

Strategic Thinking Cheat Sheet

The 6 Key Elements of Strategic Thinking

Anticipate – Many people focus on what’s directly ahead. They lack “peripheral vision.” This can leave you vulnerable to bad decisions. To anticipate well, you must:

- Go beyond the immediately available information.
- Look for future obstacles by looking at what has happened in the past.
- Talk to people who have been there before.

Think Critically - Critical thinkers question everything. To master this skill you must force yourself to:

- Reframe problems to get to the bottom of things, in terms of root causes
- Challenge current beliefs and mindsets, including your own
- Uncover hypocrisy, manipulation, and bias in others and your thinking

Interpret - Ambiguity is unsettling. Faced with it, the temptation is to reach for a fast (and potentially wrongheaded) solution. A good strategic thinker holds steady, synthesizing information from many sources before developing a viewpoint. To get good at this, you have to:

- Seek patterns in multiple sources of data
- Encourage others to do the same
- Question prevailing assumptions and test multiple hypotheses simultaneously

Decide - Many decision makers fall prey to “analysis paralysis.” You have to develop processes and enforce them, so that you arrive at a “good enough” position. To do that well, you have to:

- Carefully frame the decision to get to the crux of the matter
- Balance speed, rigor, quality and agility. Don’t be plagued with perfection
- Take a stand even with incomplete information and amid diverse views

Align - Total consensus is rare. A strategic thinker must foster open dialogue, build trust and engage key stakeholders, especially when views diverge. To pull that off, you need to:

- Understand what drives other people's agendas, including what remains hidden
- Bring tough issues to the surface, even when it's uncomfortable
- Assess risk tolerance and follow through to build the necessary support

Learn- As your success grows, honest feedback is harder and harder to come by. You have to do what you can to keep it coming. This is crucial because success and failure--especially failure--are valuable sources of personal learning. Here's what you need to do:

- Encourage and exemplify honest, rigorous feedback from others to gain lessons
- Shift course quickly if you realize you're off track
- Celebrate both success and (well-intentioned) failures that provide insight