

Executive Guide to Strategy



Learn perspectives and ideas on business strategy and strategic thinking. Read summaries from Mariposa's 2013 *WiseTalk* interviews, including insights from our guests, what we found most interesting, and some practical tools

INTRO & CONTENTS

Mariposa Leadership, Inc. is thrilled to bring you excerpts from strategy experts! Tawny Lees, COO of Mariposa Leadership, Inc., kicks it off with an essay on how to utilize strategy in your role as a leader. The following nine chapters are outlines from Sue Bethanis' 2013 *WiseTalk* interviews. The summaries include insights from our guests, what we found most interesting, and some practical tools. Content in these summaries is taken directly from the interviews, unless otherwise noted. You can listen to the full interview by clicking on the *WiseTalk* recording link in the resource section at the end of each page.

- 1 **INTRODUCTORY ESSAY: *Developing Strategic Leaders***
Tawny Lees, COO, Mariposa Leadership, Inc.
- 7 **CHAPTER ONE: *Are You a Strategist?***
Cynthia Montgomery, Timken Professor of Business Administration, Harvard Business School
- 8 **CHAPTER TWO: *Pathways to Growth***
Laurence Capron, Paul Desmarais Chaired Professor of Strategy, INSEAD
- 9 **CHAPTER THREE: *Playing to Win***
Roger Martin, Dean of University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management
- 10 **CHAPTER FOUR: *Reinventing You***
Dorie Clark, CEO of Clark Strategic Communications
- 11 **CHAPTER FIVE: *Strategies for Creativity***
Mike Brown, Founder of The Brainzooming Group™
- 12 **CHAPTER SIX: *End of Competitive Advantage***
Rita Gunther McGrath, Professor at Columbia Business School
- 13 **CHAPTER SEVEN: *Strategies for a High Performance Culture***
Kevin Kruse, Entrepreneur
- 14 **CHAPTER EIGHT: *Branding Strategies***
Ty Montague, Co-Founder and Co-CEO of co:collective
- 15 **CHAPTER NINE: *Sustainability Strategies***
Eric Lowitt, Managing Director of Nexus Global Advisors

Introductory Essay: *Developing Strategic Leaders*

We often get asked by the executives we work with: “How do I get my team to be more strategic, to think more broadly?”

We have a lot of ideas on how to best develop the strategic side of leaders; however, we hardly have all the answers. So, in 2013 we explored “strategy” as our primary leadership learning topic. We invited well-known thought leaders and experts from a wide range of disciplines to speak with us on this topic in our popular *WiseTalk* leadership forum; we tapped into the wisdom of our team of coaches; and we curated numerous strategy-related books and articles – all to share with our learning community. This article summarizes our key learnings from the year.

One theme emerged very clearly from our year of digging into this topic. Leaders must make time for focused strategic thinking and planning on a regular basis (both alone and with teams), and they must bring more strategic thinking to bear on day-to-day interactions at more levels within their organization. Strategic thinking is different than strategic planning – clearly both are important. We see that many of our client organizations do well at having some sort of regular strategic planning cycle or process. It often includes a diagnosis of the environment and competitive situation, a guiding policy on what the organization intends to accomplish, and key initiatives or action plans for achieving the intended results. But most organizations could do more to help develop *strategic thinkers and leaders*. Admittedly, this is not as easy a task. Strategic thinking is a difficult leadership skill to acquire because it is as much a mindset as a set of behaviors or techniques. Additionally, organizations often reward short-term tactical performance versus long-term thinking and planning. That said, it's very possible to instill strategic thinking skills.

Here are five ways to help you and/or your team members become more strategic:

1. Be an ethnographer

Leaders often need to do more assessing of their current organization, culture, product, technology and/or business model. There are many tools out there for doing this – such as [Galbraith's STAR Model™](#) for thinking about an organization structure, or the [SWOT model](#) for a product or business. Or by using [Design Thinking](#) techniques. But more simply, and potentially more powerfully, you can become more actively curious and observant. Think of yourself as an ethnographer . Notice things differently.

Ask questions like:

- “How does work really get done around here?”
- “What works well and why? What doesn't work well and why?”
- “What/how do we know what our customers really think about us?”
- “What values get displayed most often?”
- “Do people really understand our company's mission and strategic priorities? Do they see the connection between these and their work?”

Get out of your normal space and watch people, pop into other's team meetings, visit customers, visit the competition, use your products, etc. Pick and use these assessment techniques, or formulate your own – consistent assessment and reassessment will spark more strategic questions and thinking.

2. Establish time and space to think

Encourage leaders and managers to set a regular time alone for strategic thinking/planning at least monthly, if not weekly. This is not time to check email or calendars, or “do” things. It is a time for reflection, research, ideation, dreaming and ultimately planning. Some leaders, given this assignment, need a little help with how to productively use the time. But once they get this practice started, they cherish the time and guard it protectively. Getting outside or into a new physical space can make this time even more effective. Spending time doing a similar thing with a valued thought-partner or small group can add a new dimension to the exercise. *Bonus: with this practice, leaders become not only more strategic in their thinking and communicating, but they are usually less stressed and more engaged.*

3. Explore and employ new/different types of thinking and learning

There are scads of strategic thinking processes, books, blogs, etc. Here are three skills we like the best and use often:

Combine Divergent (expansive) **and Convergent** (analytic/funneling) **Thinking**

Divergent thinking is to imagine any possibility, head off in any direction and deliberately diverge from the conventional. It is to IMAGINE THE FUTURE. Criticism and judgment are temporarily suspended while exploring possibilities. Convergent thinking is to narrow down options to one or more preferred choices. Analysis, criticism, logic, argument and reasoning are used to arrive at a selection. Less attractive possibilities are eliminated in order to choose a way forward. It is to CREATE A PATH.

The two styles of thinking are very powerful when used sequentially. An effective ideation process consists of both phases. In the first phase, use divergent thinking to go crazy and generate many ideas; no criticism is allowed. Build on the ideas of others and run with outrageous notions just to see where they lead. In the second phase, use convergent thinking to evaluate the ideas against agreed criteria in order to select the best options for action. This sequential combination works well, but mixing up the combination - not so well. For example, convergent thinking used too soon or mixed with divergent thinking can strangle new ideas. It is easy to find fault with partly formed notions so they can be quickly eliminated, leaving only safe options. Which kind of thinking is used more often within your current team? The challenge is usually to foster and allow more divergent thinking.

TIP

Try many divergent ideation techniques:

- **Design Thinking:** Empathy and Brainstorm
- **Borrowing:** Pulling ideas from different industries.
- **Mashing:** Combining seemingly unlike things into something new
- **Depict:** Draw an idea or future state

Five for the Future

Here are five questions to help IMAGINE THE FUTURE:

- Five years from now, what will the world look like (consider economy, politics, health, society, etc...)?
- Five years from now, how will technology affect global business?
- Five years from now, how will our company contribute to global business?
- Five years from now, how will our company influence the industry?
- Five years from now, how will your team/ organization influence your company?

Think at different scales - Zoom In / Zoom Out

We often hear feedback like “he gets stuck in the weeds” and less often “her head is in the clouds, not grounded in the reality of our day-to-day work.” The level or scale at which leaders view their world can help or hinder their ability to make good strategic decisions. Rosabeth Moss Kanter’s [“Zoom In /Zoom Out”](#) metaphor is a powerful way to think about how you think. When zooming in, you get a close look at select details; but if too close it can be difficult to make sense of them. When zooming out, you see the big picture, but perhaps miss some subtleties and nuances. Each should be vantage points, not fixed positions. Leaders need multiple perspectives to get a complete picture – effective leaders both zoom in and zoom out. Leaders who are trying to be more strategic usually have a natural tendency to zoom in (being tactical/ execution/operational), and can stretch themselves by zooming out more often. Zooming out is essential to big-picture decision making. When your view is wide/far you can map a whole territory before taking action. Look for general patterns rather than getting stuck on individual events. Notice similar situations, root causes, and principles or policies that will help prevent issues from recurring. Pay attention to context. Practicing moving through a continuum of perspectives will make you a more strategic and dynamic thinker. You can even say “Let’s zoom out to take a different perspective here...” to encourage a group to shift their thinking.

Develop the top of your “T”

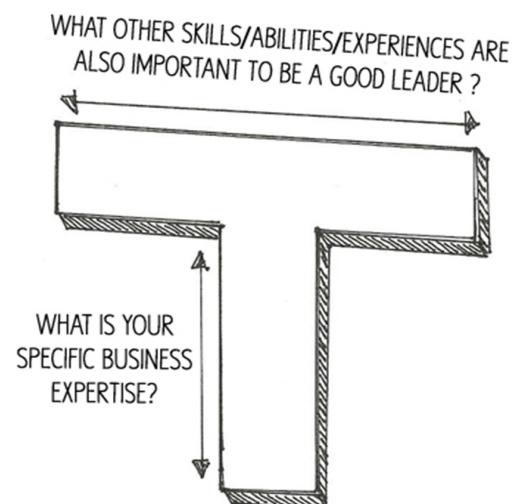
“T-Shaped” leaders are interdisciplinary: they are broad and deep thinkers as well as being curious and empathetic about *other* people’s disciplines. The horizontal part of the “T” represents breadth of understanding connections across a business and/or industry. The vertical part of the “T” represents depth of understanding and expertise in a particular business area.

The whole “T” represents *both* deep functional expertise and broad business knowledge *and* commercial acumen. A depth of functional knowledge and specialization needs to be complemented by a breadth of business understanding and strategic context. To be more strategic, ask: what other experiences/perspectives do I need to explore to be more T-shaped? For example, a director who manages web designers could further develop the top of her “T” by reading what industrial designers read, or perusing what resources architects use. By developing the top of your “T” you increase the opportunity and ability to borrow and mash; and thus come up with new strategies.

“Zoom Out”

Key Questions to help widen & up-level your view “Zoom Out”:

- How does this fit into our strategic priorities?
- What is the context here?
- What are the patterns, categories, groupings?
- What are underlying causes?
- Who does this affect in/outside of the org?
- Do we need to establish a principle, policy or framework?
- What’s on the horizon?



4. Communicate. Communicate. Communicate.

Communicate a well-articulated strategy throughout the organization. Keep people informed. Effective strategy requires information shared across boundaries; individuals and groups need to understand the broader organizational strategy, in order to stay focused and incorporate it into their own plans and strategies. If the organization strategy is not clear to you go ask about it, figure it out. Or worst-case, create one for the part of the organization that you lead.

An effective way to formulate and communicate strategy is using a "[Strategic Narrative](#)". A good narrative tells who we are now – and perhaps how we got there; it defines the challenges and opportunities we face now; and, it delivers a compelling resolution spelling out what change and strategic success really means on a personal and organizational basis. A good strategic narrative should incorporate connections to personal and organizational narratives and not stand in isolation to the rest of an organization's history and environment.

5. Notice, value, and reward strategic thinking

Publicly praise strategic thinking and actions, with specifics. For example, managers should be applauded for being able to quickly generate several solutions to a given problem and for identifying the solution with the greatest long-term benefit. Or better yet, for anticipating opportunities and avoiding problems. Too often praise goes to those who burned the midnight oil or gave up a vacation to solve a one-off problem, or who 'heroically' slaved for weeks prior to the launch of a new product. Instead, highlight those who create ways for work to get planned and done more efficiently, or those who questioned whether a new urgent feature really fit into the overall direction of a product. Or especially praise those strategic thinkers who continually think ahead and anticipate future needs and issues. Use them as mentors. One of the most effective ways to develop strategic skills is to be mentored by someone who is highly strategic. Set expectations for and evaluate strategic thinking in performance review cycles. Use specifics and find ways to highlight strategic thinking even in lower level supervising/management positions. Everyone in an organization can think more strategically – it is not a skill just reserved for and expected of senior leaders.

So those are our five tips for developing yourself or others into more strategic leaders. For those who are not naturally inclined to it, becoming more strategic takes practice and continuity. The result of refining this skill often makes the difference between an average and an exceptional leader. And an organization full of strategic thinkers at all levels certainly has an edge over competitors who do not.

Next Steps

Becoming more strategic takes practice and continuity. The result of refining this skill often makes the difference between an average and an exceptional leader. And an organization full of strategic thinkers at all levels certainly has an edge over competitors who do not.

For more perspectives and ideas on business strategy and strategic thinking, visit our *WiseTalk* archives at <http://www.mariposaleadership.com/wisetalk/>. Our guests have explored "strategy" from many angles, from personal branding to buy-versus-build strategies, to challenging competitive advantage and exploring an emerging alternative – transient advantage. Certainly, we believe the definition and application of "strategy" continuously evolves and we look forward to keeping up with and contributing to thought leadership in the years ahead. We hope you enjoy the insights and perspectives in this article. Send us your comments on Twitter: [@mariposaleader](https://twitter.com/mariposaleader).



Resources

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About the Author



Tawny Lees, M.B.A., is the COO of Mariposa. She coaches, facilitates, leads, ensures client satisfaction and is a coach/client matchmaker extraordinaire. Her coaching career began in 2004, inspired and informed by over 18 years of corporate leadership experience. She held VP roles in the financial services industry in functions as diverse as Risk, Sales, Service, Operations, Change Management and Marketing. Despite literally growing up in crazy-paced organizations, Tawny maintained a grounded perspective on leadership. Her education includes an M.B.A. from the Haas School of Business, UC Berkeley; a B.S., Finance with Economics minor at California State University, Hayward; and an organizational coaching certification by John F. Kennedy University. Tawny coaches locally in the SF Bay Area and can be reached at tawny@mariposaleadership.com, or follow her on Twitter at [@tawnylees](https://twitter.com/tawnylees).

CHAPTER ONE: Are You a Strategist?



Guest:

Cynthia Montgomery, Timken Professor of Business Administration, Harvard Business School
January 23, 2013

Summary of Topic:

Sue Bethanis talked with Cynthia Montgomery, strategist, professor and author of ***The Strategist: Be the Leader Your Business Needs*** on how leaders can be the strategists every company needs.

Favorite Quote:

"What it means to be a strategist is to bear responsibility for choices."

Insights from the conversation:

Strategy is a constant, dynamic process of defining who you are as it unfolds over time. Cynthia suggests thinking about strategy as an organic, dynamic process instead of a problem that is solved once and then done.

Leaders need to ask themselves, *why does the world need my company? If we went away, what would be different?* Think about these questions through the eyes of your customers, what would they do? These questions will force you to confront your added value and what your company brings to the game. According to Cynthia, this is where leadership starts. Everyone in a company must be able to answer those questions as well as understand how their work connects to that purpose and the needs of the customer. If leaders can't answer those questions, it can be difficult for employees to execute in a compelling way.

The most common mistake executives make regarding strategy is not living it deliberately enough and not making the trade-offs that greatness requires. Cynthia believes leaders who make choices in a piecemeal, adhoc way risk making choices that don't amount to something great. Greatness requires a certain amount of deliberateness, and she notes people short-change their potential because they don't live the implications of their choices. For example, if a business positions itself as a premium homebuilder, what does that really mean? To see the implications played out in every aspect of the business, one has to be deliberate and make trade-offs and choices in order to develop that capability.



What we found most interesting:

As an undergraduate, Cynthia studied philosophy and existentialism. Her early insights on strategy were born out of the work of Sartre. She comments, "Essence is something that can't be given to each of us as individuals, it's something we have to figure out ourselves and we do that through the choices we make. I realized the same is true for companies. The most fundamental choices at the heart of a company are *Who are you? Why do you matter?*"

For more information:

- WiseTalk Recording: <http://bit.ly/2pzCLic>
- Book: [The Strategist: Be the Leader Your Business Needs](#)
- Video: [Rebranding Strategy: Why Traditional Strategy Planning Needs a Makeover](#)
- Contact: cynthiamontgomery.com
- Twitter: [@leadstrategy](#)

CHAPTER TWO: *Pathways to Growth*

Guest:

Laurence Capron, Paul Desmarais Chaired Professor of Strategy, INSEAD
February 21, 2013

Summary of Topic:

Sue Bethanis talked with Laurence Capron, INSEAD professor and co-author of ***Build, Borrow or Buy: Solving the Growth Dilemma***, to understand the reasons why companies fail at accelerating growth and the pathway options from which companies can choose to gain competitive advantage.

Favorite Quote:

"Making acquisitions is not a strategy; it's just part of your toolkit."

Insights from the conversation:

It's widely known that 70% of mergers and acquisitions fail. In Laurence's research, she attributes this to the use of acquisitions as a strategy vs. a tool. One of the most important reasons for failure occurs before the deal is even closed. Executives jump to acquisition mode for different reasons, including being driven by ego - seeing a competitor making acquisitions so they want to do the same. But they tend to be overconfident when it comes to thinking about extracting synergies after the deal. Instead, companies need to carefully balance and use different modes of growth: build, borrow or buy.

To help executives decide which mode of growth is appropriate, Laurence advises them to first clarify their strategic roadmap. The most important questions to answer before you decide *how* to grow are *where* to grow and *why* to grow. What is your strategic vision? What gap are you trying to close? Is it a resource, market or technical gap? What capabilities are you looking for? Then, look at how to go about it achieving it: build, borrow or buy.

When choosing between build, borrow or buy, Laurence cautions against specific blind spots. For build mode, companies tend to overestimate what they have inside, which results in a longer internal path. Once executives realize their internal capabilities are not sufficient, they tend to jump to buy mode. But before making expensive acquisitions, Laurence suggests to carefully review the external mode (borrow) such as alliances, licensing, etc.

What we found most interesting:

The growth decisions of build, borrow or buy are not limited to large, mature companies. Laurence mentioned a recent study with colleagues. In it, they looked at 5,000 firms that went through an IPO. They discovered newly public firms that focus on only internal development or firms that do too many acquisitions within the first five years after an IPO tend to be delisted than the firms that combine internal growth and a small number of acquisitions. Young companies that rely on internal growth are likely to be too slow. Those that acquire too many companies in a short amount of time lack acquisition experience and integration skills and are less likely to survive.

For more information:

- WiseTalk Recording: <http://bit.ly/2othc5Y>
- Book: [Build, Borrow or Buy: Solving the Growth Dilemma](#)
- Video: [Corporate Growing Pains: Build, Borrow or Buy?](#)
- Article: [Should You Build, Borrow or Buy? | Today Online](#)
- Contact: build-borrow-buy.com
- Twitter: [@LaurenceCapron](#)

CHAPTER THREE: *Playing to Win*

Guest:

Roger Martin, Dean of University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management
March 20, 2013

Summary of Topic:

Sue Bethanis talked with Roger Martin about his book, ***Playing to Win: How Strategy Really Works***, based on the robust strategic approach he helped roll out at P&G. In this conversation, Sue and Roger discuss how strategic choices help companies beat the competition.

Favorite Quote:

"In business, if someone is simply better than you at serving customers, eventually they will eliminate you."

Insights from the conversation:

One of the biggest confusions about strategy is that it's a plan or a list of things a company is going to do. According to Roger, a list is an ineffective approach and doesn't really amount to a strategy. Strategy is an integrated set of choices that position your company somewhere on a playing field to win. A strategic plan documents what a company is going to do and possibly what it's not going to do, but it doesn't give an explanation for why those things together form a win.

In business, Roger believes "playing to play" does not amount to much. If you don't have an aspiration to be the favorite choice for a specific set of customers, either because you have delivered value that's meaningful to them which nobody else delivers, or you deliver similar value at a lower cost, you are subject to someone else trumping you. Playing to win helps you marshal your resources in a way that gives you a defensible position that will last and you can continue to improve rather than being on the run perpetually.

Unlike in sports with a clear winner and loser, in business there are many ways companies that can win in a given industry. Leaders, however, need to choose a place to stand and fight. When companies make fundamental choices, such as having a winning aspiration, picking a place to play and understanding how to win, then everyone understands how to spend their time or dollars.

What we found most interesting:

Roger believes there is a place in business for designers to participate in strategy. *"Designers have an ability to imagine stuff that can't be fully analyzed with numbers. They are trained to create something that does not exist, such as a logo, package design, user interface, etc. These skills can be very valuable to the process of strategy formulation. But first, companies need to understand that strategy is not an analytical exercise; it's a creative exercise supported by analytics."*

For more information:

- WiseTalk Recording: <http://bit.ly/2oteiOW>
- Book: [Playing to Win: How Strategy Really Works](#)
- Video: [How Strategy Really Works](#)
- Article: [Don't Let Strategy Become Planning | HBR](#)
- Contact: rogerlmartin.com
- Twitter: [@RogerLMartin](#)

CHAPTER FOUR: *Reinventing You*

Guest:

Dorie Clark, CEO of Clark Strategic Communications
April 23, 2013

Summary of Topic:

Sue hosted Dorie Clark, branding expert, strategy consultant and author of *Reinventing You: Define Your Brand, Imagine Your Future*. In this talk, Dorie explains why reinvention as a personal strategy is a must-have in today's business environment and shares tips to get started.

Favorite Quote:

"Everyone at some point needs to reinvent themselves. It doesn't have to be an entire brand makeover, but it means being cognizant of what is needed and required in the current environment and letting people know that not only are you up to it, but you're the best person for the job."

Insights from the conversation:

If you are trying to make changes in your career, either dramatic or subtle, and you leave your reputation and perceptions to chance, most likely they will be outdated or random. By taking control of and being strategic about shaping your reputation, you can stack the deck in your favor to be in mind for new opportunities.

Before beginning a professional reinvention, either in a big or nuanced way, it's important to figure out how you are currently being perceived by others. Often times, there's a big difference between how we see ourselves and how others see us. Gathering this information upfront can solve problems down the line. Dorie suggests hiring an executive coach who does 360 interviews to gather information, or do it yourself. Take trusted colleagues out to coffee and ask them. People may not tell you 100% of the truth because the findings won't be anonymous. But if you're told 80% of the truth, that's 80% more than you had.

What really matters today is not how we are similar to others, but what we bring to the table that nobody else does. So it's important to get crystal clear on your points of difference. Having different cultural background, training or experiences might look like weaknesses on the surface, but Dorie explains they are actually your competitive advantage because they are what nobody else can offer. Making a case for and explaining to people that what you have is valuable can be astonishingly powerful.

What we found most interesting:

The impetus for Dorie's book, *Reinventing You*, was her personal experience being laid off. After being laid off as a newspaper journalist due to the pinch of internet advertising, she tried to get a job as a reporter and soon came to realize that reporting jobs were not to be had. She needed a Plan B. The act of writing and creating her own Plan B became the driving force for her book. *Reinventing You* was informed by personal experience and case studies of interviews with others.

Practical tool to apply:

One of the more unique suggestions Dorie had for gathering feedback on current perceptions was to conduct a focus group. Have a friend host and moderate it. Invite 10-12 friends or trusted colleagues. You attend but only to ask clarifying questions. Have your friend use strengths-based positive approach to questioning, such as, "What are Mary's greatest gifts?" By reading between the lines, you can get a sense for what you should be doing more of (and therefore less of.)

For more information:

- WiseTalk Recording: <http://bit.ly/2p1LnQo>
- Book: *Reinventing You: Define Your Brand, Imagine Your Future*
- Video: *Reinventing You: Define Your Brand, Imagine Your Future*
- Contact: dorieclark.com
- Twitter: [@DorieClark](https://twitter.com/DorieClark)

CHAPTER FIVE: *Strategies for Creativity*

Guest:

Mike Brown, Founder of The Brainzooming™ Group
May 30, 2013

Summary of Topic:

Sue hosted Mike Brown, award-winning branding and marketing strategist, Founder of The Brainzooming™ Group and author of the eBook, *Taking the NO Out of InNOvation*. Mike shares tips to up-level your skills in strategic thinking and creativity.

Favorite Quote:

“Strategy may be the purview of senior management in an organization, but strategic thinking is open to everybody.”

Insights from the conversation:

Have a strategy before starting a creative process. Mike explains most people want to execute or do things and begin down a path without asking the fundamental question about what matters. People can be tremendously creative but without a strategy, there is nothing to judge creativity against. Pin down the target first, then start your creative process.

To tap into the best strategic thinking in an organization, Mike suggests involving three different types of people and thinking styles in a strategic session:

- **Direct responsibility or front line responsibility** - people on the P&L side of the business or who interact with clients or stakeholders in an organization
- **Functional experts** - people who understand the functions of an organization (i.e., marketing, human resources, etc.) and processes that are relevant to what you are working on
- **Creative energy/creative spark** - people who tend to look at things differently (these people could also be in the front line or functional group)

One approach Mike talked about which helps people bring in a fresh perspective is “borrowing.” Borrowing is looking at an industry or an analogous situation and bringing that in to what you do. He shared a story of working with a subsidiary which was a unique company within a corporation, focused on a very niche market, charged premium prices, was operationally strong and profitable, but wasn’t able to grow. It occurred to him their company was like the Ritz Carlton so

he asked, “If you were going to grow the Ritz Carlton, what would you do?” Suddenly, the group had numerous ideas of how to grow the Ritz because they didn’t live in that world. Mike says this is a fundamental exercise that helps people shift their perspective.

What we found most interesting:

To enhance innovation in a company with a team, one of the perspectives to take is an introspective one. Understand your strengths and what you love to do and Mike says that’s where you will be the most creative.

For more information:

- WiseTalk Recording: <http://bit.ly/2oIWong>
- eBook: [Taking the NO Out of InNOvation](#)
- Articles: [Creative Ideas—More than 50 Ideas for Borrowing Creativity](#) | Brainzooming™ Blog
- Contact: brainzooming.com
- Twitter: [@BrainZooming](#)

CHAPTER SIX: *End of Competitive Advantage*

Guest:

Rita Gunther McGrath, Professor at Columbia Business School
June 25, 2013

Summary of Topic:

For our 100th *WiseTalk*, Sue hosted Rita Gunther McGrath, a globally-recognized expert on strategy in uncertain and volatile environments, Professor at Columbia Business School and author of ***The End of Competitive Advantage: How to Keep Your Strategy Moving as Fast as Your Business***. Rita helps us understand why the notion of a sustainable competitive advantage is irrelevant in today's market and offers insights for building a successful dynamic, yet transient, strategy.

Favorite Quote:

"The dangerous side of a sustainable competitive advantage is you can find yourself getting stuck. You can get trapped by trying to extend something that is really going away."

Insights from the conversation:

What makes the difference in how companies respond to their environment and the competition is leadership. For example, Rita says a CEO who doesn't want surprises and only wants solutions to problems almost guarantees the company will end up insulating itself from the truth of what's happening in the environment. Instead, leaders who embrace (even if the news is bad) collecting data directly from the environment and communicating it so it circulates through the company quickly, make a big difference in a company's ability to take fast action.

To not lose transient competitive advantage, an organization's structure will need to change in order to deliver the business it is trying to pursue. One of the worst things Rita has seen are companies trying to fit new opportunities in structures that are built to deliver old business. For example, things end up falling through the cracks, innovation doesn't really have a home, and if a company is trying to go from product to services, the metrics tend to not work. It's a reality a lot of companies struggle with.

Companies need to allocate resources to promote deftness. In large organizations, if a leader is running a powerful core

business, there's a belief that they should call the shots on spend and people allocation. But according to Rita, the reality is a company's big established core business may not be the growth engine. If the person running that business is allowed to determine how resources are spent, those decisions won't lead to investments in your future. It's important to realize that people who control resources just because they are in a healthy business today may not be running a healthy business tomorrow. Alternative ways of influencing how resources are spent are needed.

What we found most interesting:

The idea of a transient advantage was born out of Rita's experience working with companies where the desire for sustainable competitive advantage and a bias for stability were getting companies in trouble. She saw room for articulating a point of view for strategy that accommodates for advantages, even if they don't last very long.

For more information:

- *WiseTalk* Recording: <http://bit.ly/2q4gMD2>
- Book: [*The End of Competitive Advantage: How to Keep Your Strategy Moving as Fast as Your Business*](#)
- Video: [The End of Competitive Advantage Trailer](#)
- Articles: [Transient Advantage](#) | HBR
- Contact: ritamcgrath.com
- Twitter: [@rgmcgrath](#)

CHAPTER SEVEN: Strategies for a High Performance Culture

Guest:

Kevin Kruse, Entrepreneur, Top 100 Business Thought Leader and NY Times bestselling author
July 25, 2013

Summary of Topic:

Sue Bethanis talked with Kevin Kruse, author of several books on employee engagement, including **Employee Engagement 2.0: How to Motivate Your Team for High Performance** and **Employee Engagement for Everyone: 4 Keys to Happiness and Fulfillment at Work**, on key strategies for employee engagement and creating a thriving culture.

Favorite Quote:

“Engagement doesn’t necessarily mean employees are happy or satisfied, it means employees are emotionally committed (to the organization and its goals) and giving discretionary effort - going above and beyond.”

Insights from the conversation:

Kevin outlines a six-point strategy for engagement: measure it, share the results, have a rhythm of communication, growth, recognition, trust. He explains three of the drivers of engagement account for almost all of it: growth, recognition, trust. Communication would be the fourth, but communication is the backbone that runs through everything else. If engagement is a priority and you want to improve it, you have to measure it. Then, share the results all the way down to the front line managers and their teams. Each manager should share their individual score with their team. To improve the score, focus on the lowest one and create an action plan with team members. For example, “Our lowest score is communication. What would have to happen for you to say that you strongly agree that we have great communication on our team?” He advises to let the team come up with the answers.

What we found most interesting:

A good strategy for employee engagement requires good measurement. Kevin suggests these tips for doing your own engagement survey:

1. Sign up for an online survey program, such as SurveyMonkey or Zoomerang.
2. Use a standard five-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.
3. Ask just seven questions. Assure your employees the responses will remain anonymous.
 - I am extremely satisfied working in [your organization's name].
 - I rarely think about finding a new job in a different company.
 - I would recommend [your organization's name] to my friends as a great place to work.
 - There is frequent, two-way communication at [your organization's name].
 - [Your organization's name] provides me with sufficient opportunities for learning and development.
 - I feel appreciated at work.
 - I am confident that [your organization's name] has a bright future.
4. Send out the survey and give people two weeks to complete it.
5. Scores above 4.0 are very good, 3.5-4.0 are good, 3.5 and below is bad.

For more information:

- WiseTalk Recording: <http://bit.ly/2q2K1ng>
- Books: [Employee Engagement 2.0: How to Motivate Your Team for High Performance](#) and [Employee Engagement for Everyone: 4 Keys to Happiness and Fulfillment at Work](#)
- Video: [Business Case for Employee Engagement](#)
- Contact: kevinkruse.com
- Twitter: [@Kruse](#)

CHAPTER EIGHT: *Branding Strategies*

Guest:

Ty Montague, Co-Founder and Co-CEO of co:collective
September 23, 2013

Summary of Topic:

Sue Bethanis talked with Ty Montague, creative, innovator, change agent and author of the book, ***True Story: How to Combine Story and Action to Transform Your Business***. He was named one of the 50 most influential creative minds of the past 20 years by *Creativity Magazine*, one of the Top 10 Creative Directors in America by *Advertising Age*, and one of the Top Ten Creative Minds in business by *Fast Company*. In this talk, we learn the key principles for understanding your company's authentic story and telling it through storydoing vs. storytelling.

Favorite Quote:

"If you can create a point of view and express it through action, you allow people to use your product/service/brand as a badge to signify their belief about the world."

Insights from the conversation:

To explain the concept of storydoing, Ty first defined the word "metastory" as a three or four sentence narrative of what a business wants to become. A metastory can be thought of like a mission, but is used as a tool to coordinate and drive key actions throughout an enterprise, from product development, to the way customer service is handled, to the way employees are recruited and incentivized. Red Bull is an example, as is Warby Parker and Tom's Shoes. These are companies that focus on creating compelling experiences that advance their customers' metastory, and the customers do all the marketing work by telling their friends. Ty explains most companies do not operate this way. Instead, those companies are storytellers, which disperse their narrative through traditional modes, such as advertising.

To be a storydoing company, every business needs to understand their four truths. The four truths force holistic thinking to ensure the metastory is developed in a comprehensive way:

- **Stage:** What is going on in the world we are currently doing business in (cultural, technology, competitors, threats, etc.) This is the stage on which the story plays.

- **Participants:** Other players, such as employees, partners and other businesses in a company's ecosystem, as well as customers. What role will our metastory play in helping them advance their own narratives?
- **Protagonist:** Internal focus. What is our story today and what is the need that the metastory is going to address to get us to tomorrow? This looks at strengths and weaknesses today, including unique attributes and culture.
- **Quest:** What is your greater contribution to the world going to be? To be an effective storydoing company, need a quest that is higher order and in some way is trying to make people's lives better. The quest is the engine of metastory. It can be used as a tool, to say *are we really doing this?*

What we found most interesting:

As opposed to storydoing companies, Ty believes storytelling companies tend to have a hard time dealing with social media because they haven't thought what they actually believe about the world. Without a point of view or philosophy that a company is moving towards in the world, social media becomes difficult because there's not a lot to talk about. He says, *"If you are only interested in yourself, you are uninteresting to others in social media. Being interested in something larger than yourself makes you interesting."*

For more information:

- *WiseTalk* Recording: <http://bit.ly/2otlutc>
- Books: [*True Story: How to Combine Story and Action to Transform Your Business*](#)
- Video: [Storytelling and Leadership](#) | YouTube
- Contact: [cocollective.com](#)
- Twitter: [@tmontague](#)

CHAPTER NINE: *Sustainability Strategies*

Guest:

Eric Lowitt, Managing Director of Nexus Global Advisors
October 25, 2013

Summary of Topic:

Sue Bethanis talks with Eric Lowitt, a globally recognized expert in the fields of competitive strategy, growth, and sustainability who has been named one of the Global Top 100 Thought Leaders on Trustworthy Business Behavior by *Trust Across America*. His book, ***The Collaboration Economy: How to Meet Business, Social and Environmental Needs and Gain Competitive Advantage***, will help you understand why companies can no longer ignore the responsibility to act for the greater good.

Favorite Quote:

"The collaboration economy challenges convention to figure out ways to solve problems that lead to growth for everyone involved and solve environmental challenges in the process."

Insights from the conversation:

Sustainability can mean different things, but Eric's core definition is prosperity in perpetuity. Prosperity in perpetuity is about making all the right investments to make sure your company survives today and tomorrow, the communities in which you operate survive today and tomorrow and your market in total survives today and tomorrow.

The collaboration economy is economic development aligned with environmental or social impact. More companies today, such as Nike and Unilever, are incorporating environmental and social do-goodness in their strategic plans. The idea behind the collaboration economy is that big companies and small companies alike realize growth can be achieved by starting with the concept of serving their customers well, then looking at environment and society (entities with unmet needs) as potential new customers and incorporating them into their corporate strategy.

The collaboration economy challenges traditional leadership approaches and traits. Eric explains leaders can no longer command and control their company's destiny. They have to rely on shareholders, stakeholders and other companies to get access to resources they desperately need. Influence and persuasion is the way to corporate success. Shifting to

an influence and persuasion leadership style means each individual leader will need to think about their role as a privilege and not a right, and think like an activist not merely a capitalist. The agenda cannot be achieved alone. The mindset will need to shift from "about me" to "about we." If you can get we to work for you, then you can succeed.

What we found most interesting:

Early in Eric's career, Eric played for the St. Louis Cardinal's minor league. He was drafted out of high school and came to realize he wasn't tall enough or athletic enough to make it to first base in the major leagues. He was traded for Mark McGwire, which he considers a compliment.

For more information:

- WiseTalk Recording: <http://bit.ly/2otwg3L>
- Books: [*The Collaboration Economy: How to Meet Business, Social and Environmental Needs and Gain Competitive Advantage*](#)
- Video: [Unlikely Business Collaborations](#) | YouTube
- Article: [Why Your Company Should Partner with Rivals](#) | HBR
- Contact: ericlowitt.com
- Twitter: [@ericlowitt](#)