



Achieving radical and sustainable improvement in top line performance

HAPPY TALK...Why robust discussions of business strategy fail.



June, 2013

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[What Keeps You Awake](#)

[Services](#)

[Resources](#)

[Clients](#)

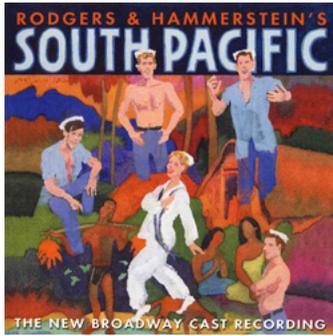
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The Challenge:

How many times have you been invited into a daylong planning session to discuss (fill in the blank) the company/division/region/country/product/market/sales/partner/competitive strategy, etc.? When you think about the outcome, can you honestly agree that you and the team have reached agreement on a few core critical decisions? Is there clarity on what happens next and who has ownership at the tactical level to make the strategy happen?

Is there a sense of clarity, focus and excitement among the participants, or was it simply a continuation of previous off-sites, just kicking the can down the road with little progress?



We often refer to these sessions as "Happy Talk," from the famous song from the Broadway show classic "South Pacific." "Happy talk, keep talking, happy talk, talk about things you like to do." Happy talk in business results from attendees typically taking a deep tangential dive into their favorite topic, about things they like or think they should do without regard to the big picture.

What to do next?

To prevent Happy Talk planning meetings with robust discussions from happening we recommend adhering to the following:

- **Understand the environment** - planning teams must pay attention to changes in the business environment, set meaningful priorities and define stretching and realistic results.
- **Commitment** - leaders at all levels must be fully committed and understand how a "real strategic plan" can improve their organization.
- **Right People** - those charged with executing the plan should be involved from the beginning which will create commitment in execution.
- **Living Document** - a plan must be used and reviewed continually because they don't have a good shelf life.
- **Willingness to Change** - the plan must be nimble and able to adapt as market conditions change.
- **Seek the Truth** - don't bury your head in the sand when it comes to market based realities.
- **Be Tough** - once the plan is developed and resources are committed, be sure there are consequences for not delivering.
- **Stretch** - focus on a manageable number of stretching and realistic goals. Fewer and focused is better than numerous and nebulous.



So What?

In summary, it's absolutely the leader's job to set the strategic agenda for any planning off-sites - that answers the questions that are at the heart of the firm's existence in ever-changing markets. Leaders who fail to do this must be held accountable. Happy Talk is a waste of everyone's time. This is true in a small firm and in a global conglomerate.

If you have any questions on Happy Talk and would like to have a robust discussion about your next off-site, please e-mail us at kappainfo@kappaeast.com.

"Ambition has one heel nailed in well, though she stretches her fingers to touch the heavens."
...Lao Tzu

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