindset, and drive required to do big things in big ways.

Leaders need access to talented contributors who will drive innovation, enable the company to be future-ready, ensure ahead-of-the-curve thinking is prevalent, unlock new opportunities for growth, and help them win. What I've experienced and observed is that when this level of talent contribution is needed, tactical leaders prefer direct hiring, while visionary leaders lean toward contracting and consulting.

Perhaps the reasoning can be found in the tendency for **tactical leaders** to think, "*what do I need*", while **visionary leaders** tend to think, "*who do I know*".

The world needs both types of leaders and both types of leaders need talented people who can help them solve tomorrow's problems today.

The intelligence, insight, and imagination that these talented contributors possess starts with a good grasp of emerging trends, technological advancements, evolving market dynamics, and potential obstacles and opportunities. They understand that sometimes a basic S.W.O.T. analysis is insufficient in framing out the kind of strategic approach that makes a significant impact.

**Just who are the wunderkind that leaders rely on to help them win?** Thinkers. Feelers. Doers. Dreamers. They are sought-after, adaptable, curious, confident, innovation-driven, critical thinking, problem-solving, entrepreneurial-minded, collaborative, growth-focused, scrappy, life-long learning, cooperative, enthusiastic, self-motivated people. They are the momentum makers.

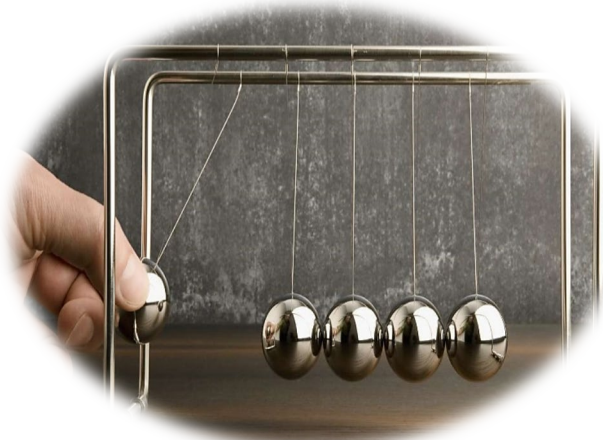


## INERTIA IS INSIDIOUS

Inertia is a barrier to organizational growth and operational excellence. It manifests out of a desire to maintain existing practices, structures, and ways of thinking and doing.

From an organizational design lens, inertia is a discreet form of resistance. It is motion absent force. The evidence of momentum is traction. Leaders who win know that **inertia is the enemy of momentum.**

Whereas the *Resistance Gap* is largely attributed to the behaviors of an individual and might spread to adjacent team members or others within close working relationship, **inertia is a widespread, collective resistance.** It can be department-wide, division-wide, management-wide, even leadership-wide. Yes, the leaders who want to hire people who can help them solve tomorrow's problems today, can also be the ones pumping the breaks of momentum while the wunderkind they have enlisted to help are in fifth gear. Trust me. It happens.



Organizational inertia, with its insidious nature, slowly hinders progress and growth. Recognizing the various manifestations of inertia is essential for leaders seeking to stop it in its tracks.

By fostering a culture of empowerment, disruption, and adaptability, leaders can break the stronghold of inertia, or better yet, stymie it before it has an opportunity to do real harm.

Review the list below and ask yourself about the consistency in which these indicators are showing up in your company. While not an exhaustive list, these are common **indicators of organizational inertia**, regardless of the size of the company. Yes, before you ask, sometimes leaders are unknowingly contributing to or causing the problem.

*rebuffing change (big and small)*  
*hierarchical decision-making*  
*sunk cost fallacy*  
*accepted unresponsiveness*  
*legacy normative behaviors*  
*micromanagement*  
*unwelcome/unsolicited feedback*  
*bureaucracy over simplicity*

*lack of employee initiative/ownership*  
*siloes and one-way communication*  
*management by overcommunication*  
*legacy ways of doing a job or role*  
*splintered morale and engagement*  
*group think or acquiescing to leader input*  
*dismissiveness of technologies*  
*fear (disguised as over-cautiousness)*

# Start With Strategy

Ideas are free. Outcomes are not. Whether it's time, energy, man power, or brain cells, all outcomes, good, bad, or indifferent; come at a cost. **Strategy is an investment. So is execution.** When leaders start with strategy, they are looking to answer those three what/why/how questions. For every strategic decision, and at various points within a company's life cycle, the manner in which those three questions are addressed will be different. *Why?* Because the cost/benefit analysis of starting with strategy often reveals surprising considerations. There are times as a leader when **having no strategy might actually be an option** - but not for long. The decision to have no strategy is in fact a strategy. But even this strategy needs a strategy.

Growing, thriving, and winning with strategy can be exhausting at times. Decision fatigue is real. Lack of clarity is real. Overwhelm is real. The race for relevance is real. Share the momentum-making with trusted contributors to spread the genius around. Leaders who win know that not having a strategy is reckless, but strategy formation in a silo is dangerous.

Below is a cheat sheet of sorts. If fatigue, lack of clarity, and overwhelm have stymied your inner brilliance, refer to this quick list to **regain your strategy-making mojo**. If all else fails, [email me](#).

Strategic Alignment – **deciding** if functional areas of the company are aligned with a cohesive vision.

Focus and Direction - **guiding** decision-making at all levels by shaping priorities, allocating resources, and setting measurable objectives.

Adaptive Planning - **ensuring** flexibility across the strategic direction to account for unforeseen external and internal factors.

Innovation and Differentiation - **leveraging** the company's unique value proposition and market advantage to propel thinking beyond the status quo.

Alignment and Engagement - **conveying** a clear vision and purpose that values individual contribution, fosters a sense of ownership, and celebrates collective efforts.



The next section of this whitepaper outlines six prevalent market-facing strategies. This is where I play to help leaders transform ambitious ideas into outrageous outcomes. See you on the other side.

# POSITIONING STRATEGY

## THE QUICK



By effectively implementing a positioning strategy, a company can establish a strong and favorable market position, differentiate itself from competitors, attract its target customers, and build long-term customer loyalty and brand equity.

## WHAT IT IS

A positioning strategy is a plan developed to establish a distinct and desirable position in the minds of its target customers within a competitive market.

## WHY IT MATTERS

To differentiate the company's products or services from those of competitors and create a unique and compelling value proposition that resonates with the company's target market.

## HOW TO WIN

**Market Analysis:** A comprehensive assessment of the target market.

**Unique Value Proposition:** A relevant, timely, and provable statement that sets the company apart and answers the question, *"why your company instead of your competitor"*.

**Target Market Segmentation:** A process to divide the target market up based on relevant criteria enabling the company to tailor its positioning efforts to specific customer groups or segments.

**Competitive Differentiation:** A bold declaration of non-parity with the company's chief competitors.

**Branding and Messaging:** A series of marketing efforts that convey the company's personality and market advantage.

**Communication Channels:** All mechanisms and mediums used to position and promote the company in relation to its target market.

**Consistency and Reinforcement:** A continuous and repetitious approach to reinforce the company's unique value proposition, differentiation, branding, messaging, and market advantage.

**Continuous Evaluation and Adaptation:** A method to stay ahead of market changes and competitors in an effort to extend the company's industry relevance.

# DEFENSIVE STRATEGY

THE  
QUICK



**A defensive strategy is not static. This strategy requires ongoing evaluation, adaptation, and agility to respond to changing market dynamics. A company must strike a balance between defensive measures and proactive growth strategies.**

## WHAT IT IS

A defensive strategy, also known as a defensive posture, is a set of actions and measures that a company undertakes to protect its market share, competitive position, and overall business stability.

## WHY IT MATTERS

It is primarily implemented when a company faces external threats, such as aggressive competitors, shifting market conditions, instability, disruptive technologies, or economic downturns. The goal of a defensive strategy is to fortify the company's current position and mitigate potential risks.

## HOW TO WIN

**Market Monitoring:** Ongoing assessment of the company's industry and competitive landscape, to include trend tracking, competitor activities, customer preferences, and emerging market threats.

**Competitive Analysis:** A thorough assessment of competitors' strengths, weaknesses, strategies, and market disruption opportunity advantages.

**Protecting Market Share:** The practice of safeguarding the company's existing customer base and market share by mobilizing tactics to strengthen customer relationships and longevity.

**Intellectual Property Protection:** Safeguarding intellectual assets that are essential to the company's brand, differentiation, and market advantage.

**Cost Efficiency:** The practice of streamlining and optimizing operational efficiencies and eliminating operational waste and duplicity.

**Diversification:** An approach that leverages new products, services or markets to buffer the company against volatility or decline in specific capability areas.

**Strategic Partnerships:** Trust-based relationships with complementary businesses for access to resources, expertise, customer groups, and market opportunities.

# OFFENSIVE STRATEGY

## THE QUICK



When implementing an offensive strategy, it should be based on thorough market analysis, competitor evaluation, and a deep understanding of customer needs and preferences. It requires agility, calculated risk-taking, and adaptability.

## WHAT IT IS

An offensive strategy is a set of actions implemented to actively pursue growth, competitive advantage, and market dominance.

## WHY IT MATTERS

Unlike a defensive strategy, an offensive strategy aims to exploit new opportunities, typically through market presence expansion and outperforming formidable competitors.

## HOW TO WIN

**Market Penetration:** An approach to aggressively penetrate existing markets to increase market share by deploying saturation and/or disruption tactics.

**Product Differentiation:** A double-down tactic that over-leverages a company's differentiation to aggressively increase its competitive edge.

**Market Development:** Entering new markets and expanding into untapped international and domestic geographical areas to diversify revenue streams and support organic growth.

**Mergers and Acquisitions:** A maneuver to integrate a complementary business to gain access to new technologies, valuable market resources, distribution networks, customer bases, and other high-value growth pursuits.

**Innovation and Research & Development:** The ongoing practice of evaluating, testing, and implementing ahead-of-the-curve advancements to establish or extend industry dominance.

**Competitive Disruption:** An aggressive, big bold move approach that directly targets competitors head-on by challenging their industry positioning, competitive advantage, and differentiation.

**Strategic Alliances:** Collaborative and complementary practices between businesses that mutually benefit from leveraging expertise, resources, access, and other real and intangible assets.

# STABILIZATION STRATEGY

THE  
QUICK



**A stabilization strategy requires decisive leadership, disciplined execution, and a willingness to make difficult decisions. A stabilization strategy is often a near-term approach aimed at rebalancing the company's operations and financial health.**

## WHAT IT IS

A stabilization strategy, also known as a retrenchment strategy or a recovery strategy, is a hyper-focused set of actions and measures to shore-up or stabilize operations and improve financial health.

## WHY IT MATTERS

A distressed company will lose its market position if it faces operational pressures, inefficiencies, or acute market uncertainties that shock or threaten its survival.

## HOW TO WIN

**Financial Restructuring:** Operational practices aimed at rebalancing the company's overall fiscal performance and operational wherewithal.

**Streamlining Operations:** Ongoing efforts to optimize and right-size the company's most essential functional areas.

**Core Competencies:** Implementing betterment practices to prioritize the company's strengths, leverage its market advantage, and reallocate resources to support operational excellence.

**Customer and Market Analysis:** Leveraging customer insights and data to implement improvements or expand market activities and regain customer confidence.

**Enhanced Value Proposition:** Incorporating methods and mechanisms to strengthen or recover eroded customer relationships.

**Stakeholder Management:** A commitment of trust rebuilding through transparency with vested interest parties.

**Continuous Monitoring and Adaptation:** Implementing near-term key performance indicators (KPIs) to assess the effectiveness of the stabilization approach and to course correct as required.

**Talent Retention and Development:** An ongoing commitment to empower people, encourage contribution, and invest in the capabilities and continued growth of contributors.

# TURNAROUND STRATEGY

## THE QUICK



**A turnaround strategy requires strong leadership, a committed team, and a willingness to make tough decisions. Efforts are time-sensitive and require swift implementation. With good execution, a solid turnaround strategy can help a struggling company restore profitability.**

## WHAT IT IS

A comprehensive strategic approach used when a company is facing significant financial, operational, or competitive challenges that threaten its viability and existence.

## WHY IT MATTERS

Any combination of happening-at-the-same-time adversities that can create peril for the company. These include declining sales, financial distress, low market share, internal inefficiencies, weakened positioning, and recurring attrition.

## HOW TO WIN

**Diagnose and Assess:** Capture data and insights from all functional areas to identify root-causes and outline remedies for implementation.

**Cost Efficiency:** Optimizing and flattening operational processes to leverage efficiencies and eradicate waste and redundancies.

**Repositioning:** Strategically coordinated tactics to regain the company's market advantage.

**Restructuring:** Reallocation and elimination to drive organizational and operational improvements with measurable results.

**Cash Flow Management:** Oversight and constraints that provide guardrails to leverage favorable, alternative financial options.

**Innovation:** Leveraging technologies and techniques to improve product/service deliverability and performance that is valuable and significant to key customer groups or market segments.

**Stakeholder Engagement:** A continuous communication process with parties whose ongoing support is vital to the company's continued survivability.

**Performance Measurement:** Captured data points and insights serve to inform essential key performance indicators (KPIs) that will be used to measure and inform look ahead operational decisions.



# FIRST MOVER STRATEGY

## THE QUICK



**A first mover company often becomes the benchmark of its industry. Implementing a first mover strategy however, comes with risks and challenges. These include high R&D costs, hefty upfront investment, market uncertainty and misjudgment, and the need to continually innovate and adapt in order to maintain market positioning.**

## WHAT IT IS

A first mover strategy, also known as first-mover advantage or a unicorn strategy, refers to the market advantage gained by a company that is the first to enter a new market, introduce a novel product or service, or pioneer a disruptive innovation.

## WHY IT MATTERS

The ability to capitalize on being the initial player in the market, which can lead to an enviable market position and an absolute advantage.

## HOW TO WIN

**Market Leadership:** You don't have to be the best, but you do have to be the first. Being perceived as an inaugural player or trailblazer often creates an overwhelming competitive edge over later entrants.

**Technological Advantage:** Leveraging technology and innovations to create a barrier to entry for new market entrants discourages replication (knock-offs) of your first mover offerings.

**Switching Costs:** Early market entry creates greater customer loyalty within key customer groups. Brand loyalty is difficult to penetrate and customers are often reluctant to switch brands due to their perceptions about the real and intangible costs of change.

**Learning and Experience:** Capturing and responding to learned customer expectations and preferences, as well as feedback from a shifting market landscape, provides rich insights as a learning and listening mechanism for first movers.

**Control of Channels:** First movers can influence an entire distribution network by securing strategic partnerships, expanding market access, and exerting distribution preferences.

**Pricing Power:** With a sustained, unique market position, first mover companies can reset industry pricing structures and disrupt long-standing, widely-used pricing models.

**Preemption of Resources:** With preemptive access to high-value resources (i.e., key suppliers, exceptional talent, preferred placement or geography, and intellectual property rights), potential competitors are hindered in having similar access.

## Your Next Move?

Imagine, if you will, that strategy is nothing more than a box.

The design and dimensions of the box, the inside and outside of the box, even the contents of the box, are all decisions that must be made about the box. Winning at strategy, achieving strategy excellence, and fueling momentum is a lesson in boxmaking.

When you invite others to contribute to the boxmaking process, something magical can and often does happen. The box takes on an entirely different set of attributes - and that is a very good thing.

### **Leaders who consistently win have mastered the art of boxmaking.**

They understand that asking people to “*think outside the box*” does precious little to stimulate the kind of innovative thinking that solves complex problems and drives real, heart-in-it momentum within and across their companies.

The art of boxmaking ensures that the resulting strategic approach, irrespective of its type, is balanced, representative, contributory, actionable, and measurable. In so doing, it will always answer those essential questions – *what are we doing, why does it matter, and how will we measure its impact.*

As you take on the role as Chief Boxmaker, remember to:

- embrace change, adaptability, and innovation
- challenge old assumptions and foster a culture of imagination
- stay agile, make quick decisions, and adjust to market dynamics
- cultivate a learning culture and invest in people development
- lead by example, inspire bold thinking, and invite others’ perspectives



Thank You!

Thank you for reading my whitepaper, *Your Strategy Needs a Strategy™*. I hope the insights I have shared from my twenty years of helping leaders, like you, serve to encourage, motivate, and inspire you to reframe your approach to strategy, reconsider what it takes to win, and amplify your efforts in driving success in your company.

*Best to you always!*  
*Olalah*

## THE COMPANY

Started in 2003, YellowWood Group is a strategy consulting company with experience and perspective garnered from client relationships across 14 industries spanning 3 continents. YellowWood partners with private sector companies, public sector agencies and administrations, and not-for-profit organizations to help leaders transform ambitious ideas into outrageous outcomes. Clients say our approach is unconventional. They also say it's wildly successful.



## THE CHIEF BOXMAKER

Olalah Njenga is an award-winning entrepreneur, an accomplished business strategist, and an advocate for the small business economy. Prior to founding YellowWood Group, she enjoyed working for global industry leaders in enterprise-level operations, administration, legal, human resources, and technology roles with broad responsibilities. Olalah serves in several national and state leadership roles where she represents the legislative interests of small business owners. She is a trusted media source with credits that include the BBC, NPR, New York times, Marketplace, Fox, and local broadcast affiliates. Connect with Olalah at [LinkedIn.com/in/Olalah](https://www.linkedin.com/in/Olalah).

