

“You need to be more strategic.” These are words that are thrown around a lot and for task-oriented leaders, these words instill fear and panic. But they do not need to. You will be surprised at how easy it is to demonstrate strategic thinking, while leaning on your superpower of focusing on the details.

What is Strategic Thinking?

The Center for Management & Organization Effectiveness defines strategic thinking as “an intentional and rational thought process that focuses on the analysis of critical factors and variables that will influence the long-term success of a business.” In short, the ability to see all the pieces of the puzzle and communicate them effectively.

As a task-oriented leader, you already do this! You know the steps that need to happen, as well as the risks/contingencies to consider. Here is a process (task-list) to help you demonstrate your strategic thinking.

Laying Out the Puzzle Pieces

First, identify all the pieces of the puzzle.

- List the starting point and the ending point. Where are things now and where do they ultimately need to be?
- List all the steps to make that happen.
- Add an estimated timeframe for each step. Make sure your estimates are realistic.
- List any stakeholders that need to be involved, informed, or consulted.
- For each step, identify any risks and dependencies. What could possibly go wrong?
- Define actions to mitigate any risks that you have identified. What contingencies need to be put in place? Is there a “Plan B” if that step is not possible or it is delayed?

You now have all the pieces of the strategy defined. Let us start putting it together.

Putting the Pieces Together

The next step in the process is to put the pieces together to form the full picture, a.k.a. the short-term and long-term strategies. Start by bucketing tasks/steps by their timing.

Do not worry about the risks, contingencies, and mitigation quite yet. We will discuss that in the next step.

- For the items to do in the current year, bucket tasks by the most logical timing. This could be by month or by quarter. This creates your short-term strategy.
- For anything further out, bucket them by year: 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025. This creates your long-term strategy.

Communicate the Puzzle You Created

The last step is to showcase your puzzle and your ability to put all the pieces together (strategic thinking). It is typically best to present your strategy visually, so that others can see everything in a logical sequence. But use whatever method resonates with your intended audience.

Good news – you do not have to start from scratch. There are many templates and models available to help you with this (PowerPoint, SlideModel.com, etc.) The key is to present it in a clean, concise way that your end user can follow. Here are some tips to create the visual:

- Identify a theme/trend for each bucket: Analysis, Development, Implementation, etc.
- List the steps within each bucket.
- For each bucket, highlight the stakeholders, risks, and mitigation actions.

Congratulations! You now have a comprehensive strategic plan – you just had to put the pieces together and present the completed puzzle!



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