



STRATEGIC ACCELERATION MEDIA

Cultivating a Strategic Training Mindset

By Tony Jeary

The speed of life demands that every segment of business challenge old ways of thinking and the training industry is not exempt from this fact. In years past, the corporate approach to training has been largely tactical. By tactical I mean the training focus has been on the 'what' and 'how' of things. Training departments have also been somewhat passive and frequently operate as order takers filling requests from an extensive "cafeteria" of training courses and curriculums. The mindset that has produced this type of training approach is more tactical than strategic, which means it is reactive – not proactive. I'm not saying this approach is wrong or doesn't meet training needs. I'm saying that cultivating a strategic mindset about training can elevate existing training approaches to higher levels of effectiveness and results.

The speed of life in business challenges every organization to be more competitive, more innovative, more responsive and more effective. To fail these tests can rapidly change the financial condition of a business and even threaten its existence. Many of these competitive and innovative challenges are related to human performance and the ability of companies to produce voluntary change in the attitudes and behaviors of its people. Some of these voluntary changes involve the acquisition of new skills and some involve new ways of thinking. The most significant of the two, by far, is the challenge to create new ways of

thinking. The reason? It's because the way people think determines what they do and what they do determines the results they achieve!

Cultivating a strategic training mindset will always elevate the purposes and value of training to a higher level. This empowers training to become a powerful strategic resource that can facilitate rapid change in response to competitive challenges. When training achieves that level as a resource it transforms into a critical investment and is no longer the first expense item to be cut in tough economic times. Using what I call a "strategic acceleration mindset" is based on three core issues that impact results: Clarity, Focus and Execution. Let's look at each.

Clarity: Clarity is about understanding your targets and the "why" behind reaching them. It can also be described as having an unfettered view of your vision, which is what you want and why you want it, fed by an understanding of its purpose and value. When you have clarity about what you want it has a dramatic effect of the way you think. When you understand the "why" of things, the "how" issues are simplified and you are pulled forward to your goals, rather than having to be pushed!

In the training arena this means getting clear about the purpose and value of the training agenda as it relates to the primary vision and purpose of the enterprise. Every business success begins with a vision. If you have no vision, there is nothing to tie your objectives to and nothing to help you measure your performance or progress. So a vision not only becomes something to *motivate* you and to provide *the power to change behavior*, it also becomes the plumb line or measuring stick that helps keep everything together as

plans are executed. Therefore, it is critical that there be a vision for the training agenda that supports the primary vision of the business.

Focus: The ability to concentrate on what really matters, and filter out what doesn't. This is a thinking skill that is acquired as a result of mental discipline. The ability to focus involves two skills: The ability to identify and eliminate distractions and the ability to spend most of your time on high-leverage activities that have the effect of moving the results needle. Both of these skills have to be learned and they are a product of learning how to think differently about how you spend your time.

When you have clarity about your vision, you must develop focusing skills that help “keep the main things the main thing”. A strategic training mindset always keeps the primary vision in view and learns how to eliminate distractions that can so easily move us away from the high leverage activities that move the results needle.

Execution: This is the process of combining clarity and focus to strategically communicate, take action, exceed expectations, and ultimately, realize your training vision and the vision of the enterprise. The two most important factors in getting something done is the ability to connect with other people and to be able to influence and inspire them! This is the core of execution and it involves a new way of thinking about issues of Persuasion, Production and what I call Strategic Presence. Persuasion is about getting others to help you achieve your vision. Production is about completing tasks and projects in reduced time frames. Strategic Presence is about the persona that defines the

total perception others have about you that influences their willingness to help you achieve your goals.

Throughout my career I have taught that a powerful organizational objective is for people to become more *strategically* effective. This means acquiring new ways of thinking, not just new ways of doing things. A shift from focusing on the tactical to focusing on the strategic is a change of mind-set that has far-reaching effects and benefits, instead of a “one-off” approach that has short-term reach. To achieve this kind of thought discipline you must understand *why* you want to go where you want to go, and you must understand *why* you are where you are today.

One of my clients is a perfect example of how results can be accelerated by changing strategic beliefs. George Burke is a very successful entrepreneur who owns a relatively large commercial paint-contracting business in Atlanta, Georgia. His client list includes Target, Emory University, Georgia State University, Kaiser Permanente, and Days Inn, among others.

When I first met him several years ago, he was already successful by any standard you could apply. George had a great family and a great business, and he made a great living. George was very happy with his life and work, but he felt “maxed out” with respect to future opportunity. He had built his company around himself, and he believed he had to be personally involved in a long list of tactical things to maintain its success. And because the things he did personally ate up all of his time, he believed he was out of options for future growth.

George did not believe he could go beyond where he was. He had a self-limiting belief about himself and his business. He believed he had hit the ceiling of success for his business and that was just the way it was. His self-limiting belief was that his growth potential was directly related to the availability of his personal time. He erroneously believed that he was the sole person capable of both selling and managing major projects, which was an enormous drain on his time and energy.

In working with George, I was able to help him replace that strategic belief with another idea. The new idea was that it was possible for him to duplicate himself in others by finding and training individuals he trusted, individuals who would sell and manage important contracts with just as much care and concern as he did personally. In the next eighteen months, George told me he duplicated himself four times in others, and the result has been that his business revenues doubled! This duplication freed up his time and permitted him to concentrate on new opportunities and think more strategically. His success grew exponentially simply because of changing one strategic belief.

Cultivating a strategic mindset requires changing some things you may believe, and is the engine of voluntary change. We all have a way in which we view the world, our role in that world, and the relationships we have with everybody in it. Called the *Belief Window*, it contains everything you believe to be true, false, correct, incorrect, appropriate, inappropriate, possible, and impossible. Two things are happening in your belief window:

1. It is framing all of your views of people, places and things, and creating the perceptions and feelings you have about everything.

2. It is influencing the actions you take regarding those same people, places, and things.

Your belief window determines all of your choices and actions, and it manages and filters information you allow to enter your mind and be retained. If you don't believe you need something, it can limit your willingness to explore opportunities that can help you work smarter. In other words, *if you don't have the correct perspective about what you need, you will not recognize the importance of things that might be critical to your success.* That is why you must be very clear about what you really want and what you need to do to achieve it.

The main belief that must be cultivated to achieve a strategic training mindset is that training is the strategic solution for voluntary, organizational change and holds the keys to competitive performance, innovation and results. To create that belief in the minds of business leaders there must be a focus by training professionals to deliver training solutions that relate to that objective. A strategic training mindset will transform results and empower the organization to execute its vision in the marketplace.

Tony Jeary's newest book, Strategic Acceleration: Succeed at the Speed of Life (Vanguard Press) will be released in March 2009.