



Achieving radical and sustainable improvement in top line performance

The Art of War Revisited



Recent Lessons Learned

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For those of you who are not familiar with this classic text, Sun Tzu wrote this extraordinary book in China 2,500 years ago. It begins, *"The art of war is of vital importance to the state. It is a matter of life and death, a road either to safety or to ruin. Hence, under no circumstances can it be neglected."*

The analogy between warfare and business has withstood the test of time. With a few simple word substitutions, here is the opening repeated, *"The art of **business war** is of vital importance to the **Board and Stakeholders** is a matter of **success and failure**, a road either to **mission accomplishment** or to **failure**. Under no circumstances can it (**planning and leadership**) be neglected.*

Here are a few gems from his book and some commentary.

Plan, Plan, Plan: *"The general who wins a battle makes many calculations in his temple before the battle is fought. The general who loses a battle makes but few calculations beforehand. Thus do many calculations lead to victory, and few calculations to defeat; how much more no calculation at all! It is by attention to this point that I can foresee who is likely to win or lose."*



While every organization believes in putting together an annual business plan, do not be fooled by the term calculations. Proper strategic planning goes well beyond the proforma budgeting process. By calculations we mean, having thoroughly thought and developed consensus answers with the "C" team (including thought leaders) to the 6 questions of strategy.

- Q1: Who will we sell to? (Geography, Vertical, Segment)
- Q2: What will we sell? (Solution, Product)
- Q3: Why will they buy? (Resulting Customer Experience)
- Q4: Why will they buy from us? (Competitive Advantage)
- Q5: What are the channels/partners? (Market Coverage)
- Q6: What are the critical capabilities to implement? (5S's)

While the answers to the 6 questions may seem obvious, our experience has shown that without the entire army (organization) having a thorough understanding of them, results usually lead to chaos and low morale.

Proact, Proact, Proact: *"He who exercises no forethought but makes light of his opponents is sure to be captured by them."*



In other words, while planning is essential, proactive planning versus reactive planning leads to competitive advantage and success. Planning when you are on the defensive only reinforces the fact of first starting with a good offensive plan with the idea to "out think" the competition and do "it" to them before they do "it" to you.

And when attacking, many companies tend to launch head-on or frontal, direct assaults against their competitor's strongest point. With proper planning and precise "calculations" rather than enter into a protracted marketplace war of attrition against a firmly entrenched competitor, consider focusing on your competitor's weaknesses. When you do this, you are able to maximize your gains while minimizing the use of resources leading to greater profits.

Execute, Execute, Execute: *"The experienced soldier, once in motion, is never bewildered; once he has broken camp, he is never at a loss. Hence the saying: If you know the enemy and know yourself, your victory will not stand in doubt; if you know Heaven and know Earth, you may make your victory complete."*



With the plan and strategy in hand, superb tactical execution is the other half of the equation to achieve success. Understanding the local terrain and environment in which you are competing will require the use of tactics which may vary from situation

to situation. By tactics we mean, the how to's. Tactics typically require that you are able to act with prudent speed. Speed requires preparation specifically in the use of weapons (sales tools) you will bring to the fight.

For example:

- Do we choose a face-to-face presentation versus phone call versus webinar?
- Do we offer one price or multiple pricing options?
- Have we identified all of the decision influencer's and decision makers and know when to ask for the close?
- And have we thought through and understand the "what if" competitive reactions to our tactical approaches?

Next Steps:

The Art of War is a wonderful and enlightening, quick read filled with gems. We encourage you to read it and consider making it mandatory reading for your everyone in your organization, especially those on the "front lines." And if you read it before, read it again!



If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to us at kappainfo@kappaeast.com.

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