Module 7: Developing the AI Business Strategy using the "Ignition" Process

Lesson 7: 90-Day World

Working in a 90-Day World

Now is when the process starts to get exciting, when you begin to see how your BHAG is possible. In this step, specific actions that will move the company towards the big goals are defined, and those actions get assigned to those who will be accountable for the result.

Finally, it's time to create your **One-Year** and **Quarterly Plans**.

You might be surprised to learn that "less is more" here.

As a result of previous steps, you've now set your sights on outcomes that seem almost impossible, but this step is about starting small. To clarify, we're not saying to *think* small. We're saying you don't have to tackle everything at once.

As the old saying goes: "How do you eat an entire elephant? One bite at a time."

After setting your BHAG and mid-range goals, each leadership team member will likely have a giant list in their heads of what needs to be done. Here's where we help them get it all out.

We'll start by having you facilitate a massive brainstorming session with the leadership team, getting everything up on a whiteboard. The list may look overwhelming after everything on their minds has been shared with you. It's OK. A pattern will begin to emerge, and from that, a timeline of the chronology of steps required.

Once this list is complete, we'll Kill/Keep/Combine once again.

Using this consolidated list of actions, you'll work with the leadership team to determine what needs to be done in the near term (this Quarter).

Everything that is still on the list but not identified as a clear next action for the current quarter will get added to what we call “the parking lot.” This is the holding place for those ideas you’ll return to at the next quarterly planning session. With this parking lot mechanism in place, there’s no fear that something that seems important will get forgotten or lost by not addressing it now.

Side note: Have two different people take clear photographs at every stage of this list-building and condensing process so you can be sure all ideas are captured.

Creating Your Quarterly Plan

To create a company’s Quarterly Plan, you should start by setting a date for when you want to achieve your first one-year goal. To keep it simple, base the date on when you would like your annual planning meeting to happen.

Typically, the annual planning meeting is conducted right before the end of the fiscal year. So, if that is the same as the calendar year for you, you’ll want your goal achievement date to match the end-of-year planning. If that means your first One-Year plan is actually only nine months, or 15 months, or whatever, that’s fine. You’re setting the meeting pattern. Just be sure to adjust the plan for that initial time frame.

Once you’ve identified the target date for achieving the goals in the One-Year Plan, the next step is to do a deep dive into any metrics, indicators, or critical data points you’ll want to track to help you know if you’re moving towards the goals that were set. What level of revenue, profit margin, number of clients, etc. (you help the leadership team determine what’s essential) will you need to meet within the One-Year Plan to get you on your way to the 3-year plan? Keep in mind that simply dividing by three here is rarely the answer.

Now, go back to that brainstorming list we did a Kill/Keep/Combine on, and work with the leadership team to determine no more than **seven** goals to meet.

Remember, less is more here.

Too many goals will diffuse the team's focus from the "critical few" that will drive progress toward those goals. In the process of Kill/Keep/Combine, you'll likely decide to remove some of the goals off the list entirely and any goals that are simply milestones within a more extensive plan already on the list (combined).

The One-Year goals should not be vague.

To ensure that goals are clear, we advise you to define these goals using the **SMART framework**: goals should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound. If you're unfamiliar with creating SMART goals, this article will help you better understand how to do it. We've also included other articles to help with this in the Additional Resources section.

To ensure the ideal outcome has been clearly defined, ask yourself, *"How will we know this goal has been achieved?*"

If you can't answer this question, you're likely missing a measurable component or a final step. Not explicitly defining the goals may cause friction in achieving the ideal outcome.

For example, a goal of "Increase our customer base" becomes "increase our customer base by 20%."

And "develop an employee onboarding program" becomes "develop *and implement* an employee onboarding program."

Once the One-Year goals are identified, we're finally ready to break them into **"Rocks."**

The concept of Rocks originated with Stephen R. Covey in his book "First Things First" and has since become part of common business lexicon.

To illustrate how he uses the term “Rocks,” imagine a bucket (which represents the amount of time you have available) in front of you, as well as three smaller containers: One has large rocks, one has pebbles, and one has sand.

The large rocks represent your big projects or milestones. They’re important, but they get pushed aside for the sand (representing your daily tasks like responding to emails and phone calls) and random interruptions that can feel urgent but often aren’t. And then there are the pebbles (your other various tasks that come up, like meetings or smaller projects.

Now imagine you fill that bucket with the sand first, then your pebbles.

Is there space for your large rocks? Not likely.

However, what if you put the rocks in first, then the pebbles, then the sand?

Suddenly everything fits into the bucket of time because the pebbles fall around the rocks, and the sand fills in the gaps.This process ensures that time for big projects is built in by default.

And this is how you and everyone in your organization should start thinking about your time and priorities.

Now, with the One-Year Plan in front of you, identify what needs to get done in the next quarter to get you toward those goals. Like with the other goals, set a deadline that works for your company's meeting pattern. These are now your **company Rocks**.

So, decide what’s reasonable as a due date for your next quarterly Rocks.

We advise organizations to set the due date for the end of the following quarter unless they’re at the beginning of a quarter at the time of Ignition. So, for example, if you hold your Ignition event on May 10th (the middle of Q2), since you don’t have a full quarter to focus on achieving the Rock, you’ll need to decide if your due date is going to be June 30th (end of Q2) or September 30th end of the next quarter, Q3).

At this point in the meeting, there may be some back and forth with the leadership team as you start defining the Rocks that will move the company toward achieving the goals outlined in the One-Year Plan.

It's best to allow the leadership team time to have that back and forth. Their participation gives the leadership team a chance to get familiar with the Rock identification process, and this familiarity helps them get better at the process.

It will be your role to help facilitate the conversation and step in if the leadership team stalls during the process. It will be a new concept for them, and they may need your affirmation to know they're doing it "right."

Once the leadership team has agreed upon the company Rocks, the next step is determining *who* on your leadership team will be responsible for each one. That person won't necessarily be the one actually doing the work, but they will be responsible for ensuring it gets done by the agreed-upon date.

For example, if you have a Rock to launch a new marketing campaign for your products, the CMO will likely own Rock.

Or, if there's a Rock that deeply involves multiple teams, you'll need to identify the head of one of those teams to ensure that the Rock is met.

It is important to note that there should only be ONE person accountable for each Rock, so there's no confusion about who is being held accountable. We've heard it said, "When more than ONE person is responsible for a Rock, NO ONE is responsible for a rock." This means that if more than one person is held accountable, it is too easy for someone to think the other person is handling it.

When progress on a Rock stalls out, the person accountable will know THEY are responsible for remedying the situation. And everyone on the leadership team will know exactly who to address if progress on achieving the Rock starts to fall behind. This mechanism allows for there to be no confusion on who to address when a Rock’s progress isn’t on target for the quarter.

Now that the accountability for each of the Rocks’ completion has been defined, the person accountable for the Rock will work with the key team members on that project to cascade *individual* Rocks out to them.

In the marketing campaign example, the CMO might work with the Copy Chief to identify the Rock that her department should have to meet their contribution to the company Rock. The Copy Chief may then identify individual Rocks for people on her team and cascade them to those team members.

Once you get the leadership team used to working in a 90-day world, you’ll get to the point where *every person* in the business has a Rock that ultimately supports the company's short-term plans, which supports the mid-range goals, which leads us to the BHAG.

Beautiful, isn’t it?