



2016

# GUIDE TO STRATEGIC PLANNING

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## Simple Strategic Planning

When you decided to start your business (or buy it), you had specific ideas in mind of what your business would do, what would make it special, what it would provide for you and your family, and you had certain goals that you were driven to achieve. Some of those goals were for your business; other goals were centered on how you would personally benefit when those business goals were met. So you took the risk and went into business!

Remember how much passion you had in your work when you first became a business owner? There was so much to do, so little time! You went to work early and stayed up late working on your business. Your mind never seemed to “turn off.” You obsessed about creating a profitable, valuable, extraordinary company. You and your team worked hard and were focused on the most important things that needed to get done.

But as time passed, perhaps you’re feeling different now. Has your passion turned into a “job?” Have you stopped being laser-focused on achieving your goals? Do you even have specific goals anymore? Have you lost the focus and determination you once had? If so, please know you’re not alone! In fact, it’s common.

Here’s why: When you first became a business owner, you had a clear idea of what you were building and why you were building it. Your team was much smaller, so it was easier to keep everyone focused on the “mission.” Most start-up companies are in “critical condition,” so there were external motivations to succeed (ie; staying alive!) in addition to your intrinsic drive to build a wildly successful company. But as time has passed and your early successes were realized, the battle of business start-ups wore you down.

Your company developed as it did (for better or worse) and much of what you focus on now has more to do with “getting through the day” rather than staying laser-focused on achieving your original vision. Your team, your customers, even your brand is more entrenched in history than driven by your dreams for a better future. Yes, you want things to be better, and you want your company to continue to grow in success, but your daily actions are more centered on crisis management and short-term thinking than in strategic, long-term planning. The “grind” of that eventually takes its toll and the excitement of yesterday gets replaced with accepting things as they are. That’s a natural reaction and the good news is there’s a lot you can do about it! The first step in getting yourself and your team reengaged is to create (or update) a Simple Strategic Plan.

I’m not talking about a huge, complicated document that will sit on a shelf! I’m talking about a critical tool that will reengage your passion and provide a roadmap to your ultimate success.

## What is a Simple Strategic Plan?

In a nutshell (and discussed in detail later), a Simple Strategic Plan includes:

1. A clearly defined “Vision” for the company
2. Specific and measurable goals for your company
3. An assessment of current conditions vs. desired outcomes
4. A specific plan to close the gap of the way things are to the way things should be

### Step 1: The Vision

Think about putting together a 500 piece puzzle. What do you have in front of you the entire time? The box-cover, of course! Imagine how much more difficult it would be to try to put a puzzle together without the benefit of the picture in front of you! Now imagine if several people were trying to put the puzzle together without the benefit of the picture. It would be chaotic to say the least!

So why do many small to medium sized business owners go to work each day trying to put the proverbial puzzle together without a clear picture (or vision) of what they’re building? How can a team of people work in synchronicity if they don’t have a clear understanding of what they’re building together? It is important that you and your team have a clearly articulated and understood vision (picture) of what your company is supposed to look like and the clearly defined principles which will lead you there. That vision is expressed in your company Vision Statement.

A company’s “Vision Statement” expresses specifically “Who the company is supposed to be.” It answers the question, “What does this company need to look like for me (the owner) to be completely satisfied?” Remember, this statement is “future oriented” and clearly (yet broadly) states what your company will become.

The Vision Statement is an explanation of why the company exists and what its purpose is. It describes the company’s personality and the overall strategic philosophy of the company. Think of it as a combination of a “Who we are,” “Why we’re here” and a “What guides us” statement. It is your company’s “Declaration.”

Here is a sample Vision Statement (from Apple Computer) that you can use as a model to get yourself going in creating your own:

*"We believe that we are on the face of the earth to make great products and that's not changing. We are constantly focusing on innovating. We believe in the simple not the complex. We believe that we need to own and control the primary technologies behind the products that we make, and participate only in markets where we can make a significant contribution. We believe in saying no to thousands of projects, so that we can really focus on the few that are truly important and meaningful to us. We believe in deep collaboration and cross-pollination of our groups, which allow us to innovate in a way that others cannot. And frankly, we don't settle*

*for anything less than excellence in every group in the company, and we have the self-honesty to admit when we're wrong and the courage to change. And I think regardless of who is in what job those values are so embedded in this company that Apple will do extremely well." - Tim Cook, CEO of Apple Computer ([Quoted on CNN Money.com](#)).*

You'll notice that Apple Computer's Vision Statement is a brilliant example of defining who they are as a company and the guiding principles from which they will operate.

Please note: When you create your company's Vision Statement, all of your strategy decisions and actions must be congruent with achieving that vision. Therefore, it's important that your Vision Statement be an honest representation of what you're committed to building and the guiding principles in which you will operate. This is not a marketing exercise; it is a declaration that you and your team are committed to actually achieving.

Here are some sample questions to ask yourself (and your team) as you're putting together the ideas of what you want to include in your Vision Statement:

- Why did you start (or buy or inherit) your company?
- What makes your company so great?
- How are you different from your competitors?
- Why should people want to work at your company?
- Why should your customers buy from you instead of your competitor?
- What are the guiding principles that will keep you in line with own uniqueness?
- Any other questions you think are important in defining who your company is, why it exists, and what your company is going to accomplish.

After you've completed your first draft, please read the draft to yourself and then ask yourself, "Does this Vision Statement touch me on an emotional level?" If it does, great! You did it. You've created your Vision Statement! But if your draft did not touch you emotionally, then you have to look at all the answers you gave to the initial questions you asked yourself and for each answer you gave, ask a new question: "Why is my answer important?" You're questioning deeply into your original answers so you can get to the heart of what's truly important to you. Write down the answers and then repeat the process. Use those deeper answers to create a deeper Vision Statement draft. Do this until you're affected on an emotional level when you read your Vision Statement draft. When that happens, you've got it!

**ACTION STEP: Please create your company Vision Statement.**

In the next section, you'll work backward from your Vision to set your major goals!

## **Step 2: Goal Setting**

So far, we've addressed the importance of having a Simple Strategic Plan. It is an easy-to-use and effective tool to help you in staying focused on achieving your dreams of going into business for yourself. This tool helps you to work "on" your business, as opposed to just working "in" it.

The first-step you took was to create your Vision Statement. It is analogous with having the picture in front of you when putting together a jigsaw puzzle. Before we move to Step-2 in creating your Simple Strategic Plan, let's review the sections of the plan.

The sections of a Simple Strategic Plan are as follows:

1. A clearly defined "Vision" for the company
2. Specific and measurable goals for your company
3. An assessment of current conditions vs. desired outcomes
4. A specific plan to close the gap of the way things are to the way things should be

In the last section, you learned how to create a powerful "Vision Statement" to begin the process of developing your own Simple Strategic Plan. If you completed your action step, then congratulations! Now we'll move to Step-2 in your strategic planning: *Defining the "Specific and Measureable Goals for your Company."*

### **Setting Specific and Measurable Goals for your Company**

Perhaps you've heard the old saying, "If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there." That begs the question, "If you don't know where you're going, how do you know how to get there?" The answer, of course, is that you can't know! (Have you ever felt like you're spinning your wheels? Perhaps that's why!)

A goal is a statement of your desired result. It specifically states what you plan to accomplish within a given timeframe.

### **What are the important goals your company needs to reach?**

As you answer that question, please be sure your goals are:

- (1) Valuable (meaningful to your company)
- (2) Attainable (not easy to hit, but not impossible either)
- (3) Measureable (in other words, specific and quantifiable by some means)
- (4) Committed to memory (don't overdo it; limit your major goals to only a few things so everyone remembers what they're supposed to achieve)

(5) So important to you that you actually have a “burning desire” to accomplish them (because passion is everything)

(6) Have a specific end-date attached to them (because without a deadline, there is no sense of urgency to fuel the fire)

As you’re setting your company goals, it is important to involve your team in the process, starting with your leadership team. If everyone has a say in the company goals, then everyone has ownership of the goal. This will make the goal(s) more memorable to your team and since they were involved in creating the goals, they’ll be much more likely to have the “burning desire” necessary to achieve the goals.

As you’re doing your goal setting, please don’t overdo it! Remember, it is important to limit your goals to just a couple major goals at a time; one or two major goals is best, and no more than three. You and your team must be laser focused on achieving the goals and if you have too many, you’ll lose focus.

Once you’ve settled on your major goals for the year (or whatever time period your goals are within), please take the time to read them and then answer the question, “Are these the most important goals for us to be focused on right now?” If the answer to that question is, “No, these are not the most important goals,” then go back to your team and continue working on them until they are. Do this until you’re completely satisfied that you’ve identified the most important goals to be achieved.

Once you’re satisfied that you’ve identified the most important goals, please congratulate yourself and your team! You’re ready for Step-3 in developing your Simple Strategic Plan.

Before you can determine what strategies and tactics to implement to move your company directly toward your goals, you need to know where you are now relative to where you want to be. In the next section, we’ll talk about different tools and strategies to use in identifying the “gaps” that stand in the way of realizing your goals!

Here’s your next action step:

**ACTION STEP: Identify the most important goals your company should be focusing on.**

Once you have that done, along with your completed Vision Statement, you’ll be half-done in completing your powerful Strategic Plan! You will be ready to move to Step-3 in your strategic planning!

## Touchpoint

Now that you have your company Vision Statement written and have identified the major goals that are most important to achieving your Vision, it's time take inventory of where you are now relative to where you want to be.

As you'll recall, the elements of a Simple Strategic Plan are:

1. A clearly defined "Vision" for the company
2. Specific and measurable goals for your company
3. An assessment of current conditions vs. desired outcomes
4. A specific plan to close the gap of the way things are to the way things should be

So far, we've discussed why a clearly defined "Vision" for your business is paramount. We also covered the fundamentals of creating a meaningful "Vision" for your company. Your first action step was to create your company "Vision Statement."

Then, we moved to Step-2 and discussed why goal-setting is important. We talked about the elements of a powerful goal, and you learned some tips to get you started in creating your company goals. Your next action step was to work with your team (or by yourself or with a business coach) and set the most important goals your company should be focused on accomplishing.

If you completed both of your action steps, then you are ready for Step-3 in developing your company's Simple Strategic Plan!

### STEP-3 - An Assessment of Current Conditions vs. Desired Outcomes

#### Determine the Gaps Between Where You Are and Where You Want To Be

Before you can determine which strategies and tactics you'll need to implement to move your company directly toward your goals, you need to know where you are now relative to where you want to be.

For each goal you have (and hopefully you only have a couple big ones), ask yourself, "Where are we now vs. where we want to be?"

For example, if your goal is to "Grow annual sales to \$5MM," then you must ask yourself what your prior year's sales were. In this example, let's suppose your prior year's annual sales were \$4,500,000. In doing this, you have clearly defined for yourself the "Desired Outcome" (\$5MM) and the "Current Condition" (\$4,500,000). The measurable difference (or gap) between the Desired Outcome and the Current Condition is \$500,000 (in this example).

#### Identify All of the Possible Strategies (or "ways") of Closing the Gap

Now that you've identified all of the "gaps" standing between where you are now and where you want to be (your goals), you must now determine all of the possible ways to close that gap.

Using the above example, you would ask yourself, "*What are all the possible strategies we can implement in order to close that gap and increase sales by \$500,000 per year?*"

Some of your answers (to this particular example) could include:

1. Provide sales training to our sales team
2. Determine which "value-added" services we can sell to our existing customers
3. Improve our online presence
4. Refresh our prospect database
5. Hire another sales rep (or replace our existing salesperson)

Once you identify all of the possible strategies you can put in place to close the gap from where you are to where you want to be (in this example, to increase sales by \$500,000 per year), it's time to prioritize the strategies.

#### Identify Your Top-Priority Strategies

Ask yourself, "*From all of the strategies I just identified, what are the top two or three that should be worked on first?*"



Once you have those identified, it's time to create the tactics, or "must dos" in order for each of those top-priority strategies to be fully implemented.

### Create a List of Tactics (or "must dos") for Each of Top-Priority Strategy

For example, if one of your top strategies (in the same example we've been using) is "Hire another sales representative," then under that strategy, identify all of the things that need to happen for that strategy to be fully implemented. You're creating a checklist of tactics for yourself to guide you in executing your overall top-priority strategy. In this example, your tactics may include:

- Write (or update) the job description
- Identify the personal qualities and business experience levels that would be best for this position
- Decide on the compensation plan that will be offered
- Advertise the position on (whatever job-seeker site you use)
- Create (or update) the initial training program for this position
- Create (or look into outsourcing) an ongoing sales management program to support the new salesperson
- Create a workspace for the new salesperson
- Etc..

Now, it's time to take action!

### Giving Yourself Action Steps

Look at all of the tactics you just identified. Now, ask yourself, "What can I do in the next seven days to begin the process of knocking off those tactics?" Remember, you can't overdo it! Whatever you commit to in this step **MUST** be completed within the next seven days!

Obviously, you want to carefully consider each of the tactics (or must-dos) you identified as necessary in fully-executing each of your priority-strategies. Invest time and consideration in prioritizing you tactics. It's important that when you choose which tactics to work on first, you're being smart to make sure you're working on the most important things first.

In my experience, a good rule-of-thumb is to give yourself two hours or so of actions steps each week (in addition to the day-to-day operations you're currently responsible for). If you can invest more time working on your weekly action steps; great! But to maximize the benefit of strategic planning, you must be regimented in your execution of the plan. In order to be regimented, you must identify your action steps on a weekly basis, complete those action steps, and then identify next week's action steps. This is a continual process.

## **ACTION STEPS**

- 1. Determine specifically what the gaps are between your goal (Desired Outcome) and your Current Conditions.**
- 2. Determine all of the overall strategies you could employ to close that gap.**
- 3. Identified which of those overall strategies is the highest-priority (to be worked on first).**
- 4. Create tactics (or “must-dos”) for each of the top priority strategies.**
- 5. Prioritize your tactics (must-dos).**
- 6. Assign yourself specific action-steps that you will take within the next seven days.**

Congratulations! You did it! You started your Simple Strategic Plan by creating a vision of what it is you’re building.

Then, you identified the top two or three major goals your team will go after.

After that, you took inventory of specifically where you are now (Current Condition) from where you want to be (Desired Outcome / Goal).

Using that information, you determined the best overall strategies to use to be able to close that gap. Then, you prioritized the strategies by identifying the top two or three that should be implemented first.

Once you had the top-priority strategies identified, you identified all of the tactics (or must-dos) required for each of those top-priority strategies to be fully executed. Then, you prioritized those tactics.

Finally, you considered your priority-tactics and then assigned yourself specific action steps to begin the process of completing those tactics!

## Summary

By using this easy-to-use, practical Simple Strategic Plan, you:

1. Turned your ideas and wishes into a clearly defined Vision.
2. Determined the top couple of major goals for your organization.
3. Identified the “gaps” between where you are now and where you want to be
4. Created a specific plan to close those gaps by (1) identifying the strategies to close them, (2) prioritizing the strategies, (3) creating tactics for the top-priority strategies, (4) prioritizing the tactics, and finally, (5) determining specifically which tactics you will work on in the next seven days by assigning yourself specific action steps to be taken within the next week.

This is how serious business-development happens – Step-by-Step! It starts with your Vision and ends up with the “smartest things you can do this week.”

For your convenience, here is a quick-reference guide to assist you in creating your own Simple Strategic Plan:

## Creating a Simple Strategic Plan Quick-Reference

1. Create a Vision Statement
2. Create Major Goals
3. Identify the Gaps
4. Identify the Strategies to Close the Gaps
5. Prioritize the Strategies
6. Create a Tactics List for Each Priority Strategy
7. Prioritize the Tactics List
8. Create Specific Action Steps to be Taken Within the Next Seven Days and then Complete Them

One week later...

1. Measure the Results of your completed Action Steps
2. Determine the Next Most Important Action Steps for the Following Week
3. Create Specific Action Steps to be Taken within the Next Seven Days and the Complete Them

One week later...

Once you get started using this type of planning, you must make sure you complete your actions steps each week and also (critically important), you must plan for next week's action steps based on what you got done this week.

### Here's the catch, though...

You have to realize that this type of strategic planning and executing is ignored (or postponed) week-in and week-out because it does not feel pressing. This is not about putting out the proverbial fires in your business!

The "fires" I'm referring to are the things that demand your attention immediately. They include (but are not limited to):

- Returning phone calls
- Handling customer complaints
- Working on proposals that have deadlines for submission
- Employee issues
- Equipment failures
- Cash flow issues
- Replying to emails
- Etc...

The problem with strategic planning and then implementing the strategic plan is that it never feels urgent! It seems to always be able to wait until later. Unfortunately, “later” seems to never come. The result of that is what you’ve probably already experienced:

- Frustration
- Stagnation
- Lack of significant growth
- Continued unmet opportunities
- Low company value
- Burnout

### The Solution

To rectify that, it is important that you make strategic planning and executing the action steps a priority by actually scheduling time for it each week. We’re only talking about an hour or so of planning and two hours or so of completing your action-steps. So in total, you only have to block off around three hours per week. Once you have that time blocked (scheduled), you must be sure to schedule all of your day-to-day duties around that precious strategy time!

This is where a good business coach can be your greatest asset.

To assist you in being accountable to your planning and strategic action steps, it’s a smart idea to hire a business coach to assist you.

It is very difficult to work alone in strategizing for your business. A business coach can help you by being a great sounding board, and also in helping you when you get stuck in your planning. Further, when you have a business coach, you have the benefit of personal accountability!

To be sure, you are not accountable to your coach, but you are accountable to the coaching process!

If you know your coach is going to be there at 1pm on Mondays (for example), then you’ll plan around it and you’ll be sure nothing conflicts with that critically important meeting. You also know that by 1pm on Monday, you had better have your action steps from last week completed!

When you have a business coach, you have what equates to a “personal trainer” who will help you in your commitment to calculated and continual business development.

If you’re thinking you can do it alone, then absolutely go for it! But if after trying you come to realize you’re not able to stick with it, you may want to consider doing something different. After all, if you...the owner...is not doing the important strategic work in your company, then who is?

Congratulations again on taking these important steps to make your business work for you. I wish you all my best!