

A Metaphor for Strategy - cycle of a Tuscan vineyard

For seven years of my early career, I lived and worked in Tuscany, and like most people there, did many things to make ends meet. While guiding tours, I would tell people stories about famous artists' and politicians' rivalries, what it was like to live during the plague years, why medieval painting was so flat and baroque art so ornate, about 300 year turf battles, and papal assassination plots. Along the way, I pointed out modern-day details that remind us of the particulars of history (the semi-circular indentation on the façade, which was from the erosion caused by centuries of use of the ring through which horse-reins were tied; or a renaissance villa's large footprint and its wrap-around "bench", was for potential borrowers to visibly sit as they waited for their appointment with the oh-so-important merchant-villa-owner, or the tall towers on medieval dwellings which indicated a powerful family, etc; it is so often about showing off your bling). I also got to take people on wine tastings, show them the beautiful countryside, and tell them a bit about how wine was made.

My friends tell me, "the wine here in the Chianti is so good because the soil is rocky and dry. The grapes will not grow too fast." When you are preparing a vineyard, the soil is tilled and the big rocks are removed. When the vines are planted they do not actually bear fruit for three or four years. Once they do, there is then a multi-step process to growing the best wine grapes. If you were to drive by a vineyard in March, you would see a desolate field of gnarly upright sticks. In April it starts to bud and by June, the vineyard is a beautiful hillside with rows of fresh leafy vines, perfect for the photographer or painter's imagination... especially given the nearby fields of poppies in May, wheat in June, or the sunflowers in July.

Though the leafy vines are beautiful, the foliage is trimmed and excess grape bunches are culled in June and July... to facilitate circulation of light and air among the best bunches of grapes and to make sure the photosynthesized sugar is concentrated into fewer, high quality grapes. As the September harvest approaches, most of the work has been done, the wine-making machines are being cleaned and the vintner waits and hopes... hopes for no rain the last few weeks, which would "explode" the grapes and dilute their sugar content, or even worse, create mold. In mid-September, the activity and fun pick up - we call all our friends to help at the vendemmia. Everyone walks through the vineyard, pail in hand, bent over, cutting off the grape bunches by hand, enjoying the early autumn weather, complaining about the backaches and teasing each other about getting old. It takes hours, sometimes days, gets tiring, yet remains enjoyable, hopeful, inspiring. And after the day of hard work, everyone sits down to a feast of abundant, seasonal food, teasing and camaraderie.

A strategist or CEO will go through an analogous cycle. S/he directly deals with or avoids the biggest challenges or rocks, leaving the small rocks for employees to take care of - challenges to make them think and grow in quality. Pruning the foliage and excess grapes, or culling the seemingly beautiful projects with an enthusiastic following, to avoid dissipating energy from the goal of the business (in this case, good wine). Then that tension filled time of waiting for results, hoping "for no rain," of accepting that we must work hard, but some things are out of our control. And the actual vendemmia, or grape harvest, is that glorious time of pulling everyone together to work hard to meet the deadline... and celebrate when it's over.

If you would like help developing your Strategic Plan, or on other Marketing or General Management issues, please contact us at info@glocalconsultantsgroup.com or call +1-773-218-8270 or +1-347-480-8679.

Glocal Briefs™ are pragmatic, five minute intros to diverse management and leadership topics. Check out the others [here](#).