



Creating A Cohesive Strategy To Guide Different Business Units



*Douglas Henck, CEO
Sun Life Financial*

Douglas Henck had put together a broad plan for the company, which he now realized was no longer sufficient. “For the first time I began to understand that the overarching statement that I had put down on pages had sort of outlived its usefulness. It had provided a general sense of direction for building a regional office for the types of things that had been requested and the types of changes we were going to make and the people we were going to hire and so on. It had provided enough direction while we were getting things in place but then it really didn’t do enough for substantially figuring out what we were going to do and what we were not going to do in the future,” he says.

It was then that Henck turned to Strategic Thinking Group (STG), an international consultancy in Hong Kong he had worked with at his previous company. “Based on my previous experience it was time to regenerate,” says Henck. “I knew the core basis for Jim’s work (James Haybyrne, chairman of Strategic Thinking Group), the strategic anchor and the competitive analysis that he does. You’ve bought his time, personally, and that’s a big difference from going with some of the big firms. I have far too many times hired someone for a strategic project or assessment of some kind and gotten a lot of very bright and pleasant people who are fairly recent graduates. So with Jim, I knew his work, I knew he would personally not just be involved but really be part of the process and that was important. And, frankly, it has been great value for the money spent.”



The work with Strategic Thinking Group gave Sun Life Asia specific, concrete plans to follow and time targets to meet. “Jim doesn’t just leave you with a written document that people refer to now and again,” says Henck. “He leaves you with very specific and concrete project plans that you have to follow through on, and then you schedule the time for when you are going to follow through. We know that at the end of next month we are going to be getting together for two days to discuss and dissect progress. So that’s important because it also becomes a time to refresh; and say, yes, we’ve had to put out these fires in the meantime, but this is [still] the direction we are going in and this is how we’re going to do it. This is where we are going to invest the money in “order to get that done.”



Henck involved ten of his top people in the strategic development process: five country managers and five top managers. “One of the things that surprised me was some of the strengths and creativity that came from some of the people,” says Henck. “It was not immediately apparent where the contributions were going to come from. It was very useful and important to have both the general managers of the countries themselves, along with some of the functional heads, because it really provided a nice blend of backgrounds and responsibilities in terms of perspectives.” In this way Henck’s team got a true picture of what was and wasn’t important. “It’s also important to have facilitators who will draw out people because when you have a mixture of cultures, backgrounds, age, intelligence and gender, it’s not always easy to draw on everybody. When we made a concerted effort to get everyone to participate we really benefited from it,” he says.