

THREE TIPS FOR A WINNING DIGITAL STRATEGY

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I've spent more than three decades leading technology and business transformations, and one thing I've learned is this: digital strategy only matters if it drives real outcomes. Technology today isn't just supporting the business — it is the business. And that means the Chief Information and Digital Officer has to do more than implement systems. We must enable clarity, execute with structure, and adapt continuously.

Here are three tips that I've found critical to success.

1. ENABLE CLARITY

A successful strategy starts with clarity. You need to define the **current state**, the **future state**, and the **gap in between** — and then you need to tell that story in a way that people can understand and rally around.

I often remind leaders that simplifying complexity is one of the most important skills we have. The best CIDOs are great storytellers. They take complicated issues and explain them in a way that executives, teams, and stakeholders can act on.

During a project I championed at FedEx, I once told the board, "This is going to be a vicious fight, but a fight worth fighting." That honesty mattered. People don't follow vague optimism; they follow leaders who speak the truth and provide a path forward. Clarity is about truth, direction, and alignment.

2. EXECUTE WITH A FRAMEWORK

Clarity is powerful, but without structure it doesn't stick. That's why execution requires a framework.

Here's the one I've used:

Strategy ➔ **Capabilities** ➔ **Value** ➔ **Operating Model** ➔ **Organizational Model**.

You can use any framework, but you must have one. Too many organizations get stuck talking about what they want to achieve and never define how to achieve it. The "how" is where alignment happens. It's what connects the work of dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of people to the strategy itself.

When the framework is clear, execution becomes more than a plan on paper — it becomes a playbook that the entire organization can run together.

3. BE ADAPTIVE

If you've designed a perfect five-year strategy and executed it exactly as written, I'd argue you weren't paying attention. The world changes too fast for rigid plans.

Great leaders are adaptive. That means making decisions in real time, based on real information, and doing so in partnership with the business. The old days of giant PMOs tracking projects with red, yellow, and green lights are over. Today, we need leaders who can adjust course quickly and decisively.

Adaptability doesn't mean being reactive. It means setting up the systems and partnerships that allow information to flow, so that decisions can be made continuously — not months later in a review cycle.

FINAL THOUGHT

Clarity, structure, adaptability — those are the three pillars of successful digital strategy. Get those right, and you're not just managing technology. You're transforming the business.

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Ken Spangler is the former Executive Vice President & CIO of FedEx Global Operations Technology, where he led large-scale technology transformations and enterprise innovation across one of the world's most complex logistics networks. The only executive to serve as CIO for each of FedEx's major operating companies, Ken spearheaded global initiatives in AI, IT strategy, and enterprise business agility. Now an adjunct professor at Carnegie Mellon University, he brings more than 37 years of executive technology leadership to the classroom, helping the next generation of digital leaders align innovation with strategic impact.

Learn from leaders like Ken Spangler in the **Chief Information and Digital Officer (CIDO)** Executive Education Program at Carnegie Mellon University's Heinz College.

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