

Realistic Thinking and Strategic Thinking

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it...”

Luke 14:28

Recognize the Importance of _____ Thinking

Many people seem to think that realistic thinking is negative thinking, especially men and women who are naturally optimistic. It is not unusual for those who avoid realistic thinking to make decisions based on “idealistic thinking” without adequate consideration of the realities they face. Such decisions often result in disappointment. Here are some examples of idealistic and realistic thinking:

Idealistic Thinking

I can make everyone happy.
 People like change.
 It is enough if the leader
 takes care of people.
 Good leadership makes tough
 calls unnecessary.

Realistic Thinking

There will be conflict.
 People resist change.
 People must be developed
 to be effective.
 Tough calls must always be made.

The Value of Realistic Thinking

Realistic thinking will not undermine your belief in people, nor will it lessen your ability to see and seize opportunities. It will add value to you in many ways:

1. Realistic thinking _____ the negative consequences of a decision.
2. Realistic thinking provides the basis for good _____.
3. Realistic thinking is a catalyst for _____.
4. Realistic thinking provides _____.
5. Realistic thinking gives you _____.
6. Realistic thinking provides a _____ to build upon.

Improve Your Realistic Thinking

Here are five strategies you can implement to improve your realistic thinking:

1. Develop an appreciation for the _____.
2. Do your _____.
3. Think through the positives and _____.
4. Picture the worst-case _____.
5. Align your thinking with your _____.

Discussion: Before you make a key decision, how can you build a solid foundation on facts so you can think with certainty?

Biblical Case Study: Titus (2 Corinthians 7:2-16)

The apostle Paul turned to Titus when he needed someone to see a problem realistically and come up with solutions. Paul sent Titus to both Corinth and Crete to deal with chaotic situations. His ability as a problem solver was based in large part on his ability as a realistic thinker. Consider some characteristics of realistic thinkers:

1. They anticipate _____.
2. They discover the real _____.
3. They accept the _____.
4. They see the big _____.
5. They consider their _____.
6. They develop an action plan based on _____.

Discussion: Why do you think Paul was willing to trust Titus with difficult assignments?

Biblical Case Study: Samson (Judges 13-16)

Samson had the potential to be a great leader. But his story is filled with failure. He is the perfect example of one who refuses to become a realistic thinker. Consider some characteristics of Samson:

1. He failed to listen to wise _____.
2. He refused to learn from his _____.
3. He was _____, not proactive.
4. He was _____.
5. He failed to consider the _____ of his actions.

Discussion: Do you agree or disagree that a realistic thinker must have a teachable attitude? Share examples to support your answer.

Which statement below best describes you?

1. I do not engage in realistic thinking.
2. I do not like realistic thinking.
3. I let someone else do realistic thinking.
4. I do realistic thinking only after I am in trouble.
5. I continually make realistic thinking a part of my life.
6. I encourage my key leaders to do the same.

Discussion:

- Are you now facing a problem that needs to be solved or a decision that needs to be made?
- What steps will you take to be sure you have a realistic view of the issue?

Release the Power of _____ Thinking

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible reveals the implementation of God's strategic plan for the redemption of fallen humankind. The promised Messiah, the virgin birth, the sacrificial Lamb on the cross, the victorious resurrection, the ascension back to Heaven, the birth of the Church at Pentecost, the gospel preached to the Gentiles and the Second Coming of our Lord are key parts of God's strategic thinking.

Strategic thinking can be observed in the ministries of Moses, Joshua, Nehemiah, David, Jesus, Paul and other biblical leaders. Sadly, today, many leaders spend more time planning their next holiday than planning their lives. It is often said: *"If you fail to plan, you plan to fail."* Strategic thinking is crucial to good planning. Strategic thinking enables a leader to maximize his strengths, become more efficient and find the most direct path to achieving his goals.

Benefits of Strategic Thinking

1. Strategic thinking is _____ at the highest level.
2. Strategic thinking requires you to ask the right _____.
3. Strategic thinking prompts you to talk to the right _____.
4. Strategic thinking sharpens your _____.
5. Strategic thinking prepares you for an uncertain _____.
6. Strategic thinking is the _____ that links where you are to where you want to be.
7. Strategic thinking reduces the margin of _____.
8. Strategic thinking provides _____.
9. Strategic thinking gives _____.
10. Strategic thinking increases your _____ for success.
11. Strategic thinking increases your _____ with others.
12. Strategic thinking provides _____ for the leader and his team.

It has often been said that the one with the plan is the one with the power. It doesn't matter in what activity you are engaged, the strategic thinker will gain major influence. People want to follow a leader with a good plan. If you possess a position of leadership in any organization, strategic thinking is essential.

How to Release the Power of Strategic Thinking

1. Break down the issue into manageable _____.
2. Ask "Why" before "_____."
3. Ask probing questions to identify the _____ issues.
4. Inventory your _____ (money, people, supplies, abilities, etc.).

5. Develop your _____.
6. Put the right _____ in the right place.
7. Become a _____ strategic thinker.

Discussion: Does your calendar include specific blocks of time for strategic thinking? If not, take the necessary steps to make time for strategic thinking on your calendar.

A Biblical Case Study: Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1:4-2:8)

Nehemiah was a strategic thinker. The wall of Jerusalem was in shambles and urgently needed to be restored. It seems remarkable, but Nehemiah could see both the problem and the solution, even though he had never visited Jerusalem. Nehemiah knew his purpose, made his plan and led the people through the process. His story is truly one of the most remarkable accounts of leadership and strategic thinking ever recorded. Look at his strategic thinking:

1. He saw the _____.
2. He prayed for _____ favor.
3. The problem became his _____.
4. He developed his _____ plan.
5. He understood the _____ that would be necessary for success.
6. He explained his _____ to other leaders.
7. He asked them for _____.
8. He established _____.
9. He was _____.

Discussion: The people of Jerusalem needed only 52 days to rebuild a city wall that had been in ruins for more than 120 years. Do you agree that strategic thinking was a key reason for this remarkable achievement? Discuss the ways that Nehemiah's strategic thinking impacted the successful rebuilding of the wall.

Biblical Case Study: Paul (1 Corinthians 4:9-21; 16:5-9)

The apostle Paul, a key leader in establishing the early Church, was a strategic thinker. Note several components of his strategic plan:

1. Preached the gospel to _____ and _____.
2. Selected and mentored key _____ to assist him.
3. Selected major _____ in which to establish the Church.
4. Selected cities where he could _____ the greatest number of people.

5. Wrote _____ of instruction, correction and encouragement to key churches and leaders.
6. Challenged all churches to focus on a shared _____.

A Note of Caution for Christian Leaders:

Isaiah reminds all of us of the utmost importance of seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our strategic planning (Isaiah 30:1-5). Leaders must be sure their plans fit God’s revealed will for them and their organization. They must continuously ask if their plans remain relevant to the needs of their mission, their values, their vision and their long-range objectives. This makes for wise leadership and strategic planning.

Proverbs Speaks

The book of Proverbs has a number of clear and practical principles regarding strategic thinking:

- Proverbs 14:15 – *“A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps.”*
- Proverbs 15:22 – *“Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.”*
- Proverbs 16:3 – *“Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.”*
- Proverbs 16:9 – *“In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.”*
- Proverbs 20:18 – *“Make plans by seeking advice; if you wage war, obtain guidance.”*

Assessment and Application

Assessment:

What are you currently doing that is not strategic for you? Assess how many hours you are working in your areas of weakness rather than in your areas of strength.

Application:

List your personal strengths in ministry and then compare the list with where you are investing your time. What changes do you need to make in order to be more strategic?