

STRAAD STORIES: MEET JF GRATTON, PRESIDENT AT STANDENS

Case Study

/ Empowering leaders through a revived strategic direction

In 1924, a Canadian manufacturing company set its sights on making alloy steel products for a variety of markets. A century later, the company is continuing to offer the products that made it a leader in the manufacturing industry, while focusing on modernizing its strategy, creating future-focused leaders, and driving strategic change that will set it up for another 100 years of growth and innovation.

To support this vision, [JF Gratton, President of Standen's](#), was looking for a partner who could help him translate his vision for being operationally excellent, building a performance culture, and fostering innovative, collaborative practices to the forefront of the strategy. Now a year later, JF is seeing the fruits of his labour as the plant pushes the envelope of what's possible in an environment that continues to challenge the status quo.

[Megan Luu](#) and JF recently sat down to reflect on their work together and hear about how the team is leveraging the results nearly a year later.



Megan Luu,
Founder & CEO
at STRAAD



JF Gratton,
President at
Standen's

AT A GLANCE

THE PROBLEM

On the heels of COVID, leaders at Calgary-based manufacturer, Standen's, were **operating in silos**, **lacked strategic clarity**, and had **lost sight** of what made for **operationally excellent manufacturing**. The imperative: drive improved results and align culturally with parent company, IMT.

LEVERS TO LEAD STRATEGIC CHANGE

STRAAD's strategic change support included:

Customized strategy process to articulate market differentiation, identify capabilities required for stabilization and growth, define annual goals and KPIs, and develop a quarter-by-quarter execution plan.

One-on-one guidance to help leaders align team plans with the enterprise strategy.

Integration meetings to ensure alignment, coordination and accountability across teams.

System-based insights of leaders, teams and organizational dynamics to inform leadership decisions and actions to successfully lead strategic change.

OUTCOMES & RESULTS

Deploying these levers brought clarity to Standen's' organizational direction. Leaders drove smaller-scale changes leading to **improved safety** and **stabilized working capital**, while fostering a budding **performance culture**. Clear, focused outcomes have **empowered leaders** and teams, while the introduction of new technologies are **breaking down silos** and **improving manufacturing practices**.

/ Uncovering the problem



Megan

Before we dive in, can you share a little bit more about yourself?



JF

I have a background in engineering and began my career in the industry, but soon found myself being drawn into the world of construction, working primarily in project management roles. After a few years of project management, I eventually moved into general management where I started to get a taste for the business world.

I quickly realized my passion for leading teams and growing organizations, and wanted to arm myself with the right tools, frameworks, and expertise. I completed my MBA through the Haskayne School of Business and post-MBA, transitioned into the world of private equity. It was here that I honed and nurtured my business and leadership acumen.

While the exposure to different markets and businesses was an incredible learning journey, I was craving a role that could see me build a team, drive change, develop growth strategies and see them through, something I'm now truly able to lead in my role as President of Standen's.

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/ Uncovering the problem



Megan

Can you paint the picture of what you stepped into as you joined Standen's? What did you assess as key problems to solve and what questions were you asking yourself as you looked for external support?



JF

I took my first three months to assess both the opportunities and challenges within the organization and my leadership team. I was trying to get a sense of not only what needed to change but how the organization may best embrace change. Like many organizations, this team had just navigated COVID, had been significantly impacted by challenges in supply chain, and was struggling to find the talent necessary to keep pace with demand. I needed to ensure that I had my arms around the issues, and more importantly, folks felt that I had really listened before I started to act.

Our teams were operating in silos, we'd lost sight of what made for operationally excellent manufacturing, and we'd lost our spirit for solving hard problems and innovating to find new opportunities.

As I looked forward, I was asking myself what kind of skills the leadership team needed to come together and lead a different tomorrow. I was also asking myself how long I had to get the strategy articulated and clear outcomes in the hands of those making important decisions that impacted our stability on a day-to-day basis. Like many significant transformations, I found myself trying to balance time to results with the development of our people as the means for sustainment.

I was also seeking to drive improved alignment between Standen's priorities, KPIs and underlying culture with that of our parent company, IMT. The problems we were trying to solve needed to be seeded in the culture of IMT – one that is anchored in an entrepreneurial spirit and innovative mindset.

Both the internal challenges and the need for greater alignment with IMT, poised great opportunity for me and the organization at large, but I also knew I had one shot to get the transformation off on the right foot.

/ Moving from challenges to leading strategic change



Megan

I remember our first meeting at the Standen's office fondly. Why did you choose STRAAD to partner with?



Megan

What was valuable about our approach?



JF

It was your ability to meet us where we were at. We weren't ready for a large-scale change model or a theoretical approach – we were seeking a partner that could provide a fit-for-purpose approach to help us make use of the data we had, articulate our strategy, and most importantly grow the competencies of our leaders to start smaller, more tangible changes in their respective areas.



JF

STRAAD brought forward a customized strategy process, a set of frameworks and tools, and hybrid work practices that helped us turn our ideas into tangible outcomes.

We spent 9 weeks moving through articulating our market differentiation, capabilities required for stabilization and growth, annual goals, KPIs, and a quarter-by-quarter execution plan. The STRAAD team provided one-on-one support to each of my leaders to help build teams plans that aligned with the enterprise strategy and we met to ensure integration, coordination, and accountability for results. Along the way, we worked on our sense of high-performing team and spent time learning tools that would help us lead the necessary change ahead.

I could see my leader's developing week to week. Showing up ready to participate in conversations that reflected their improved understanding of strategy, bringing forward creative ways to make meaningful change, and ultimately, seeing their belief being rekindled that we'd be successful.

/ Moving from challenges to leading strategic change



Megan

What did you walk away with that was most helpful and/or most surprising?



JF

I knew you'd bring a hands-on approach, but what surprised me the most was how deeply genuine it was. Most times, consulting firms tell you they care and adapt their services and they don't. But with you and the team, it was remarkably different. The work and our experience with you felt human, we felt listened to, and you had our best interests at the forefront the whole time.

I look back at our weekly one-on-ones in the Standen's office, and what stands out is the deep insights that you shared with me on our people, team, and organization. I would hear what folks were saying, but I wasn't able to translate it into what that meant in terms of motivations, goals and what was happening within the system. STRAAD's skill in providing system-level insights allowed me to engage with people differently, provide stronger career support, and help me lead the organization into its next phase of growth. From experience, this level of insight and genuine care is something you wouldn't get from a consultant asked to execute against a plan.

“STRAAD’S SKILL IN PROVIDING SYSTEM-LEVEL INSIGHTS ALLOWED ME TO ENGAGE WITH PEOPLE DIFFERENTLY, PROVIDE STRONGER CAREER SUPPORT, AND HELP ME LEAD THE ORGANIZATION INTO ITS NEXT PHASE OF GROWTH.”

/ The impact and results



Megan

What specific outcomes and results were achieved by the end of our engagement?



JF

As we wrapped up the engagement, I was able to start clarifying where the organization was headed, what we were focused on, and why the changes were necessary. My leaders started to drive smaller scale changes in their respective areas, and we started to see safety improve, working capital stabilize, and the beginnings of our performance culture take root. From a President perspective, I had my head and hands around the critical changes and a sense of sequencing quarter by quarter.



Megan

In what ways has the leadership team evolved? The organization?



JF

Over the last year, we've changed quite a bit. Talent has shifted roles, we've hired new leaders, and I've used those changes to restructure.

The strategic clarity allowed me to critically hire talent and ensure we had functions scoped to deliver on focused outcomes.

The culture is changing for the better. We've implemented new technologies that are breaking down silos and getting improved manufacturing practices on the floor that help connect actions with outcomes. Our spirit is returning, and I am proud of how far we've come given all that this organization has endured over the last 5 years.

“FROM A PRESIDENT PERSPECTIVE, I HAD MY HEAD AND HANDS AROUND THE CRITICAL CHANGES AND A SENSE OF SEQUENCING QUARTER BY QUARTER.”

/ Movement making & future outlook



Megan

Looking forward, what's next for yourself as a future-focused leader? What's next for Standen's in terms of growth, innovation, or strategic direction?



JF

Despite what may have seemed like a post-COVID normalization period, the markets we play in continue to experience shifts (whether it be supply-based, demand-driven or regulatory-based) which require quick identification and action. The work we completed with STRAAD has provided our senior team with the tools necessary to identify these changes, mitigate risks, and develop actionable plans that monitor for effectiveness. These tools have also given us the ability to identify strategic areas of focus in relation to our target markets, the products we manufacture, and the go-forward processes that need to be developed. Having the tools on hand and the focus will both protect us from some of the market volatilities previously experienced, and will provide us with a clear market advantage in the future.

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Regarding team development, we continue to build on a culture of collaboration, communication, and accountability. These values were at the heart of the engagement between Standens and STRAAD and were essential to the continued development of our team. Over the past year, we've navigated changed to our senior leadership team, and the adoption and execution of STRAAD's strategic framework provided much-needed continuity within the organization. It also allowed us to maintain momentum as we continue to work towards our strategic objectives.

The next three to five years will be transformational for Standen's as we aim to pursue growth in particular market sectors and look to automate some of our key manufacturing processes. The foundational work we completed with STRAAD on strategy development, change management and leadership performance will be key to our future success.

STRAAD™

How we can help

The world is operating in a **state of unprecedented complexity**, so practicing **future-focused leadership** today is more important than ever. This means **strengthening your strategic foresight** to truly hear the people around you, paying attention to the **signals coming from your environment**, and **building trust** within your organization and in your **strategy design and execution**.

Whether your organization is in a time of growth or a time of contraction, **STRAAD can help you unlock organizational performance**. Our service offering includes:

- Strategy Development & Implementation
- Leadership Enablement & Team Effectiveness
- Organizational Design & Ways of Working
- Culture Design & Alignment
- Strategic Change Management

The **complexity of strategic change** requires **commitment, consistency, and time to be executed successfully**. By remaining alert, proactive, and thoughtful, future-focused leaders can **change the system of their organization** and lead their teams through sustainable strategic change initiatives.

If you are interested in learning more about how STRAAD develops future-focused leaders who drive successful strategic change, drop us a note at connect@straad.ca.

/ Work with us

Contact us today, and together, let's create a meaningful impact in the world.



connect@straad.ca



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