

# INTRODUCTION

## WHITE HOT

Ask any business leader how tough today's environment is and they'll most likely tell you they've never worked harder. Many talk of an environment where the pressure to deliver has reached a "white hot" level of intensity, where careers that used to be measured in decades are now measured in a couple of years (or months!), and where product and company lifecycles move from inception to commodity status in record time.

They will also tell you that, in spite of cost management taking center stage, many of them have more initiatives to handle now than ever before: Enterprise solutions, new go-to-market strategies, acquisition planning, expedited product development, new manufacturing strategies, downsizing, internal start ups, online strategies, employee engagement programs, supply chain management, technology upgrades, talent development, succession planning, disruptive competitors, and governance standard development are just some of the concerns that currently drive daily activity in countless organizations. The "more with less"

mantra has never been more prevalent; and it is imperative that leaders deliver greater results with fewer resources in less time. “Daunting” would not be an overstatement in describing the challenge.

We recently heard from one particular leader that, despite everything her company was doing, she was still very frustrated with the pace of progress in delivering their business strategy. Although they were running at full speed and had a packed slate of initiatives, it still didn’t feel as though they were “hitting on all cylinders” or were as aligned as they could be. The sense that they were “leaving too much on the table” not only made for some sleepless nights; it triggered some very real consequences in how the business operated. As sustainable results were slower in coming, the firm was quick to question the core strategy. This incited what this executive called the “annual strategy rework,” with a new strategy being layered on top of the old one year after year—before the organization had even begun to absorb the previous one. Over time, this approach conditioned employees to expect the next “silver bullet” or, even worse, to adopt a “this, too, shall pass” mentality regarding the strategy—something that inhibits employee engagement when it is needed the most.

It was with this challenging environment in mind that we decided to write *Never By Chance*.

### OUR POINT OF VIEW

We knew from our first discussion about this book that we wanted to leverage each of our unique backgrounds to provide a well-rounded and thoughtful perspective on what we believed was a key issue facing leaders today.

Chuck Feltz has been a successful C-level leader of both public and private companies in multiple industries that range in size and scope—from an international startup to a Fortune 500 company. He is widely recognized for his innovative business strategies and visionary leadership that drive shareholder value in the companies he has led. His “feet on the ground” operating style and leadership experience were perspectives we felt the reader would value.

Joe Calloway has been a popular business advisor for almost 30 years. He has helped literally hundreds of companies and thousands of people create and sustain success. Joe has studied success factors across a wide range of businesses and has spoken on performance issues at thousands of events. Joe is the author of three other books: *Indispensable—How to Become the Company That Your Customers Can’t Live Without*; *Work Like You’re Showing Off!*; and the best-selling *Becoming a Category of One: How Extraordinary Companies Transcend Commodity and Defy Comparison*.

For over 17 years, Kris Young has designed experiences that engage employees and customers with companies’ visions. She is an expert in creating events that compel strategic execution and has worked with the top global business speakers on a wide variety of corporate meetings. In 2007, Kris was named the National Speakers Association Meeting Partner of the Year.

Our goal in writing the book was very simple: We wanted to help companies and their leaders answer the question, “How do we increase the effectiveness and speed of our business strategy?” We wanted them to be confident in their ability to do more with less—not paralyzed by it. And finally, we wanted

leaders to rest easier knowing that every resource they had was laser focused on making their vision a reality.

### AN INTENTIONAL MINDSET

When we consider how resources are used, we typically think of the effort and thought that goes into traditional asset deployment (plants, real estate, equipment) in order to create return for shareholders. What's less certain is how consciously the resources that are not on the balance sheet are utilized to create value. These powerful elements are too often left to chance in terms of how strategically they are managed—for several reasons:

- They are considered to be “soft” or intangible assets that do not drive quantifiable return.
- They aren't owned by anyone in particular in the organization.
- Most leaders do not have a process in place to derive value from these.

In times when resources are constrained (and they almost always are) and leaders are still held to incredibly high standards for creating value, it is a mistake to leave the strategic leverage of these resources to chance.

In companies that do this well, it is less about a tactical approach and more about a mindset. Leaders who deliver successfully in all types of conditions and economies approach the situation aggressively by saying: “Any resource that *can* be valuable *will* be valuable.” Whether it is tangible or intangible is irrelevant. They apply the same intentional approach to aligning and managing these resources as they do to the “hard

assets” and consider this one of their primary obligations because they know that, with the right level of intention, effort, and creativity, these intangible resources create real value. They realize these resources already exist within their organizations and are not incremental additions that drive more cost. The benefit comes from their intentional development and utilization and is grounded in the belief that if these resources already exist, it is simply smart business to put them to work more effectively on behalf of your stakeholders.

But, more than anything, company leaders know that, when these *existing* resources are treated in this manner, they can have a hugely disproportionate benefit. Not only do they create value in and of themselves; but they also act as catalysts that enhance other assets and accelerate the strategy’s overall delivery. For this reason, this mindset cannot be an elective for leaders looking to deliver maximum value on behalf of employees, clients, and shareholders.

### RETURN ON EVERY RESOURCE

It’s important that leaders can clearly answer the question, “Am I getting the most return on every resource at my disposal on behalf of stakeholders?” However, it’s not a one-time question. Companies must be able to constantly self-diagnose their situations to recognize the “alerts” that signal the need for a new approach or operating perspective. Consider the following list of indicators as a good starting point:

1. You’re frustrated with the pace of your progress, even though you have “all hands on deck” and couldn’t imagine being any busier.

2. Your customer experience is inconsistently executed, or you have no intentional design being delivered across all of your customer touch points.
3. You rarely share your vision openly and aggressively with employees and other key stakeholders as the context for “why you are doing what you are doing.”
4. You don’t feel your teams “get” the strategy like you do; you’re one of few people in your company who can clearly describe how all the pieces come together and make sense; employees complain that initiatives seem isolated and one hand doesn’t know what the other is doing.
5. Operations simply seem too complicated; your teams are constantly asking, “Does it really have to be this hard?”
6. You seem to spend more time planning strategy than executing it; strategies change too frequently and old ones are layered on top of new ones.
7. Your employees are not as engaged as you think they should be, given the significance of the challenges and opportunities you are facing.
8. Your executive team cannot clearly describe how your culture is a competitive advantage in your marketplace *from the customers’ perspective*.
9. Your sales teams are getting less contact with higher level decision makers than they used to; they complain that customers just want cheaper prices. There’s more concern than there used to be about your product or service becoming a commodity.

## ABOUT THE CHAPTERS

Though this book is about aligning people and strategy, you won't see separate chapters on either "people" or "strategy." While each organization's strategy will be different, there are several key similarities: Each wants theirs to be as effective and successful as it can be and accomplished in the shortest time possible. For that reason, we analyzed the key factors that exist in every organization that can make this happen—and how we can intentionally align them for maximum results.

Accordingly, each chapter is dedicated to one of the foundational factors critical to executing your strategy most effectively. Each chapter was written with the mindset that, if you were going to invest the time to read it, it should contain information that could immediately be used to drive your strategy faster—and without adding significant cost. Each chapter also identifies and defines each undervalued resource and how to determine whether you are getting its maximum value. We also provide short case studies of companies who have excelled at these strategies because we feel that it's important to see what this looks like in action when it's done well in the "real world."

We begin with the chapter on Vision, the genesis of strategy and one of the most powerful (and underutilized) resources at our disposal. A deliberately designed vision is a powerful tool for establishing a working context for making decisions and encouraging behavior in a company. It provides the ambition that propels an organization forward, sustains it through difficult times, and answers the question, "What will we look like when we succeed?" We will discuss how important it is to create a compelling vision with all stakeholders in mind and not

simply tactically generating one for a specific event (analysts call, annual report, board meeting, etc.).

“Culture As a Competitive Advantage” discusses how you can consciously *design and showcase* your firm’s culture in a way that distinguishes you from your competitors and drives maximum employee engagement. We want to answer the question, “What should we stand for in our organization that helps make our vision a reality?”

The chapter on Relevance encourages you to look at your organization objectively and ask, “Do our customers think we are as important to them as we do?” Market changes, technology, new competitors, and even an organization’s historical success create blindspots that can cause its level of customer relevance to slip away. How you handle the things that matter most to your clients and customers is critical to maintaining your standing with them. We’ll teach you how to audit your relevance and increase your position on your customers’ “Relevance Hierarchy.”

We then delve into the role Customer Experience plays as an accelerator of your business strategy. There’s never a case where you do *not* have a customer experience; it’s just a matter of whether it is intended to enhance your business strategy or just a collection of random behaviors occurring at your customer touch points. The first promotes value, employee engagement, and pride, while the second advances a fractured strategy that leaves customers at best underwhelmed and at worst broadcasters to the world of how little they think of your company.

In our Special Report on Events As Strategy, we’ll discuss this underleveraged asset and challenge the tendency to schedule

our next event or meeting simply because “we do it this time every year”. Company meeting and event strategy management is a vital asset in the execution of your overall business strategy. It is a powerful tool for leaders to engage and focus employees on the vision and the key role each of them play in making this a reality.

Finally, the chapter on Intentional Leadership supports our foundational perspective that an organization’s leaders are uniquely positioned—even *obligated*—to purposefully develop and execute this level of strategic alignment. Due to their complex and cross-functional nature, these responsibilities simply cannot be initiated and executed at a grass roots level. When left unattended by the leaders, organizations will deliver sub-optimal performance. However, when leaders fulfill this obligation and execute accordingly, they have the power to start a wave of cascading success that will benefit customers, employees, and shareholders alike. Their message will be loud and clear: that their leadership and success will always be intentional and *Never By Chance*.

### FINAL THOUGHTS

A Google search of the term “leadership books” delivers 36.6 million hits. Clearly, we didn’t decide to write *Never By Chance* because there was a shortage of material on the subject of leadership. We wrote this book because we have experienced, witnessed, and in some cases *caused* the level of frustration that comes from running an organization at breakneck speed with so much in play that you can barely keep track of it. We know that many organizations take seductive comfort in thinking, “We couldn’t be any busier or jam any more into our

days; therefore we must be making progress”—only to later realize that *how much* is going on means much less than *how* it is going on.

Given the incredible demands to grow value—and the very short windows of time in which to do so—companies have decidedly short attention spans and think nothing of layering one strategy on top of another, confusing employees, customers and shareholders alike. Again, if the definition of success is the constant churn of direction, activity, and resources, then this is perfect. But, at some point, measurable and sustainable success is essential. We can take no comfort in activity without results.

All but a very few organizations are forced to deal with significant resource constraints. The intelligent and judicious use of assets is critical for creating new value and growth; none can be overlooked or squandered. Purposefully aligning and delivering more value from existing assets and resources (“more with less”) has become the coveted “magic potion.” The bad news is, as always, that there is no magic. The *good* news is that there *is* a way to draw out the value in *existing* resources that lie dormant in many organizations. It is this intentional alignment of resources and people with strategy that has the power to catalyze an organization.

We wish you success.