



# The Well-Practiced Manager

Professional Development  
Resource for  
Boston College Managers  
and Supervisors

Winter 2012

## Dear Colleagues:

We often talk about the need to have a good strategic plan in order to continue to serve our constituents well in a rapidly changing world. This must be a living document that adapts to shifting trends and unexpected events. And that requires strategic thinking.

This approach forces us to step back and look at the bigger picture of what we as an institution are trying to achieve and our specific role in that. It allows us to be innovative as we determine how to respond to what's coming so that we direct our future rather than scrambling to react.

Strategic thinking is not something that can be limited to the top leaders or confined to one unit. Rather, it should be a model used by individuals at all levels for their own as well as group planning.

In this newsletter, we offer some perspectives and insights to help you deploy strategic thinking on a daily basis.

Sincerely,

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## Strategic Thinking for a Stronger Future

As you make your plans for the upcoming year, wouldn't it be great to have a crystal ball? With the wave of your hand, you could know exactly what is headed your way and be prepared for it.



Consider instead a more realistic and highly effective alternative: **Strategic thinking**. This is an approach that allows you to prepare for and nimbly respond to what is coming. With strategic thinking, you look more broadly at what is going on around you, your role in the larger organization, and how things are changing. You look ahead to what those who you serve will want and need and this allows you to make better decisions about what you do now.

It is related to and a part of good strategic planning, but it goes beyond that. Strategic thinking is a way of evaluating and integrating information so that you can quickly make the adjustments needed to meet your goals.

The bedrock of strategic thinking is to challenge your assumptions about the future and your current ability to thrive and carry out the vision of the institution. You cannot take for granted that how you have done things in the past will work in the future.

## Look Around

Strategic thinking involves taking into account the overall goals of the University. What is the mission? How will that mission be achieved given changes in the marketplace such as globalization and technological advances?

What is your role in carrying out the mission? How does your unit or department fit into the future plans of the organization? How might that change in the months and years to come?

You probably already have a good sense of whom you serve. But how are they changing? Students and alumni, for instance, are already relying heavily the Internet to get news and complete transactions, and that is likely to increase. How is the institution responding to those changes? What are the implications for what you do?

What are others in your field doing? What changes have they made? Looking at what others are doing can give you an idea of what you may be doing well or what you may be missing.

*continued*



**“To act strategically, you need to comprehend your organization’s strategy, set aligned strategy for your group, assemble the talent to carry it out, execute against it, and measure how well it’s working.”**

*Successful Manager’s Handbook*



**Resource:**

*Successful Manager’s Handbook: Develop Yourself, Coach Others*

Susan H. Gebelein,  
 Kristie J. Nelson-Neuhaus,  
 Carole J. Skube, David G. Lee,  
 Lisa A. Stevens,  
 Lowell W. Hellervik,  
 Brian L. Davis

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**Look Back**



Although the focus of strategic thinking is generally on the future and responding to what is coming, it is still important to consider what has happened. Reviewing the past can give you insights into changes you can or should make as you move ahead.

How was your unit or department formed? How quickly have you grown? What changes have been made both externally and internally? What do you count as your biggest successes? What mistakes have been made and how have those been corrected?

In looking at what has gone well and what has not, you can get a better sense of your strengths and weaknesses. You can then build on your strengths while addressing the weaknesses.

**Look Ahead**

Strategic thinking is about being prepared. This is the most critical component of planning. It goes beyond looking at trends to thinking about how those trends will affect you, the organization and its various components and, most importantly, those whom you are serving.

How are others going to respond to what is coming and what are the implications for you? Run through the potential scenarios. Ask the “what ifs.” Of course you can’t prepare for every situation, but thinking about even the most remote possibilities can give you ideas for improvements.

More than anything, strategic thinking is about awareness. Know where you are, know where you’ve come from, and know where you want to go so that you can determine how best to get there.



A SWOT Analysis is a useful way to begin the strategic thinking process. This tool was developed in the 1960s and remains popular today. This can be used for a brainstorming session to get discussions started or for intensive planning.

**Strengths**

What do you do well?  
 What unique resources can you draw on?  
 What do others see as your strengths?

**Weaknesses**

What could you improve?  
 Where do you have fewer resources than others?  
 What are others likely to see as weaknesses?

**Opportunities**

What opportunities are open to you?  
 What trends could you take advantage of?  
 How can you turn your strengths into opportunities?

**Threats**

What threats could harm you?  
 What is your competition doing?  
 What threats do your weaknesses expose you to?

Mindtools: [http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC\\_05.htm](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_05.htm)  
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