



DEVELOP STRATEGIC THINKERS – AND CATAPULT YOUR BUSINESS

THE BIG IDEA

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Strategic Thinking Shouldn't be an Annual Event

Strategic thinking facilitates better decision-making about all the actions impacting your organization's growth and profitability.

While most companies typically go through a "strategic planning process" once a year, strategic thinking should be an ongoing process – and a skill developed in leaders and employees alike.

In this eBook, you will learn:

- what strategic thinking looks like in action;
- the value of regular strategic thinking sessions;
- how to strengthen your strategic thinking skills; and
- how to develop strategic thinking in your employees

...all to drive profits, innovation, performance, retention and more.



The Link: Strategic Thinking Leads to Success

According to a 2013 study by Management Research Group, one of the biggest factors for individual and organizational success is the ability to think strategically. According to Robert Kabacoff, who authored the study, 60,000 managers and executives in over 140 countries rated a strategic approach to leadership above all other qualities including communication, persuasion, innovation and results orientation.¹

Strategic thinkers:

- Problem-solve with the long term in mind
- Think ahead
- Plan ahead
- Think in multiple time frames (today, next month, six months, a year, three years, etc.)
- Think systematically
- Identify the impact of a decision on various segments of the organization

Strategic thinking is a skill, which means it can be learned and honed over time. As leaders cultivate strategic thinking abilities, they can and should cultivate that skill in their team members. Not only will this help future leaders, it will make the entire team more effective overall.

¹ <https://hbr.org/2014/02/develop-strategic-thinkers-throughout-your-organization>



The Benefits: Advantages of Developing Strategic Thinkers

What is the value of learning to think strategically and passing that skill on to others? At its core, strategic thinking helps you anticipate and prepare for shifts in the market and identify emerging opportunities.

Building a team of strategic thinkers keeps your organization a step ahead of competitors, helping you to:

- Work with limited resources: Determining better ways to allocate resources effectively and do more with less.
- React quickly to change: Strategic teams can mobilize quickly when an opportunity is on the horizon.
- Think competitively: Strategic thinkers know what's going on with competitors, so they can improve their own products and services to gain an edge.
- Focus on growth: Strategic thinkers look forward, create momentum and rail against stagnancy.



The Dangers: "Yes Men" and "Sheep"

Surrounding yourself with people who agree with your opinions and decisions may be comfortable.

But it's also dangerous.

You need people who challenge you, share different viewpoints and pose "what if" scenarios to identify opportunities and threats.

Effective "inner circles" of trusted employees contain a mix of these roles:

- *Everyman*: Has a finger on the pulse of the lower levels of the organization and frames challenges and decisions from their point of view.
- *Devil's advocate*: Challenges you by taking the opposite position or opinion and plays out "what if" scenarios and what can go wrong.
- *Optimist*: Balances out the devil's advocate by focusing on what will go right.
- *Empath*: Helps you understand how your decisions will impact others.
- *Customer voice*: Keeps the needs and perspective of the customer in mind when making decisions.

A diverse team is far more ripe for thinking strategically than a group that simply says "yes" to everything.



The Shift: How to Get Your Team Thinking Strategically

Developing strategic thinkers is a marathon, not a sprint.

Here's how to win the race:

- *Focus on the mission:* Communicate the organizational philosophy, mission and goals so employees understand where they are going.
- *Share the big picture:* Strategic thinkers look ahead, so it is important to share high-level overviews of your customers, competitors, the market, technologies, etc. Help them see beyond their daily tasks and start connecting their work to the organization's mission and bottom line.
- *Create mentors:* Pair people who have strategic thinking skills with those who haven't developed them yet. As they work together, the mentee will begin to pick up on important skills.
- *Reward thinking:* Often, it is only results that are rewarded. Creative solutions sometimes fail, but people who step up and share ideas that are well-thought-out and developed should be rewarded and encouraged to continue to try.
- *Encourage questions:* When someone presents an idea in a meeting, encourage the group to ask thoughtful questions to really flesh it out. Guide them towards asking questions about "why," "when," "how," and "who will this impact?"



The Future: Screening Candidates for Strategic Thinking

The best way to grow your team of strategic thinkers? Make it a hiring requirement for key roles.

Use tactics like these during the interview phase to assess potential:

- *Present a problem to solve:* Describe the problem and give the candidate a few moments to think it through and then present their solution. Ask them to walk you through the steps they took to form the answer.
- *Present a flawed strategic plan:* Ask them to review the plan and identify any flaws or gaps.
- *Listen for strategic phrases:* True strategic thinkers will identify themselves throughout an interview. You'll hear phrases like: strategic goals, looking ahead, connecting the dots, data-driven decisions, cross-functional, multiyear plan, etc.
- *Consider their questions:* Strategic thinkers will ask questions related to strategy in an interview. They may ask how the position fits into the corporate mission, what opportunities the position provides for contributing to business strategy, etc.



The Ally: Your Partner in Hiring Strategic Thinkers

Building a team of strategic thinkers is essential for business success, and recruiting them requires specialized skills. A strong staffing partner can quickly and cost-effectively deliver the strategists, leaders and innovators your organization needs by:

- Pinpointing hard and soft skills that align with strategic thinking
- Formulating behavioral and scenario-based questions to identify essential thinking skills
- Administering relevant assessments to gauge abilities in this area
- Direct-recruiting passive talent with proven skills
- Effectively marketing your opportunity to appeal to candidates with strategic thinking skills
- Accelerating the recruiting process to minimize drop-off of A-level talent

Many staffing firms can also provide strategy experts on a project or consulting basis, to either address your needs directly or provide training in strategic thinking to your direct staff.

Final Thoughts

Developing a team of strategic thinkers can catapult your business – driving profits, innovation, performance and more. For help in acquiring or developing the talent you need, contact your staffing partner today.

Sources

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