

How a Flash of Insight can Create a Unique Strategic Position

I HAVE always felt that business planning seemed to be a bit of a chore. Indeed some were compelled to move through huge planning hoops to acquire either large or small sources of funding. You always felt it took up a lot of time – too much time and if that was the case you asked yourself what was the purpose?

But then I remember talking to a senior sale manager in the food business who told me: “We spend 5 minutes on strategy every morning before we get down to sales!” Needless to say I came away thinking this surely isn’t enough!

What is absolutely crucial though is to have some sort of broad purpose, a clear opportunity and an expectation of results. A further imperative is to engage with customers and prospects and plan round them with what I call **‘creative insight.’**

So what is creative insight and how does it help contribute to successful business development?

Successful business strategies

I’d like to start with the story of a man I once knew; a man who thought you could look at the world through 4 box-matrices! For a while I believed. In fact I saw men (and women) running around with bifocals inventing formulae to unlock – and implement - the secrets of

successful business development...But I soon lost confidence in such a stereotype...this was no way to build a business....you can’t reduce business success to a formula!

In my mind’s eye, I was also aware that detailed planning is not going to help find success either. True it gives you the nuts and bolts, but it won’t necessarily give you the all important idea — or **‘flash of insight.’**

I remember a former CEO of Mars Pet foods that I worked for many moons ago – a man that I could have walked over a cliff for - showing me the light on this. He told me to find the insight and then let the planning kick in. It was a great lesson.

The ‘flash of insight’ — the vital element!

Detailed business planning necessarily fails, due to frictions inevitably encountered in the planning process: chance events, imperfections in execution, and the independent will of customers and indeed competitors. Instead, human elements: ambition, leadership, people, morale, and above all intuition, or flash of insight. The French word for this is **‘coup d’oeil;’** (pronounced coo doy). Literally translated it means; *a quick recognition of truth—or opportunity*, and as the French say, is paramount.

In fact it was Napoleon who said that such things are paramount in battle. And it was a military historian, writing on the great Emperor’s military campaigns that coined the phrase. It was said that Napoleon moved his armies throughout Europe seeking that flash of

insight; the ground, the place – the big opportunity that would course him to concentrate his armies and overwhelm his enemies in battle. Once seen all effort of intellect, energy, planning and resources were given over to the pursuit of victory.

What most successful business owners and managers do?

The finest business owners and managers perfect such concepts in practice. They do not expect a business plan to survive beyond the first contact with customers. They set only the **broadest of objectives** and emphasise **unforeseen opportunities as they arise**.

Business development is not a lengthy action plan. It is the evolution of a central idea through continually changing circumstances in which a business owner sees the opportunity to drive his business forward, through an interaction of varying attributes; intuition, determination, leadership, motivation and central purpose, around different plans – or strategies as and when required!

Creative insight—not planning - should be the true focus of business success and achievement.

What are the implications for business owners and managers?

Well I think there are four:

1. The first is that you enter business with a 'presence of mind' – you expect the unexpected. Don't go around thinking that you've arrived or you already know what to do. Be ready for surprise and change.

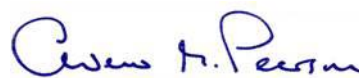
2. Second you are ready to cut through the fog with an insight that comes from out of the ordinary or after prolonged reflection and of what has worked in the past.
3. Third, you are ready to go forward with resolution particularly when you can't convince doubters with all the facts. Simon a produce manger, with a major importer summarises the point succinctly when he said;
4. Fourth, all planning is directed to support the combinations of insight and intuition with what has worked in the past.

"...if you work with a management team some time they get to know the ways in which you think about certain aspects of the business. They know your attitude to certain things in the business. If you come to them and say we need to do this or change that they might say (straight or behind your back) that this is just a waste of time. And that's when you have to make your mind up to do something you really believe in and apply yourself and others to its achievement."

I hope this suggestions will be useful when it comes to strategic planning for your business.

To read more about strategies to grow your business [click here](#)

Best wishes,



Andrew Pearson

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