



VIP INNOVATIONS, LLC
TAKING CHARGE OF YOUR
PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

SPECIAL REPORT:
STRATEGIC THINKING AT WORK

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Top 4 Ways to Find Time for Strategic Thinking at Work

It's easy to get caught up in the day-to-day tasks at work. There are so many demands on your time, from the never-ending cascade of emails to meetings, presentations, and conferences. The trouble is, you often just don't get time to spend thinking about anything other than what's right in front of you. And that's not good for business.

If you struggle to find time for strategizing, doing some long-term planning, and competitive analysis, try these tips to make strategy part of your regular routine.

1. Make Strategic Thinking A Team Responsibility

Maybe you don't have to take sole responsibility for doing strategic thinking. You'll get a whole lot more energy, ideas and importantly, greater buy-in if you engage your entire team in strategic thinking from the get-go.

Think widely about who can bring positive input to the table. Schedule a series of meetings with all your stakeholders, collaborators, and clients. Make strategic thinking a regular part of your professional engagement.

2. Quarantine Your Strategic Thinking Time

It can be almost impossible to do deep, reflective thinking in the modern office. You're likely to be interrupted or have competing priorities clamoring for your attention. Block out a whole or half-day in your calendar and consider working from home, booking a meeting room, or even going off-site.

Encourage your creative flow by turning off your phone or put it in another room, so you're not tempted to check for messages. Turn off notifications on your computer and close your email.

Make sure you have plenty of brain-nourishing foods, and water to stay hydrated. Schedule in a walk for some fresh air. Above all, find quiet time to really encourage your blue-sky thinking.

3. Get brainstorming

Strategic thinking can thrive on unstructured, freewheeling group discussion. Sit down with your team and have an anything goes brainstorming sessions. House rules are that no ideas are bad ideas, and everyone gets a turn.

Make sure to prepare your participants, so they are well briefed before you meet and get them to commit to the house rules. Set the boundaries for a judgment-free zone and wait for the ideas to flow.

4. Talk Up Your Strategic Thinking

There's nothing like accountability as a motivator. So instead of just thinking about finding time for strategic thinking, tell your colleagues and your boss that this is a priority for you. You need them to support and respect your commitment and not unwittingly undermine you by interrupting or overloading you with other work.

4 Ways to Think Strategically About Your Goals

Strategic thinking can have a significant impact on your success. It's the fundamental skill that will lift you up and make recruiters and clients notice you. Whether you want that promotion, or to really light a fire under your business, developing your strategic thinking will set you up to surpass your goals.

If you want to start thinking more strategically about your goals, there are four steps you should consider.

1. Find the Strategic Balance

Strategic balance means thinking about where you focus your time and your resources. Most people could spend all day fielding emails and still not get anything substantial done. It's up to you how you allocate your attention and your energy.

Experts say you should strive for a 10/90 balance of thinking big and getting stuff done. So, you decide to spend 10% of your time thinking strategically, about how to do your job better, why you're doing the things you're doing and if maybe there's a better way. The rest of the time, you do your thing. And you'll be doing it better.

2. Set Aside Strategic Thinking Time

Strategic thinking needs to be given separate, priority time. Block out your 10% of time (four hours, if you work a forty-hour week) and give yourself permission to think, ponder, and open up your mind to some blue-sky thinking.

Strategic thinking needs uninterrupted quiet, not snatched minutes sandwiched between other tasks. Shut your office door or take yourself off to a café or park so you can really think deeply.

3. Quarantine Your Strategic Thinking Time

Guard your strategic thinking time as a treasure. There will always be demands on your time, but you should commit to allocating 10% for strategic thinking. No emails, no meetings, no phone calls. Learn to say no to the 'just this once' demands and give this time the respect it deserves.

4. Make the Time

You've probably gotten used to being available 24/7 and having an eternally bubbling-over checklist of tasks. In our modern world, time to think might seem like a luxury, maybe even a self-indulgence. But your goals are important to you, right? And they deserve allocated time to really focus on what you want, how you're doing, and what could change.

Finding and using dedicated blocks of time for strategic thinking is part of your life maintenance and essential for your career. Think of strategizing as a non-negotiable part of your life and a priority, to keep you on course to meet your goals.

The 4 Traits All Strategic Thinkers Share

Strategic thinkers are not born, they're made. Strategic thinking is a skill like any other, and one that is highly valued by recruiters and executives. It is a key element of good leadership and can be inspiring and motivating. Strategic thinking is a skill anyone can choose to learn and develop - if you want to.

If you want to get ahead and be seen as top talent, here are four qualities of strategic thinkers you'll want to cultivate.

1. Strategic Thinkers Never Stop Learning

One fundamental quality of strategic thinkers is curiosity. They always ask why or why not. They see possibilities everywhere and are always on the lookout for new information.

Strategic leaders are committed to learning from as many sources as possible. It's about listening and learning from others, reading, and getting as much as possible from events like networking and conferences.

2. Strategic Thinkers Ask for Advice

People who are highly-skilled strategic thinkers never fall into the trap of believing they know it all. They understand that there's a whole world of experience and data out there to draw from. So, they seek advice from others, they ask questions, and they test ideas. They look out for constructive criticism, to make sure their product or service is as robust as possible before it's unleashed on the world.

3. Strategic Thinkers Are Risk Takers

Successful people know that a certain amount of risk is necessary to get anywhere in this world. Innovation, problem-solving, and excellence require a certain level of confidence, chutzpah even, that risks failure. And strategic thinkers are okay with that. They accept that failure is part of the deal and offers an opportunity to refine and perfect.

4. Strategic Thinkers Stay Focused.

Whatever else is going on, strategic thinkers never take their eye off the ball. They stay focused on the key objective of their project and business. Whether the company is an investment multinational, a one-person entrepreneur, or a not-for-profit, the strategic leader stays true to the primary purpose of the organization.

They know that if you lose your line of sight to the business' central vision, that you're no longer being strategic.

Strategic thinking combines an ability to plan for the future, adapt to changing environments and circumstances, and deal with challenges. All organizations need strategic thinkers, and you are in a position to become a powerful strategic thinker and an influential leader.

7 Smart Strategies to Use When Talking to Your Boss (About Anything)

No matter how well you get on with your boss, there will always be situations where you need to be strategic in how you handle a discussion. Whether you have a performance review, are asking for a raise or telling them you're quitting, you can work it to maintain a positive relationship while still staying true to yourself.

Here are some expert tips on how to have those tricky conversations without jeopardizing your career prospects!

1. Be Clear About What You Want to Say

It's always a good idea to be straightforward about what you have to say. Beating around the bush is irritating, and makes it look like you have something to hide. If you're anxious about stumbling over your words, work out a script or some bullet points before the meeting, so you stay on track.

2. Stay Calm

If you're upset, don't go storming into your boss' office. Wait until the first flush of emotion has passed, take a deep breath or a walk outside, and work out how you want to handle the situation. Don't speak to your boss until you've calmed down.

3. Have an Objective

Before you go into the meeting, have a clear objective. What do you want your boss to know by the end of the meeting, and what exactly do you want to achieve? What outcome would work for you?

4. Be Mindful of Your Boss's Way of Working

People have different communication styles. Some bosses have an open-door policy and are always up for a chat. Others maintain a strict schedule and prefer time to prepare for a conversation. If your boss works best on a schedule, set up a meeting a few days out, so you aren't taking them off-guard.

5. Provide Evidence

Before you leap in to disagree with a decision your boss has made, be sure you get your facts straight. Be prepared to back up your statements with firm evidence, not just opinion.

6. Own Your Mistakes

Everyone makes mistakes; it's part of being human. What really counts is how you deal with them. If you've messed up, don't hide it or blame it on someone else. 'Fess up straight away and get focused on a solution.

7. Learn to Take Criticism Gracefully

It's vital that you don't take workplace criticism personally. It's normal to react to being criticized, but it's essential to keep calm. Even if you feel it's unjustified just keep repeating 'it's not personal' over in your head until the emotion passes. Then you'll be in a better place to respond professionally.

3 Signs You are a Strategic Thinker in the Workplace

Strategic thinking is one of the key skills that will help you get ahead. It's what every recruiter is looking for and what every successful organization needs. But how do you know if you're a strategic thinker? And how can you showcase one of your most marketable skills?

1. Strategic Thinkers are Reflective Thinkers

One of the hallmarks of strategic thinking is the capacity to reflect. Critical, reflective thinking allows you to dive deep into all the aspects of a problem. It is a habitual way of thinking that allows you to see the issue from all angles.

If you're a strategic thinker, you don't go straight for the easiest or most obvious answer. In fact, you're likely to be wary of the easy solution and really turn the problem inside out before you decide on a course of action.

Strategic thinkers draw data from many sources to inform their thinking. They explore possibilities and likely and unlikely scenarios. They weigh the pros and cons of potential solutions and think of how each will affect the stakeholders.

2. Strategic Thinkers make Great Leaders

The capacity to see all aspects of a situation and to think of the possible ramifications makes strategic thinkers natural leaders.

Honing your strategic thinking skills helps to develop and build your strategic leadership skills.

Strategic leaders can join the dots and make surprising connections and have a particular aptitude for systems thinking. Many people tend to have a narrow

vision that doesn't extend much beyond their own job or specialization. Strategic thinkers tend to be interested in what everyone is doing and why which gives them a very different perspective on problem-solving. And because they are looking at the situation from a 360-degree angle, they can assess the impact on the organization as a whole.

This kind of strategic leadership inspires loyalty and trust in employees and clients alike.

3. Strategic Thinkers Create More Strategic Thinkers

Strategic thinkers tend to be inspiring. They see and think outside the box. They are enthusiastic about the future and its possibilities and inspire a can-do attitude.

Strategic leaders tend to ask questions. They think deeply about the issues affecting the organization, and prompt others to think about the same issues. They're focused on the strategic vision, how the organization meets the needs of its stakeholders, and how it can go beyond just delivering the same product.

If you want to foster and signal your strategic thinking, learn to think deeply, and ask the hard questions. Go beyond what's in front of you and think of what is possible.