

A STRATEGIC MINDSET

As a leader in your organization an important question to consider is 'how much time, if any, do I need to dedicate to create a strategic view/perspective?' Before you can effectively answer this question we need to define what strategic thinking and a strategic mindset really are.

A simple way of looking at how you spend your time vocationally is to split your activities into **tactical and strategic**.

Tactical activities are those that are directly connected to 'the priorities or issues of the present' and have an immediate impact on what could be considered immediate or near-term outcomes. To this end, and borrowing from Stephen Covey, *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, tactical activities are hopefully both urgent and important. We say 'hopefully', because many activities that appear to be both urgent and important may not actually be productive when compared to our priorities.

Strategic thinking and activities, on the other hand, can be defined as those activities that don't necessarily provide an immediate or near-term productive payoff and have more of a future or longer-term outcome in mind. To this end, they are important as they focus on your big picture desired outcomes, but they are not considered as something that is urgent or that needs to be addressed today.

The next question after defining tactical and strategic, is to determine to what extent strategic thinking and activities are of value? Three things to consider in this regard are:

1. We live in a rapidly changing world, where the identification of lasting patterns and consistencies, are difficult to nail down. To this end, you may ask, 'is strategic thinking of value, in a rapidly changing world'? Isn't the world simply too unpredictable to plan for? But by definition – two of Leadership's core accountabilities is to set direction and to successfully steer the course. In fact your stakeholders are relying on your skills to do this well. This is especially true in times of turbulence - and a well conceived strategic framework is central to help Leaders navigate and to keep their eye on 'the ball'. Blackberry is a classic example of a firm that lost its strategic focus in the rapidly changing smartphone marketplace.

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2. We live in a world that values speed, immediacy, sound bites and quick fixes - yet we also need Leaders with perspective and wisdom. To be successful we need to be quick, flexible, AND concurrently capable of detailed analysis and thoughtful reflection.
3. To successfully live in turbulent times we need to be able to live and act in the present while keeping a birds eye view of the landscape. In effect we need to be able to see the forest and the trees in order to build a sustainable organization that makes a real difference and the world a better place.

So now the questions are:

What are strategic activities?

When should they be acted upon?

What can a Leader do to nurture a strategic mindset within their organization?

Possible Strategic Activities:

- Consciously create a positive work environment (be aware that your team members are continually watching and judging).
- Development (coaching) for your team (including asking questions like - 'how are you doing' / 'what are you working on'/'how can I help').
- Social time with your team (where the immediate work priorities aren't the topic of discussion).
- Purposefully sponsoring activities & behaviours that create the kind of environment/culture your organization requires to be successful.
- Taking time to reflect to recognize your accomplishments, those of your team and to evaluate the lessons from your setbacks.

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- Weekly reflecting upon your longer-term goals, vision and setting weekly goals.
- Evaluating the top and bottom lines, including lead and lag indicators of success.
- Reflecting on what is changing and the impact it will have on the organization.
- Team problem solving & planning exercises.
- Reflecting upon 'our vision' and what would make a significant difference in reaching your desired destination.

Finally, **having a strategic mindset** drives consistency in thoughts and actions. The leader must **believe and see** that thinking and being strategic are ongoing activities.

As Leaders it is critical that we not only embrace our accountability regarding strategy but that we also set aside time to think strategically and to nurture this capability inside our organization.

We hope that this overview is both thought provoking and influential in your leadership development.

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