

Jun 15, 2021, 05:38pm EDT | 945 views

3 Powerful Characteristics Of A Strategic Thinker



WomensMedia Contributor ⓘ
ForbesWomen



Listen to this article now

05:19



Powered
by **Trinity Audio**



Is it time to learn the steps? ICLIPART

By Dianna Booher—

Strategic thinking sets you apart from the crowd—as particularly promotable. Consider these characteristics and differences between strategic thinkers and tactical thinkers:

Strategic thinkers see the big picture. You'll frequently hear them talk of “casting a vision” or “nailing down the mission for the long-term.” They love projects that are all about “coming up with the concept.” To do that, they always push to understand the “why,” the purpose behind any mission, project, or assignment. Once they understand the why and design the concept, they focus. They concentrate on building the structure and designing the roadmap to accomplish their goal.

Tactical thinkers, on the other hand, tackle work and life differently. They concern themselves with day-to-day operations. They go to work each week focused on short-term concerns: What are the tangible, physical tasks that need to get done right now to make things happen? Their attention is typically scattered because they have to keep many “balls in the air.” As managers, supervisors, or project leaders, they intend to put the right people in the right place with the right tools to make sure things get done right.

The most significant of these differences is the central organizing vision or structure: What's the goal, purpose, lesson learned, conclusion, or plan for moving forward as a team, organization, or family?

So if you want to fall into the “strategic thinkers” group, that means you must always be able to articulate the *why* as well as the *what* and *how*.

Sort The Significant From The Trivial

Once you understand the overriding principle of why, other things fall into place: Doing the right thing. Focusing. Creating the roadmap. Sorting and sifting become second nature in your day-to-day projects, tasks, and priorities.

MORE FOR YOU

Alex Morgan On The Tokyo Olympics, Her New iFIT Series And Creating Space For Female Athletes

How To Build Your Business Around Your Life

Meet The Company Offering An Innovative Medication-Free Approach To Better Pelvic Floor Health, Bringing Female Urinary Incontinence Out Of The Closet

Given your ability to think strategically, you select appropriate information to pass on to others and forego the urge to hit the “Send” button every time new gossip, startling data, or urgent deadlines hit your inbox.

You squelch the urge to “speak your truth” in a meeting when stray thoughts flutter across your mind. One of the most frequent difficulties my coaching clients mention as we work to prepare strategic presentations is determining the appropriate detail for the boardroom.

VP Connor expressed it this way: “I give this routine monthly briefing in an all-hands meeting, and quarterly to the president of our business unit. Then once a year, I fly to headquarters and deliver it at Corporate. I’m just not sure about how detailed to get with each different audience. Our president has told me several times that I need to stay out of the weeds.” He shrugged with a helpless outstretched arm. “But I’m an engineer.”

Connor’s acknowledgement of his typical habits proved accurate. His boss had phoned me before our session to pass on his own assessment:

“Connor’s a brilliant guy. But he needs a little polish before he moves to the executive suite. He gets far too detailed in his presentations. . . . In fact, he gets lost! Particularly during the Q&A. He knows so much about the subject that he wants to tell *everything*. So he’s indecisive about *what* to tell. . . .

Consequently, he sounds like a bumbling fool.”

The boss’s suggestion for my session with Connor: “Help him learn to sort the strategic from the tactical—the significant from the trivial.”

To be strategic and promotable, learn to do likewise. Sift the significant from the myriad information you have at hand. Your reputation rests on what you choose to say, . . . how and to whom you distribute that information, . . . and how you allocate your time in saying it.

Ask “Why Not?”

Why not go one step further to focus on the “why not”? Look at what others are doing and focus in the opposite direction. Why not do things differently? I’m not talking about being a contrarian just for the sake of attention—just for branding purposes.

But can you think in contrarian ways to streamline processes, to take advantage of new opportunities, or to raise provocative product and service ideas?

When reporting on a problem, the tactical thinker will tell *how* to correct a current situation and/or what’s wrong with your vision, idea, or plan.

You, as the strategic thinker, will focus on how to circumvent the problem altogether—or how to take advantage of opportunities the “problem” creates!

Practice Intake Before Output

Strategic thinkers rarely rush to judgment of people, situations, or data. They make it a practice to listen, observe, and collect and assess information.

As a former or current member of five executive forum groups and also as part of my consulting work, I’m continually reminded of this differentiator: Strategic thinkers stay alert, take in information, ask questions, analyze data, and think before they speak. Inventors stumble upon new processes and new products because they have great curiosity and

continually ask others and themselves provocative questions—and then go discover or develop the answers.

Strategic thinking uniquely positions you as the go-to person for sharp focus, sound analysis, and innovative ideas. Your distinct way of thinking becomes just as recognizable to close colleagues as your body language.

To colleagues and particularly to your boss, you are what and how you think.

My point is *not* that tactical thinking is unnecessary. On the contrary. Strategic goals demand tactical execution. Tactical thinking is critical—but vastly more common among your colleagues.

That's why strategic thinkers (like you) stand apart as promotable leaders. What's more, they typically sign the paychecks.

*Dianna Booher is the bestselling author of 48 books. Her newest is **Faster, Fewer, Better Emails**. She helps organizations communicate clearly. Follow her at BooherResearch.com and [@DiannaBooher](https://twitter.com/DiannaBooher).*

Follow me on LinkedIn. Check out my website.



WomensMedia

I'm Nancy F. Clark the curator of Forbes WomensMedia, author of The Positive Journal, and CEO of PositivityDaily. After studying physics at Berkeley I started out in...

Read More

Reprints & Permissions