

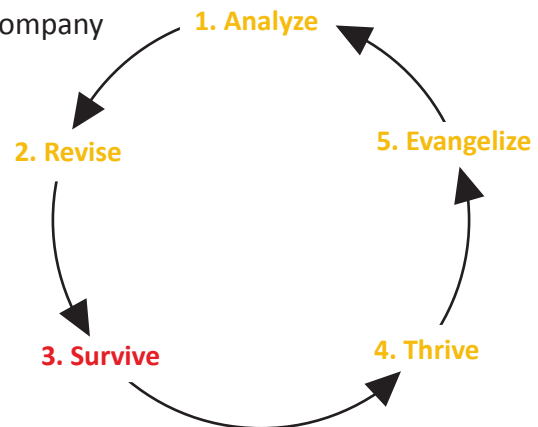
## The Stranger in a Strange Land Series:

### Five Steps to Services Leadership in a Product-Centric Company

#### Step Three: Survive

By James A. Alexander, Ed.D.

*Successfully leading a professional services organization in a product-centric company is not for the faint of heart. Learn what works.*



Previously, in Step Two, Revise, I emphasized the importance of using hard facts to re-think and revise your professional services business plan and your personal leadership blueprint. In this issue, I will talk about first things first—doing the basic requirements needed to survive as a services leader in a product-driven company—how to buy some time while building core capabilities. Here are the vital few mindsets and behaviors necessary to keep you on the payroll.

#### Recognize the Reality

You can't fight city hall...East is east and west is west, and never the twain shall meet...You can call a duck a chicken, but it is still a duck. You have to face the facts: You may well know the huge potential of your organization becoming a high-powered, services-led enterprise, but if you now live in a product-thinking, product-acting, products-are-everything company, it isn't going to happen (at least for a while). So soften your speeches and mind your manners. You are going to have to live with it until the winds of change start to blow in a direction that makes your senior management willing to navigate a new course.

This is, by far, the most difficult element of being a Stranger in a Strange Land—seeing the Promised Land, yet being stuck on the path of less potential with people who don't perceive the services vision. Patience, patience, patience is the difficult yet practical remedy.

A vice president of professional services for an ERP software company had the personal goal of transforming her company into a services-push, product-follow company. She readily saw the potential and had embarked on an internal "let's change the company" crusade that was being resisted at every twist and turn. Her drive and her energy were being turned into frustration and despondency. She summed it up this way:

"Once I came to grips that my vision for service was just not possible at this time, it was like a big weight was taken from my shoulders. When I went from trying to change a resistant world to concentrating on what I could control, the disappointment and sense of doom went away."

Sounds like good advice, don't you think?

#### Create the Core

Whether a sports team, an army, or a business, you always need "strength up the middle," a core group upon which you can depend when trouble brews or opportunity bubbles. Important in any situation, this concept is vital in the early days of a PSO start-up. So put a major focus on defining/finding/developing

a core leadership team—the project and practice leaders who will manage your consultants and engagements.

When reflecting upon the success he achieved starting up professional service at RSA Security, Rick Welch, vice president of professional services, had this to say:

“These people are really hard people to find, but they represent about 80% of your risk—they are doing the bidding, managing, dealing with the tough issues. You need people who have been there. Of course, you will want to tap any existing talent, but you will have to go outside for some core experience. You will make enough mistakes on the tough situations; you don’t need to make mistakes on the easy ones.”

So make creating the core a priority. Define the capabilities you need, aggressively go after them, and don’t quit until you find the handful of highly talented people who will help you drive success.

### **Train the Team**

Everyone (including you) needs ongoing training to increase knowledge, improve skills, and keep the right mindset. We all know that. But every day I run into situations with consultants who have never been trained in consulting, project managers who don’t understand project definitions or scope creep, and so on. Budget, plan, and require that everyone update their skills, but focus on these three: project management, consulting skills, and selling capabilities. Make sure that:

- The training is high-quality, services-specific, and tailored to the needs of your PSO. (This is not the time to be on the cheap.)
- The trainers not only know training, but they also understand the services business. (Most don’t.)
- You have a plan to reinforce the training. (If you don’t, much of what is learned in the classroom will never make it out to the field.)

### **Demonstrate Your Devotion**

You are in a product company, correct? What do product people care about? So show your support by helping sell more products and ensuring that those products are satisfying customers. I’m sure that your services organization is already good at that, but what you may not be good at is continually communicating your contribution to client loyalty, sales growth, and company profitability. Selfishly, this communication is much more important than the actions that spurred it.

You need to constantly show your good citizenship by relentlessly recounting how your PSO helped win key product sales. Quantify your contribution. Record the number (and the size) of product sales that your PSO helped get. Come up with a formula for showing how your great services work helped retain customers and the amount of business your PSO “saved.” Don’t whine about how your financial results suffered from bailing out the product screw-ups or giveaways; just point out your contribution in time and dollars for the “good of the corporation.” This is where the term “good team player” comes in. Deposit the goodwill of your product brethren into your savings account—there will be times when you will need to make withdrawals, but use this sparingly.

### **Cater to the Customer**

In the early days of your PSO, customers will be skeptical. In some situations, you will be asking them to pay for what was free in the past. In other situations, you may be asking them to buy high-level professional services to be delivered by the same people who do break/fix. (What made them so smart all of a sudden?) Customers will rightly question your capabilities. It is vital that you clearly define your value proposition, market message, and selling approach.

So, above all else, make sure you do a great job with the customer first. If not, the sales force will abandon you. Everyone is watching your organization under the microscope during the first 90 days or so. Your customer relationships will be key to your long-term success, so start now in doing what it takes to create some “showcase” accounts that will support you as your organization matures and gets ready for future success.

The step of Survive is all about doing first things first—buying some time while you create the core capabilities required for top performance. Do what is mentioned above, and you’ll be around to take advantage of future opportunities.

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