

# Unleash Your Leadership Greatness: 12-Steps to Breakthrough Initiatives

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Behind every successful initiative or solution is a great leader who championed the vision, executed the plan, and created amplified results. This article presents 12 steps for developing and implementing successful initiatives. These 12 steps are particularly powerful for developing/executing a strategic plan, formulating a marketing strategy, solving problems, improving processes, or handling a financial or personnel issue.

1. **Define the situation:** Summarize the key facts of the situation from your perspective. Then define the voice of stakeholders, empathizing with customers, employees, suppliers, your board and even your competitors—anyone important to the situation. Being open to multiple points of view, backed up by facts and figures, can help you assess a situation in a way that the issue might nearly solve itself. Thinking in extremes, as in what would each love and hate about the situation, is highly revealing.
2. **Set a SMIT goal:** SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant with Timing) are what you promise your banker, board or spouse. But if you want to achieve a breakthrough, aim at (not promise) what's called a SMIT goal (Specific, Measurable, *Impossible* with Timing.) Set the goal high to force you and your team to creatively seek both insights and solutions “out of the box.”
3. **Dive deep for insights:** Dig down as you do when you process issues in your meeting. Rather than solving or addressing symptoms, penetrate to the root causes of your strategy, process or performance issue. It is at this constructively negative extreme that great leaders discover strategic insights and foresights. As Jim Collins says, face the “brutal facts of reality.” This is also where your compassion for the pains of customers can uncover unmet needs, the fuel for innovation. Steve Jobs reportedly hatched the iPhone in a conversation like this: “What do we hate? Cell phones. What do we have to make? A cell phone with a Mac inside.” Steve Jobs is a master at employing extreme negative and positive thinking to produce disruptive innovations.
4. **Take creative leaps:** It's now time to soar to the positive extreme to work with your team to conceive wild ideas and strategies (as well as not-so-wild ones) that will ideally eliminate the problem or capitalize on the opportunity. To unleash your organization's imagination in this step, ignore cost, feasibility, company policy and industry rules—for the moment. You will have plenty of time later to kill unattractive ideas. But realize that almost all breakthroughs seemed absurd when first proposed, and then totally logical when they become profitable.
5. **Borrow best practices:** Ask your business colleagues for best practices; find them on Web sites; borrow them from competitors; even look for them in entirely different industries. Southwest Airlines, for

instance, wanted to shorten its already best-in-the-industry turnaround time in terminals; so, it sought ideas from Indy Car racing pit crews.

6. **Play with wild ideas:** Don't kill any yet. Float all wild ideas gently down to earth, particularly ones that might generate a breakthrough if they could be done. Scale them down in size if necessary, and/or try to morph them into winners. Not all ideas will translate into something workable, but it's far better to spend a few minutes trying, than to immediately race to reasons why they will fail. Innovative leaders spend time "playing" with wild ideas to make them work.
7. **Make decisions "inside the box":** When you develop ideas, it's important to be creative and unconventional, or "outside the box." When you make decisions about which idea to pursue and how to implement it, you should be rational, or "inside the box." Good decisions are made when you equally weigh pros and cons, rewards versus risks, and probability of success versus failure. Out-of-the box decision making is a recipe for disaster. Consider credit default swaps and zero-down mortgages. "In-the-box thinking" gets a bad rap. Unfortunately, many people are *in* the box when they should be *out* of it, and *out* of the box when they should be *in* it.
8. **Develop a vivid vision:** For any initiative that you decide to pursue, you should articulate the case for change, mission, vision, strategic values, stretch goal, objectives, strategies, strategic action plan and financial forecast. Your vision shouldn't be an idealistic, jargon-filled, single sentence. Instead, it should be an explicit picture of the expected future state, showing what the strategy looks like when implemented. One way to prepare a vivid vision is to write it as a script for a four-minute television documentary on your company three to five years in the future, describing in the present tense everything that is strategically different from today.
9. **Bullet-proof your plan:** Go to the constructively negative extreme one more time. Have everyone on the implementation team brainstorm everything that could go wrong with the plan. Be open to their venting and criticism, and be sure not to counter these objections yourself. Instead ask the same people to develop preventatives for each concern. Then thank them and incorporate their best solutions into the plan. This process will relieve emotional resistance, uncover and cure weaknesses in your plan, and supercharge buy-in. Vent to prevent.
10. **Over-communicate the plan:** You need to sell (not tell) your strategy to all stakeholders. Making change happen is internal marketing. Explain the case for change, which should include both the benefits of the plan as well as the consequences of not executing it. And customize this message for each stakeholder group. Overcome any residual resistance by inviting another round of venting and preventing.
11. **Track key success factors:** Prioritize and measure the key indicators of success of your plan. Keep these metrics balanced in four quadrants, as Robert Kaplan of Harvard recommends: financial; customer; process; and employee growth. Use your measurements and tracking to celebrate wins,

identify your barriers and how to unblock them, or to determine if it's time to cut your losses and kill the initiative. The most innovative companies are constantly experimenting with numerous new strategies, products, services and processes.

12. **Continue to innovate and improve:** Keep looking for new opportunities or ways to enhance your current strategy on a quarterly basis. Take a fresh look and seek a leap in the performance of your strategy annually. In my years of surveying leading business leaders, I found that remarkable leaders, in ranked order, are: inspirational; visionary; driven; passionate; innovative; change agents; never satisfied with the status quo; and great assemblers and builders of teams that do the same.

Amplitude is the height and depth of a wave, and determines its intensity and power, whether it be light, sound, electricity, etc. My insight is that remarkable leaders operate with huge *Leadership Amplitude* to push the extremes. Average leaders have a low amplitude. They avoid the brutal facts, don't consider wild ideas, or both. Poor leaders do the same, and then make decisions with big amplitude—the worst of all combinations.

Your job as CEO is to lead your entire organization out of the box when in search of breakthroughs, but keep it in the box when making decisions. This can unleash your organization's *Innovation Amplitude*, and enable your company to achieve remarkable financial results. May breakthrough be with you.

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