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### ***What Makes People Content?***

To those for whom “misery loves company” is true, we hate to tell you, but there are people who are consistently content – even in the face of the challenges, stresses, mishaps, and frustrations that drive the rest of us crazy!

What makes these people so darned content? You might be surprised to learn how much of their sense of wellbeing is due to wise choices, not good luck. Content people have usually learned how to accept both the plusses and minuses of daily life, acknowledge what is within their control and what is not, and appreciate even the small things in life. Sure, we envy the lucky few who seem content. But a better idea is to increase their number by emulating the way they approach life.

### ***The Success Paradox***

Concentrating on helping *others* succeed – not focusing on your own success – is the surest way to succeed.

### ***Strategic Planning Guidelines***

Strategic planning is underserved in many organizations. This crucial planning must be an ongoing, dynamic process in order for the results to be continually relevant to changing conditions and new learning.

Here is a simple guide to assist organizational leaders and Boards of Directors in designing a strategic planning process:

1. Review external/internal strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats
2. Identify/clarify mission, purpose (why the organization exists)
3. Clarify vision (picture of the future)
4. Identify governing values
5. Project into the future the desired state of the organization
6. Diagnose current state
7. Analyze gap between current and desired future state
8. Identify goals for bridging the gap
9. Identify strategies - including specific approaches, actions, responsibilities, costs, and implementation issues for meeting each goal
10. Develop success metrics and specify ways to monitor plans

The order of these steps in the development of the strategic plan can be adjusted. For example, you may want to start by diagnosing the current state (#6), then clarifying the mission and vision (#2, #3). The process of identifying implementation issues (#9) may cause you to revisit earlier steps.

Ultimately, you want to identify: (a) what are the services and products to be offered in alignment with our mission, (b) who are our customers and what do they value/want, and (c) what or who is the competition.

Starting with a review of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats ensures that everyone involved is working with the same set of assumptions. This opens up important avenues for thought and action. Strengths should include your core competencies. Opportunities should include a discussion of your competitive advantage.

The desired future state should include a discussion of how you can further differentiate the organization. This should include “out of the box” thinking, placing yourself into the future without any limits or constraints.

Diagnosing the current state includes both the internal state of the organization as well as your position in the marketplace.

Ensure that the right people are part of the strategic planning team — people with organizational influence; people from whom you need input and commitment. Seek diverse perspectives.

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## ***Show That You Heard Them***

Even when you are listening deeply to what others are saying, they may not know that you are unless you:

- Restate or paraphrase what they have said
- State your opinion about what they have said
- Indicate how you will think or do something different based on what they have said

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## ***It's Not About You***

In managing or coaching others, don't be so focused on your own performance that you don't hear what is being said or focus on the real issues. If you feel yourself being defensive, seeking approval, or trying to demonstrate your own brilliance, then you are probably serving your own needs rather than the person you are trying to help.

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## ***Strategic Planning Guidelines (continued)***

The quality of the conversations about each element is as important as the conclusions reached. These conversations bind people together, fostering deeper understanding and mutual commitment. Appropriately, the best conversations involve debate — creative tension — which ultimately results in better decisions. Consider using an external facilitator such as WBW&Associates.

Keep track of the questions raised during the process, how issues are defined, and what emerges as critically important.

Throughout the process, determine what the resource requirements are for executing each component.

Eventually, you need to determine who is accountable for executing the strategy, and which key individuals and functions will depend upon each other and support each other.

Strategic planning should not be viewed as a control mechanism, although it does provide for focus, discipline, and a clear rendering of expectations. Strategic planning should open a door to creative thinking, and allow room for ongoing innovation and responsiveness to changing market conditions.

Once completed, be prepared to periodically challenge your plan. This includes challenging your assumptions and even posing counter-arguments to your overall strategic direction. This keeps strategy vibrant, flexible and tied to current realities.

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## ***Tips for Practicing Self-control***

Contrary to the adage to “be yourself,” we cannot always “let ourselves go” without restraint. In the workplace, this may mean that we cannot have an emotional outburst when we feel like it — as some managers we have run into feel is their right. (“I’m only being myself” is one lame excuse we’ve heard for chewing out a subordinate.) Unrestrained behavior is not effective at getting the desired results. We burn out ourselves and others, and any message we intended to convey gets totally lost.

Self-control, however, should not be looked upon as losing privilege. As we learn in raising children, control is a necessary part of being a fully developed human. We need to learn how to keep destructive emotions and impulses under control. In so doing, we become more fully developed and effective, and help others around us as well. Here are some tips:

- Rather than simply react to something that bugs you, insert a step or a pause (or even take a walk to calm yourself down) before responding.
- Be kind to yourself. If you treat yourself with kindness and understanding when you make a mistake, you are more likely to react that way when others falter.
- Don't let emotions build. Sometimes we do not deal with something that bothers us for a long time —until we reach the breaking point. Express your concerns early before you build up undue emotion around it.
- Keep the overall objective in mind. Don't “win the battle but lose the war” by letting your own behavior get in the way of achieving the results that you want.