



Strategic Direction – Why does it matter?

When I think of **Strategic Direction**, I'm reminded of a simple quote by Yogi Berra: "When you come to a fork in the road, take it!" Knowing which path to take when you and your organization reach a fork in the road can mean the difference between success and failure. A well-articulated strategic direction and continuous strategic thinking based on agreed priorities, enables focused implementation and provides a framework for dealing with change.

Strategic Direction is a path set out for your organization based on your vision, mission, core values and the strategies identified to achieve the goals you and your team determine for your organization. As you and your organization move down that path, it provides guidelines for decision making, allows adaptability and enables everyone to be on the same page if communicated well.

As my colleague Jane Baxter Lynn and I created our Strategic Leadership Essentials program, we developed a dynamic process we call the **Strategic Navigation Guide**[®]. It proposes a real time roadmap analogous to a GPS system rather than a one time, static document. When you plan a trip with your GPS, you decide where you are headed, the best way to get there and how you can successfully reach your destination. However, once you get on the road, the environment around you will change, such as traffic flow, accidents, or weather. With your GPS and your own observations, you can continuously monitor what is going on around you and adjust your route to achieve your desired result – i.e. reaching your destination.

The primary tool for defining an organization's strategic direction is **strategic planning**, a continuous and systematic process of evaluating the past, reviewing the present and envisioning the future. The process translates the organization's vision into broadly defined goals and objectives, along with actions to achieve them.

Of course, any process or tool, like the GPS, if not used effectively can give you poor results. We've all seen the strategic plan that sits in a binder on someone's bookcase or in a folder on someone's computer and is rarely, if ever, referenced. There are, in fact, those who argue that strategic planning is no longer relevant in today's fast paced, changing world. We disagree.

We believe there is still a need to have a clear idea of what you do and a plan for where you are going, while allowing yourself the flexibility to keep the direction relevant and adapt to changing environments and changing stakeholder needs. The Strategic Navigation Guide[®] empowers you to lead your organization using your plan as a reference.

In reality, while you and your organization may seek a future destination (vision), there should be understanding that it is in fact a continual journey that will require constant monitoring of new circumstances occurring in both the internal and external environments and an ongoing review of your strategies and plans to see if it is necessary to adapt or change them to address the current situation.

You as a leader need to focus on implementing the current strategy while, at the same time, constantly stepping back and looking at the organization as an integrated enterprise and assessing whether it is on the right path. If you do this effectively, when you come to a fork in the road, you will have the knowledge and strategic framework to know on which path to go forward.

Enjoy the journey!

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Craig Snook is co-author of *Strategic Leadership Essentials*®, a unique training program that integrates personal leadership development with strategic direction and strategic identity.



He has a passion for helping leaders grow and develop through proven techniques to strategically lead their organizations. A dynamic speaker, trainer and presenter, Craig employs clarity, innovation and humor to deliver workshops to diverse audiences at all organizational levels. With over three decades of experience in global leadership and strategy development in both the for-profit and nonprofit sectors, he is skilled in leadership coaching and remote team management with proven success. His involvement in leadership development has ranged from individuals to senior management teams at the Dow Chemical Company. As a consultant with Executive Service Corps of Houston, an organization designed to promote best management practices in nonprofits, he delivered strategic planning and organizational assessment skills in the community.

Craig is a Board Member and past Board Chair of EcoRise Youth Innovations, Board Chair at VELA, and past Board Member of the Caporal Assistance Network, three Austin area nonprofits.

Strategic Leadership Essentials® (SLE) is the only leadership development program that explores the integration of personal leadership approach with an organization's strategic direction and strategic identity and how they are connected. Specifically designed for nonprofit executives, the goal is that through alignment of these three areas, they will enhance or reinforce their leadership skills, advance their organization's mission and engage their stakeholders through clear, consistent communications strategies to achieve greater results. Immediate actionable outcomes, ongoing accountability and peer learning are some of the program's benefits. www.jblstrategies.com/programs.html