

PRAISE FOR THE ONE-HOUR STRATEGY

“Vivid and engaging, this book is full of provocative takeaways. My favorite is takeaway 2: ‘Make strategy part of everyone’s job.’ Now that is something to think about!”

—RICHARD WHITTINGTON, professor of strategic management at the University of Oxford and coauthor of *Exploring Strategy*

“There are bookshelves of strategy books filled with fancy acronyms and models that are useful in understanding strategy and choosing a direction. This book isn’t fancy, model-rich, or acronym-ridden; it’s dedicated to the practical factors of how to make a strategy work! Great book!”

—ISABELLE PARIZE, chair of Delsey and nonexecutive board member at Coty

“The watershed between strategy and execution is one of today’s big problems in strategy. Kraaijenbrink’s *The One-Hour Strategy* suggests a way out. Not by simply emphasizing one or the other but by dissolving the distinction and creating one organization-wide approach to strategy.”

—HENK W. VOLBERDA, professor of strategy and innovation at the University of Amsterdam and coauthor of *Reinventing Business Models*

“Having read quite a few strategy books, I can definitely say that this book is different. Kraaijenbrink’s *One-Hour Strategy* takes strategy out of the stratosphere of the boardroom and brings it down to earth, putting it in the hands of the managers and employees who have to do the actual work.”

—RUTGER MILDERS, human resources director at AkzoNobel

“An inspiring read with a refreshingly different outlook compared to other strategy books. Kraaijenbrink offers a practical and powerful approach to engage the entire organization in strategy and help bridge the gap between strategy and execution.”

—KATY YOUNG, senior vice president and partner at BTS

“A convincing plea to make everyone in the organization think about strategy regularly, with the frequency increasing with the hierarchical level. Jeroen Kraaijenbrink packages his original message in the form of a smoothly written novel. Not only is his newest book easy to read, but because of its many valuable takeaways and reflection questions, it is also excellent for application in daily practice.”

—MARC G. BAAIJ, associate professor of strategic management at Rotterdam School of Management and author of *An Introduction to Management Consultancy*

“*The One-Hour Strategy* is an enjoyable read, challenging the necessity of omnipresent, oversophisticated strategy frameworks. Kraaijenbrink guides readers toward a simple and embracing approach, in which strategy becomes an integral part of people’s actual work. Highly recommended.”

—HOLGER FEIST, chief strategy officer at Messe München

“Dr. Kraaijenbrink delivers again! Here he leverages decades of experience with helping managers establish and sustain their businesses’ strategy conversation. His aim is to show that shaping the business’s strategy can become part of everyone’s work, an ongoing practice. Part of this is time management, ensuring time is set aside. Part is structure. He carefully builds a structure of takeaways, the questions the business’s strategy addresses. Part is Kraaijenbrink’s subtlety, the energizing result as individuals throughout the business make their own mark on its strategy. Overall, this is an accessibly written, superbly handy pocketbook for busy people.”

—J.-C. SPENDER, research professor at Kozminski University and author of *Business Strategy*

“*The One-Hour Strategy* presents a new angle on strategy making and challenges traditional strategy perspectives by positioning strategy as part of organizational life rather than an annual activity. Though written in narrative form, with the aim of ensuring accessibility, the concepts are substantial and thought provoking, and the reflective questions useful.”

—FRAN ACKERMANN, John Curtin Distinguished Professor at Curtin Business School and coauthor of *Making Strategy: Mapping Out Strategic Success*

THE
ONE-HOUR
STRATEGY

THE
ONE-HOUR
STRATEGY

BUILDING A COMPANY OF
STRATEGIC THINKERS



JEROEN KRAAIJENBRINK



FAST
COMPANY
Press

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, organizations, places, events, and incidents are either a product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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INTRODUCTION

THIS IS A STORY ABOUT MARTIN. He is the new marketing guy at Waters & Flows, and both Martin and Waters & Flows are fictional. But more importantly than anything else, this is a story about strategy, and that part is decidedly real. Not about how strategy is done in the average company today. It's a story about how strategy could, or even should, be done to achieve extraordinary daily success. So it's a bit of a romantic story, too.

To start with a spoiler, the main message is that strategy should become part of the day-to-day processes throughout your organization. All levels, all departments, everyone. It needs to be in your organization's DNA. It should be ordinary, even mundane. Not extraordinary, special, or something reserved for gray people wearing blue suits.

Only then can we expect strategy to become an organization's core competence. And that's what organizations need,

especially in a world that is as complex, dynamic, and uncertain as ours today. As they say, the only constant is change. If that is true, a company's ability to spot changes and embrace them in a coherent way is the single most important competence a company can have. Strategy is that competence. Or it should be. And only then can we expect a company to have extraordinary success on an everyday basis.

This is also a story about you and about your organization. Or at least, that is who and what I wrote this book for. Maybe you are Martin; or Alex, the CEO; or Chi, the product manager. Whoever you identify most with, all are a key part of the approach to strategy that unfolds in this book. The approach is called the One-Hour Strategy. I won't give you any more spoilers about why I have called it that. You'll soon find that out when you start reading the story.

As you read this book, I recommend stopping after every chapter, or even after every takeaway, to reflect for a moment on how what you have just read applies to your own organization. To help you with this, every chapter ends with a set of "what is" and "what if" questions. The "what is" questions invite you to evaluate how strategy is currently done at your organization, including the strengths and weaknesses of that effort. The "what if" questions invite you to think about how things could, would, or even should be done differently when adopting the One-Hour Strategy takeaways from the chapter.

Of course, you're not Waters & Flows. But the lessons from

this story are universal. They may require a tweak here and there to make the approach fully fit within your organization. And if your organization is very small or very large, you may need to adjust it a bit more. But the bottom line applies everywhere. Read the story, let it sink in, and turn it into action to make it work for you.

CHAPTER 1

THE SHOCK

5:43 A.M. MARTIN LOOKED AT HIS alarm clock and sighed. *Why do I wake up this early?* he thought. It was Monday, his first day at his new employer, Waters & Flows, and he was excited. But he could have slept for another hour.

He was more excited than he wanted to admit, because he had heard great stories about Waters & Flows. Not so much about the business itself—the company designs, manufactures, installs, and maintains industrial pumps. They do it well and are highly successful. Their products and services are possibly the best and most reliable in the industry. And they're known for how well they treat and care about their employees.

But that's not what the stories were about; at least, those were not the stories that Martin was most interested in. No, the most intriguing stories he had heard were all about how

Waters & Flows is managed—and specifically about how they do strategy.

Martin liked strategy, a lot. While studying for his MBA, he learned about all the different, though largely conventional tools: SWOT, Balanced Scorecard, Five Forces Framework, BCG Matrix, Mission, Vision, Golden Circle, and so on. He was excited to see how Waters & Flows was able to use all these tools effectively and how they had become a master at strategy.

But he didn't have to get up until 7 a.m. *What shall I do?* he pondered. *Get up or try to go back to sleep?* He decided to give it another try and closed his eyes.

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BEEP. BEEP. BEEP. BEEP. BEE— Martin woke up with a shock and smashed the big yellow button on his alarm clock. *What day is it? What time? Did I oversleep!?*

Monday, 7 a.m., he realized. Time to get up. So he stepped out of his bed, took a shower, dressed, and fixed his hair. “You look great,” he whispered confidently to the mirror.

After his breakfast, he put on his helmet and jumped on his e-bike, ready for a six-mile commute. Avoiding all the traffic jams that automobiles are prone to, he arrived twenty-five minutes later at Waters & Flows. Time for his first day at his new job!

. . .

His instructions were to go to the front desk and ask for Nina. Outside the office, he locked his e-bike into the shiny steel rack alongside the building, and fixed up his hair with his hands as best he could. He then entered through the sliding doors and approached the reception desk, behind which a young man with dark hair and wearing wire-rimmed glasses stood ready to greet him.

“Hi, I am Martin Koverski. I’m new here, and I was told to ask for Nina.”

“Ah, the new guy! Welcome to Waters & Flows. I am Sandeep. Nice to meet you,” the man replied. “Just follow me; I’ll bring you to Nina. How has your day been going so far?”

Short and pretty chaotic, Martin thought, replying instead, “Um, quite good, I think,” as he followed Sandeep up the stairs, stepping briskly.

“Anyway, this is Nina’s office,” Sandeep said, gesturing with his right hand as they approached the doorway. Then, stepping inside, he said, “Hi, Nina. This is Martin, our newest employee. Can I leave him with you?”

“Sure, Sandeep, thanks. Hi, Martin. I am Nina. I’m the marketing manager of this nice little company.”

You call this little? Martin thought as he gazed across the expansive office headquarters. “Hello, Nina, nice to meet you.

And as you know, I am starting today as your new team lead for sales in Asia.”

“Of course, and I want to hear all about you. But first, would you like some coffee?”

“I’d love some,” Martin replied cheerfully.

• • •

After they both got their cups of coffee from the employee lounge, they returned to Nina’s office, and she closed the door behind them. “So we won’t be disturbed,” she explained with a smile. “Have a seat,” she said, as she rounded the desk to her own chair.

“So. Why did you decide to come and work for Waters & Flows?” Nina asked. “Sorry for being so blunt, but I’m always asking this to hear how outsiders see our company—or in your case, newcomers. Because, once you’ve become an insider, I can’t ask you anymore.”

“Um . . . ,” Martin replied. “Several reasons, of course. You have great products, you work for great customers, your brand stands out from the competition, and I like your company’s mission and vision.”

“Come on!” Nina laughed. “You can be honest with me. Sure, we’re doing pretty good, but we’re not exactly Apple, Tesla, or saving the planet, and I can’t believe industrial pumps are what fires you up early in the morning.”

Okay, Martin thought, this is going to be interesting.

“Well, you’re probably right, although I do like the fact that you’re a sound, profitable company, and I actually do love your products because of how refined they are. But what really got me excited and made me curious are the intriguing things I heard about how your company does strategy.”

“Now we’re talking! And what intriguing things did you hear?”

“Um, maybe I am completely missing the main point, but I’ve heard your company is doing strategy in one hour or so . . .”

“Ah, that’s what I thought! Another one! Every new hire is asking this. Maybe we should rebrand ourselves as a strategy company instead of an industrial pump maker.

“Are you familiar,” Nina continued, “with the mission-vision-SWOT approach?”

Martin nodded slowly.

“And with annual offsites, brown paper, and Post-it sessions?”

“Yes.” Martin was wondering where this was going.

“And with trend analysis, extensive strategic planning, and hockey stick curves?”

“That as well. Are you saying you do all of that in one hour?”

“Not at all.” Nina smiled. “In fact, we don’t do any of that, and certainly not within one hour!”

“But that’s what you’re supposed to do, right? These are the tools and approaches that I learned, and this is what a large part of my MBA was all about,” Martin replied.

“Exactly, and how does all that work out in the real world?”

Do you know any company that has successfully applied all these tools to develop and actually implement their strategy?”

“I guess so. Why else would we learn about these tools in business school?”

“Great question. I don’t know. Maybe there are companies out there that can make them work, but we certainly can’t. That’s why we have adopted an entirely different approach. Occasionally, we may use some of those tools, but that’s only when a part of our strategy needs some extra attention. It’s the exception, not the rule. And what we want is to make strategy the rule, not the exception.”

I have to remember that one, Martin thought. Make strategy the rule, not the exception. He told himself to make a note after his meeting with Nina.

TAKEAWAY 1

Make strategy the rule, not the exception.

“But how does that work, and how can one possibly do that in one hour?” he asked.

“Let me take you to Marina. She is our One-Hour Strategy specialist. She can tell you all about it. And don’t worry, we’ll continue our conversation later today. Just knock on my door again after you’ve talked to Marina. Let me introduce you to her.”

SELF-EVALUATION

“What Is” Questions

1. How does your company currently approach strategy making?
2. How do you (as an individual, or as a manager or employer) presently address strategy making?
3. How successful are your present strategy-making mechanisms? How well is your strategy executed?
4. Are you (or your company) using conventional business methods like SWOT and yearly offsites to design future strategy?
5. How effective have these methodologies been for you? Which shortcomings would you like to overcome?
6. What other, less traditional methodologies have you (or your company) tried to implement?
7. How successful were they, and are you still using them?

“What If” Questions

1. How could your strategy approach be improved? What could make it more effective?
2. What could you do personally to improve how your company makes strategy?
3. What if there were no gap between strategy and execution? How would your company flourish?
4. What would it take to have everyone in the company on board, and committed to the strategy?
5. What would a strategy approach look like in order to effectively deal with the dynamics, complexity, and uncertainty of today’s world?
6. What would it require to align your entire company so that everyone’s attention goes in the same direction?
7. What benefits would there be if your company were really good at strategy? How would this affect performance and growth?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



JEROEN KRAAIJENBRINK is an accomplished strategy educator, speaker, writer, and consultant with over two decades of experience, extending from academia through modern business and industry. He empowers people and organizations to discover, formulate, and execute their future plans by providing innovative tools for expansive and forward-thinking strategy making and both personal and organizational development. In doing so, he enables individuals to realize their greatest ambitions and organizations to effectively achieve their business goals and mission through ongoing, effective strategy techniques.

Drawing from cognitive psychology, humanism, martial arts, Saint Benedict, and an extraordinarily wide range of other sources, he has written innumerable articles on

strategy, sustainability, and personal leadership, as well as authored four books: *Strategy Consulting*, *No More Bananas*, *Unlearning Strategy*, and *The Strategy Handbook*. He is an active contributor to *Forbes*, where he writes about strategy, leadership, and how to embrace and harness the complexity and uncertainty—and the opportunities—of the global marketplace that the world has become.

He has a PhD in industrial management, teaches strategy at the University of Amsterdam Business School, and has helped significantly improve the strategic planning of many midsize and larger companies across the engineering, manufacturing, healthcare, and financial services industries.