

Stratagem

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Part 1: Making strategic planning work

In the motorcyclists' rights movement, commitment is something we understand. We understand that people who are committed to achieving their goals and are willing to do what it takes to win usually do just that. We understand that the challenges confronting us will change over time and that we must adapt to those changes without compromising our long-term goals. We understand that although hard decisions and even harder actions are required of us, we will remain committed to victory.

Still, all that commitment can't guarantee success. Without a good plan of action, without actually writing down in black and white what it is we expect to achieve and then following through, our success is determined as much by luck as it is by hard work. What we need to do is take luck out of the equation whenever and wherever we can.

In order for any organization to assure success it must have a strategic plan of action. Throughout its history, MRF has followed a sound strategic plan regarding our legislative goals, and the results have been impressive. That same approach has been applied to MRF's budgetary and financial dealings over the last several years, and again has proven its worth. The bottom line is, strategic planning works.

So just what is strategic planning, and how do we go about doing it? Although it sounds complex, strategic planning usually begins with a few lines of text on a single sheet of paper. At its most basic level, a good strategic plan states what we want to achieve and when we want to achieve it. This sounds easy enough, but before the plan can have any real meaning we have to clearly understand what it is we are trying to accomplish and have a realistic view of how long it will take us to get there. We must also keep in mind that no plan works unless the people involved are committed to the plan and its ultimate success. Fortunately, when we put a good plan on the table people are

naturally drawn to it.

As we move on to more detailed planning, we write down the steps we'll take to achieve our goals. We write down targeted timeframes for completion of those goals. We write down who is responsible for completing each step in the process and ensure that those individuals have the necessary tools to do the job. One, three and five year plans are developed wherein the goals stated in the one year plan naturally lead us toward completion of the three year plan. Likewise, completing the objectives in the three year plan lead to successfully realizing our long-term goals.

For example, one of our three year goals may be to have effective legislative teams in each district, chapter or county in a state organization. In this scenario, we'll define an effective team as a group of people who stays current on legislative issues and can discuss these issues in a knowledgeable way. We'll also define it as a group who actively works the campaigns of biker friendly legislators in the area, regularly schedules legislators to speak at local meetings, and stays in close contact with legislators and their staff year round to ensure that the goals of the group are being met. Now let's assume that achieving this goal in every district, chapter or county is going to take a lot of hard work, even if we have three years to get there. Although this can be daunting at first glance, don't give up hope. This is where the one year plan comes in.

Our one year goals can include putting a legislative team together in those areas where one doesn't currently exist, or better educating the members of an existing team. Other one year goals could be to improve lines of communication so that an informed group stays informed, or encouraging teams to schedule meetings with legislators who have shown support in the past but haven't been contacted on a regular basis. Now all of a sudden things don't look nearly so bleak. Now we've got some blocks to build on, and we're well on the way to achieving our three year plan. The

point is, a major objective of the one year plan is also by definition one of the steps we'll take to reach our three year goals. The five year plan can be thought of as a culmination of all of these efforts.

All strategic plans are dynamic, meaning they can and do change over time. Because of this, we need to be in the habit of updating our plans at regular, scheduled intervals (a good rule of thumb is to revisit the plans on a quarterly or biannual basis). We do this for two reasons. First, by putting a plan down on paper and committing ourselves to a course of action, many times we find that our goals are achieved even faster than we had hoped. Therefore, we need to update the plan to reflect what it is we've already achieved. This in turn helps us to understand how that achievement relates to the remaining steps in the process. Second, setting regular intervals to review the plan will ensure that we continue to work in the direction we want to go, rather than getting off track.

Also keep in mind that we need to have one, three and five year plans in place at all times. Once we've achieved our one year goals, rather than just pursuing the existing three year plan we need to develop a new one year plan and adjust our three and five year plans accordingly. This approach helps us to stay consistently focused on both our short and long-term goals.

The real beauty of strategic planning is that it works for any and all endeavors. It works as well for a non-profit SMRO as it does for a big business. It works for budgeting as well as it does for increasing membership. It works as well at a local level as it does at a state or national level. MRF has instituted one, three and five year strategic plans for our legislative activities, our treasury, the MRF State Reps program, our product line and our communications. We are in the process of developing plans for our conferences, corporate relations and membership departments as well. We will review these plans three times every year to make sure we continue to move in the right direction and continue to improve on the services we offer. Having seen first hand just how effective strategic planning can be, we're looking forward to a successful future.

We in the motorcyclists' rights community have a big leg up on a lot of other groups. We have people who understand commitment. Let's put a plan of action together that will take full advantage of that commitment.

Part 2: The types of people needed to establish and carry out the plan

Let's assume an organization has decided to get serious about improving its effectiveness in one area or another. In order to do this, a group of officers has come up with a detailed strategic plan. They've written down what they want to accomplish, when goals should be met and who will be responsible for taking the necessary steps. Specific duties have been assigned to volunteers and quarterly meetings have been scheduled to review the plan and make sure things are staying on track. Despite all this work, the plan fails to deliver. Why?

The answer may lie in the people involved. Before we can even start planning, we need to separate the "doers" from the "talkers." By definition, doers are people who take commitment seriously. They may not always be 100 percent successful, but it's not for lack of trying. Talkers, on the other hand, are just that. On the surface they seem to have lots of good ideas and enthusiasm, but somehow they never find the time to work on the things assigned to them. Obviously, to formulate and execute successful strategic plans, we need to go with the doers.

Now let's break the doers into two groups: the strategists and the tacticians. Strategists can see how different aspects of the organization relate to one another. They realize that a change in how one facet of the organization does business may have an affect on all the others. Strategists can see the big picture, and think clearly about where the organization as a whole should be in one, three and five years.

While some people are good at strategic thinking, others are more tactical. The tacticians among us are more comfortable when given a specific duty to perform as opposed to spending a lot of time thinking about how individual tasks fit into the grand scheme of things. Tacticians are the "give me a job and get out of my way" folks. These

are also the people who should, for the most part, be executing the day-to-day aspects of the plan.

We need to be honest with ourselves and ask, "Am I a strategist or a tactician?" If you're a strategist, you're intuitive. You're an "idea" person. You enjoy examining all the possibilities. You typically think about things in a logical, one thing after another manner. Strategists also understand that even though things are working, they could always be better. In other words, a strategist looks to continually improve any situation, looking for options while understanding that the ultimate goal is to get better and better over time.

Tacticians tend to think in concrete terms, focusing on specifics and facts. Tacticians work best in an environment where they can get involved in a project that has well-defined, short term goals. They like to take a job on, get done with it, and move on to something else. Tacticians are "one thing at a time" people, and are well suited to executing specific tasks. Tacticians are also good at "running the business" after the guidelines and procedures have been set. Tacticians are usually the "if it ain't broke don't fix it" types, but that doesn't mean they can't address problems as they come up. If you're a tactician you like looking for answers, as long as you're not expected to look for several answers at the same time.

Whether you are a strategist or a tactician, you need to appreciate the other. As a strategist, you can do this by paying more attention to details. If you're a tactician, slow down every once in a while and ask yourself if you're on the right track. In rare cases you'll find individuals who are both good strategists and good tacticians, but this is definitely the exception rather than the rule. Be careful not to allow these people to try to do too much (they'll just wind up getting burned out!).

A word of caution: if we don't understand who the right players are, we run the risk of having people assigned to tasks they're not comfortable with and may not be capable of doing in the first place. If we've got talkers or tacticians assigned to develop a strategic plan - with no strategists in sight - the chances are the plan won't work. Likewise, if we expect strategists to handle all of the day-to-day aspects of the plan, we're

likely to fail. Keep in mind that putting a plan into motion that is poorly thought out or never successfully implemented is worse than never planning at all. In this scenario, instead of seeing its goals accomplished, the organization is left with the feeling that strategic planning is a waste of time.

So how do we bring the strategists and tacticians together and make it all work? In the initial phase of your strategic planning, have the strategists put the plan down on paper including goals and timelines for completion. Then have the tacticians examine the plan, line by line, to see if they understand and agree with the individual goals. Also ask the tacticians to add any specific steps they feel are missing. Once consensus has been reached, both strategists and tacticians need to "sell" the plan to the general membership of the organization, thereby ensuring membership buy-in and participation. Now it's time to execute the plan. The tacticians will probably handle many of the day to day aspects of the plan. The strategists, meanwhile, will ensure that the tacticians have the tools they need to do the job, and facilitate plan reviews and updates.

To be effective we have to know where we're going, and why. Are you a good strategist, or are you a good tactician? Are your strategists formulating plans? Are your tacticians putting those plans into action? Have you provided sufficient detail and support mechanisms to ensure success? Are your strategists working with your tacticians in a supportive mode? The bottom line is, the success of strategic planning depends on two things: good strategy and good execution.

Source material: "Strategy or execution: what kind of planner are you?" by James L. Lynn of Lynn and Associates.