

# RICK'S TIPS

*Rick's Tips* explores the competencies necessary for successful leadership and provides activities to assist with the development and mastery of these skills.

## THE EXECUTIVE GROUP

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# CREATIVITY

## THE PATH TO SUCCESSFUL PROBLEM-SOLVING

“Life is a continuous exercise in creative problem-solving.”  
– Michael Gelb

A problem is anything that is currently happening that shouldn't be happening OR anything that is not happening that should be.

Problem-solving is really decision-making. It is not enough to simply make a decision in order to problem-solve. You must engage in decision making with a purpose and that involves:

- Proper awareness that problem exists
- Objectivity
- Listening and asking questions
- Time and setting deadlines
- Challenge
- Removing emotion and bias

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### THE PROBLEM-SOLVING PROCESS

- Preparation: know what needs to be accomplished
- Data Gathering: seek knowledge, ask advice (\*you will never have all the facts)
- Write It Down: list advantages and disadvantages
- Give It Time: take a step back; time provides perspective
- Implementation: act on it, no decision is risk free
- Alternate Plan of Action: things change, have a back-up plan
- Follow Through: evaluate and make changes

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## LEADERSHIP REQUIRES STRATEGISTS

There are more people good at producing short-term results than there are visionary strategists. It is more likely an organization will be out maneuvered strategically than it will be out produced tactically. Most organizations do well at what they do today. It is what they need to be doing tomorrow that is missing.

Being strategic relies on freedom early and structure later, not structure first. Testing strategic ideas is no different than any other problem-solving/evaluation process. The difference is in how the ideas get generated.

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## DEVELOP STRATEGIC THINKING

To develop your strategy thinking, you must first understand what impedes strategy. It is our own thinking and actions, and in some instances the organization and culture, but there are numerous elements that get in the way of our ability to be strategic in our thinking.

### **Strategic thinking is impacted by:**

- Thinking patterns and narrow mindedness
- Being uncomfortable with risk, uncertainty and change
- Being too busy with today's tasks
- Being more comfortable with tactical roles
- Having limited background in our roles and outside expertise
- Lacking flexibility and requiring structure
- Not talking strategically

### **Strategic thinking requires:**

- Anticipating future consequences and trends accurately
- Broadening knowledge and perspective
- Being futuristic in thought
- Articulating credible pictures and visions of possibilities
- Creating competitive and breakthrough strategies and plans

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## TAKE ACTION

To develop strategic thinking ability, practice the following:

### **Speak Strategically**

If you want to be seen as more strategic, you have to talk more strategically. Speaking strategically is a mind set and a form of communication that lets everyone know you are strategic. Every discipline has its “buzz words”, learn to use them effectively.

### **Do Not Reject Strategy**

While it is true that most strategic plans never work out as planned, that doesn't mean that it was a wasted effort. Strategic plans lead to choices about resources and deployment. They lead to different staffing actions and different financial plans. Remember, most failed companies got buried strategically not tactically.

### **Be More Curious**

Being a visionary and a good strategist requires curiosity and imagination. It requires playing “what ifs.” Nobody knows the answers to the “what if” questions, but good strategists form the questions. Work at developing broader interests outside your business. Think about tomorrow. Talk to others about what they think the future will bring.

### **Broaden Your Perspective**

Some people are sharply focused on what they do and do it very well. They have prepared themselves for a narrow but satisfying career without even realizing it. Then someone tells them their job has changed, and they now have to be strategic. Being strategic requires a broad perspective. In addition to knowing one thing well, it requires that you know a lot about a lot of things.

### **Make the Time**

Finding the time is always a challenge. Strategy is usually last on the list. Solving today's problems, of which there are many, is job one. You have to make time for strategy. A good strategy releases future time because it makes choices clear and leads to less wasted effort. Steps toward finding the time to be strategic include effective delegation and better time management.

### **Become Comfortable with Risk**

Strategic planning is the most uncertain thing leaders do next to managing people. It requires assumptions about the unknown. Most strategies can be challenged, questioned and come down to one subjective estimate versus another. Learn to be okay with this.

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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Developing Strategic Thought](#) by Bob Garrett

[Strategy Pure and Simple](#) by Michel Robert

[Strategic Planning: What Every Manager Must Know](#) by George Steiner

“There is no doubt that creativity is the most important human resource of all.”  
– Edward de Bono