

The Value of Personal Strategic Planning

By Gayla Hodges

The value of personal strategic planning, simply put is the difference between living the life you want and living the life that happens to you. Venturing into a deeply forested area without a map or knowledge of the region, at least for most people, is either brave or stupid. Most of us will get lost and find ourselves at the mercy of the elements. Many people approach life this way. Some people believe in fate or destiny or a divine plan that will deliver them somehow to their predetermined goal. My study of human history, however, has revealed many stories of people who chose to float through life like leaves on the wind. Many of these people reached the end of their lives feeling unfulfilled, unproductive, dissatisfied, and empty. Planning could have prevented that situation.

There are people in the world who are compulsive planners. They carefully plan and schedule every moment of every day. There are other people in the world who choose spontaneity and freedom. They wouldn't dream of tying themselves down to a plan. The rest of us are somewhere in the middle. Most people plan for certain events and opportunities in varying degrees of detail. We plan events and family size, we plan parties and dinner. Many of us, however, are not convinced of the value of personal strategic planning.

To me, planning is a matter of knowing where you are going and how you will reach the destination. Of course, there will be detours and distractions. Planning, however, helps us get back on the right road when we are forced to take a detour, and restores our focus on the destination when we become distracted. Personal strategic planning is like putting the car in drive rather than sitting with it idling in neutral.

Do you have a vision of where you want your career to go? What will you be doing ten years from now? What will you be doing five years from now? Do you know how to get from where you are to where you want to be?

The first step in effective personal strategic planning is to identify your vision and ensure that it fits your life purpose as well as the way you function most efficiently and effectively. I call this Natural Effectiveness™. Many people base their vision on what they've seen others do and often miss a key element of success and happiness. How does this vision fit you as a person? Can you actually "see" yourself in the roles you envision?

The next step is to be clear about your personal values. You can probably identify your values without much work, but what if I asked you to define them? It is best to resist the temptation to skip over this step and go right to goal-setting. Many times when we do this, we don't achieve the goals we've set. The reason we fall short of our goals is often because they don't fit our purpose, vision and values.

So, our goals must be in sync with our purpose, vision and values. Our strategies to attain those goals must approach them from our personal strengths as defined by the way we work most efficiently and effectively. When these conditions are in place, it creates natural momentum toward the goals we seek.

For example, my purpose might be to enhance the lives of others through teaching. My vision might be to become an Elementary School Teacher. My values are likely to center on learning, giving back, and leaving a legacy. Let's say I'm an extrovert who likes to be in charge, with an adequate, but not endless patience level and a need for a certain amount of structure to function most efficiently and effectively. This will impact my education strategy as I prepare for my teaching certificate. I will need to have a hand in designing my curriculum. I will be more likely to thrive in an interactive learning environment. I will want to finish my certification process within a

reasonable amount of time and without too much pressure. I will probably choose to do a directed program rather than a self-directed program. I will also want to put accountability partners and structures in place to keep me on track.

When I have my strategy in place, it will then be time to set short- and long-term goals to make up the rest of the personal strategic plan. This strategic plan will move me from where I am to where I want to be in life. I can also add marriage and children to this plan. The plan is adequate for my journey to my desired destination, but it is not restrictive or overwhelming. It will keep me on track and focused. My chances of achieving my goal will be greater. This is the value of personal strategic planning.

About Gayla Hodges

Gayla Hodges is the President and Principal Consultant of Change Agents, Inc., a company that specializes in energizing workforces to achieve strategic goals. She has extensive experience in instituting corporate transformational change. She coaches executives and managers on leading corporate change, facilitating the development and implementation of organizational effectiveness strategies. For more information, visit www.changeagentsinc.com or call 623-362-3876.