



# Why the traditional approaches to **Strategic Planning** don't work and what to do about it.

A booklet for non-profit organizations considering a more effective way of undertaking strategic planning

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# Strategies that Work

A booklet for non-profit organizations considering a more effective way of undertaking strategic planning

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## Overview

The objective of this book is to remove some of the “shock and horror” that many organizations go through when they do strategic planning.

Even brave people will go to great lengths to avoid participating in a strategic planning process.

The main reason for this aversion to strategic planning is because they have previously suffered through a very long process and all they have to show for it is a thick document packed with hundreds of initiatives that lands up on a shelf gathering dust.

Even worse, some people have experienced strategic planning sessions that resulted in detailed plans that stretched on for years into the future.

These detailed plans were then enforced without coming up for air from time to time to see if the action steps were still relevant.

Therefore, people hate strategic planning for good reason: the process is often costly in terms of time and energy and yet does not provide any real value.

However, the absence of a strategic plan for a non-profit is even worse.



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*"Hi Stuart,  
Thank you for your time and as always your seminar presentations are outstanding.  
The feedback I have received is great!"  
Anne Lorrigan  
HR Director  
YMCA of Simcoe/Muskoka*

# Strategies that Work

Why traditional approaches to strategic planning don't work and what to do about it.

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Stuart speaking at the CAFÉ Symposium in Toronto May 2006

## Common pitfalls in strategic planning

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The common pitfalls in strategic planning are:

1. **Producing a plan that is not actually strategic.** The strategic plan may have a mission and vision statement that sounds great but unless it addresses the key issues facing the organization it is not useful.
2. **Getting caught up in the day-to-day or operational issues.** Strategic planning is designed to address the big issues of direction for the organization and not the day-to-day issues.
3. **Internal focus.** Unless consideration is given to the client, members at large or other key stakeholders, the plan risks becoming unrealistic.
4. **Trying to do it all with inside staff.** Surgeons do not operate on themselves or their family, and lawyers maintain that, *"he who represents himself has a fool for a client."* The dynamics are the same in a good planning process.

The most common approach is to have an outside facilitator and outside (i.e. non staff) board members or other outside stakeholders attend.



5. **Developing a plan that is not meaningful.** Unless the board, executive director and staff know, understand and support the plan - it won't happen! For it to work, the plan must be effectively communicated and "sold" both inside and outside the organization.
6. **Developing a wish list instead of a plan.** No strategy is worth much until it's implemented. The plan needs to be translated into measurable components and discrete individual activities. Plus there must be enough follow-up, rewards, and consequences to put teeth into the actions.
7. **Strategic planning is treated as an event.** To be effective, your planning team must treat strategic planning as a process not an event. Reporting regularly against the plan helps participants realize when it is time to revisit the plan. The best strategies usually evolve: they seldom just happen over one weekend a year.

## A brief history of strategic planning

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The term "strategy" derives from the Greek "*strategos*," which means, literally, "general of the army." Each of the ten ancient Greek tribes annually elected a *strategos* to head its regiment.

At the battle of Marathon (490 BC), the *stratego*i advised the political ruler as a council. They gave "strategic" advice about managing battles to win wars, rather than "tactical" advice about managing troops to win battles.

In time, the job of the *stratego*i grew to include civil magisterial duties as well, largely because of their status as elected officials.

From these military roots, strategic planning has always aimed at the "big picture." The focus is on results or outcomes, rather than products or outputs.



Strategic planning is less concerned with how to achieve outcomes than with defining what those outcomes should be.

*Thus, strategic planning aims to exploit the new and different opportunities of tomorrow, in contrast to long-range planning, which tries to optimize for tomorrow the trends of today (Drucker 1980, p. 61).*

Strategic planning has gone through several major changes in the last 50 years.

Long range planning in the post World War II period was popular with large companies (such as oil companies) who needed to plan their capital needs over 20 – 50 year horizons.

Through the 1960's, strategic planning became a standard management tool in virtually every *Fortune 500* company, and many smaller companies as well.

With the oil crisis in the early 1970's, this kind of sudden disruption created the need for a short term, more flexible approach to planning and the term strategic planning as a discipline developed.

Until the mid-1980's, strategic planning remained mostly a private sector undertaking. Notions of customers, marketing, industry growth, market share and risk management were foreign to the public and non-profit sector. Instead, local

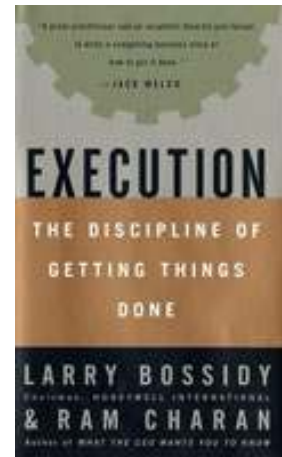
governments and non-profits wrote comprehensive plans that dealt with the efficiency of services and program plans, and were usually limited to narrow chains of authority on the organization chart.

In the mid 1990's the traditional approach to strategic planning came under attack from two fronts.

Firstly, a study done in the UK around this time provided the shocking result that 70% of strategic plans were never implemented! CEO's realized the need to become more focused on results.

Secondly, the arrival of the Internet changed the way many organizations looked at the future. To adapt, many organizations started to focus more on the customer as the basis for their strategic planning.

By 2002 business books (like *Execution*) became more focused on getting results and less on the traditional analysis in strategic planning.



Some organizations stopped doing strategic planning all together while others developed scenario planning and environmental scanning tools to try and predict the future.

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*"Stuart, we thoroughly enjoyed our time together at Beauchene and I think it was unanimous that this was one of our best, if not the best, retreats. Although I ...have done a lot of strategy planning, I found your common sense and direct approach very refreshing and effective.*

*Again thanks for sharing your wisdom and war stories.*

Best regards

Dave"

*C.J. David Nettleton  
President & CEO  
Sertapak Group Packaging Systems*

## The history of strategic mapping

Stuart Morley was involved in turning around companies in the early 1990's and found he did not have time to write 40-page strategic plans.

He developed a way to capture the most important information on one page. The essence of Stuart's approach is for the strategic planning group to be able to produce a strategic plan on one page in less than one day.

Stuart found the biggest gap in the strategic planning process was linking the vision or mission statements of the organization to some quantifiable benchmarks of success.

Organizations often spent too much time crafting a vision and /or mission statement and then struggling to develop action plans. These sessions developed too many action plans and then expected the staff and volunteers to implement them as well as do their assigned jobs. Stuart's process is not only about what to do but also using the strategic map to decide what to stop doing.

As more organizations achieved significant successes using this approach, Stuart has been asked to provide speeches, articles and now this booklet to help organizations understand why it is worth switching to this approach from the traditional approach to strategic planning.

More details on Stuart Morley are provided later in this document.



**Stuart facilitates strategic planning retreats**

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*"I have had the pleasure of working with Stuart Morley on many occasions and have always found Stuart to be extremely creative, very quick to identify and understand difficult issues and, more importantly, able to find practical solutions that work. Our work together focused largely on key strategic matters. Stuart always had effective ways to help me and my management team to work through a variety of complex issues, identify solutions and own the responsibility to make moves in new directions and/or implement corrective actions on a timely basis. I have recommended him to many other organizations and would not hesitate to do so again. He doesn't disappoint!"*

*Stan Thompson  
President  
Novartis Consumer Health*

## The success of the one page strategic plan

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The strategic mapping process involves a one-page planning tool that has been successfully used in more than 100 organizations in Canada and the USA.

It has been used by divisions of large professional firms as well as one-person businesses. The tool is so flexible it has been successfully used in non-profits, governments and associations. This process works. Try it!



Stuart Morley lives in Muskoka and some of the non-profits in his community that have successfully used his services include: the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare (MAHC), The Canadian Association of Family Enterprise (CAFE), the Community YWCA of Muskoka, and Muskoka Family Focus and Children's Place (MFF). In Toronto he has also used the strategic map to help organizations like The Association of Professional Speaker (CAPS) and Financial Executives International



canada

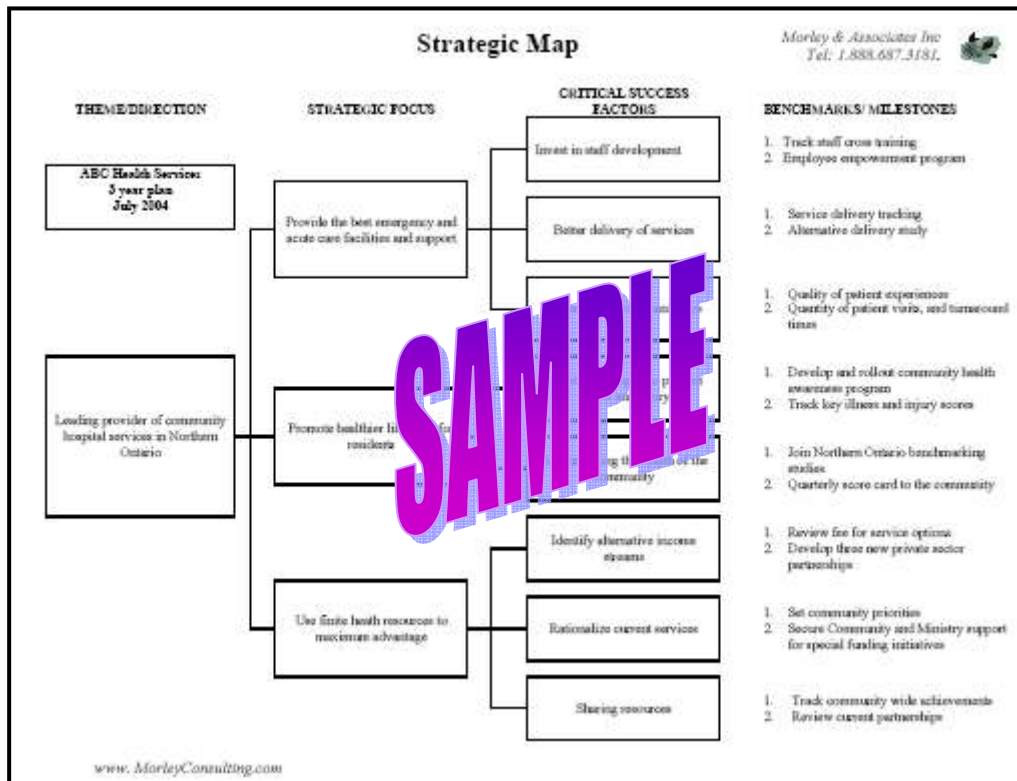
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*"Morley & Associates provided a Strategic Planning workshop for our not for profit agency. The workshop was excellent. Stuart's knowledge, combined with his clear and concise delivery of information, gave us a template to use in our growth as an agency. I would highly recommend them to anybody seeking direction in planning."*

*Jennifer Purkis  
Senior Manager  
Muskoka Family Focus & Children's Place*

# Benefits of strategic mapping compared to traditional approaches to strategic plans

A sample of a strategic map is shown below. The various elements of the strategic map are discussed later in this document.



Some of the benefits of the one-page strategic mapping process include:

**Time.** Traditional strategic planning processes can take three to six months to complete while the one-page strategic map can be completed in a day with the strategic planning group.

**Visibility.** Traditional strategic plans are documents of 20 - 400 pages in length and are often put in a bottom drawer and never looked at again. The one-page strategic map can be put on the wall by each employee's workspace.

**Trade offs.** The traditional approach to strategic plans means more work for employees in addition to their current workload. The one-page strategic map is not only about what is to be done, but also about what employees don't have to do. It encourages participants to consider what they should stop doing as well as what they should continue doing and start to do differently.

**Easy to update.**

A traditional strategic plan may need many drafts before completion. Many plans get so bogged down in the drafting that the plan is never finished. A one-page strategic map is easy to update if the situation changes.

**Results focused.**

Traditional strategic plans focus on the analysis of the market place and other factors that are important but often don't need to be captured in the plan.

The traditional strategic plan often does not provide a clear linkage to the milestones or benchmarks to be achieved.

The one-page strategic map has a clear set of benchmarks/milestones to be achieved. It is easy for organizations to develop operating plans that are linked to the benchmarks/ milestones in the strategic map.



**Speaker Series Luncheon: Stuart Morley**

1. **Checklist** - Allocation of work. Action steps are developed in this step and people are assigned to projects and teams. Everybody needs a list of what to do to get to the finishing line. It is important to remember that what you do in the future should be clarified, as well as when to do differently.

2. **Trade off** - Review the trade-offs between the technical and the strategic. You must understand what you can do and what you cannot do so that the business of the firm is clear.

3. **Plan II** - This step deals with performance and cost. You need to decide what to do if your plan doesn't work. It is important to discuss with yourself and your colleagues.

4. **Follow Up** - Monitor the progress and adjust the plan as needed.

5. **Success** - This is the celebration step. You need determine what the quick wins are to give people a sense of what they are going to do right, direction, and why some things the leaders are going to make and people will have to change. It is important to have a reward for success.

6. **Summary** - Review the plan and the progress. It is important to have a reward for success.

**Stuart's Strategic Mapping Workshop in Barrie**

Participate  
Adopt a strategy to create  
Adapt to a wide range of situations  
Plan  
Execute  
Track to realize  
Summary: Your Milestones

**Focus.**

Traditional strategic plans often have so many objectives to be accomplished that the whole process lacks focus. With a strategic map there are only 16 benchmarks (half qualitative and half quantitative) to achieve.

**Stop doing.**

A traditional strategic plan is viewed as the work an organization must take on in addition to the

current workload. The one-page plan is designed to be the only work the organization needs to do. Anything that does not contribute towards the benchmarks should be stopped or outsourced to someone else.

## Why most strategic planning processes fail

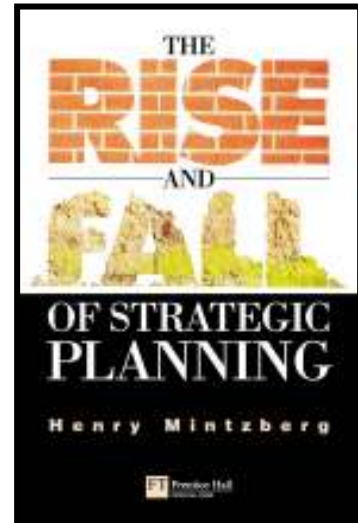
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According to recent studies *most strategic planning processes fail*. And why is that? Henry Mintzberg, probably the world's leading strategic planning scholar, and author of *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning* (Free Press, 1994), says the main reason is that traditional strategic planning provides "the illusion of control."

What this means is that, as most people do strategic planning the traditional way, they unwittingly build into it assumptions and strategies over which they personally have little or no control. "*If you plan it, it will happen.*" This is very seductive and difficult even for experienced planners to avoid.

Another reason is they treat it as an annual event rather than a process or journey that needs constant attention. Thirdly, they make the process too long and complicated.

In this booklet we will outline both the traditional approach and a more practical approach that is focused on getting results.



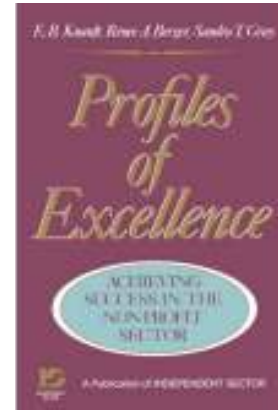
Note: In this booklet we use the term "executive director" to describe the top staff position in a non-profit organization. In some organizations the titles are President, CAO, CEO, General Manager or Senior Manager.

## What most executive directors think of strategic planning

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The four primary characteristics of successful non-profit organizations, according to the book *Profiles of Excellence*, are:

- a clear, agreed-upon mission statement (or direction)
- a strong, competent executive director
- a dynamic board of directors
- an organization-wide commitment to fundraising.



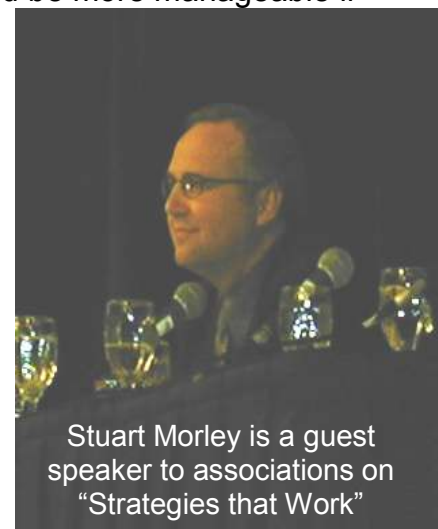
A clear direction or agreed upon mission statement is a key factor for success in non-profit organizations yet most executive directors don't like strategic planning....WHY?

A study done by CompassPoint Nonprofit Services of more than 1,000 executive directors found that executive directors thought their boards were most effective in “mission advocacy” and personal support for the executive director and less effective in strategic planning, fundraising, finances and community PR.

The toughest issue for executive directors is to get help with board development. In other words, executive directors felt their jobs would be more manageable if the governing abilities of their board improved and strategic planning is part of that process.

Long tenured executives felt the key to success was the constant attention to board development by both the executive director and board members.

As strategic planning is perhaps the most important aspect of an executive director's job, we will devote much of this booklet to what to do and why non profits should do this and less on how to do complete the strategic map. If you want to know the mechanics of how to complete a strategic map then email Stuart at [stuart@morleyspeaks.com](mailto:stuart@morleyspeaks.com).



## Why non-profit organizations are different

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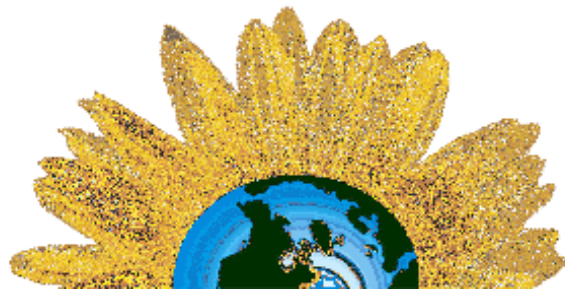
A CompassPoint Nonprofit Services study completed in 2001 highlighted the profile of executive directors. Some of the key findings were:

- ✓ 50% of executive directors bring management experience from the for-profit sector and public sector
- ✓ 51% of respondents had 4 years or less in the job.
- ✓ About 50% would not continue in the job after tenure
- ✓ The top two reasons for taking the job were the agency's mission and an opportunity to give back to the community
- ✓ The biggest challenges in the job are finance anxiety and fundraising
- ✓ The agency's executive directors who experience the most stress have budgets of \$500,000 to \$1 million
- ✓ The top three sources of training and support for executive directors is their management teams, peer networks and workshops/ conferences
- ✓ The top need in terms of "more money" was for staff salaries, benefits and reserve funds.

There are some differences in the way non-profit organizations approach the world compared to business corporations. Here are the nine most common differences and how those differences impact the role of the executive director.

### 1. **Passion for a better world**

Many people join non-profit organizations because they have a belief, optimism and the desire to make the world a better place. The challenge for the executive director and board of directors is to make sure the passion for a better world does not lead to a misallocation of resources and a lack of focus on results.



### 2. **Conflict resolution**

On a personal level, the desire for a better world can result in participants developing a rigid view and a sense of righteousness to the extent that they become political and confrontational. This challenges the executive director to be aware of this dynamic and develop conflict resolution skills to address this behaviour.

### 3. **Atmosphere of scarcity of resources**

Because non-profits have traditionally been underfinanced, this creates a reality and a mentality of being under financed and the executive director

as well as outside advisors and consultants are often resented by staff and board members because there is a belief that that these senior people should be working for free.

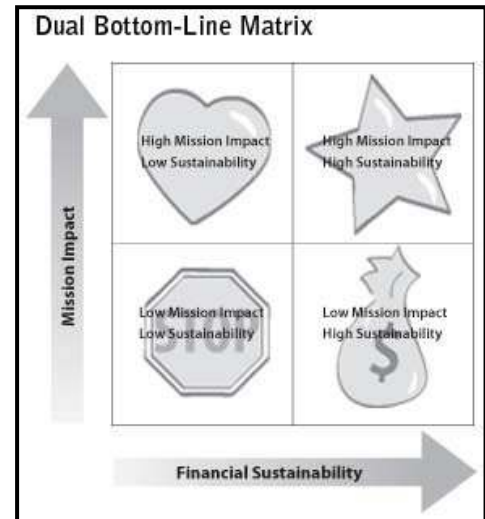
**4. Outcomes are hard to measure**

Executive directors and boards need to develop plans that articulate what success looks like and how to measure it because there is no profit motive.

**5. Policy boards**

Boards of non-profits can create problems if they try to supplant the staff running the daily operations. Boards should create a “policy focus” by looking at the long-term benefit. While the staff and volunteers focus on the day-to-day decisions. The executive director has to make sure the board is clear which “hat” they are wearing (e.g., board vs. volunteer).

Executive directors often incorporate board governance training or use of consultants to help boards see the difference between effective supervision and micro-management.



**6. Dual bottom line: financial versus vision/mission**

Non-profits often have a mentality that financial success and staying true to the vision and mission are mutually exclusive. Having a surplus at the end of a financial year is often considered the ultimate sin. The road to the vision may mean the non-profit needs to navigate years of surpluses as well as years of deficits. The challenge is for the board, and the executive director is to ensure the organization can and does hold sufficient reserves to deal with the fluctuating demands for funds.

**7. Third party fundraising**

Donors may have their own agendas and try to influence the organizations they support. The executive director has to be very strategic in her/his actions to insure that the “tail does not wag the dog.” The executive director needs to be clear what the “non-negotiable” elements are and be prepared to walk from donors who cannot respect the non-negotiable elements.

**8. Mixed skill level of board and staff**

Some people are kept around out of kindness, and others are appointed for reasons other than their skill to perform their tasks. Individuals need

skills to do the work or else they will inadvertently sabotage the overall effort. Therefore, the executive director often has to budget more time and resources for training or more support for certain roles than in a for-profit corporation.

**9. Bias towards informality, participation and consensus**

The executive director has to work toward consensus and allow more time for consensus building than in business environments. They also have to have a fallback if consensus can't be reached. The executive director often has to live with decisions that contain undue bias in order to keep things moving along. Business people on the board often find this approach confusing and frustrating.



The differences that non-profits face often become most noticeable during strategic planning sessions. Therefore when using outside advisors and consultants, the executive director would be wise to ensure that all participants understand the environment and how consensus is reached in the organization.

## Ten tips to making your strategic planning process work

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**1. Be sure your organization can benefit.**

The timing of a strategic planning process is important. Pick a time when the organization has the capacity and energy to undertake the process and is willing to follow through on the commitments.

**2. Pick a process that is simple.**

Strategic planning is productive when it has three elements: (1) sharing information on what has happened (2) agreement on what direction the participants would like to take the organization in the future and (3) a commitment to action with milestones to measure progress.

**3. Keep the strategic planning group small but have representation from all key stakeholders.**

It is a balancing act to have enough key people to ensure commitment to the process but not so large the group cannot get through the process quickly. Those who cannot attend the strategic planning can be asked ahead of time to prepare materials for participants to read and digest as well as submit ideas and concerns. In some situations it may be appropriate to interview stakeholders before the retreat using a structured survey.

**4. Doing the homework on the issues.**

For strategic planning meetings to be effective, the attendees must have information to make sound strategic decisions. Ideally, the information should be documented and sent to participants ahead of the meeting.

**5. Integrating the planning with Board development**

The planning process brings a natural, positive opportunity for board members to be more actively involved in the organization. Some non-profit organizations include governance training together with strategic planning.

**6. The process is as important, if not more important than the strategic plan that is produced.**

Strategic planning is a time for thinking about the big picture, for sharing ideas, brainstorming, bonding, having fun and getting excited and motivated towards a common direction and sense of being part of something greater than any one person.



**7. Think big but take small steps.**

In the non-profit world, three years is as far into the future as most groups

can consider. While it is important to set a direction with a view to accomplishing a significant benefit for the community, the action steps need to be carefully developed as many non-profits have limited budgets and staff to carry out the plans.

**8. Use a facilitator.**

Facilitation is a critical skill for coordinating the ideas and contributions of diverse sets of people within organizations. Hiring a professional facilitator frees the executive director from the worries of making sure every one has a say or that the meeting stays on track and finishes on time.

**9. Ask clients... “What is missing?”**

It is common to confer with experts in the field. However the people most impacted by the actions of your organization are the clients. They often know best what is needed. Collecting client comments anecdotally or in a structured client survey is invaluable. In return you can thank the clients who participate by taking their comments seriously and delivering feedback to them when the planning is complete.

**10. Follow up**

Employees only do what the leader follows up on. The follow up includes making sure the strategic plans have clear benchmarks that provide parameters for the operational plans that follow. These operational plans in turn need a follow up mechanism in the form of monthly progress reports that tie into the strategic plans.

**Remember:**



## Some of the **don'ts** in strategic planning?

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When talking about “don'ts” in the area of strategic planning, there are a few steadfast principles.

1. **Don't take too long** to complete the plan. Most plans can be completed in a one day or less. Some organizations with a larger strategy group may need two days.

2. **Don't** focus on “analysis paralysis” but rather on what general direction you want the organization to go, making sure to get commitment to the milestones or benchmarks. These will enable you to demonstrate later how you are progressing.

3. **Don't exclude key people** who are responsible for making the plan happen. If the key people don't have a hand in developing the plan, they will not be committed to making it happen, thus rendering your strategic plan a worthless piece of paper.

4. Leave the writing of novels to such qualified folks as Leo Tolstoy. **Don't** attempt to **write a book** like War and Peace. Some of the best strategic plans are done on one page and certainly less than 8 pages.

5. Once you have written your strategic plan, **don't throw it in the bottom drawer** and ignore it till next year, think of it as a living, breathing entity. You should have it handy for constant review to determine its continuing validity.

6. It is not a document set in stone. If things change dramatically during the year, **don't panic**, be ready to call the strategy group together to revisit the plan.

7. **Don't** treat it like a secret document to be **put under lock and key**. It needs to be shared with as many stakeholders as possible so they can all help you achieve your goals. It should not be unusual to share the plan with suppliers, funding organizations, governments, employees, customers and the public at large.



## How do we know if our strategic planning process is working?

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Here are some of the some of the indicators of a successful strategic planning process:

- ✓ We have a shared vision of the ideal future that is values-based
- ✓ We have consensus on our direction for the next three to five years
- ✓ Our actions are more coordinated
- ✓ We have an inclusive, participatory process in which board and staff take on a shared ownership
- ✓ We have demonstrated some accountability to our community
- ✓ We are externally focused and sensitive to the organization's environment
- ✓ We are open to questioning the status quo
- ✓ We use it as a key part of effective management.
- ✓ We measure progress against the plan regularly
- ✓ We are not afraid to redo the plan if it not longer fits
- ✓ **We are getting results and meeting the milestones we set**



In essence, the best indicator of success is if your audience feels that your plans are: big, noble, make sense and are worth the effort to help you achieve them.

## Completing the strategic map - a case study

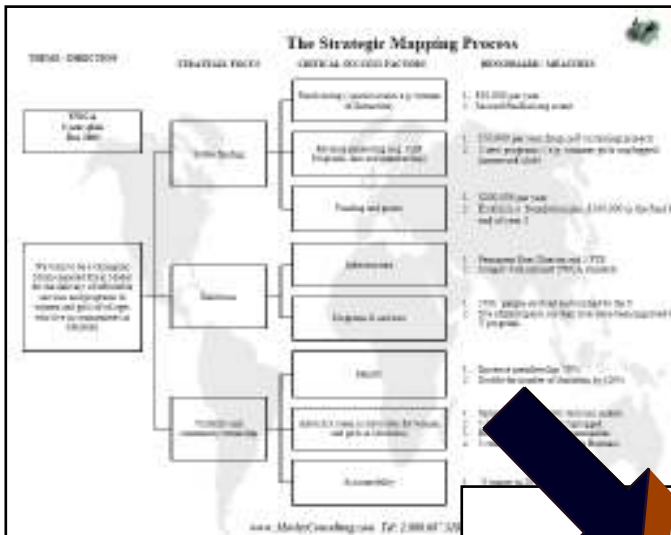
In December 2003, Stuart facilitated the development of a three year strategic map for the Community YWCA of Muskoka. The board and staff had a one day retreat in their offices one weekend.

The group selected a theme *“We want to be a Champion Multi-centered Rural Model for the delivery of affordable services and programs to women and girls of all ages who live in communities in Muskoka.”*

The group then selected the three areas of strategic focus to support the theme.

These areas of strategic focus were: *stable funding; resources; and visibility/ community ownership.*

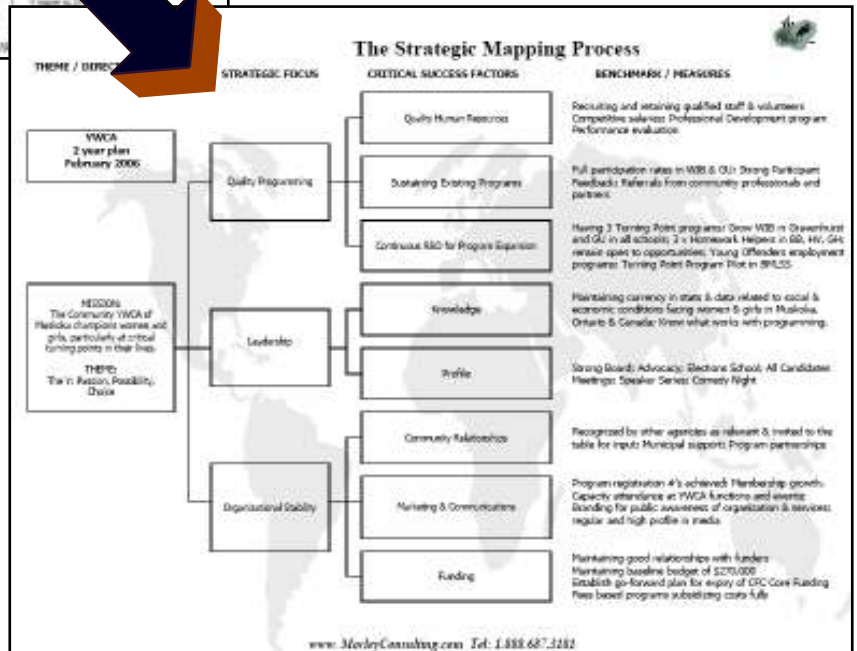
Then the group went on to define the critical factors to support the strategic focus and the benchmarks/ measures of success.



After the session, the executive director then met with the staff to develop operational plans with action steps, budget and resource allocations and deadlines.

The executive director reported each month to the board on progress to meet each of the deadlines.

In February of 2005 the Board met to review the strategic map and revised the theme into a Mission *“The Community YWCA of Muskoka Champions women and girls, particularly at critical turning points in their lives”*.



The theme or slogan was also included in the first box of the strategic map and became *"The Y: Passion, Possibility & Choice."* The change of theme resulted in changes to all the other elements of the strategic map. Again this process was completed in less than a day.

2005 Annual General Meeting  
Executive Director's Report, Carolyn Bray



In 2002 when I began working here part-time, our primary business was Women in Business and a small but growing Girlz Unplugged and Techno Splash program. Our longest standing employee was part-time and two years into her tenure. We had three part-time staff plus myself. The YWCA was flush in program funding, for one year.

In 2003, when we gathered for a Strategic Mapping session, we set a goal to build stability, expand our presence throughout Muskoka, grow programs, and have three full time staff by 2006.

Last year, we reached a few milestones: some medium range stability through a generous core funding grant from the Counselling Foundation of Canada. In January we had our first full-time position, our Youth Program Coordinator, followed by a full-time Women in Business Coordinator, and a full-time Executive Director. And we can't leave out a part-time bookkeeper. In 2006, we have met many of our goals set in 2003, and we have reason to be proud.

Our mission is to champion women and girls, particularly at critical turning points in their lives. The true rewards in the work we do are within this mission. Next week 22 women will graduate from the Women in Business program. This is by all accounts a humbling and inspiring group of women. In May, over 200 girls will celebrate Spring Fling, a Girlz Unplugged year-end party.

While it is easy to celebrate the tangibles – the job creation and employment developed through this program, and the growing number of schools and participants in our school based programming – the real celebration is in the less visible but even greater achievements. Throughout programs like Women in Business, Girlz Unplugged, and the new Turning Point Pilot running at RMI SS, women and girls of all ages dig deep and

"In 2003 we gathered for a Strategic Mapping session... In 2006 we have met many of our goals set in 2003..."

The organization was very pleased with the results of the strategic mapping and continue to use this tool to update their strategic thinking. Here is the quote from the executive director on the success of the process.

*"On our way to meet our objectives in 2003-04 we have entered into and completed a Strategic Mapping Process. We certainly couldn't have done this without the direction and support of Stuart Morley, and we are most grateful to him for his role in putting us on this path. The sessions that the board had with Stuart not only helped us design our future, but also acquainted us with each other on a more personal level that has most certainly enhanced relationships and board productivity."*

*Carolyn Bray  
Executive Director  
Community YWCA of Muskoka*

## Using a retreat in the planning process

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A planning retreat is a meeting typically involving board members and staff. It can be one to two days long, sometimes using a facilitator to help structure the process.

Retreats are usually held away from the workplace or on weekends to ensure that participants can focus wholly on the issues at hand and are not distracted by the everyday interruptions of the office.

Sometimes other key stakeholders will be invited to join the retreat in an effort to strengthen the relationship between those stakeholders and the organization or it is used to educate individuals about the organization.

Part of the value of the planning process is the opportunity for representatives from different parts of the organization to work together in setting the future direction for the organization. Retreats provide an excellent way of achieving this aspect of the planning process.

### **When a retreat should be used**

An organization can have a retreat at any time during the planning process, but the most common times are either at the beginning or at the end of the process.



Retreats may be organized at the beginning of the process to educate participants on the process or to build enthusiasm and commitment.

These types of retreats are opportunities to begin collecting and processing information about the environment. Some organizations have external experts speak on different strategic issues that may be important to keep in mind during the planning process (e.g. role of fundraising, changing client needs, potential duplication of services, or opportunities for collaboration, etc.).

Retreats may also be used at the conclusion of the planning process to complete the one page strategic map which effectively summarizes the direction and key benchmarks and then becomes a communication tool to board and staff.

In larger non profits, where not all the participants can attend the retreat, it is important that the decisions and ideas are communicated to others to ensure they understand and support the plan. The retreat, however, should not be used in place of this routine communication -- it is a time for recognition of commitment and contributions in addition to an opportunity for closure.

## How a retreat can be formatted

Retreats are a combination of small and large group activities and discussions. The small group is used for extensive discussion and consensus building, whereas the large group is for reporting on small group activities, as well as brief discussions and final decision making.

It is important to have a well planned retreat that includes a formal agenda and planned outcomes distributed to retreat participants prior to the retreat. Michael Doyle and David Strauss' book, *How to Make Meetings Work*, provides an excellent reference guide to planning a successful retreat.

## Benefits to having a retreat

A well planned and managed retreat can accomplish several key success factors that may enhance your planning process. They include:



- Encouragement of creativity - many people in group situations stimulate each other to think beyond traditional boundaries.
- Teambuilding for the organization - people work together more efficiently once they know each other (e.g., personalities, work styles, methods of communicating, etc.). Retreats provide an opportunity for staff, support staff, and board members to come together and collaborate for the first time.
- A foundation of common understanding - for many organizations, this is the opportunity for everyone to hear the same information and messages.

## Drawbacks to having a retreat

Although using retreats may enhance your planning process, there are several potential drawbacks to having a retreat. They include:

- Consumption of critical resources - a successful retreat takes a considerable amount of planning. The process also consumes both cash and time resources.
- Pressure to produce results at the retreat - often the purpose of a retreat is to identify and discuss issues. Not everyone feels that this is an effective use of time, and the retreat can be viewed as a waste of time and other scarce resources.
- Generation of work the staff cannot or should not handle - participants often assume that because it was discussed, it should happen. Sometimes the

group can feel overwhelmed with ideas generated and the planning process as a whole.

### **When a retreat is right for your organization**

There are a few questions to consider when evaluating whether your organization should plan a retreat during the planning process:

- How knowledgeable is the board about the organization and how much will they be able to contribute in this setting?
- What outcomes are the different parties looking for in the retreat?
- How realistic is it that all outcomes will be accomplished?
- How willing are the board and staff to commit preparation and participation time?



## Retreat checklist

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One of the best ways to prepare for a strategic planning retreat is to develop a pre-retreat and retreat checklists.

A sample checklist is provided below:



Retreat Objectives (update strategic plan, board governance training etc.)

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Strategic Planning Horizon (1 year, 3 year, 5 year etc.)

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Length and Date of Retreat (one day, two day, etc. in October)

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Retreat Environment (boardroom, resort, hotel, B&B, lodge, park, etc.)

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Type of Content Desired (main room, breakout space or breakout rooms, fun team building programs etc.)

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Number of Attendees (Departments/Divisions)

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Training Topics and Activities

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Budget

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## Pre-Retreat Checklist

- Appoint facilitator to help plan and carry out the retreat
- Circulate retreat agenda and obtain final approval from key team members.
- Have an executive director presentation ready on how the organization has progressed over the last year(s) and the major challenges facing the organization
- Have program stats for participants (or email to participants)
- Have copies of prior year plans sent to participants (or email to participants)
- Have summaries of any market studies, client feedback results etc. (or email to participants)
- Conduct any employee/stakeholder survey interviews before the session
- Have feedback/evaluation forms prepared
- Make reservations for retreat venue, meeting rooms and lodging, if needed.
- Arrange for projector/screen, laptop computer, flip chart and pens etc.
- Make sure the retreat room and any breakout rooms have plenty of wall space to hang flip chart notes
- Arrange for note paper, post it notes and pens
- Survey of participant's food and drink preferences and needs.

- Make food/snack arrangements (feed them more than you think they will eat, plus snacks)
- Communicate retreat details to attendees.
- Set up transportation plan – shared transport, maps to location, parking etc.
- Plan recognition/incentive gifts.

### **Retreat Checklist**

- Provide attendees with a detailed itinerary.
- Ensure that catering is handled (including any special dietary needs).
- Ensure that meeting or breakout rooms are set up properly.
- Have sessions videotaped (if applicable)
- Have events photographed (if applicable)
- Meet with facilitator for an event debriefing.

### **Post-Retreat Checklist**

- Plan any follow-up activities accordingly.
- Circulate photos or video of retreat (if applicable) to the team
- Review the evaluation forms of the entire retreat and prepare notes of improvements for the next time
- Finalize the strategic plan if it was not completed at the retreat.
- Develop operational plans based on the results of the strategic plan prepared at the retreat

### **Budget Checklist**

- Facility rental (guest and meeting rooms)
- Meals and snacks
- Travel for attendees
- Facilitator fees and expenses
- Special activities costs (dinner cruises, golfing, etc.)
- Photography and or videotaping
- Incentive prizes

## For more information on strategic planning

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You can contact Stuart and Theresa Morley at 1.888.687.3181 or by email at [stuart@morleyspeaks.com](mailto:stuart@morleyspeaks.com) or check out the website at [www.morleyspeaks.com](http://www.morleyspeaks.com)



### **Stuart Morley MBA Strategist & Keynote Speaker**

Stuart works with leaders to take their organization to the next level. He is a strategist in helping clients address marketing and financial issues to better articulate a future for their organization. He is a frequent speaker to associations and corporations on strategic issues.

Stuart has 25 years experience in the management consulting (focusing on marketing strategy) and investment banking sectors (focusing on financial and turnaround strategies). He has worked with more than 200 different organizations including hospitals, health units, financial institutions, large public corporations, professional firms, non-profit organizations and owner/managed enterprises.

He is a Past President of the American Marketing Association (Toronto Chapter). He is a part-time lecturer in Marketing at Georgian College

(Bracebridge Campus) and is a former part-time lecturer at Rhodes University in South Africa plus he was a regular guest speaker at Ryerson University.

Stuart is a frequent speaker at conferences on strategic issues. He is a National Member of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers (CAPS) and is a Board Member of the Toronto Chapter. Stuart is an active member of CAFE (Canadian Association of Family Enterprise and is also a guest expert on the CFIB (Canadian Federation of Independent Business) website ([www.cfib.ca](http://www.cfib.ca)). He is a leadership coach in partnership with Fulcrum Search Science (an executive recruiting firm in Toronto).

Stuart earned a B.Sc. in Agricultural Economics and an MBA from the University of Cape Town, South Africa.

Prior to starting Morley & Associates in 1996 he was a partner in an investment-banking firm for seven years. His career started as a Management Consultant with Deloitte in Cape Town and he transferred to Toronto in 1986. He became a Certified Management Consultant in 1987.

Stuart was Co-Chair of the Strategic Leadership Forum Conference on High Performance Organizations. He is on the leadership team of the Business Retention and Expansion Project for Gravenhurst, led by the Mayor of Gravenhurst.

He is a Past Vice President of Muskoka Family Focus and Children's Place and is a Past President of Gravenhurst Minor Hockey Association.

Morley & Associates Inc. is a family business with offices in Barrie and Gravenhurst. Stuart Morley focuses on providing clients with strategic facilitation and business planning services while Theresa Morley, CA, provides QuickBooks coaching, accounting and tax services to clients.

