

THE LEADERSHIP REFLECTION

PART TWO

When Good Plans Aren't Enough



Introduction

Every organization has plans. Strategic plans. Implementation plans. Action plans. Improvement plans.

The question isn't whether your organization has a plan. The question is whether every person responsible for carrying it out can clearly see how their work contributes to the organization's purpose and success.

An Experience

Six months ago, a leadership team proudly introduced the organization's new strategic plan. Months of work had gone into it. The priorities were clear. The goals were measurable. Every department received its responsibilities.

At the end of the rollout meeting, the Executive Director asked, “*Does everyone understand where we're headed?*”

Heads nodded around the room. The answer was unanimous. “Yes.”

Several weeks later, a department manager met with their team to discuss one of the new initiatives. One employee asked, “*How does this change what we do?*”

The manager explained the new expectations. She reviewed the timeline. She described the new responsibilities. Then another employee asked, “*How does what we do help the organization succeed?*”

The room grew quiet.

The manager knew what the department was responsible for. But she struggled to explain how the department's work contributed to the organization's larger purpose.

The strategic plan was clear. The department's responsibilities were clear. Their contribution wasn't.

Reflection

At first glance, it appears to be a communication problem. Perhaps it isn't.

Everyone understood the plan. Everyone knew their assignments. Yet one simple question revealed something deeper.

People don't naturally connect their daily work to an organization's purpose simply because they've been introduced to a strategic plan.

Knowing what to do isn't the same as seeing why your contribution matters.

A Different Perspective

Strategic plans explain priorities. Job descriptions define responsibilities. Policies establish expectations.

None of them automatically help people see how their work contributes to something larger than themselves.

That realization doesn't come from reading a document. It comes from leadership intentionally creating the conditions where people recognize the significance of their own contribution.

When people begin to see that connection, something changes. They stop seeing tasks. They begin seeing purpose. And when people see purpose... ownership grows naturally.

Another Way to See It

Think about the person furthest from the boardroom. The receptionist. The maintenance worker. The overnight staff member. The finance clerk. The volunteer.

Can they clearly explain how their work contributes to the organization's purpose and success?

If they can... your strategic plan has become more than a document. It has become part of your culture.

If they can't... perhaps the plan never truly left the boardroom.

A Personal Reflection

When I was in my early twenties, I worked as the receptionist at a stock brokerage firm.

One day, our branch manager, Ed Zurek, handed me a book. He told me it had changed the way he thought about the role of a receptionist and wanted me to read it.

Until then, I had thought of myself as just “the little receptionist.” That conversation—and that book—changed the way I saw my role.

For the first time, I began to see how my contribution mattered. I took ownership of my work. I loved my job. People often assumed I was one of the brokers. I'd smile and say, “*No, I'm the receptionist. Let me get you whatever you need.*” And I made sure they got exactly what they needed.

Looking back, I realize that experience wasn't really about being a receptionist. It was about helping me see how my contribution mattered.

YOUR LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

Before your next leadership meeting, ask your team these two questions:

- 1. Can the person furthest from the boardroom clearly see how their work contributes to our organization's purpose and success?**
 - 2. Why should this matter to us as leaders?**
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