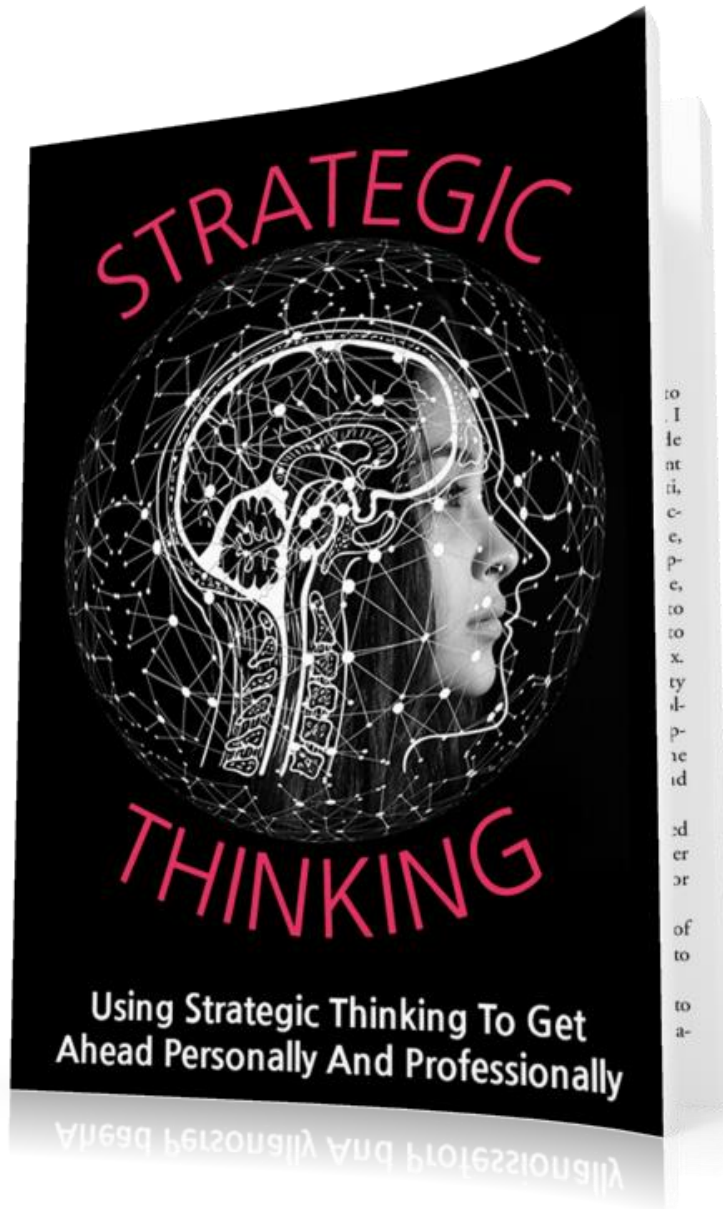


# STRATEGIC THINKING PERSONALLY & PROFESSIONALLY



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# 6 Practices You Must Perform to Be Strategic in the Workplace

Whether you're the boss, a partner, or an employee, it pays to develop your strategic thinking skills in the workplace. Strategic leadership is fundamentally crucial to your career, and for the success of any organization.

But you might be uncertain about what exactly constitutes strategic thinking and how you go about nurturing it. Experts have defined 6 practices that strategic leaders do well.

## **1. Strategic Leaders Scan the Environment**

There's so much day-to-day work to get through that it's easy to get caught up in the tasks of the moment. Or if you do find time to do some planning, it's focused on what's directly ahead of you—next week's meeting, the quarterly report, the annual conference.

But a truly strategic leader takes a 360-degree view of the business environment. What are the emerging trends? What are your competitors doing? What are your data projections?

## **2. Strategic Leaders Are Skeptical**

Critical thinking is under-rated. You need to develop a degree of skepticism to avoid being taken in by fads. You might meet resistance of the, 'but we've always done it like this' type. Strategic leaders challenge entrenched mindsets and habits to find better solutions.

### **3. Strategic Leaders Interpret**

Strategic thinkers enjoy sifting through multiple sources of information. They test assumptions and hypotheses to see which are robust and worth pursuing. They are comfortable with ambiguity and don't reach for easy or conventional solutions.

### **4. Strategic Leaders are Decision Makers**

Some people feel uneasy about having to make a decision. It can be a big responsibility, after all. But strategic leaders are confident in their ability to analyze and assess multiple forms of data. They seek advice and know it's better to make a firm decision than to be paralyzed by fear of failure.

### **5. Strategic Leaders Strive for Alignment**

Often alignment is a better result than consensus. It's hard to get everyone to agree. But strategic leaders build trust with stakeholders, are open about their decision-making processes, and are not afraid to talk about the tough issues. And they take responsibility for their decisions.

### **6. Strategic Leaders Learn**

One of the hallmarks of the strategic thinker is curiosity. Strategic leaders have a thirst for learning and are always prepared to adapt their thinking when they uncover new information. Strategic leaders live for continuous improvement. They use techniques like debriefing sessions to get better insights into project learnings. They are also flexible and use feedback to course-correct when necessary. Strategic leaders celebrate success and learn from failures.

# 4 Tips for Strategically Planning to Discuss a Difficult Topic with Your Partner

In any relationship, there will be times when you must have that awkward conversation. There will be topics or issues that neither of you wants to discuss, but the only way through is to sit down and talk. But don't just say, "Honey, we need to talk." If you want a positive outcome, you need to be strategic and get prepared before you even mention it.

If you're puzzling over how to bring up a tricky issue, here are 4 tips to help you prepare.

## **1. Don't Put off Talking**

Difficult conversations get more problematic, the longer you postpone them. The whole issue gets loaded down with emotion, and that's the wrong place to start from. Your partner will know there's something wrong, you'll be dreading bringing up the subject, and you'll both start from a defensive position.

## **2. Check Your Expectations.**

Don't start the discussion expecting a fight. Don't try and pre-empt how your partner will react, or what they might say. How often have you already played through the argument in your head before you even start talking? Be strategic and think of what outcome you want from the conversation. Think positive, and the whole tone of your approach will change.

## **3. Be Clear About Why You're Talking**

Before you start, it's essential to know what you want to get out of the discussion. Do you want to clarify a misunderstanding? Do you want your partner's view or assistance on a problem? Is there something they have said or done that you need to work through? Maybe it's a complicated discussion about another person, and how they are impacting on your relationship.

Try to focus on one issue. Don't go in with a shopping list of problems, or your partner will feel attacked.

It can help to write down the problem, and even rehearse what you might say.

#### **4. Be Prepared for Uncomfortable Emotions**

You should try to stay calm when talking about difficult issues. After all, you really don't want things to escalate into a fight. But accept that it will be stressful. One or both of you are likely to feel sad, angry, or hurt. Emotions are likely to run high.

Acknowledge the feelings you're both having and accept that you may feel divided. You can be honest about that in talking with your partner. Say that it's difficult, say that you know you'll each have a different view on the issue.

The more open and honest you can be, the better, and the more likely you are to be able to work through the problem.

# 12 Steps to Strategically Balancing Your Life and Work

A healthy work/life balance is probably something you really want to achieve, but it's getting harder and harder in this modern world. The good news is that you can use your professional strategic skills to get some balance back into your life. Here's how in 12 easy steps.

## **1. Log Your Time**

Maybe you're used to tracking your time for billing clients at work, but why not apply it to how you're spending all your time? Just for a week, note down every activity, and you'll see how you're shortchanging your downtime. What time-wasting activities could you forgo so you have more time for deep relaxation and self-care?

## **2. Set Priorities**

Set aside some time to work out what is important to you right now. Are you happy to focus on your career goals, or would you like to spend more time on more personal goals? What do you need to do less or more of? What can you do differently?

## **3. Set Some New Goals**

Drawing on your new life priority list, set some concrete goals, and allocate time to achieving them.

## **4. Schedule, schedule, schedule!**

Link the calendars on your smartphone or computer. Set daily and weekly tasks to help you stay on track. Don't forget to include self-commitments, like time for a hobby or a yoga class.



## **5. Set Clear Boundaries**

Set limits to your work and home commitments and make it clear that they are not negotiable. Turn off your phone in the evening and on weekends so you can spend quality time with your loved ones.

## **6. Stay Healthy**

Make healthy eating a top priority. To keep yourself in maximum condition, you must start taking time to eat regular, healthy meals. No more skipping lunch!

## **7. Tend to Your Relationships**

Relationships with family and friends need nurturing. They need your attention just as much, if not more than your job does. Schedule it if necessary.

## **8. Tend to Your Self**

Spending quality time with those you love should include yourself! Schedule “me time” into your calendar to make sure it happens.

## **9. Leave Work at the Office**

Break the habit of ‘just checking’ your emails at home. Close the office door behind you and switch off.

## **10. Explore Your Entitlements**

Many companies actively support a better work/life balance by offering flexible hours, job sharing, or part-time employment. See what you’re entitled to and use it.

## **11. Work Smarter**

There are so many time management practices that can help you use your time more efficiently. As well as apps and technology, learning to say 'no' effectively will stand you in good stead.

## **12. Ask for Help**

Learning to ask for help is the adult response to feeling overwhelmed. Delegating, sharing tasks, or outsourcing home responsibilities will help get your life back in balance so you can enjoy it.

# 4 Key Steps to Design a Strategic Life Plan as Smart as the Apple Company

You probably have at least one Apple product in your home. Or if you don't have one, you know someone who does. Apple has become shorthand for ubiquitous, sustainable success and instant recognizability.

Apple has a small stable of products that they do exceptionally well. They are focused and strategic in their product development and marketing. And their big not-so-secret weapon? They invent something and then keep refining it. This approach to innovation and incremental change is something you can easily adapt to your own life. Here's how.

## **1. Keep it Simple**

Steve Jobs made a strategic decision to keep Apple's focus tight. He simplified their product lines down to four computers.

You can easily simplify your life right now by eliminating the elements that waste your time and resources. Start by cutting down or cutting out TV and video games, which are both low-return uses of your time.

Then think of how you can downsize your resources from switching to a smaller car, a smaller house, de-cluttering, to not buying more stuff you don't need. Free up time by shopping in bulk and batch cooking.

## **2. Learn to Iterate**

Any psychologist will tell you that small, incremental lifestyle changes are much more successful than the big sort that tries to change everything at once. Think of how successful most New Year's resolutions are.

Make a commitment to a significant life change, like early retirement or budgeting for more vacations. You can make a series of small changes, like switching from an-on-the-way-to-work coffee to having one at home. Then add in complementary changes, like cutting down on takeout, downgrading your subscriptions and buying a smaller car. Small iterations compound over time and can make a massive impact on your life.

### **3. Be curious**

One of Apple's big successes is its research and development capacity. They are committed to not missing an opportunity to learn and grow and improve over time.

Stay ahead of the pack by being curious, by always being open to learning and change, looking for new opportunities, tweaking your goals, and always staying committed to improvement.

### **4. Being Okay with Imperfection.**

One of Apple's mottos is 'just ship' meaning that they don't wait to get a product absolutely perfect before they launch it into the world.

Being okay with imperfection doesn't mean you just leave it there and turn out low-quality work. It means you keep hustling. You give it your best shot, get it out, and then make improvements. You keep moving, keep thinking, keep improving.

# 5 Questions You Need to Ask Yourself to Clarify Your Strategic Thinking

Are you feeling a bit confused by strategic thinking? You know it's essential for your career and your business, but how do you actually do it?

Here are five questions to should ask yourself to really sharpen your strategic thinking.

## **1. What do you want?**

The most important thing to work out is where you want to be. Everything—goals, strategies, steps, should all be pointing to your desired destination. Do you want to be CEO, or be running your own company?

What do you want to achieve this year, in five years, ten? What are your actual goals? What's your vision? Get it all down on paper and think big!

## **2. Where are You Starting From?**

Do a survey of exactly where you are right now. What skills, resources, and assets do you have? What are your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and risks in your current job or business?

Are you satisfied with life the way it is, or do you want something more? What connections do you have? Map out your network and what value you provide to them, and what they offer you. Write up your self-inventory.

## **3. What do You Have the Power to Change?**

Think about what is in your control at the present moment. What can you streamline or eliminate? What do you need to add, enhance, or modify to reach

your goals? This can include anything from training, networking opportunities, to investment advice or strategic career planning.

#### **4. What do You Need to Move Ahead?**

Take another look at your self-inventory. What skills, resources, knowledge, and connections do you need to get closer to success? If this is difficult or overwhelming, consider finding a mentor or life coach who can help you find your way.

#### **5. How Can I Reach My Goals and Still Enjoy Life?**

Really going for success shouldn't make for a joyless life, totally focused on getting ahead. Make sure you take time to have fun and do the things that give you pleasure. Think of what Future Successful You enjoys doing. What makes your future worth striving for?

Write down all the fun things you will do, whether it's staying in 5-star hotels or being able to work for only half the year. Imagine driving your dream car. See yourself in your future executive suite.

See what elements of your future life you can start to incorporate in the present and build on those. Before you know it, you will be toasting your success!

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