

*Are you ready for
strategic planning?*

Strategic Planning and Implementation Checklists

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Key checklists to help you assess your readiness and start you on the path to creating a strategic plan for your company:

- ✓ *Checklists to help you select the process and facilitator*
- ✓ *Pointers on the CEO's role in the strategic planning process*
- ✓ *Tips on how to surface your company's strategic issues*
- ✓ *Pointers on how to establish a vision for the future, establish team consensus on strategic goals, and develop an initial action plan for each goal*
- ✓ *Pointers on how to implement action plans*

Table of Contents

<i>Introduction: What is strategic planning?</i>	1
<i>Step 1 – Decide whether you are ready to plan</i>	2
<i>Step 2 – Decide on the process</i>	3
<i>Step 3 – Decide on the facilitator</i>	4
<i>Step 4 – Decide to do it now!</i>	5
<i>Ten Secrets to Strategic Planning Success</i>	5
✓ #1. <i>Play your role as CEO and walk the talk</i>	5
✓ #2. <i>Use a facilitator</i>	6
✓ #3. <i>Select a quality executive team</i>	6
✓ #4. <i>Pre-plan the planning meeting</i>	7
✓ #5. <i>Use good meeting rules and tools</i>	7
✓ #6. <i>Surface the company's strategic issues</i>	8
✓ #7. <i>Establish a vision for the future</i>	8
✓ #8. <i>Establish team consensus on the strategic goals</i>	9
✓ #9. <i>Develop initial goal action plans during the meeting</i>	9
✓ #10. <i>Implement! Implement! Implement!</i>	10
<i>How to document and implement action plans</i>	11
<i>Strategic Planning Definitions</i>	12
<i>What Myrna Associates can do for you</i>	13
<i>About John W. Myrna</i>	14
<i>Testimonials</i>	14

What is strategic planning?

Use strategic planning to create your future.

Strategic planning is creating a vision of the future and managing toward that expectancy.

Strategic planning is choosing the 20% to implement that will accomplish 80% of your corporate goals.

Strategic planning is operating under a vision, mission, and strategy umbrella that focuses your organization's effort.

Strategic planning is making sure your short-term decisions are consistent with your company's long-term goals.

Strategic planning answers the four big questions:

Where are we?

Where do we want to be in the future?

What part of the status quo do we need to change to get us where we want to be in the future?

How do we make it happen?

It is a simple process with an incredible power to energize your organization.

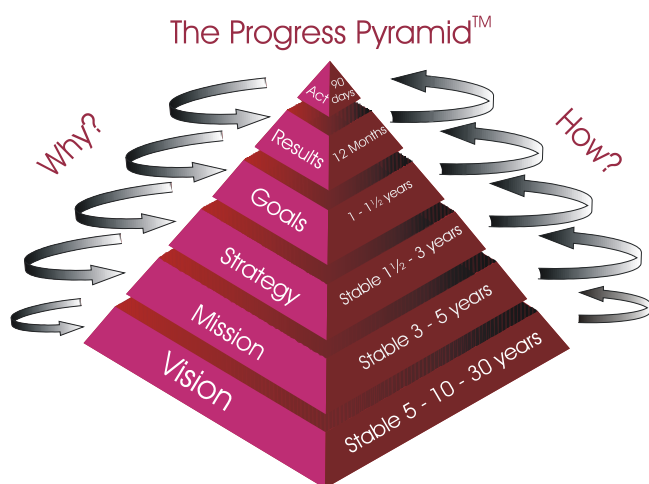
Use strategic planning to create a stable platform for investment. Strategic planning organizes and anchors your investments in the future. When you make an investment, you need a platform that will remain stable long enough to complete the investment and reap the reward. To deliver real results, a good strategic planning process provides not one platform but several stable platforms, each with a shorter time frame.

The Progress Pyramid™ organizes your investments based on the “why” and the “how” of effective strategic planning. It provides you with time frames for completing your initiatives and realizing their returns.

The most stable platform is your vision. It sits at the base of the pyramid. Its stability enables you to work on the truly long-term goals, the ones that take decades to accomplish.

The least stable platform is your action steps at the top of the pyramid. This is where you take short-term tactical steps, which evolve quickly as you respond to changes in conditions and resources.

Too often, organizations confuse the tactical with the strategic, changing the mission in response to a change in the environment when they really only need to change action steps.



Vision. The stable base of the pyramid is your organization's vision. It is designed to be stable for five, ten, or as long as thirty years, an eternity for most organizations. It consists of your core ideology – core values and core purpose, and an envisioned future built around one vividly described, big, compelling goal.

Mission. The organization's DNA – an affirmation of who we want to be, what we want to do, who we want to do it for, and why we do it.

Strategy. A shared visualization of where we want to be within three to five years – the picture on the jigsaw puzzle box.

Goals. Each goal is strategic because it changes the status quo.

Key result measures. The set of outcomes that define that we have, in fact, changed the status quo.

Action steps. The tactical plan to achieve those outcomes. Action steps to be completed within a moving 90-day window.

**"The great thing in the world is not so much where we stand,
as in what direction we are moving."**

Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., Supreme Court Justice

Step 1 – Decide whether you are ready to plan

YES! **Is the CEO ready?** Are you prepared to share the information required to make good decisions and gain commitment? You want your organization to make choices and commit resources to achieving its goals. You, the CEO, are ready to commit your attention, time and resources to the planning process and the resultant plan. You're prepared to personally demonstrate the behavior that will set your executive team's expectations and commitment to the ultimate action plans.

YES! **Are you concerned with effectiveness rather than cost?** It usually costs a bit more to do the right things in the short run. Be honest with yourself: If the only criteria you apply is today's cost, you're not ready for strategic planning.

YES! **Are you ready to move away from back-of-the-envelope management?** Strategic planning requires commitment on the part of executives to deliver the agreed-upon mix of quality, quantity, timeliness and cost. Importantly, the company and CEO must deliver on their commitment of resources and attention. If you are not ready to commit the resources and attention, if you feel the need to turn on a dime monthly, weekly or even daily, then you're not yet ready for strategic planning.

YES! **Can you afford to invest money today for future return?** If you see every dollar spent as a cost rather than an investment, put this process away for another day.

YES! **Do you have an executive team?** These are people who see and care about the business in a holistic way. They have opinions; they can put company needs ahead of their personal or departmental needs. I'm not referring to titles, capabilities, or competencies; I'm talking about attitude and vision. Strategic planning will empower these executives with information and overview to channel their natural abilities. The strategic planning meeting is an opportunity to take the measure of your team, but there must be a core team in place to work with.

YES! **Is your executive team stable?** If you plan to remove a member or hire a major new player in the next 90 days, you should defer this exercise until those changes are made. A key element of the planning process is the individual commitments made to the goals. This commitment needs time to be demonstrated before it can transfer to a new player.

YES! **Can you make the time to invest in strategic planning at this point?** You need time for the strategic planning meeting. The CEO's attention over the next few months reinforces the importance of the process and makes sure company resources are committed to its success. There is much to gain from the meeting even if there is no formal follow-up, but the gains from follow-up are beyond the dreams of avarice.

Step 2 - Decide on the process

YES! **Is it a team planning process?** Your senior team, with their hands in your business daily, has in their heads the information you need for strategic planning decisions. Further, they are the ones who will implement the plan. Only when they are involved in creating the plan can they truly own it.

YES! **Is the process comprehensive?** Many programs are based on a popular business book. Two days focused on defining a mission or identifying your hedgehog won't generate the tactical steps needed for implementation. Alternatively, a process that doesn't bother to develop a vision, mission, and strategy to set direction and inform your tactical steps isn't really strategic.

YES! **Is the process the right size for your organization?** Processes developed for Fortune 500 firms assume you have extensive staffs for implementation and welcome multi-day meetings at expensive resorts. A process designed for a \$2 - \$100 billion dollar company is unlikely to deliver the same results for a \$2-\$100 million dollar company. On the other hand, a process designed for a mom-and-pop operation without a 5 to 12-person management team is equally unsuitable.

YES! **Is the process affordable and predictable?** What is the cost in dollars and time? Are there hidden expenses such as paying for travel time, printing and duplication, etc.?

YES! **Can you handle the paperwork?** Many strategic plans stumble because the organization isn't able to get the plan's documentation until weeks or months following the planning meeting. Insist on a facilitator who guarantees delivery of comprehensive documentation quickly – ideally within a week of the planning meeting.

YES! **Is there availability of services to assist in implementation?** Facilitated follow-on presentations, reviews, and annual meetings will help insure your company maintains momentum.

YES! **Do you have a choice of professional facilitators?** Pick a facilitator to match your organization's culture and needs. Are they highly skilled in producing productive conversations, facilitating the best team communication ever, and skillfully converting talk to action for breakthrough results? Do the facilitators bring unique, relevant real world and life experience to the meeting?

YES! **Will the planning process customize itself around your unique issues** while consistently providing the highly positive results you expect from a proven, formal process?

YES! **Will the process and facilitator provide field-proven** solutions to common business management and personnel problems presented as part of the discussion of issues? Will they provide valuable insight and workable models without telling you and your team how to run your business?

YES! **Is the process proven?** Are there sufficient, relevant references and testimonials to provide confidence that the process is proven and appropriate for your company?

Step 3 – Decide on the facilitator

YES! The facilitator **adapts the agenda or meeting activities on the spot**, as needed; handles multiple tasks smoothly, adapts personal style to the group and tries new things.

YES! The facilitator considers how to work questions that **encourage thought and participation**, and develops thoughtful questions on the spot, when necessary.

YES! The facilitator **demonstrates responsiveness and respect for people**; is sensitive to emotions; watches and responds to nonverbal signals; empathizes with individuals who have special needs; helps develop constructive relationships with and among members; greets and mingles with the group; and uses the group's own words and symbols..

YES! The facilitator **draws out individuals** by asking questions; gets people involved early on; controls dominant people to ensure equal participation; provides anonymity and confidentiality when needed; acknowledges and is open to the group's contributions; and appropriately uses humor, games, music, and play to enhance an open, positive environment.

YES! The facilitator **encourages looking at issues from different points of view**, and uses techniques, metaphors, stories, and examples to get the group to consider different frames of reference.

YES! The facilitator encourages **the group to handle conflict constructively**; provides techniques to help the group deal with conflict; helps the group gain agreement and consensus on issues; and allows the group to vent negative emotions constructively.

YES! The facilitator **gives explicit instructions**; uses clear and concise language in presenting ideas; gives the group written information such as handouts and printouts; provides research and background information; presents models and frameworks clearly; and makes important information visible on flipcharts or overhead projections.

YES! The facilitator **has a definite direction** and knows where to go next in the agenda; clearly communicates the task to the group; and keeps the group's comments relevant to the desired outcome.

YES! The facilitator **helps the group take responsibility** for the meeting and its outcomes; helps the group create follow-up plans; turns the floor over to others; permits the group to call its own breaks; and encourages the group to evaluate the process.

YES! The facilitator **involves the meeting leader** or initiator in planning; develops clear meeting outcomes (goals); designs an agenda and selects group processes on the basis of those outcomes; clarifies ground rules; learns about the group members ahead of time; and uses appropriate tools, such as visual aids or meeting software.

YES! The facilitator leads **the group through the meeting process**; uses the agenda to guide the group; sets time limits, enforces group rules, and limits choices; sets time limits, enforces ground rules, and limits choices; provides models, frameworks, and processes to guide the group; uses breaks effectively; and checks progress and reactions with the meeting leader and group.

YES! The facilitator **really listens** to what the group is saying and makes an effort to make sense out of it; clarifies goals, terms, and definitions; reiterates participant responses; remembers previous comments to reconnect information; and helps organize information into themes.

YES! The facilitator **recognizes and deals with his or her own behavior or feelings**; behaves confidently; behaves honestly -- openly admits mistakes and lack of knowledge; shows enthusiasm; and keeps his or her ego out of the discussions.

YES! The facilitator will **be familiar with any technology used**; clearly understands tools and their functions and capabilities; and solves common technical difficulties.

Step 4 – Decide to do it now!

Were your answers “YES”? Then you’re ready for strategic planning. Start as soon as possible, because every day you delay now puts off the benefits of strategic planning. You know that the benefits from strategic long-range planning warrant your commitment and investment.

Ten Secrets for Strategic Planning Success

Here are some of the secrets for successful strategic planning that we’ve learned from facilitating planning meetings for hundreds of companies since 1991.

#1: Play your role as CEO and walk the talk

The CEO has only three jobs that can’t be delegated:

- Making the “you bet the company” decisions.
- Developing the management team.
- Leading the strategic planning process.

The strategic planning meeting is the best path to fulfilling these responsibilities. Strategic planning only works when the CEO is committed to it and leads the process. As the CEO, it is key that you **communicate the importance of the planning retreat** to your executive team. Informally talk to each team member one-on-one about your goals for the retreat. **Solicit agreement and buy-in** on the value and need for the meeting. Discussing any concerns they may have about the process with your executives before a final commitment is made can help to create an effective team planning climate.

During the meeting, the CEO plays a particularly difficult role. The **CEO acts as a participant** in the planning meeting rather than the usual day-to-day one of problem-solver and action-oriented time-saver. CEOs are the ultimate problem-solvers. When an executive appears with a problem, the CEO tends to try solving the problem then and there. But in the planning meeting, it is important that major issues get surfaced, discussed to a common level of understanding and prioritized. Trying to immediately “solve” an issue dampens discussion and understanding.

This process of discussing issues until the entire team “gets it” can drive a CEO up the wall because CEOs are bright and intuitive. They tend to reach an understanding after hearing only a little bit of information and use that understanding to formulate a solution. In a desire to save everyone time, CEOs share their insight with a simple “Here’s what we should do” statement. Executives who don’t see where the answer came from try to ask, but usually get squelched. Ultimately they salute and say “yes sir!” but they don’t have the deep commitment that flows from a personal understanding. Bite your lip or take a walk, but allow the rest of the team to catch up with you. (They might even come up with an approach that’s even better than the one suggested by your intuition.) Further, a CEO can’t be sure the team really understands what he or she is saying if their team members are never given the opportunity to paraphrase and feed it back.

People listen to what you do rather than what you write or say. In the three weeks following the strategic planning retreat, focus your actions on asking your executives how they are doing on their close-in milestones. Be the first to meet your milestones. Make sure that the team understands that you take their commitment to results seriously and expect them to achieve the goals. Further, keep your commitment to providing the resources required by the plan. Do not change direction because of an interesting article in Friday’s *Journal* and do not create an operating budget that isn’t anchored by the strategic plan.

Your team will take the plan as seriously as the CEO does.

#2: Use a facilitator

- **Select a facilitator experienced in the strategic planning process.** Someone who facilitates strategic planning retreats week in and week out will be more experienced and effective than someone who does it once a year or once in a while. The power and value of experience becomes crucial when the planning retreat doesn't go exactly as planned.
- **Select a facilitator with real-world business knowledge and experience.** This experience allows the facilitator to do a better job of relating to basic company issues. On the other hand, it is not necessary nor even desirable that the facilitator come from your industry. The industry knowledge and plan should flow from the team's heads, because they will be implementing it. Sometimes it is hard for facilitators to keep their distance from a market they grew up in.
- **Select a facilitator who can establish credibility** with the team. People implement better when they believe. If the team doesn't believe in the facilitator then they may not believe in the plan. Be sure to select someone who has good chemistry with the CEO and the team.
- **Select a facilitator who can educate** the team as well as facilitate the process. All management teams have uneven experience. This retreat is an excellent opportunity to learn.
- **Select a facilitator who can earn the CEO's respect.**
- **Select a facilitator with presence.** Executives and CEOs are a rowdy bunch. You need someone who can get the group back on course when they start to wander off.
- **Don't ask a team member to facilitate.** Team member contributions are too intense and too valuable to be diluted by worrying about the myriad of issues a good facilitator has to track. Further, a facilitator who is seen as a neutral party can steer the group through discussions of the really tough issues.
- **Never have the CEO facilitate!** It is a false economy. Time and time again, companies find that they either don't finish the agenda or worse yet, finish the entire agenda in a few hours because the meeting becomes a presentation by the CEO.

#3: Select a quality executive team

- **Pick people who can look at the business through the eyes of the CEO.** An executive is someone who cares about the entire business, not just their function, their department, their people or themselves. This attitude is key. Your executive may not yet have the education, experience and insights to excel but without the attitude they will never be effective members of senior management. **It's expected and OK that team members' business skills are uneven.** The planning meeting is an excellent opportunity for the team to learn and develop general business skills.
- **Pick 5 to 12 people.** The information necessary to set direction and establish goals is in the heads of your executives. Strategic issues are too complex and nuanced to be completely understood by any one member of the team. It takes the synthesis of the individual views of a group of people, each with their personal view of reality, to create a thorough understanding of each strategic issue. With fewer than five participants there isn't enough diversity to get the job done. Above twelve participants there isn't enough time for everyone to reach the common understanding required to achieve a state of flow where everyone can see and balance the complex interrelationships between issues. With more than twelve participants the meeting can turn into a series of presentations rather than an interactive session.
- **Select your planning team to include your direct reports, department heads** (no matter where they report in the organization), **key outside consultants** and the **1 or 2 movers and shakers** that will affect your success over the next 3-5 years. A mover and shaker might be an insightful top sales rep or product developer. Make sure **all members participate.** There are no observers. Everyone weighs all the issues and as a team they "place their bets and take their chances." You can't allow someone to stand aside and not be part of the commitment. To this end, **never include lame ducks.** You are asking for commitments and a lame duck is not in a position to make one.

#4: Pre-plan the planning meeting

- **Set a retreat date far enough in advance** that the entire team can commit to it without conflicts from weddings or major company events such as a new product launch. **Communicate clearly that this is important** stuff and the executive's calendar is to be kept clear of any other appointments. Explain that this is all we will be doing for those two days, so don't assume you can overlap the planning with a sales call or other activity.
- **Use an input form to gather basic information** anonymously from the team. Ask for the 5 major weaknesses, opportunities, threats, strengths and industry trends. (These are the WOTS-up topics.) Ask for team members' expectations, 5 top products and 5 top markets. Have a non-team member, such as the meeting facilitator, create a one-page, numbered list of items from each topic (weakness, opportunity, etc.). Combine duplicate items and sort the list to obscure the author of any particular item. Ask for the top 5 in each topic to start the process of prioritizing and focusing.
- **Set an expectation for intensity, dedication, and possible evening hours.** The meeting will start at the company's normal starting time and end any time between 6 PM and 8 PM, depending on how long it takes to address the issues. Ask people to keep both evenings open. This is a key moment in the history of the company and you don't want to stop short of finishing because someone has tickets to the opera or a plane to catch. (If you set an expectation to end at 8PM and finish early at 7, the team will retain its focus. Set an expectation to end at 6PM and the team will focus on the clock rather than the issues if you need to keep going until 7PM.)

#5: Use good meeting rules and tools

- **Meet off-site.** Your own in-house meeting rooms can carry their own negative connotations. The off-site room doesn't have to be expensive. It could be a conference room at a colleagues' company or even a rented church hall. Dress in **business casual**. The casual dress breaks the mold and 8 to 12-hour meetings are more comfortable in casual clothes.
- **Dedicate two intensive days** to establish an organizational state of "flow time." The two planning days must be back-to-back. The most popular combination is a Friday and Saturday, one day of company time and one day of personal time.
- **Post, distribute, and use an agenda.** Post the agenda on the wall and check off the items as you go along. (This signals that there is no hidden agenda.)
- **Define, explain and acknowledge the different roles of the facilitator, participant and CEO.** The facilitator is responsible for the meeting having met the team's goals. The CEO suppresses his or her own normal modes of operation and acts as a participant. The team members acknowledge that they are here to look at the entire business through the eyes of the CEO. They are not here representing their people, their departments, their functions or themselves.
- **Define, explain and acknowledge a set of meeting rules** everyone agrees to follow. (1) Listen, (2) say what needs to be said, there are no sacred cows, (3) focus on solving problems rather than placing blame or being defensive, (4) respect differences of opinion, (5) avoid cheap shots, (6) stay focused, (7) contribute only new information to the discussion, (8) conduct only one discussion at a time, and (9) agree that silence implies understanding and agreement.
- **Use flip charts**, taping sheets to the wall as the meeting progresses.
- **Maintain sizzle** with **penalty flags** to throw in front of rule breakers, and motivational **posters**, etc. Tossing a bright yellow penalty flag, or bean bag, demonstrates that you are serious about following the rules without putting someone down. The tossing of flags also has proven to be a good way to break the tension.
- **Use a quiet meeting room with enough space and walls that are clear** for posting the flip charts used while setting goals.
- **Serve food that keeps the team alert and awake.** Skip the croissants, onion rings and pastrami; instead serve bagels, salads and chicken.

#6: Surface the company's strategic issues

- **Surface issues by discussing, synthesizing and prioritizing** weaknesses, opportunities, threats, strengths and trends. This is a variation of the classic SWOT analysis. After facilitating meetings for hundreds of companies, we've found that WOTS-up works better. Leading with weaknesses surfaces more issues and ending on strengths strikes a positive note.
- **Jumpstart the discussion** of each topic (weakness, opportunity, etc.) by handing out a numbered list of items taken from the pre-retreat input form. The list should have combined duplicate and similar items. The process works best if items are sorted alphabetically to obscure the author of any specific item.
- **Start the process with smaller teams of 2-4** discussing each item on the list. After all the items on a given list have been discussed, have each small team agree on the three most important items (three major weaknesses, three major opportunities, etc.). Encourage teams to "cheat" by grouping related items and voting for the new group. This "cheating" synthesizes individual issues into a set of company-wide strategic issues. When the smaller teams come back, **discuss** each prioritized item **until the entire team understands** it. Everyone doesn't have to agree but everyone should understand the item's point and everyone's view of that point. The blending of each of the smaller team's items should identify about five prioritized, thoroughly understood company issues.
- **Say what needs to be said; there are no sacred cows.** In the discussion of each item, (weaknesses, strengths, etc.) never attempt to assign blame. Assigning blame tears down teamwork, makes people defensive and close-mouthed, and inappropriately focuses attention on the past rather than the future you want to create.
- **Don't vote without discussion, and don't railroad discussions** to "save time."
- **Focus future attention only on those prioritized, most-important issues** you prioritized.
- **Discuss and record the expectations of the various stakeholders** in addition to the WOTS-up analysis. (Stakeholders include customers, employees, owners, and sometimes vendors, community and lenders.) A plan can't meet the expectations of the various stakeholders if the team doesn't know what those expectations are.

#7: Establish a vision for the future

- **Define and capture your vision.** Update and/or establish and commit to a set of core values, core purpose, and a "big hairy audacious goal" (BHAG). **Values usually derive from the CEO's and/or founder's existing values.** The core purpose is a short statement that was likely true for the past ten years and will apply for the next ten. (Think simple – Disney's core purpose is "family entertainment.") Your BHAG should be something that will take at least ten years to achieve but, with hard work and some luck, be achievable within thirty. Some companies have a vision of curing cancer, others to be recognized as the top player in their market.
- **Update and/or establish and commit to a company mission statement.** The mission statement is an affirmation of who you want to be 3-5 years from now, not merely who you were or who you happen to be today.
- **Make your mission statement answer the questions of who you want to be, what you want do, who you want to do it for, and why you do it.** A productive way to develop the mission is to break the team into small groups and take 15 minutes to have each group brainstorm phrases that address the four points. When the team reconvenes they prioritize the phrases. Assign the task of assembling the phrases into a mission statement to 2 volunteers or the facilitator. Review the result of their work the second day before setting goals. The **mission statement should fit like a lobster shell** - large enough to protect and support your growth over the next 3-5 years while not being so big as to drag you down today.
- **Update and/or establish a company product/market strategy.** This is a **one-page description of where the team wants the company to reach within 3-5 years.** How big do you want to be, how profitable, what markets, what products, use of technology, organization, risk tolerance, etc. Think of the strategy statement as the picture on a jigsaw puzzle box. When everyone can see where you are headed they can do a better job aligning daily actions to completing that picture. Every team member has a personal picture of where they *know* the company wants to be in the future. Writing down a consensus of those visualizations gets everyone literally on the same page. It is a visualization of where you want to be rather than a projection of where current momentum is likely to take you.

#8: Establish team consensus on the strategic goals.

- **Start with smaller teams of 2-4 defining** their concept of the most important **four things that need to be in place within eighteen months to feel confident that the company is truly on a path to achieving its strategy – the five year out visualization**. Teams should work alone for about 30 minutes to look at the business through the eyes of the CEO. Each of the smaller teams defines four key results that they believe will do the best job of meeting stakeholder expectations, overcoming weaknesses, exploiting opportunities, protecting from threats, leveraging company strengths and exploiting industry trends. These should be consistent with the company mission and follow the company's product/market strategy.
- **Develop a small set of goals** from the eighteen-month key results that can be **kept in front of the team daily**. Set the number of goals, **4-6 typically**, to **fewer than the number of executives**. Goals are accomplished because one person champions them. There can be no more champions than there are planning team members.
- **Make each goal a synthesis of several individual objectives**. Capture goals as simple statement like *Double sales*.
- **Ask what will be the key results** for each of the 4-6 goals that will have to be in place within a year for the team to declare the goal a success. Typically there will be 3-6 key result measures (KRM) for each of the 4-6 goals. KRMs should be some statement of quality, quantity, timeliness or cost.
- **Perform a red-face test on the goals**. A year from now when you have accomplished the full set of goals, will the team agree that they were the best way to get where you want to be in 3-5 years? Keep at it until the team agrees that the process has led to a reasonable set of goals.
- **Identify goal champions** who represent **the best mix of passion and competence**. Select champions through volunteering and CEO prompting. Remember that champions can champion only one goal.
- **Have the CEO champion** a "Maintain the momentum of the strategic plan" goal. (This is the "**Plan of Plans**.")
- **Identify multiple co-champions** for each goal. They should have energy and genuine concern for success.
- **Identify a single accountable** party for each KRM. This is your opportunity to push the plan deeper in the organization.

#9: Develop goal's initial action plans during the meeting.

- **Don't stop** until you have written down the first set of 90-day **tactical action steps!** Most strategic planning meetings end when you have goals. This is a mistake. It is seldom realistic to assume that people will create the action steps immediately when they get back to the office. Instead, have the KRM accountable parties, champions, and co-champions take 1-2 hours during the planning meeting to draft initial action steps.
- **Capture on paper** the strategic goals, their key result measures, initial tactical action steps, champions, and accountable parties. These are your action plans. Specific, quantifiable measures and action steps start everyone walking the talk.
- **Establish personal ownership and accountability**. Each strategic goal represents a consensus of the planning team and was derived by grouping individual goal statements. However, once the goals are defined and the champions and accountable parties identified, the goals take on a life of their own. The goal's action plan is not a committee effort. The accountable parties and champions, with the enthusiastic assistance of their co-champions, create action plans that reflect how **they** will accomplish the goal. (This is how you avoid creating a camel, an animal designed by a committee.)
- **Each action step has a "must be done by" date**. **Align dates** if possible **with key external events**. Use the dates as communications and commitment but never as a club. Action steps have a 90-day focus – i.e. your "tactical" window.
- **Do not cast action steps in concrete**. Action plans can and must be revised during the year, with action steps sometimes changing weekly or even daily.
- **Think of the plan as having a hierarchy of stability**. The vision and mission are the most stable, followed by the product/market strategy and goals. You need to keep your goals stable during the year in order to produce results. (You never produce results unless you finish what you start!) The action plans that implement the goals, however, are like drafts of a new book. You learn as you execute the plan. It is appropriate to apply that learning by continuously revising your action plans.

#10: Implement! Implement! Implement!

Implementation is a simple cycle of **agreement**, **accountability**, **action**, and **assessment**.

The Progress Accelerator™

Agreement is the first phase. It is necessary to agree on the priority of issues, tactical approach, and expected outcomes among the appropriate stakeholders. At a strategic level, this agreement is best reached between the CEO and the senior team during a two-day meeting and documented in the strategic plan. At a tactical level, reaching this agreement can be as simple as the huddle football players hold before every play.

Accountability refers to personal accountability or responsibility for completing a task and producing the agreed-upon outcome. Whether for a tactical action step or key result measure, one (and only one) person must be designated as accountable. There will always be multiple people involved, but without a single point of accountability you get this situation:

*There was an important job to be done and **Everybody** was sure **Somebody** would do it. **Anybody** could have done it, but **Nobody** did it. **Somebody** got angry about that, because it was **Everybody's** job. **Everybody** thought **Anybody** could do it, but **Nobody** realized that **Everybody** wouldn't do it. It ended up that **Everybody** blamed **Somebody** when **Nobody** did what **Anybody** could have done. (Adapted from a Charles Osgood poem)*

Action is tactical. It is a burst of activity that moves us closer to the desired outcome. One person is personally accountable for making sure it happens. There is a specific time period during which it will be completed. (Texas Instruments called this the W3 model – *What* will get done, *Who* will be accountable to make it happen, and *When* will it be completed by.)

Assessment is accomplished in a meeting. Meetings to assess tactical actions could be a daily, weekly, or monthly huddle that starts with a question of what we may have learned about previous plays or weak spots. Strategically, senior management needs to close out the year's strategic goals during an annual two-day meeting. Closing last year's goals requires that management identify where the status quo has actually changed, and evaluate their overall success.

Deliver the paperwork documenting the meeting within a week. The single biggest thing you can do to communicate urgency is to get the paperwork done quickly. Give the delivered product an **important look and feel**. Don't distribute the plan as a stack of poorly photocopied, stapled sheets of paper.

- **Complete company communication within two weeks** via a stand-up meeting. Employees can help you reach your goals only if they know what they are. Don't wait until you can "do it right" -- that usually means it doesn't get done at all.
- **Have the goal champions commit to revising and re-distributing their action plans within two weeks.**
- **Review/discuss action plans during regular** weekly or monthly **meetings**; don't create special weekly strategic planning meetings that just add overhead. Planning is a lifelong process, not a special event.
- **Commit to and hold formal, facilitated quarterly review mini-retreats.** Set those dates at the end of the planning meeting. The team will want to delay each quarterly meeting to have more time to finish milestones, but resist. Much progress will happen the week before the meeting! Delay a week and you delay the progress by a week.
- **Make sure the CEO and executive team maintain their attention** to the plan, keeping goals and milestones visible and in front of them daily. Print a simple calendar with the next 90 days of action steps. Post a copy of the goals and KRMs where the team can see them when they meet.
- **Hold a full, zero-based, strategic planning retreat annually.** Don't just take the existing goals and add new ones. While you invest the same amount of time in planning each year, each time you do planning the team deals with more nuances of the business and greater detail, and applies more sophisticated trade-offs in the decision making.
- **Celebrate success.** Don't allow your intensity and constant push for excellence to blind you to the successful achievement of your goals. It is all too easy to focus attention on the small details that didn't happen the way you expected (the "trees") while ignoring that you achieved the goals (the "forest"). Take a few minutes to celebrate before pressing on to the next challenge.



How to document and implement action plans

Key Result Measures are the “what” – Action Steps are the “how.” The action steps are your tactical plan. You should expect to adjust them as you gain tactical experience through execution. You need to remain focused on creating the results but be careful that you don't fall in love with your current tactical plan. How you produce those results should evolve based on insights gained, available resources, approaches that didn't work, etc.

Start by taking each key result measure in turn. Each measure should identify a condition that will exist when the goal has been accomplished. The measures are the set of desired outcomes required to change the status quo.

Each key result measure has an accountable person who owns it. Initially the champion may take ownership, but as the plan develops anyone in the organization can end up being accountable for a measure. If you have a formal annual review process it would be ideal that each measure ends up on someone's individual standard of performance. The accountable person can account for where we are, why we're there and what we're doing about it.

Key Result Measure:	Accountable Person	“Due by” Date
Action Step	One person's name	Finish within 7, 30, 60, or 90 days

The accountable person for each key result measure determines exactly what actions will be taken in the here and now to advance toward the completion of the measure. Actions need to happen today, this week, this month, or this quarter. Champions formulate their tactical plan in the form of zero to four, high-level, 90-day action steps.

W3 – What are we going to do? Who is going to do it? When will it be finished by?

What are we going to do? Each action step should encapsulate a “burst” of activity – some focused hours over a concentrated number of days. (Remember that we are squeezing these “developmental” activities into days that are dominated by operational demands.) Action step activities have to be in digestible chunks. The wording of action steps should assume a professional execution. Action plans are not intended to be highly detailed micro-step-by-step plans that require Microsoft Project to manage. We are all professionals and can trust that the owner will start early enough to meet deadlines, solicit input, produce sufficient drafts for review, incorporate feedback, etc. What we need is a commitment to complete actions with impact major enough to advance toward the goal's objective, i.e. key result.

Who is going to do it? One and only one person should be accountable for each action step, even for a team's effort. If everyone is responsible then no one is responsible.

When will it be finished? Each action step should have a clearly defined finish - it is done or not done, and no later than the “due by” date. The due by date should not be a projection of when you expect the action step to be completed, rather it is a drop dead date that represents a commitment about when the action step will be finished. Due by dates can be

- a **specific date**, if that date is meaningful, such as year-end **12/31/10**
- a **time frame** such as **ASAP** – i.e. under a week – or **within 30, 60, or 90 days**, or
- a **recurring timeframe** such as **Ongoing, Weekly, Monthly, Quarterly**.

Once there is an established set of action steps for all the goals and their measures, you need to work the plan. Set aside some time to review the goals and their measures once a month in your regular staff meeting. Focus on the 20% of the plan that requires more attention to get on track. As a group, hold each member responsible for fulfilling their commitments.

As part of the monthly review, each owner should identify what exactly they will accomplish today, this week, this month, this quarter to advance completion of their key result measure. They should add/replace their action steps appropriately. If the team is drifting, consider meeting more frequently for a while.

Every 3 to 4 months, get the entire team together, off-site with a skilled facilitator is ideal, to revalidate and re-evaluate the entire plan, consider major adjustments in the tactical plan, and refocus and re-energize the team.

Strategic Planning Definitions

Accountable Person: A **single named individual** who can account for **where we are** with regards to a key result measure, **why we're there**, and **what we're doing** about it – i.e. what are the next 90 days of action steps.

Action Plan: An organization of personal commitments that serves as a vehicle for causing a strategic goal to become a reality. It is comprised of:

A **Strategic Goal** statement – a pithy one-liner that captures the spirit of the required change in status quo.

A **Champion, Co-Champions** – folks who are accountable for shepherding the goal to completion.

A list of **Key Result Measures** – comprehensive, specific set of outcomes that define completion for the team.

An **Accountable Person** for each key result measure – the single, named individual accountable for the KRM

A set of 90-day **Action Steps** – specific actions to be finished in the next days and weeks that create results.

Champion: A named individual, the planning team's best mix of passion and competence, for shepherding a **Strategic Goal** over the next 12-18 months. They decide **how** the goal gets done while remaining accountable for **what** gets done through delivery of the team-set **key result measures** and operating through plans that are written, understood, reviewed and approved. An individual is the champion of one and only one goal. They and their co-champions are the forward wedge to personally guarantee that their goal is moving forward and will be completed as rapidly and completely as possible. They plow the road, garnering support and resources. They know the current state of progress on their goal at all times. They build and maintain corporate awareness and support. They represent the consensus and commitment of the entire planning team.

Co-champion(s): One or more named individuals who would be the champion of a strategic goal if the planning team didn't have someone with a stronger match of passion and competence. They **back up the champion** (usually the member[s] of the team who are accountable for the key result measures under the goal).

Customer: Someone who **has bought from you more than once** in the recent past – typically over the last 1-2 years. The customer can be recognized as the one with the open wallet. (There may be many end users of your service that your products must attract and service but if you don't also meet the needs of the customer you will never make a sale!)

End Users: The individuals who **ultimately use your product**. If your product does not meet the needs of the ultimate users there will be no motivation on the part of your customer to buy it. (For example, end users of Dove soap ask Wal-Mart, your potential customer, to carry the product.)

Market: A **collection of prospects** you have an effective way to **communicate** with, that have **common needs** that can be met by products your product group can develop, your sales team can deliver and your customer services group **can support**, that can generate **enough revenue** to be relevant at your current size. Markets can be defined by any criteria that groups your prospects such as application, function, geography, job title, industry, etc.

Mission: Your chosen approach over the next 3-5 years to fulfill your vision. It is an affirmation of:

Who you **want to be**

What you **want to do**

Who you **want to do it for**, and

Why you do it.

Product: The manifestation of the **value you create** for your customer. The "thing" they pay you for. Sometimes it is a physical thing like cable, screws, or disks, and sometimes it is an intangible thing such as advice.

Sale: A **one-time event** when money changes hands. The first sale typically costs more than the profit it generates. Typically you can only make a profit once there are multiple sales from the same organization – i.e., sales don't build a business, customers build a business.

Vision: The embodiment of your organization's internal gyroscope consisting of your **core purpose**, **core values** and a 10 to 30-year **big hairy audacious goal**.

What Myrna Associates can do for you

Myrna Associates enables you to transform the conceptual exercise of strategic planning into a tactical reality.

You and your senior management team produce a complete and powerful Strategic Plan in only two days. Unlike traditional strategic planning "experts" and their conceptual processes, the Myrna approach to strategic planning gets everyone to focus **on what's really important**, which results in **proactively changing the status quo**, not with a lifeless, bound summary, but with a **proven implementation process** that **keeps people on schedule, on track, and regularly held accountable** for 30-, 60-, and 90-day action steps.

Our method has proven highly effective while remaining affordable and timely. With a fee as low as \$8,000 and a 100% money-back satisfaction guarantee, you can feel confident in your decision to work with us.

The plans we help you create don't just sit on a shelf – they have concrete 30-, 60- and 90-day action steps with people assigned to them. This works because it creates ownership and accountability – and **results** as proven by our over 80% word-of-mouth client referral rate.

How we do it:

We initiate, supervise, and direct (subject to the CEO) all aspects of the strategic planning process leading up to execution of the plan. This includes soliciting and organizing the planning team's initial pre-meeting input, establishing a productive meeting environment, and getting everyone on the same page with regard to vision, mission, strategy, and strategic goals.

We participate in the creation of the plan from inception to completion, with ongoing 90-day action steps, including due dates and accountable parties.

We document the plan in Microsoft Word and PowerPoint format. Within a week of the meeting, we deliver individual notebooks and CDs to each team member that include the plan, notes from all discussions, records of input, and insights gained -- over 50 pages of valuable information. The CDs contain all working files, plan highlights, and photos of the planning retreat experience for each planning team member.

Follow-up services

To maintain momentum, follow-up support includes middle management presentations and one-day review meetings each quarter. Ongoing support includes annual planning meetings to close out last year's plan and generate an updated one.

What makes our services unique?

- A choice of **professional facilitators** you pick to match your organization's culture and needs. Each is highly skilled in producing productive conversations, facilitating the best team communication ever, and skillfully converting talk to action for breakthrough results. Each facilitator brings unique, relevant real-world and life experience to the meeting.
- A **planning process that customizes** itself around the unique issues of each organization while consistently providing the highly positive results you expect from a proven, formal process.
- **Affordable and predictable cost** in dollars and time.
- **All paperwork handled** by Myrna Associates with professionally presented results delivered within a week.
- Availability of facilitated **follow-on** presentations, reviews, and annual meetings to sustain momentum and accelerate implementation.
- **Field-proven solutions** to common business management and personnel problems presented as part of the discussion of issues.
- **Proven process** with hundreds of enthusiastic testimonials - a process that leads to renewed energy, focus, and incredible excitement and commitment.
- A 100% money-back **guarantee**.

If this appeals to you, arrange for a complementary consultation to determine if the program is right for you and you are right for the program. Call us at (800) 207-8192, email us at success@myrna.com, and investigate our process at myrna.com.

About John W. Myrna

John W. Myrna is co-founder of Myrna Associates Inc., a renowned group of facilitation experts and consultants who help organizations plot successful paths during retrenchment as well as periods of expansion.

Using proprietary techniques, Myrna Associates helps management teams to go from strategy to action plans and accountability quickly, starting with two-day off-site meetings and followed by one-on-one coaching and team reviews.

He is a contributing author of *The Business Expert Guide to Small Business Success*, writing chapters on strategic business planning and implementation.

His recent books, *An End to Meeting Madness*, coauthored with team member Maria C. Birkhead, and *Where the Hell Are We*, document his successful methodologies validated over 30 years of strategic experience.

Contact John at johnw@myrna.com or his company's website, www.myrna.com.



Testimonials

Since 1991, Myrna Associates' Total Quality Planning process has helped many organizations create the future they want. We have enthusiastic testimonials from organizations as varied as community banks, law firms, automotive parts manufacturers, associations, market research firms, pharmaceutical API manufacturers, and luxury goods importers. Here's a sampling of what our clients have to say:

"The Myrna process gave us the structure and focus to understand where we are, where we want to be, and a means to get from here to there. After several years of unsuccessfully trying to do this ourselves, we're pleased to have had this opportunity and a great facilitator [George Fowler] to achieve this." **Harley L. Moore, Chairman, Principal - Lea+Elliott Inc.**

"Jim [Kabbani] has been a tremendous benefit to our team helping us to build consensus and a shared vision of our future. His measured approach and broad view of our business issues allows him to guide us and change directions as the meetings evolve and new challenges develop." **Bob Deprez, President and CEO - MGI Manufacturing Inc.**

"John's two-day strategic planning with our company was outstanding. It was engaging, high intensity, focused, very practical and truly a road map that can produce measurable results. Thanks, John." **Dr. Istiaq Khan, CEO Choice Care Occupational Medicine**

"Thank you for a fun-filled, productive two days. You have exceeded my expectations in the accomplishment of our strategic plan. I would suggest that any company with a new president or promoted employees use this process to align the team."
Norbert O. Kaiser, President - Kamco Plastics

"George Fowler, and the Myrna Strategic Planning Process, was the piece of the business that had eluded Exacto in the last several years. Our team is a fantastic one, from a creative level, but we lack the discipline piece for accountable follow-through. George has helped us, in two short days, to mature professionally, which will begin to guide us to solid growth. Thank you!" **Diana L. Braun, President Exacto Inc.**

"Strategic planning is perhaps the most important task a management team and a board can perform. It sets the focus and the direction, and engenders the support essential to success. – Thank you, John Myrna and Maria Birkhead, for doing a wonderful job of facilitating." **Mark H. Anders, President & CEO - AmericasBank Corp**

"The Myrna facilitator [Maria Birkhead] conducting our first strategic planning session was nothing short of amazing. In the two-day session, we discussed and tackled multiple core deficiencies in our operation and emerged with a specific plan to address each. We jointly developed a vision for our companies' future, a public mission statement and specific action plans to correct existing issues and capitalize our strengths in the future." **Nicholas Barrett, CEO - Law Offices of Nicholas Barrett & Associates**

"John [Myrna], you have the passion and competence to lead leaders at the highest level I've ever experienced."
Rev. Rodney B. Hart, President - Teen Challenge New England

"John, you transform a conceptual exercise (strategic planning) into a tactical reality. Myrna Associates' strategic planning process has directly contributed to our five-fold increase in EBIDA." **Bob Posten - tnsLandis Strategy & Innovation, Co-president tnsLandis**