

# How to Start YOUR JOURNEY OF CHANGE



By Stan  
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It's May and you're in the throes of the busiest part of the spring season. It's scramble time trying to keep up with inventory management, customer service, staffing and just trying to keep the wheels from falling off.

You've long forgotten what a weekend off looks like, and standing still for a few minutes to catch your breath is often a luxury; it seems like every day is a blur. Good Lord willing, all your hard work and planning is paying off in a profitable season!

Right now, your focus is on operations and short term, tactical decision making, and rightfully so. You know that after the peak is over, you'll want to recap the season, so you can start planning for next spring, and the better the information you have of what worked and didn't work, missed opportunities and home runs, the better your 2020 plans will be. So, I encourage you to keep a daily journal, jotting down notes while they're fresh in your memory.

Over the years, one of the most rewarding (and frustrating and challenging!) parts of my role as an advisor to many companies in our industry is to help them think and act strategically, planning and positioning/re-positioning for growth.

As an industry, we're very adept at making day-to-day, tactical decisions, but very few companies take the time (and make the effort) to think and plan longer term.

Deep down we all know that in today's dynamic marketplace, change is not an option; it's an imperative. But, more often than not, we tend to wait until change is forced upon us from deteriorating financials or negative market conditions, too frequently waiting until we're in crisis mode when it's difficult to set and execute new direction because we're looking over the edge of the cliff!

## Don't Go at It Alone

From my experience, one of the best tools to assess where your business is in relation to all the internal and external conditions that exist, and to ferret out where you should be focused, is a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis.

## Change doesn't come easy, but if the world around you is changing and you're not, you're losing ground!

Used correctly, it's a great process for organizing information, presenting solutions, identifying roadblocks and emphasizing opportunities. It's helpful in exploring avenues for new initiatives, making decisions about execution strategies for a new policy or direction, identifying possible areas for change in an existing program, refining and re-directing efforts, and an overall review of your business positioning.

Though this analysis can be self-managed or administered internally, it is sometimes helpful to bring in a third party to work with you and/or your leadership team to offer an objective outlook on

where you are and where you should be heading.

The only way SWOT or any other analyses will be effective is to be totally honest in your responses; owners and managers are deeply invested in what exists today, and human nature dictates that we tend to protect the status quo we helped create, downplaying the significance of any challenges or problems/deficiencies that may exist.

Once you identify the objective of the review, you list short, concise and factual responses to the following.

### Strengths:

- What do you do better than others?
- What unique capabilities and resources do you possess?
- What's your unique value proposition?
- What do others perceive as your strengths?

### Weaknesses:

- What does your competition do better than you?
- What can you improve given the current situation?
- What do others perceive as your weaknesses?

### Opportunities:

- What trends or conditions may positively impact you?
- What opportunities are available to you?
- Do any of your strengths open any new opportunities?
- If you eliminated any of your weaknesses, might that lead to new opportunities?

### Threats:

- What obstacles do you face?
- What are your competitors doing that may impact you?
- Do you have solid financial support?
- Could any of your weaknesses seriously threaten your business?

Over 15 years ago, I came across a SWOT Analysis Template that includes a lot more depth into some of the questions and areas of discovery that help in this process, and I've been using it ever since. If you'd like a copy of this template, just send me a request at [spohmer@pohmer-consulting.com](mailto:spohmer@pohmer-consulting.com) and I'll send one your way.

**SWOT in Action**

So, let's assume that you were thinking about adding a landscape design business component to your garden center offerings, using the SWOT analysis to help you identify what you need to work on to make it a profitable reality.

After going through this process, it should be clear to you how you can leverage your strengths, what your challenges to success are and what you can do to make it all happen, with a list of projects, resources and tasks that need to be worked on that should be prioritized and assigned to individuals with a timeline for completion.

Or let's assume that you were going through this SWOT process to review the positioning and direction of your garden center. After completing this assessment, you should have a pretty good handle on any strategic changes that should be made and a list of goals to be achieved to execute the needed changes.

It's important to note that you'll probably have a long list of new goals, far more than you can reasonably expect to achieve in a timely manner or have the resources (funding, time, staffing, expertise) to support.

I'd suggest that you prioritize this list down to the top three that, if accomplished, would have the most immediate and positive impact on your business or strategy, keeping the rest of the list to be added and focused on as the top goals are achieved.

Most of the companies I've worked with have used the SWOT analysis process to create short-term change and to establish goals that can be achieved relatively quickly (three to 12 months to accomplish) which can demonstrate the power of change and lead to more expansive and rapid change in the future.

Many companies get so excited about the power of this process that they start thinking about longer term, more radical and broader scale goals (three years plus to accomplish) that can change the very nature of a business' existence; these fit the definition of a "Big Hairy Audacious Goal" (BHAG).

Typically, BHAGs should be overly ambitious and seemingly unattainable; they are action oriented, innovative, compelling and exciting. It requires that

you stretch yourself out of your comfort zone and it creates internal momentum.

Just like you do with any goal, you will need to commit to your BHAG and start forward progress with a sense of urgency. You can break it down into smaller, measurable chunks, or mini-

goals. And make sure you check in on your progress regularly (I suggest monthly) to dedicate productive focus to your BHAG.

No, change doesn't come easy, but if the world around you is changing and you're not, you're losing ground! The

sooner you start your journey, the sooner you can start moving forward ...

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