

The secret to 'moving the ball' is to roll it downhill

CEOs, other senior line executives, and HR professionals frequently complain that the midlevel managers in their company "don't get it" about the company's strategic objectives nor take the action required to get strategic results.

Unfortunately, grumbling rarely solves the problem.

If you hear yourself saying, "Our managers just aren't strategic," try to tease apart the underlying issues.

A good way to do this is to ask yourself, "If our managers did think strategically, what would be different?" Look at the list below. Taken together, these are a good description of what it means to "think strategically."

Do your managers:

■ Fully understand the company strategy?

■ Connect their own efforts with the larger organization's objectives?

■ Focus on both long-term and day-to-day results?

■ Work with others outside their function to achieve objectives?

■ Engage employees as partners in executing the company strategy?

When I hear complaints about middle-level managers not thinking strategically, I often find that there is some "blaming of the victim" going on.

If you're a senior leader, it's hard to think it's your fault when people don't comprehend the strategy or fail to take quick and decisive action related to it when you've spoken about the strategy



Perspective on People

Richard McKnight

until you're blue in the face. But experience tells me that most senior executives are not skilled at communicating strategic matters in a way that induces action-taking on the parts of employees.

Meaningful communication requires two-way communication.

In most organizations, power is concentrated at the top and so is a felt sense of responsibility for results. It's an artifact of bureaucracy. Without intervention, those who get the greatest pay and have the greatest say — those at the top — will feel a disproportional commitment to creating strategy, translating it into action, and getting results. Others lower down, without some change in the usual way of doing things, will not feel the same obligation to "move the ball." The result will be a pathetic chain that goes like this:

1. Middle-level managers do not understand the strategy.

2. Therefore, they feel no sense of urgency to do things differently.

3. Consequently, they fail to translate company strategy into aligned local ac-

tion.

4. Thus, they fail to get strategic results.

To fully "think strategically," middle managers need skills as well as meaningful dialogue with their leaders. Best is to kill two birds with one stone: get the dialogue going about the strategy between levels in a context where everyone — middle-level leaders and senior leaders — can learn the skills associated with strategy execution.

First and foremost is the skill of two-way communication that addresses the five big questions employees have about change: What needs to change? Why? What does that mean for me in my area? What's in it for me? What are you going to do to support me?

If your managers appear unable to think strategically, start by helping them answer these questions.

RICHARD MCKNIGHT is a principal of McKnight Kaney LLC, a strategy execution and organization design firm in the Philadelphia area and the co-author of "Leading Strategy Execution," among other books. For more information, visit McKnightKaney.com.





COLLEGE OF BUSINESS
LeBow
Drexel UNIVERSITY

PHILADELPHIA
BUSINESS JOURNAL

Philadelphia Business Journal and Drexel University's LeBow College of Business will recognize the top CFO's of Greater Philadelphia.

When: Thursday, July 7, 11:15am-2:00pm
Where: Crystal Tea Room, Wanamaker Building

Register Today: <http://tinyurl.com/pnjcfo2011>
Early bird. Register by June 23: \$95, increases to \$110 thereafter

2011 Finalists
Alphabetical order

Richard Baron , Avid Radiopharmaceuticals, Inc.	Brian McClintock , McGrath Systems
Larry Berran , iPipeline	Kevin McClure , NHS Human Services
Arthur Chandler , Harleysville Group, Inc.	Dennis McGonigle , SEI
Diane Corrigan , The Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania	Tonia McNeal , KenCrest
Harold Earley , FXI, Inc.	Ashish Parikh , Hersha Hospitality Trust
Tina Fiumenero , Vitae Pharmaceuticals	Edward Purdy , J.J. White, Inc.
Louis Gonczy , National Adoption Center/Adoption Center of Delaware Valley	Joseph Trainor , University of the Sciences in Philadelphia
John Hanson , Delaware River Port Authority	David Whitwell , Ansaris, a division of Locust Pharmaceuticals
Adam Kaliner , Power Home Remodeling Group	Stephen Zarrilli , Safeguard Scientifics, Inc.
Ted Kaminer , BioClinica, inc.	Bill Zarrilli , Richardson

Sponsored by





Hosted by







Questions? Contact Jennifer Wolf at jenniferwolf@bizjournals.com

want to know
how this stuff
works?



Social Media Crash Course
Wednesday, June 22, 2011
8:00 am - Noon Community College of Philadelphia

Social Media Overview: Joel Capparella, Yoh
Content Creation: Kristin Kane, Kane Partners
Metric Management: Erin Allsman, The Brownstein Group

Register at
<http://events.bizjournals.com/46011>

