

# THE IMPACT OF A MORE STRATEGIC YOU

ENSURE EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS  
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# THE IMPACT OF A MORE STRATEGIC YOU

## Seven Step Action Plan

Developing a more **strategic** you does not have to be overly complicated. You don't have to be a guru or sacrifice your weekends—you **only need to understand the fundamental steps.**

When leaders talk about definitions of strategy, most will say that a strategy is a plan. But it's not just any plan. It is vital we understand the difference for ourselves. Strategic people create connections between ideas, plans, and people that others fail to see.

The good news is that this type of critical thinking is exactly what your brain is built for. Your ability to see nuance, uncover patterns, and synthesize data makes you especially original, creative, and suited for strategy. The key to becoming a more strategic thinker is to learn how to channel your thoughtfulness to work for you, instead of against you.

Once you engage in creating this plan, you must be purposeful with it. You are starting the journey to transform ideas into a plan and a plan into reality. Although the plan is simple, staying the course may not be. It's ok. Understand that part of the journey is falling, but not staying down. Don't get discouraged if this happens. You are improving the quality of your life and the life of others and that is not an easy thing to do. Remain positive and keep your eyes on the goal.

**Remember to be faithful over the little and you will be ruler over much!**

**Let's get started!**

**The Impact of a More STRATEGIC You**

# STEP 1: FOCUS ON SYSTEMS NOT GOALS

“You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems.” — *James Clear*

Prevailing wisdom claims that the best way to achieve what we want in life is to set specific, actionable goals. For many years, this was how I approached my habits as well. Each one was a goal to be reached. I set goals for the weights I wanted to lift in the gym, for the metrics I wanted to achieve at work, for the score I wanted in golf. I succeeded at a few, but I failed at most of them. Eventually, I began to realize that my results had very little to do with the goals I set and nearly everything to do with the systems I followed.

- If you're a musician, your goal might be to play a new piece. Your system is how often you practice, how you break down and tackle difficult measures, and your method for receiving feedback from your instructor.
- If you are a business leader, your goal might be to outpace the competition and obtain the highest earnings for the company. Your system is the way you recruit employees, develop, and grow your organizational leaders, and establish systems of accountability.
- If you are a student, your goal might be to get straight A's. Your system is how often you study, how you manage your time to focus on priorities, and your process for remaining organized.

# STEP 1: FOCUS ON SYSTEMS NOT GOALS (CONT.)

“You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems.” — *James Clear*

Ask yourself this question: if you completely ignored your goals and focused only on your system, would you still succeed?

Setting goals is useful, however, goals are good for planning your progress and systems are good for actually making progress. Goals can provide direction and even push you forward in the short-term, but eventually a well-designed system will always win. Having a system is what matters. Committing to the process is what makes the difference.

**If I don't focus on developing clear, specific systems now, what will happen in the long run?**

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# STEP 2: PLAN FOR IMPACT

“Setting a goal is not the main thing. It is deciding how you will go about achieving it and staying with that plan.” — *Tom Landry*

Any time a leader is planning, they should always be focused on impact. Leaders must set meaningful priorities to pursue results. It must be about impact. The problem for many people is they confuse activity with impact.

Here are three key steps to best plan for impact:

First, make every measurement relate to impact. The mere act of moving to impact-based measurement tends to improve outcomes. If work isn't easy to measure, you're probably still thinking about activity. Second, be clear on where your opportunities are to increase impact. Third, you'll need to say no a lot and be ready to kill initiatives as soon as it's clear they won't increase impact.

Plan for impact, not just to check a box.

**Develop a clear vision of where you are focusing more on activity than on impact. How are you measuring each aspect of your plan for impact?**

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# STEP 3: LOOK FOR SOLUTIONS, NOT PROBLEMS

"Problem-solving leaders have one thing in common: a faith that there's always a better way." — *Gerald M. Weinberg*

Strategic thinkers don't simply highlight problems; they always go a step further to offer a potential solution. They come to the table with proposals and plans for how to take action. They talk in terms of what's going well, what could be better, and what's possible – not what's wrong or deficient.

Assuming a solution-oriented approach requires you to get comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. It means lowering the defenses of your inner perfectionist who desperately wants to avoid mistakes and failure.

So, the next time you are faced with a problem, take a moment to separating the symptoms from the cause. Make your diagnosis about understanding what hurts and why. This takes time, practice, and might mean doing a bit of research to reveal the underlying issues behind the problem, but it will be worth it in the end.

**What impact would your shift in mindset regarding being more solution oriented have on your career? Your relationships? What would hold you back from focusing only on solutions to every problem for one full day? How will you overcome this setback?**

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# STEP 4: QUESTION YOURSELF

"If you do not know how to ask the right question, you discover nothing."

— *W. Edwards Deming*

Questions are the language of strategy. Strategic thinkers challenge their own assumptions and look at challenges from a number of different perspectives before deciding on the best path forward.

Ask yourself:

- What current and past trends do I notice?
- How does this make me feel? How would this make others feel?
- Where are the holes and how would I fill them?
- What is the most optimistic viewpoint?
- What possibilities does this hold?
- What processes need to be in place to ensure success?

By becoming more curious, and looking at information from different points of view, you will be able to see different possibilities, different approaches, and different potential outcomes.

**Identify a reason you would hesitate to engage in questioning yourself or have others question you.**

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**How do you plan to overcome that hesitation?** \_\_\_\_\_

## STEP 5: BE FLEXIBLE

“What is malleable is always superior to that which is immovable. This is the principle of controlling things by going along with them, of mastery through adaptation.” — *Lao Tzu*

Along with monitoring consistently, there should be a generous allowance of flexibility. Although the nature of being strategic is to look around corners and identify potential challenges, to be a strategic thinker you must be nimble and adaptive to all the nuances and changes that come with working with and leading people.

Flexibility directly impacts fulfillment in all areas of your life. However, due to our fear, resistance, stress, and obsession with being right, we often end up being inflexible to our own detriment and frustration of those around us. Flexibility is a conscious choice, a powerful skill, and a practical approach to the ever-changing, always-evolving world we live in. We can be firm in our convictions, passionate about our beliefs, and clear about our intentions, and at the same time be flexible enough to make significant changes and be open to new ideas along the way.

**Are you willing to let go of controlling everything?**  Yes  No

**Are you willing to be wrong and admit it?**  Yes  No

**Do you take yourself too seriously?**  Yes  No

**Are you open to receiving support and feedback from others?**  Yes  No



## STEP 5: BE FLEXIBLE (CONT.)

“What is malleable is always superior to that which is immovable. This is the principle of controlling things by going along with them, of mastery through adaptation.” — *Lao Tzu*

If you answered “No” to any of the above questions, ask yourself why and confront the root cause beliefs that you hold that are keeping you inflexible. Why do you believe you are inflexible in that area? What experiences have you had that have led you to believe that way? What do you believe about your ability to change?

**Once identified, share this belief with an accountability partner and commit to forcing yourself to be flexible in every area of your life for the next seven days.**

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# STEP 6: KNOW: OBSERVE AND SEEK TRENDS

“It’s through curiosity and looking at opportunities in new ways that you can better map the path.” — *Michael Dell*

To be strategic, you need a solid understanding of the organizational context, trends, and drivers. An intellectual appreciation of the importance of bringing in current data and seeking trends isn’t enough.

## You also must:

- Make it a routine exercise to explore and synthesize the internal trends in your day-to-day work. For example, pay attention to the issues that get raised over and over in your organization and synthesize the common obstacles your colleagues face.
- Be proactive about connecting with peers both in your organization and in your industry to understand their observations and perspectives. Then, share your findings across your network.

**What commitments will you make moving forward? What one action will you take each day to move you closer to your vision of being more strategic?**

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# STEP 7: FOCUS ON THE IMPORTANT

“What is important is seldom urgent and what is urgent is seldom important.”  
— *Dwight D. Eisenhower*

The “urgent” is the enemy of the “important.” And if you spend your career reacting to fire-drills, you’ll inevitably find yourself in a reactive cycle of being behind the eight-ball – never proactively in front of it.

There will always be new problems and opportunities vying for your attention. So, if you want to be a true strategic leader, you need to select and prioritize only those projects that advance the organizations’ core objectives, i.e., ways to save time, impact student achievement, or otherwise grow the organization. Otherwise, you’re simply keeping busy for the sake of being busy.

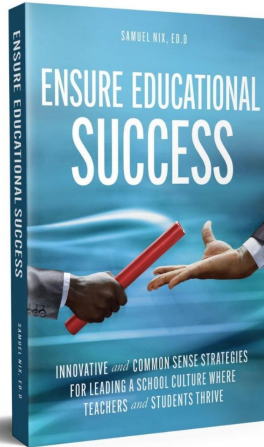
To ruthlessly prioritize, you must be able to answer the question, “What’s the most important thing I need to accomplish in this role?” Keep your goals front and center and get comfortable saying no and pushing back on competing demands, which can be tough for conflict-averse Strivers.

**Is what you are currently doing giving you the results you want? What are your next steps for finding the time to prioritize “urgent” over “important”?**

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