



Stop Selling Vanilla Ice Cream

The Scoop on Increasing Profit by Differentiating Your Company Through Strategy and Talent

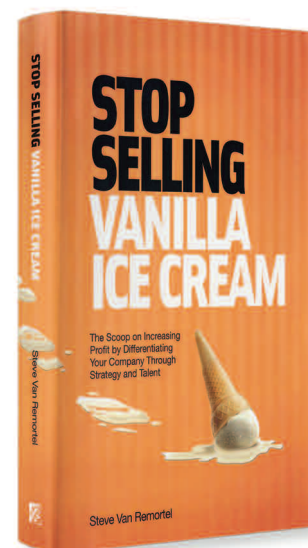
THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

If you are like most business owners and leaders today, you feel stuck working constantly “in” your business, for little return. Profit expert Steve Van Remortel has the solution to work “on” your business. The *Stop Selling Vanilla Ice Cream* process offers an easy-to-follow strategic planning and talent development methodology that leads to real differentiation delivered by a high-performance team. You will discover the answer to the most important strategic question: Why will a customer choose you over a competitor?

The unique planning methodologies in *Stop Selling Vanilla Ice Cream* address the business fundamentals of strategy and talent concurrently, because optimizing both leads to individual, team and organizational performance breakthroughs. Over 90 percent of Van Remortel’s hundreds of clients experience an increase in sales and profits in the first year after completing the process. Those same results and the process to create them are now available to you.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN HOW TO:

- Find your competence and create the differentiation so tangible that customers will choose you over your competitors.
- Adopt a talent management system that enables your organization to select, develop and retain the talent and skill sets needed to deliver your competence and strategy to achieve your goals.
- Develop and implement department plans that, when executed, accelerate the success of your organization.
- Create a culture of discipline and accountability within your organization.



by Steve Van Remortel

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: STOP SELLING VANILLA ICE CREAM

by Steve Van Remortel

The author: Steve Van Remortel is an entrepreneur, engaging speaker, strategist, certified behavioral analyst and author. As founder and chief strategist at SM Advisors, he has helped clients from more than 300 industries work through more than 1,000 strategic planning sessions.

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For additional information on the author, go to www.summary.com or www.StopSellingVanillaIceCream.com.

Why You Must Stop Selling Vanilla Ice Cream

Are you selling vanilla ice cream? If you are, you are likely getting negotiated on price, losing customers to competitors and experiencing declining sales and profitability. As consumers we choose to go to certain stores or restaurants every day because they provide something you can't get anywhere else. Why would it be any different for your business? You must differentiate yourself from competitors. Defining your competence, or as we call it your mint chocolate chip, is essential to the long-term success and prosperity of yourself, your family, your employees and their families, and your organization. It's time to stop the vanilla!

Over the last 20 years we have developed the tools and processes to help organizations stop selling vanilla ice cream. The combination of simultaneously taking your strategy and talent to the next level is what makes this process so unique and powerful. (We've made all the tools, templates and assessments available on our website: www.stopsellingvanillaicecream.com.)

There are five fundamentals of the Stop Selling Vanilla Ice Cream process that help define the organization's path from square one — where you are today — to greater prosperity and effectiveness:

- 1. Differentiation.** Deliver a competence that creates a differentiation so clear that your customers consistently choose you over your competition.
- 2. Tangible Value.** Your organization must consistently reinforce the tangible value, in dollars, that your competence delivers to current and prospective customers.

3. Talent Management. Implement a talent management system that enables your organization to identify, select, develop and retain the talent and skill sets necessary to execute and deliver your competence and plan.

4. Department/Tactical Plans. Develop and execute action plans to work “on” the business in each department of your organization rather than simply working “in” the business with regular daily duties.

5. Plan Execution. Implement a plan execution program to ensure an organizational culture of discipline and accountability. ●

The Power of Strategy + Talent

The book walks you through the four phases: planning process preparation, building the team and strategy development preparation, strategy development and strategy implementation.

• **Phase One: Planning Process Preparation.** Phase one is focused on collecting the content (specific issues and challenges of the organization) for the planning process. The planning team is selected from the leaders across the organization. The team members' function is two-fold in phase one: they complete a series of behavioral assessments that are part of the Talent Management System and complete a preplanning questionnaire. The advisor meets individually with each planning team member to review their preplanning questionnaire and debrief their behavioral assessment results. Through the questionnaires and interviews the advisor collects all the content to design the rest of the process to resolve the identified strategic challenges of



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the organization. To complete phase one, members of the planning team prepare the financial analysis, sales analysis and market research in prep for the first team planning session.

• **Phase Two: Building the Team and Strategy Development Preparation.** Now that all the content and data has been collected, the planning team now comes together to prepare to develop the strategy of the organization. To develop the optimum strategy the team must be able to address the company's most sensitive issues. To accomplish this, the team completes a team development exercise we like to call "getting the team in their underwear." Each team member presents their behavioral survey results to the rest of the team, which creates the most candid and effective discussions the team has ever had. After building a more cohesive team through this exercise, the team prepares to develop the strategy of the organization by completing the internal analysis (values, strengths, weaknesses and financials), and external analysis (market research), so the team has all the information to develop the optimal strategy. The team completes phase two of the process by creating homework teams and reviewing the action plans each team will complete to prepare for phase three.

• **Phase Three: Strategy Development.** The strategy development phase of the process begins by having each homework team present their recommended competence, strategy and target markets for the organization. After each team presentation, the team starts developing the company strategy by deciding on the company's competence and target markets, the competition's area of competence, action plans to strengthen the competence and make it tangible to the target markets, and brand strategy that communicates their competence, mission statement and vision for the next 2-3 years.

• **Phase Four: Strategy Implementation.** The final phase defines the plan to take action via strategy implementation and department planning. The team designs the optimal functional organizational structure to achieve the vision, discusses the skill set voids that need to be addressed, processes and communication systems that need to be implemented, and a business planning calendar. Company goals are identified for the next year, and a method of measurement is established for each goal. Department plans are developed to ensure each department works on the business and guides the company towards its vision. Lastly, a plan execution review is established to create an ongoing culture of discipline and accountability in the organization. ●

Phase 1: Planning Process Preparation

Selecting the Planning Team

In many ways, this first step of selecting a planning team and an advisor is the most important in the process. Who makes up the planning team will define the direction of the company and the success of the process.

Is there an individual in your organization who is trusted by his or her peers, maintains objectivity in tough situations, and is effective in terms of organization and process? That person might be right for the role of advisor. If there is not a person internally who is capable of effectively leading the process, consider using an outside advisor you are comfortable with.

Optimizing Your Talent

Behavioral assessments, the foundation for the Talent Management System, ties together the strategy and talent. There are three parts of this assessment: behavioral styles, workplace motivators, and a soft skills indicator. The behavioral style component of the Talent Management System is called the DISC behavioral profile. DISC is an acronym for Dominance, Influence, Steadiness and Compliance. These are the four primary behavior modes and each is scored on a scale of 1 to 100. DISC is an assessment, not a test.

- **Dominance:** How you respond to problems and challenges.
- **Influence:** How you influence others to your point of view.
- **Steadiness:** How you respond to the pace of the environment.
- **Compliance:** How you respond to rules and systems.

The second set of results from the Talent Management System illustrates the six basic workplace motivators. An individual's top two workplace motivators drive their actions and decisions at work:

1. Theoretical: The primary driver is the discovery of knowledge and an appetite for learning.
2. Utilitarian: The driver is return on investment and time, efficiencies and money.
3. Aesthetic: The primary motivator for these individuals is form, harmony and the arts.
4. Social: The motivator is gaining satisfaction from helping people and eliminating conflict.
5. Individualistic: The primary driver is advancement and gaining power and influence.

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6. Traditional: This driver measures an individual's desire for a system of living or principles.

The third component of the Talent Management System is the Soft Skills Indicator, which measures your clarity and understanding of the world and yourself. The factors in which you have the greatest clarity are the areas in which you have the greatest capacity for soft skills. Soft skills help people get things done. Soft skills are what usually separate an average performer or leader from a high performer.

Aligning an employee's soft skills, behavior styles and motivation within the company leads to increased job satisfaction, reduced turnover, enormous cost savings, higher productivity and increased profits.

Planning Team Interviews

Interviews are one of the biggest process steps for the advisor. After the interviews are complete, you'll have a very good idea as to where challenges and opportunities exist for the organization. The interviews and assessment results provide content to build the entire planning process. The interviews provide a cross-functional, honest appraisal of the state of the organization from the perspective of each team member. Interview questions are designed to bring up a number of items that are worthy of discussion with the planning team. The goal is to identify those four to six strategic challenges that are limiting the company's potential. ●

Phase 2: Building the Team and Strategy Development Preparation

A Process for Resolving Strategic Challenges

The strategic challenges that come through in the interviews are the primary point of focus for the rest of the process. The initial meeting of the planning team members will lay an important foundation for the rest of the process. It's important that the team agrees on how they will interact during the planning meetings and going forward as a team. The team covers some basic guidelines for the planning sessions, including important ground rules of team communication:

- Challenging a teammate's idea is healthy; attacking the teammate is not.
- There are no untouchables or sacred cows. All issues must be addressed.
- All teammates have equal responsibility for the development and execution of the plan.

Despite the fact that strategic planning usually makes sense to the majority of an organization's leadership team, a common set of obstacles can stand in the way of making it happen, including the following:

- There is no one, single vision.
- Operational (day-to-day) thinking dominates management's time.
- Organizations let outside forces shape their strategy.

It is helpful to allow these concerns into the conversation so they can be addressed immediately.

Building the Team to Achieve Your Dream

The team development exercise has each team member presenting their behavioral assessment results by completing the following statements:

1. I learned the following strengths of my behavioral style that positively impact the team:
2. I learned the following growth opportunities of my behavioral style that could increase the performance of the team:
3. I feel others in the organization perceive my style as:
4. To communicate most effectively with me, I ask that you do/not do:
5. I am going to take these steps in my development in the next 12 months to increase my performance and build a stronger and higher performing team:
6. a) My vision for the planning team interactions is:
b) The characteristics or processes of a high-performance team that need to be implemented in our team are:

A great first step in providing a candid and interactive environment is to have the leader present his or her behavioral style first. The behavioral style presentations are a roller-coaster ride filled with highs and lows of emotion, but the results of the exercise change how the team interacts and performs together forever.

Looking in the Mirror: Internal Analysis

As part of the development of a proactive strategy, conduct a thorough internal analysis of your strengths, weaknesses and finances. Completing an internal analysis requires the team to:

- Develop or refine the company's values and beliefs statements. The values and beliefs define how the organization is going to interact internally and externally while implementing the plan. The values of an organization are at the core of its existence. The outcome of the planning process in regard to values and beliefs is to develop action plans that align behaviors with defined values.

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- Conduct a strengths analysis from the interviews. Knowing your strengths — especially your top strengths — lays the foundation for the development of your competence.

- Conduct a weaknesses analysis from the interviews. Collecting weaknesses during the interviews allows for candid and honest dialogue about them that leads to action plans to eliminate or minimize as many of them as possible.

- Review the current financial analysis. Profit is not a strategy, but the result of a great strategy, so having a clear understanding of your financial picture is essential.

These four steps create a wealth of knowledge and insight, and a strong foundation for the eventual discussions about your competence and strategies for moving forward.

Looking Out the Window: External/Market Analysis

Conducting an external analysis requires you to identify trends and collect industry data to make the most informed decisions regarding your future strategy and direction. It's critical to understand what your marketplace wants and doesn't want.

Through continuous market research, successful organizations adapt their competence and strategies to the changing marketplace.

Use three primary questions to direct your market research efforts:

- What market research information do we need to collect and study to make the most informed strategic decisions?
- What trends are developing in the world, state and industry right now?
- Based on the internal and external analysis, what are the strategic options for the organization?

Establishing a market research gatekeeper is a step to consider in organizing the flood of information collected by team members. The gatekeeper's task is to collect and organize all of the market research that team members gather throughout the year.

The Process to Create a Real Differentiation

The greater the level of differentiation through your competence, the larger your margins can be.

The following step-by-step process is to assist the homework teams in developing and presenting the future competence and strategy of your company:

1. Review and discuss the internal analysis of the organization: Ask your team what strengths can be the foundational strengths of your competence. What weaknesses do you need to eliminate? Which of your products or services have the highest demand (growth) and margin?

2. Review and discuss the external analysis and market research summary. What are the emerging trends that could create an opportunity in the markets in which you compete?

3. Review the strategic opportunities list and brainstorm and list additional possible competence options for your organization.

4. Discuss how you think your top competitors are trying to differentiate themselves. Can you outperform one of your competitors on the competence it appears to have selected?

5. Complete your first draft of the future competence and use it to build the competence hierarchy using the template. Can you build on a possible current competitive advantage, or do you need to go in a different direction?

6. Provide your rationale as to why you chose this competence. Why is this competence going to separate your organization from your competition?

7. Define the target markets of the company. These are the companies or consumers that will value your future competence the most.

8. Discuss other aspects of the strategy on which you need to gain agreement.

9. Brainstorm and list all the strategies and action plans from your discussions. ●

Phase 3: Strategy Development

Defining Your Competence and Strategy

Defining your competence and how you are going to differentiate your company is the single most important strategic decision you will make as a planning team. Why is a customer going to do business with you versus one of your competitors?

Truly successful organizations hone in on specific target markets. This enables them to effectively craft their message and appeal directly to the decision makers within companies or demographic groups that will want their brand of mint chocolate chip ice cream. Does your company have a clearly defined target market or customer? How is that information communicated internally? How is it communicated externally?

Define your target market and develop messages that will appeal to customers looking for your specific type of mint chocolate chip ice cream.

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Limit your target to a finite group of organizations or people. It is far more effective, especially for a small to midsize company in the business-to-business market, to create a marketing plan that targets a few hundred companies (or consumers) rather than several thousand.

Inevitably, you will be tempted to sell to as many target markets as possible. Resist this urge. Instead of trying to cast the net over the entire ocean, you'll find you can increase your sales by focusing your limited resources on the primary and secondary target markets that are most likely to value your competence the most.

Competitive Competence Analysis to Verify Differentiation

The competitive competence analysis examines your perception of how your competitors are trying to differentiate themselves. Answer these questions while completing a competitive confidence analysis:

- Who are your primary competitors in the markets where you compete?
- What is the perceived competence of each competitor?
- Based on their competence, to what level does each company differentiate itself on a scale of 1 to 10?
- Are any of these competitors delivering or trying to deliver a competence similar to that of your company?
- If yes, can you tangibly prove that you will deliver it better?

If you find out that your competence is similar to that of the competition, you need to go back to the drawing board until you define a competence that you can deliver better than anyone else in the market.

A brainstorming session aimed at strengthening your competence against what's known or perceived about the state of the competition typically generates a lengthy list of action plans. It's important to capture those action plans and assign the department plans that will include them. The focus of the exercise is to come up with a list of ways to increase the degree of differentiation and implement your strategy.

Communicating Your Competence to Increase Sales and Profit

You have to reinforce your competence at every touch point your company has with a customer. That includes branding, business reviews, email signatures and your mission statement.

You must be able to measure and illustrate the value that your product or service brings to your customers.

The brand strategy positions your competence in the minds of your target markets. Your brand is your No. 1

salesperson and it needs to effectively communicate your competence and/or the value of your competence to your target markets.

One simple question — What does your company do? Does your response effectively communicate your competence — your mint chocolate chip ice cream — in a way your listener will retain after the interaction is complete? Your mission statement developed through this process will effectively communicate why your company is unique and why your target markets should do business with you.

Creating Clarity through a Strategic Vision

One of the leadership team's primary responsibilities is creating a detailed vision that all employees can understand and shoot for. The vision contributes to strategy development by helping leadership specify what the organization needs in the future and why. It also serves as a rallying point for the rest of the employees, instilling a level of excitement and anticipation.

A compelling and clear vision has subjective and objective components. The subjective components include how you want your internal culture to be described by your employees and what you want your customers to be saying about you when you achieve your vision. The objective components include the market and scope of the products and services offered in the vision time frame, and the strategic measurements and financial objectives.

To develop a powerful vision, you will need everyone to agree on all aspects of the vision, including what new products, markets and geographic territories you're going to pursue within the vision time frame.

The next step involves developing and maintaining a tool called a measurement matrix. The matrix provides an objective view of your progress by tracking the results needed to achieve your plan. Establishing goals for each of the metrics requires that you tie the targets to your budget and performance numbers.

Performing annual plan updates is the most effective way for an organization to methodically move toward its vision.

Preparing to Turn Strategy into Action

Before you can begin executing, you need to focus on resolving transitional issues. You'll also identify goals for the next year, establish a plan execution program, and launch the department planning process.

The first assignment for the homework teams to prepare for phase 4 is to design the functional organizational

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structure needed to achieve your vision and strengthen your competence. You'll need to include all necessary functions on this chart, whether they currently exist or not. This may or may not match up with current roles and responsibilities. While building the functional organizational structure, you should not discuss or assign any names to positions within the structure. All you want to do is identify responsibilities and functions.

Once a team completes its functional organizational structure, then ownership and/or leadership can place specific individuals in each role of the organizational structure based on the necessary skill set match. Consider the education, experience and behavioral assessments of each person in evaluating existing skill sets. Skill set misalignment — along with not having an organizational competence — is typically one of the main reasons a company underperforms.

The next assignment for the homework teams is identifying the systems and processes needed to achieve the vision. This is an important component for the first year's success because you need to ensure that you consistently deliver your competence throughout the organization. You accomplish this by consistently executing documented processes in every department. As you grow, the systems enable you to handle significantly more business with your current assets and team.

The last assignment is developing a list of three to five organizational goals. When creating goals, nothing is simpler or more effective than the tried-and-true SMART approach:

- **Specific:** Be able to answer who, what, where, when, and why questions about the goal.
- **Measurable:** Identify concrete criteria for gauging progress.
- **Agreed-upon:** In a team setting, gain consensus regarding the appropriateness of the goal and any incremental steps to achieve it.
- **Realistic:** You must believe the goal is possible in order to make it happen.
- **Timely:** Ground the goal in a time frame. ●

Phase 4: Strategy Implementation

Developing the Structure and Skills to Execute the Strategy

After the homework teams complete their action plans to prep for the next session the team comes back to

together to present their recommendations, hash them out and makes decisions on the following topics:

- Developing an optimal functional organizational structure to achieve the new vision
- Addressing the skill set voids in the organizational structure
- Identifying systems and processes to implement, including a performance-based compensation system and a communication system
- Establishing an annual business planning calendar to ensure the organization optimizes its success year after year.
- Any other significant transitional issues that could be identified by the advisor or planning team member.

After meeting with all the planning team members, the leader needs to complete the organizational structure by filling in specific names. The goal is to help employees find a position within the organization where the position matches the person's natural skill set.

Company Goals and Action Plans

Measurable goals require concrete criteria for gauging progress toward the desired outcome. The ability to measure progress makes it easier to stay on track, reach target dates, and experience the exhilaration of achievement that spurs the continued effort needed to reach your goal.

Agreed-upon goals are necessary to keep your organization's momentum moving in a positive direction. Consensus makes it easier to find ways to make goals happen. You develop the attitudes, abilities, skills and capacity to reach them.

You can attain virtually any goal you set when you plan your steps wisely and establish a time frame that makes it realistic for you to carry out those steps.

Department Planning to Make It Happen

Taking strategy from theory to tactics is where most companies fail. The best approach is a team effort driven by the leader to develop a department plan for their area of responsibility. Department plans are about working on the business. As each department completes their action plans it accelerates the success of the organization and creates a company-wide momentum that everyone can feel.

In first year department plans we make every effort to make the process as simple as possible so organizations continue this approach year after year. The outline for

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the department plans can become more elaborate in subsequent years but in the first year we recommend the following department plan outline:

1. Outline the education/training needs for each or selected individuals in the department: Working with these individuals, use their behavioral assessment results as a foundation for creating a detailed individual development plan.
2. Develop action plans to achieve each company goal by doing the following:
 - Read the entire business plan.
 - Review your values and beliefs statements.
 - Review all the action plans from the brainstorming sessions.
 - Review weaknesses from the internal analysis.
 - Review your competence hierarchy and the competitive competence analysis.
 - Determine action plans necessary to ensure every member of the team understands your competence and their role in it.
 - Determine action plans necessary for the department to execute in order to strengthen their competence.
 - Review all the transitional issues and develop action plans to implement the new organizational structure, build or implement new systems and processes, and address skill set voids in your department.
 - Assign each action plan an owner and completion date; ensure each individual in the department has at least one action plan to complete.
 - Use the goal and action plan template to capture and monitor progress.
3. Determine how your department will measure its progress toward success: Identify those measurements you can capture that will illustrate whether or not your department plan is working.
4. Decide how you will use measurements as benchmarks for performance reviews. For budget/capital requests, define any capital or significant expense you will need to implement your plan. What additional expenses or capital are you requesting that are needed to execute your departmental plan?

A Program to Ensure Effective Plan Execution and Accountability

The Stop Selling Vanilla Ice Cream process includes a plan execution program that systematically guides an organization toward its vision. A successful plan execution program does the following:

- Guides timely execution of the strategic and departmental plans

- Keeps the organization focused on the strategy and working on the business
- Promotes a culture of discipline and company-wide accountability
- Drives completion of projects and eliminates complacency
- Consistently builds the talent of the organization through the completion of the individual development plans
- Ensures the plan is a living document used as a tool to manage your organization
- Creates breakthroughs via the combined impact of increasing your strategy and talent simultaneously
- Dramatically increases the probability of increasing sales and profits

To gain these benefits, follow the five steps of the plan execution program:

1. Completion of the strategic plan
2. Presentation of the strategic plan to the company
3. First draft of department plans are presented to the planning team
4. Budget and department plans are approved by shareholders after discussion and any requested changes
5. Monthly plan execution meetings

Each member of the planning team should present a component of the plan to show that the plan was created by the team, the team is unified around it, and each member of the team is excited to get the rest of the organization involved in the process.

The Stop Selling Vanilla Ice Cream process offers a simple step by step approach to complete a strategy and talent development plan for your organization. There is not an obstacle your company faces that can't be resolved by optimizing your strategy and talent. That is why over 90 percent of companies that implement the process into their organization experience an increase in sales and profitability. It is time for you to stop the vanilla! ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Stop Selling Vanilla Ice Cream*, you'll also like:

1. ***Be Different or Be Dead* by Roy Osing.** Osing shares strategies he has personally developed and executed for immunizing an organization against performance decline and business failure.
2. ***Differentiate or Die* by Jack Trout.** Trout and co-author Steve Rivkin address what factors allow a company or product to stand out in an increasingly competitive (and global) marketplace.
3. ***Trade-Off* by Kevin Maney.** Kevin Maney shows how conflicting forces determine the success, or failure, of new products and services in the marketplace. Almost every decision consumers make involves a trade-off between fidelity and convenience.