



THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Some leaders seem to do very little formal planning yet they accomplish incredible things. They have a clear picture of what they want to accomplish and do an excellent job of bringing and keeping people on board toward its fulfillment. People are aligned around the vision. These leaders make wise decisions in view of the objective, much in the same way that the captain of a sailing vessel works with his environment to go from destination to destination. In reality these people are strategic thinkers and planners using the strategic planning process.

WHAT IS THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS?

Committing ourselves to the planning process is different than committing ourselves to a plan. Many plans are simply filed away because of their obsolescence after the first month or so. The plan failed, not because we failed to plan but we failed to plan in accordance with our changing environment.

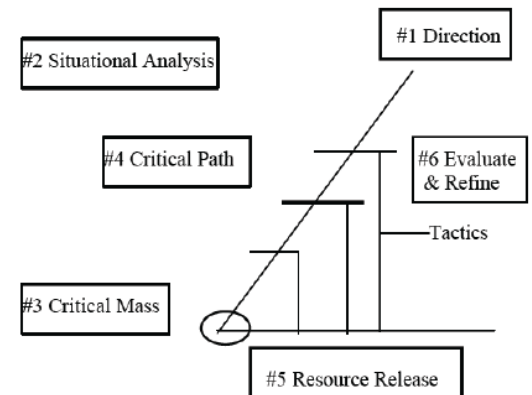
A strategic planning process is needed anytime we are operating from a changing, unpredictable environment where we are expected to accomplish something great with limited resources. These are the conditions of the changing environment of the university campus and student culture. The rate of change is rapid and unpredictable. Our financial and human resources are scarce. We can not afford to stick with plans that don't work or are filled out simply to satisfy an administrative requirement. We don't need a plan as much as we need to master a planning process.

BENEFITS OF STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

An important advantage of the strategic planning process is that it involves all "stakeholders," is highly visual and it can be done quickly. The key of the planning session is that it forces all the participants

to focus on what will have a real strategic impact on the movement. This process helps the team to visually conceptualize the key issues and to allow them to focus on those factors that are critical to accomplishing the mission.

Drawing your strategic plan--a visual map



Although this diagram suggests sequential and linear planning with a beginning and an end, in reality it is a fluid, ongoing process that is continually being refined to take us closer to the fulfillment of our mission. This process is really linear only once--the first time you use it. After that it is dynamic and really doesn't matter where you start or finish as long as you touch all the bases. The local leader ought to be working through this process in his/ her heart and head several times a day and as a team several times a quarter. It's more than a planning process, it's a way of looking at life and ministry opportunities.

#1 DIRECTION—WHERE WE ARE GOING?

The first step of the strategic planning process is to clearly articulate our direction. The components of "direction" are purpose, values, mission and vision. "Purpose" serves as the "north star." It can be general, sweeping and vague, but at least it tells you that you



are going north and not east or south. It tells us what “business” we are in. Our purpose centers around glorifying God by helping to fulfill the Great Commission.

“Mission” flows from purpose and is the “road sign” that answers the question, “What will we do for whom?” This needs to be answered with “painful specificity” to be useful. It says we are going to Minneapolis, not Seattle or Saskatoon. Vision flows from purpose and mission. It is the emotive, artful, ‘Monet’ part of our direction. While purpose and mission are static, vision is dynamic, in constant interaction with the present situation, opportunities, realities, values and aspirations of the leadership.

More than informing others what we want or see, spiritual vision originates from the heart of God. It comes from asking, “Lord, what great thing do you want done that we can get in on?” A good corporate vision encompasses, not stifles, the individual visions of those who will work to fulfill it.

Leadership and vision casting is required to pull this off. Remember, vision, no matter how grand, is still subject to “purpose” and “mission.” In other words, in the US, a vision for a soup kitchen may fit under our “purpose” to glorify God but not under our “mission” of turning lost students into Christ-centered laborers. To summarize:

- Purpose--what we live for
- Values--what we stand for
- Mission--what we shoot for
- Vision--what we root for

The direction setting step should accomplish two things for the leadership and those they are leading. “It should communicate 1) hope--our best years are ahead of us and 2) vital necessity--these are the few things we are going to take personal and public responsibility for. By the time you are done, you should have communicated the direction in an emotionally compelling (vision) and intellectually credible (mission) manner. The process of alignment should have begun. It’s part Monet (vague) and part Rockwell (clear and specific).” For this reason, it is often beneficial to “quantify the vision” through specific time-bound goals.

#2 SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS--FACING REALITY

The second step in the strategic planning process

is to get all the facts we can about our present situation. Here we consider the strengths (assets) and weaknesses (liabilities) of our external environment and internal (ministry) situation. You can never align people to a vision of the future unless they agree with your perception of the present.

#3 CRITICAL MASS—LEADERS AND TOOLS

The third step is to define with clarity and precision the key components critical to get started--to get you launched in your mission. To define critical mass is to define “how much of what” it will take to get you started (continue and eventually fulfill your mission). Your initial critical mass must be sufficient to:

- Break gravity--get the thing off the ground... enough to get you launched.
- Ensure at least two “wins” along your “critical path.” Without a couple of initial wins, you will not have the momentum to sustain your critical path.
- Generate the capacity to build the resource base required to fulfill your vision. You don’t need all of your resources in place to begin accomplishing the mission, but you do need critical mass to take the first step.

You don’t need to persuade every person or even half of those involved. You need to target those 15% of “early adapters” who will lead the “middle and late adapters.” The “laggards” may never come on board, but that’s OK. When Moses used this process, he knew that his mission was to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. His critical mass was to simply convince the elders (Exodus 3:16, 4:29). He had to have the leaders on board before trying to convince the people (6:9) and Pharaoh (7:1-6). He didn’t need a plan at that time to cross the Red Sea or provide food and water for the multitude--God would provide that later. But he did need enough to launch.

In determining your critical mass you are asking and answering, “What do we need to launch?” Perhaps it is as simple as \$50 and five students. One successful entrepreneur defined critical mass as simply “a vision and people to share it with.” He understood that if the vision was powerful and compelling enough and he had the right audience to share it with, the vision would act as a powerful magnet and attract the right leaders and resources to achieve it. Is your vision compelling?



#4 CRITICAL PATH

The fourth step in the strategic planning process is to determine your critical path. That is, to determine the absolute and essential things we must do to move us toward the vision and mission without which the mission and vision cannot be fulfilled. These steps are “mission defined” in that they are done “on behalf of and have direct bearing on the mission being fulfilled for the ‘mission customer’--in our case students.” So fund development would not be “critical path activities.” More likely it is a “critical mass” and “resource release” activity. Prayer, Win, build and send strategies would be critical path steps because they are directly related to our mission...they are studentcentered. In short, your critical path serves as the most effective way to take you from where you are to where you want to be. In determining the critical path, we are answering the following questions:

- What will we do that will take us the furthest, or position us to go the furthest in accomplishing our mission?
- How (or to what) will we allocate our resources to best accomplish our mission?
- What will occupy our discussions during staff meeting and our activities during the week?

#5 RESOURCE RELEASE—STEWARDSHIP

Remember that “efficiency” has to do with achieving the maximum results for the minimum cost and effort. Resource allocation is about:

- Assigning resources wisely
- Getting enough of the right resources to the right need in time
- Matching resources with necessity and opportunity— doing the right thing at the right time

#6 EVALUATE AND REFINE

The last step of the strategic planning process is that of evaluating and refining everything from direction to releasing resources. Remember that strategic planning is a dynamic process that continually takes into account new information from our environment and what God might be doing. We are continually solving problems and taking advantage of opportunities that help us fulfill the mission with a “whatever it takes” spirit. This is not a yearly activity

but must be done continually. The plan is not carved into stone but rather written on a chalkboard. The commitment to evaluate and refine forces us to become a learning organization and commits us not merely to a plan but to a process of continual improvement. Evaluation and refinement are about:

- Giving yourself permission to get smarter and wiser
- Making necessary adjustments to your strategic plan in light of changing situations
- Establishing success criteria by which your strategic plan will be evaluated
- Obtaining precise, accurate, meaningful feedback

PUTTING THE PLAN INTO ACTION

Strategic planning must be followed by strategic action. Tactics and strategies are the small scale actions which accomplish the critical path steps. What will we start doing? What will we stop doing? To think that we will get different results from doing the same thing is insanity. We must answer, “Who will do what by when?” Then we can effectively measure the progress that we are making in achieving the mission. If we cannot identify who is responsible for achieving a given goal or accomplishing a given task, then no one can be held accountable, and it will be impossible for us to assess whether we are making significant progress. We will never be able to learn from our successes and mistakes.

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Strategic Plan for

1. Vision:

(Write out a statement of what you want to see happen with the ministry on your campus and list a few prayer goals.)

Students Being Sent (send)

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Students Discipling Students (build)

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Students Reaching Students (win)

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Students Praying for Students

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5. Evaluate & Update:

(At least every other week, ask yourself what goals, strategies, and tactics have been completed, then erase them and replace them with new tactics to help you reach your vision.)

4. Critical Path Steps:

3. Current Reality:

(What is the current reality of our campus and movement?)

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2. Critical Mass:

(What types of things are needed to get to our vision?)

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