

Pre-Work: Preparing for the Workshop

Workshop Preview

People—especially in business—use the term “strategic” often, almost always implying that being strategic is a good and necessary thing, and yet we seem to have very little agreement about what it means. If you asked ten different people what they think “strategic” means, you’d probably get ten different answers, ranging from “being smart about our competition,” to “thinking long-term,” to “not getting caught in the details.”

The *Being Strategic* workshop offers skills and approaches to help you lead more strategically, as well as develop others to do the same thing. Because strategy can be interpreted in so many different ways, we should begin with a common definition:

BEING STRATEGIC
Consistently making the core directional
choices that will best move you toward
your envisioned future.

This is a deceptively simple sentence. There’s a lot in there. First, it’s hard to know what’s going to move you in the direction of your “envisioned future” unless you know both where you are now and what that “envisioned future” looks like. Then you can figure out what the best “core directional choices” are to get you there. Otherwise, it’s like saying, “I’m going to take a trip, but I’m not sure where I am now, and I’m not sure where I want to end up.” You’d have a hard time knowing which highway to choose!

And then there’s that word “consistent.” Once you’re clear on where you’re starting from and where you want to get to, and you’ve made those core directional choices that will get you from here to there—you have to learn how to be focused on making decisions and taking actions that will consistently support those choices.

This definition highlights how being strategic is a capability you can develop—in yourself and others. And that’s what this course is designed to help you do.

Define Your Challenge

During the workshop you'll have the opportunity to apply what you learn to your own business issue.

Please identify an Assortment Planning challenge you are facing. It might be about how to address what isn't working in the current season, it might be related to feedback you received in the most recent Rack meetings, it might be about an opportunity to grow the business. When selecting an Assortment Planning challenge you're trying to address, please identify a high-priority issue you are facing in your business—something that might take up to 2 years to implement—and be sure to review the example with your manager prior to the workshop.

We would like you to begin working on your individual issue now so that we can use our time together in class most effectively. The following questions will help you frame your challenge—please bring your preparation with you to the workshop.

What isn't working?

People generally don't like to focus on what isn't working. We tend to move too quickly to solutions. We don't want to think about what isn't working; we want to fix it! To be strategic about crafting a solution, though, we have to get clear about the problem. Take a few moments to note on a blank sheet of paper what isn't working right now relative to your current situation at work.

How can we/I...?

Once you've looked clear-eyed and unflinching at what isn't working, it's fairly easy to frame the challenge. It helps to put it in the form of a "how can I" question (e.g., "How can I keep my most promising managers highly engaged until more senior roles become available?") That kind of question helps you state your desired outcome.

Review what you wrote above about what's not working now relative to your current situation at work and then write a simple "how can I" question that captures the core of your problem.

My draft challenge question: _____

Would this feel like success?

This is your checking question. It gives you a way to make sure you've defined the challenge accurately. Just ask yourself, "If I found the answer to my 'how can I' question, would I feel I had succeeded in addressing this challenge?" If not, revise the question until meeting the challenge would feel like success.