

HR INSIGHTS

Magazine

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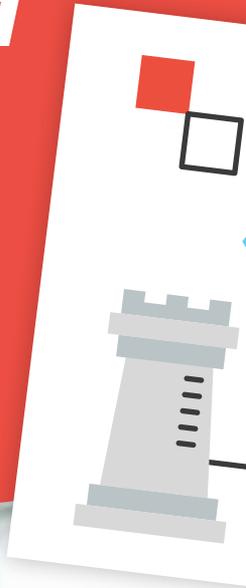
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MOVING FROM *TACTICAL THINKING* TO *STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP*

BY VALERIE GRUBB

Everyone is inclined to deal first with what's right in front of him or her—that is, what's due today. True, sometimes that “here and now” approach is ideal. But if you find yourself focusing only on tactical (that is, short-term or everyday) issues for hours or even days, you're doing yourself, your HR department, and your company a disservice.

HR has a lot to offer in terms of strategic planning for companies; however, you need to give yourself the time to focus on the long-term. Take a close look at how much time and energy you spend focused on strategic growth issues—and how much time you spend entrenched in tactical day-to-day tasks. If you're spending most of your time on the latter, then a change is definitely in order. These five tips can help you transition from a tactical thinker to a strategic leader

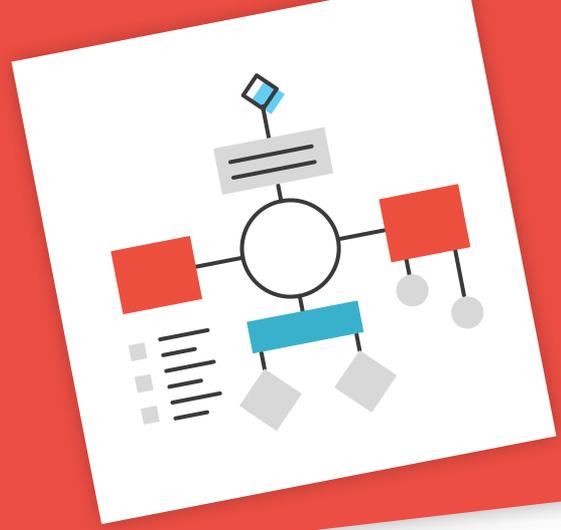


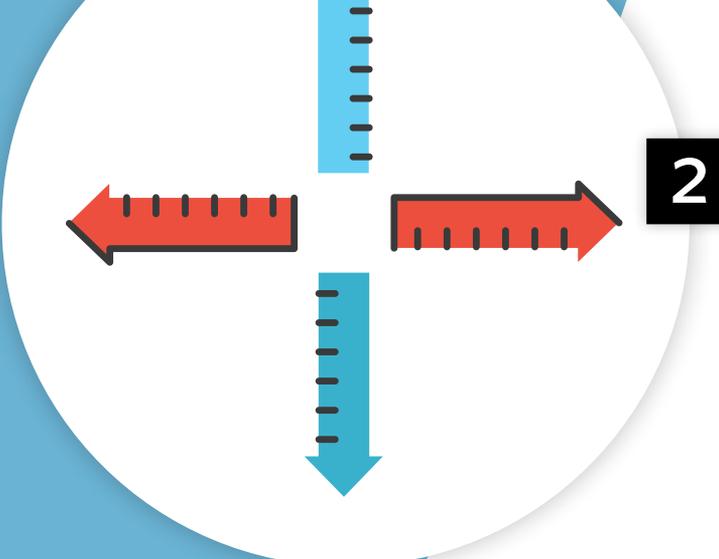
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DELEGATE THE SMALL STUFF

It's hard to let go of a task, especially when it's something quick that you're sure you can knock out in 20 minutes. The next thing you know, though, that one "small" task has turned into three tasks—and you've just killed an hour. Also, rarely does anything truly take "only a few minutes," especially with the constant interruptions caused by e-mail, texts, and phone calls.

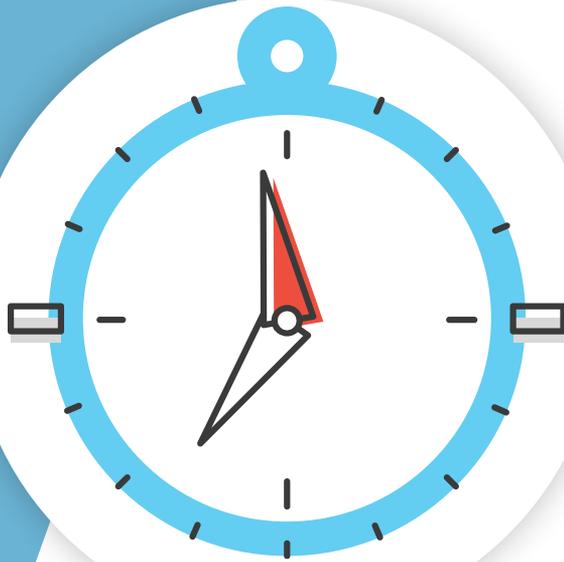
So delegate as much of the small stuff as you can *right now*. If you can't delegate a small task, ask yourself whether it's really essential. Remember, 20% of your efforts results in 80% of the profits, so make sure you focus only on stuff that *matters* (and avoid falling into the trap of doing a task simply because it's easy). And recognize that even though it's not always an easy thing to do, sometimes you have to say no to the nonessential stuff so you can focus on what's important.



**2**

ELEVATE YOUR STAFF

Sometimes, though, delegating the small stuff can lead to new problems if those smaller projects end up consuming your employees' time. So just as you help other departments improve employee performance, review the competencies of your staff and create a plan for elevating the skill level of each team member. This training will take time, but keep in mind that this is a *short-term* investment that will yield long-term dividends. Once your employees understand your expectations and expand their skill sets, they will become more valuable members of the HR team (and as a side benefit, they'll be more motivated by the additional authority and trust you've placed in them!).

**3**

BLOCK TIME FOR STRATEGIZING

Spend time each day plotting out what you're going to accomplish that day. On that list put the tactical items and training initiatives for your staff that definitely *must* get done, but be very strict about how you define the "musts." If you don't, the tactical tasks can take over your day!

Right after you finish building your action item list, either jump right into strategy mode or block time for this exercise later that day. Make time for strategizing every single day, even if you can devote only half an hour to it. The historian Will Durant wrote (in his summary of Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*), "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit." So if you make strategizing part of your daily routine, it will become a habit.

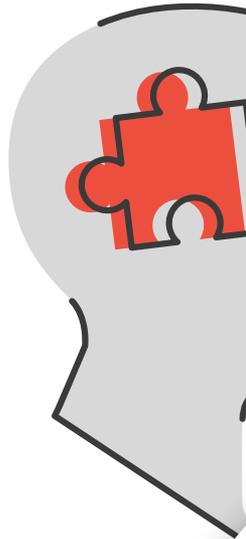
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EVALUATE STRATEGIC ISSUES

What exactly does it mean to "strategize"? Strategizing means evaluating your long-term plans and goals and answering these three questions:

1. Do your plans align with the future you see for yourself professionally?
2. Do you spend time each week working toward your company's strategic objectives?
3. Do HR's goals align with the organization's long-term vision?

If you answer "no" to any of these questions, you need to reconsider how you're spending your time. Reprioritize your time by dumping the "nice to have" items and focusing on the "must haves" you need to reach *strategic* objectives in line with the company's own long-term goals.

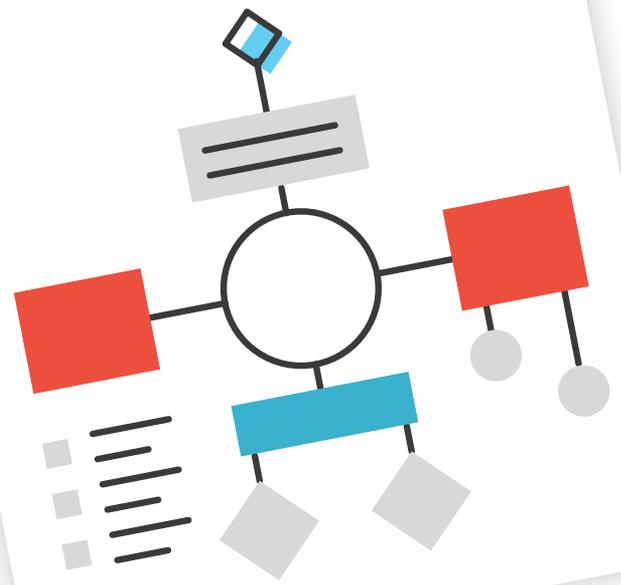


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MAKE A PLAN

After determining *what* to focus on, figure out *how* to make your plan happen. To do that, prioritize your strategic objectives and set *real deadlines* for them. Unless you choose dates that matter, you might not feel genuine pressure to work on your plan—and your strategic goals will remain mere pipe dreams.

With end dates in mind, map out how many hours a week it will take to accomplish these objectives. Then block out on your calendar the time you'll need to work toward them. Every bit of time helps, and you'll be amazed at what you can get accomplished: spending just one hour each weekday on this work, for example, yields 20 hours a month of concentrated effort.



TRAITS OF GOOD STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

As you shift your focus from tactical thinking to strategic leadership, keep in mind that effective strategizing requires you to do the following:

- **Think outside the box.** This sounds trite, but it's true. Strategic leadership means anticipating what's next before anyone else does, at employee, department, and company levels.
- **Question the status quo.** Doing the same things the same way year after year means falling behind. Constantly ask how to improve so you're not settling for "business as usual."
- **Focus inward.** Always push yourself to learn. Evaluate your skill set (and those of your staff) and determine what you need to move up and lead your organization. And if your skill set doesn't enable you to spearhead company initiatives, be cautious about advancing through the ranks: there are already enough inadequate leaders out there who have sunk companies.
- **Focus outward.** Do the research on your company and its competitors so you can provide alternate strategic options for your organization's future success and be part of the bigger picture for both your department and your company.

The business world never stands still, and companies that maintain the status quo will quickly be left behind. To keep pace with the changing demands of the market, your organization needs an HR leader who actively engages in strategic planning, defines growth opportunities from a people perspective, and prepares the organization to meet those future goals. Are you up to the challenge? ■

Valerie Grubb of Val Grubb & Associates Ltd. (www.valgrubbassociates.com) is an innovative and visionary operations leader with an exceptional ability to zero in on the systems, processes, and personnel issues that can hamper a company's growth. She is also the author of *Planes, Canes, and Automobiles: Connecting with Your Aging Parents through Travel* (October 2015). She can be reached at vgrubb@valgrubbassociates.com.

