

7 Secrets of DIY Strategy

If you're thinking about doing some DIY strategy, here are our top tips. Yes, we know there are 13, but somehow "13 secrets" just didn't sound as good. And, we figured you wouldn't mind a few extra.

1. **Start with easy jobs**, work up to the tricky stuff. Many of us can do a bit of rough carpentry or painting, but few of us are ready for completely rewiring our houses. If you don't feel confident taking on the whole job, reconsider if this is one you should undertake alone. Consider breaking the effort up into smaller, more manageable pieces that will deliver value in and of themselves, while building your skills for a more major effort. Or, start by sorting out a small issue that has similarities to a big issue you need to tackle, but can't get your arms fully around yet.
2. **Recognise what you already know how to do.** Most companies already are doing a fair amount of DIY strategy, but may not think of it that way. Changing sales force structure, setting product development priorities, changing selling floor layouts: all of these can be strategic decisions, many of which are made by management teams as part of their ongoing decision making. Learn from your own practice as to what has worked and not worked in the past and make a realistic appraisal of what you can handle in the future.
3. **Don't be afraid to ask for help.** For a DIY project, that might mean asking a neighbour or a friend who has done something similar before. For DIY strategy, that doesn't have to mean calling in consultants. Suppliers, customers, even non-competing companies in your same line of work may well be able to provide some advice or hands on help. Books, articles, short courses and conferences can also give you lots of useful input. Sometimes, just knowing what sort of job it is you're getting into can be a big help, and a bit of input early on where the tough spots are can make all the difference.
4. **Plan the whole job before you start.** There's little worse than having to stop a job every time you really get going to run over to B&Q for something you forgot. Plan ahead for all the steps and make sure you've got the resources you need. Make sure you plan for the

disruptions: holidays, year ends, major sales campaigns – they can all derail your plans if you don't look far enough ahead.

5. **Tidy up as you go.** Divide the effort into sensible chunks where some major questions get answered or options get closed down by the end of each chunk. Bring each phase of work to a tidy end so the issues dealt with don't keep getting reopened.
6. **It always takes longer than you expect.** Even with the best plans, you'll almost always find that some things just take longer than you thought. The most likely time to make a big mistake is when you're rushing things. So have a fall back plan, have some built-in contingency time, but most importantly, have a way to pull a rabbit out of your hat.
7. **DIY is mostly hand labour, so be very hands on.** Feel the quality of the work others are doing, let others run their hands over the bits you've sanded. Get right up close to the work: interview the customers face to face, visit the sites you're considering consolidating, run the numbers yourself.
8. **Rent (or borrow) the power tools** (with an operator for really big stuff). You can spend a lot of time reinventing the wheel: market size data, optimisation models, competitor information. Unless it's really going to make a difference to design your own wheel, rent (or borrow) one from someone else. That might be a neighbour, or it might be the strategy equivalent of a hire shop. If what you need is complicated, make sure you get help on how to use it.
9. **Keep your workspace:**
 - **clean** (make sure you don't have a hidden agenda; it won't be hidden to anybody else)
 - **dry** (say calm and detached from the implications of what you are learning – focus on the facts first, then sort out their implications)
 - **well ventilated** (make what you are doing as open and accessible as possible)
10. **Take adequate safety precautions.** There will inevitably be politics. Or at least something that looks like politics. It's the rare organisation where issues don't have winners and losers. And it's equally rare for executives to be able to put the good of the organisation completely

first when the consequences are that they might be out of a job. Make sure you know where your organisation's high voltage wires are buried, where the explosive gas pipes are. That doesn't mean you shouldn't slay a few sacred cows, just be ready for the blood when you do.

11. Don't paint over rotten wood. You're almost undoubtedly going to find out things that you didn't expect, things that raise still deeper, broader issues. Sometimes, you have to just stay focused on the issues you're dealing with. (If you identify things that need to be dealt with, but that you aren't going to – at least mark where they are for next time.) The more difficult times are when the work you're doing will be wasted if you don't address the deeper issues. When that happens, there's little for it but to take care of the fundamental issues first, ideally incorporating your original objectives into a bigger project.

12. Measure twice, cut once. Don't move directly to action. That doesn't mean getting caught in analysis paralysis, but it does mean that you should test your conclusions and intended actions before implementing them fully. Even while you are developing your chosen course of action, look for ways to test your first steps before you get fully committed. Pilot / prototype exercises, full scale dress rehearsals, and engaging lots of people in deciding how to implement are all good ways to reduce the risk of major screw-up.

13. Put your tools away carefully. One of the biggest risks in putting your best and brightest people on a DIY strategy project is they get so excited about change and so energised by the degree of senior level contact and exposure they get that returning to a day job looks frustrating and unfulfilling. Make sure you've got a great place for them to go back to and that they're coached on making the transition back from project work to operational work.

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