

STRATEGY QUEST by Paul A. Sacco

EXCERPT

A quest is an arduous journey in search of something serving a larger purpose. The word quest seems to describe the effort required to find truly strategic opportunities. “Quest” is derived from the Latin word *quaerere*, which means to ask or to seek. *Quaerere* is also the root of the word *question*. In seeking ways to improve the competitive position of their business, the strategic leader’s role is to question the status quo.

I hadn’t anticipated that it would take two years, and as with any quest, there were points when I felt like giving up, but I couldn’t—transforming the strategic status quo seems to have become my life’s purpose and helping executives learn to find strategic opportunities has become my life’s mission. I believe that Strategy Quest presents an entirely new and unique means for finding and selecting truly strategic opportunities.

Strategy Quest is about how to find and select strategic opportunities. However, it is also a tale of two businesses—Sears and Amazon. Sears represents a cautionary tale of leadership failure and Amazon, a celebratory tale of leadership success. During Sears’ downfall, Amazon became the third-largest business in the world. The difference in the outcomes of these two businesses is strategic leadership—Amazon’s Jeff Bezos has it, and Sears’ Eddie Lambert doesn’t.

Since Sears was the Amazon of their time, it is quite ironic that they were as failing while Amazon was growing. In 1993, Sears ended its 100-year-old mail-order catalog sales channel. The following year, Jeff Bezos recognized that the practical size of a mail-order catalog limited the number of books offered for purchase via this channel. He started-up Amazon.com by offering over three million book titles for sale via the Internet—a quantity which, according to Bezos, would have required a stack of catalogs three feet high.

With their extensive mail-order experience, pioneering e-Commerce seemed like a natural fit as a strategic opportunity for Sears. After all, they knew how to distribute remotely ordered merchandise and only needed to switch its sales channel from mail-order to the Internet. Yet, Sears failed to create this strategic future, and in a matter of years, despite having no retail experience, Jeff Bezos built an eCommerce business having a tremendous strategic advantage over it.

If a naturally tactical executive is going to succeed in their strategic leadership role, they must develop a strategic mindset. If a board of directors is going to choose a successful CEO, they too must understand the two mindsets. Despite that the strategic and tactical mindsets are dichotomous, many executives find themselves in executive roles as a result of their tactical abilities.