

# THE ART OF STRATEGIC THINKING



Public Service  
Alliance of Canada

## What is strategy?

A strategy is a broad plan which combines separate actions in such a way as to reach the objectives sought. It is concerned with the methods by which the overall struggle is conducted.

A strategy is like a road map. We need to know where we are and where we want to end up. Our strategy tells us how to get there.

A strategy suggests immediate action projects but also provides a long-range perspective that will carry us through years of hard work, setbacks and short-term successes.

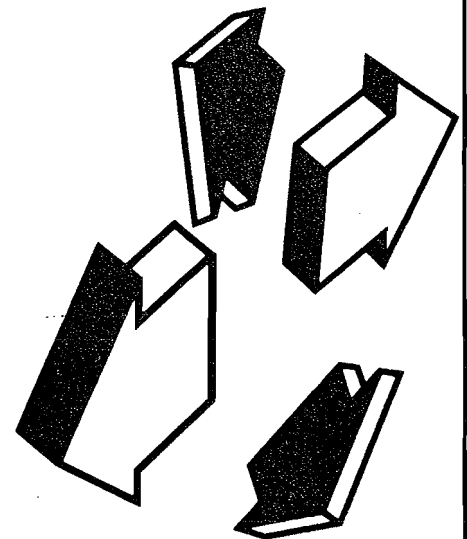
## What makes a good strategy?

1. A good strategy is planned well in advance. It anticipates what is likely to happen. It also considers what isn't likely to happen but might happen anyway.
2. A good strategy is flexible. It leaves room for alternative plans should the impossible occur.
3. A good strategy builds on the experiences of people. It uses their skills to the best advantage. It stays with their experience so that their values fit in with what they need to do to be part of the strategy.
4. A good strategy involves people. It takes into account that how we get there is as important as the ultimate destination. People learn as much from the process as the content of a campaign.
5. A good strategy is realistic. It develops out of an analysis of what the membership can and cannot do.
6. A good strategy includes activities that build spirit, that keep people interested and involved along the way.
7. A good strategy has depth. It includes not only good ideas but steps to carry out those ideas.

## Goals

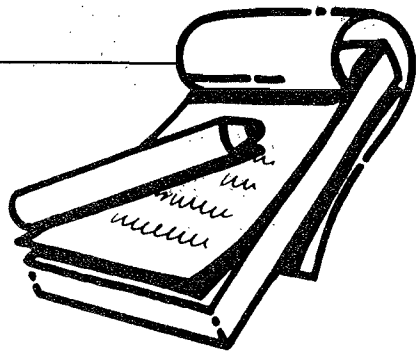
One of the first things a strategy must consider is its goal. How can we plan a trip if we don't know where we want to go?

## Notes:



**A strategy is like a road map.**

# Notes:



***A strategy should be written down somewhere.***

To maintain our sense of direction, we must have goals that are concrete and measurable. These characteristics are important also so we can periodically assess our situation. Are we closer to achieving our goal than we were a year ago? Are we as close as we thought we would be by now?

Our goals must also be attainable. We will only waste time and demotivate our supporters if we focus our energies on goals that can't be won.

Our goals should say something about us and what we believe in. Goals are like Article One in a union constitution. They represent a point around which supporters can rally.

## **Structures**

People come and go in volunteer organizations. They take on new responsibilities, they withdraw, their priorities change. A strategy should be able to survive independently of the individuals who first planned it.

The strategy should be written down somewhere.

The strategy should also be carried out within a structure so that responsibilities are clearly delineated and actions and decisions are seen to be legitimate.

How much structure? The more people who are involved in the implementation of the strategy, the more we need to communicate through a structure. Information must flow in a predictable, consistent, and dependable fashion. At the same time, our interaction should not be so structured that members don't feel part of the decision-making process. Volunteer organizations have to keep its members interested in and willing to work for it. Experience shows that people are more willing to work for strategies they feel they participated in creating.

People's organizations often tend to avoid hierarchical structures because they contradict the very principle for which the organization stands, equality. Sometimes we have to walk a fine line between the need for efficiency and the need to function in a way that is true to our ultimate goal.

## **Strategy and issues**

Issues are problems that strategies are designed to solve. But, sometimes our goals are bigger than a particular issue and then issues are chosen to fit in with a strategy. It's important that we choose issues that do, in fact, advance our strategy. The wrong issue can dissipate our energies, confuse our supporters, and even distort our goals.

## **Strategy and tactics**

Strategies and tactics are not the same thing. The strategy is the overall plan for getting where we want to go.

Tactics are the specific things we do to help us get there: demonstrations, picket lines, petitions, mass grievances. Tactics are important because they move the issue along and build the organization.

## **Time lines**

A time line is a plan of action that ties the specific steps to when they need to happen. Some things need to happen before other things can occur, like choosing a meeting place before advertising a meeting. Having a time line worked out in advance helps us co-ordinate our activities and decisions, reminds us of deadlines, and helps us see if we're making the progress we need to.

Time lines can also maintain commitment by drawing attention to "dead spots", those periods between events, or while we wait for a court decision, or immediately following a minor success when members get restless, wonder what's going on, and lose interest. When it comes time to bring them together again, it may be hard to do.

A time line lets us know if our plan contains long gaps between activities so we can go back and create something interesting to keep people involved.

## **Evaluation**

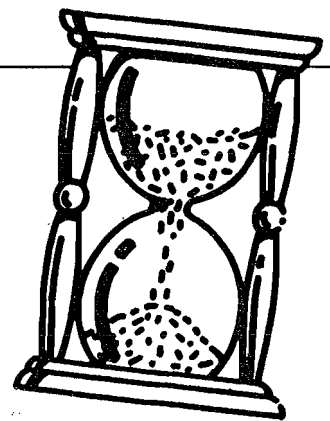
Are we making progress? Are our original assumptions still relevant? Have the facts changed? Do our ideas work? Have we been sidetracked?

Strategies don't always unfold according to plan. Sometimes we just need an opportunity to rejuvenate and remind ourselves of the bigger picture. Sometimes we are making mistakes and need to give ourselves a chance to learn from them. There are many good reasons to build checkpoints into our strategy, points at which we assess our strategy and make changes if necessary.

### **Developing a Strategy: Step by Step**

1. Set goal.
2. Identify appropriate activities.
3. Identify human resources, available and needed.
4. Identify material resources, available and needed.
5. Divide tasks and responsibilities.
6. Set up a communication/decision-making system.
7. Set deadlines.
8. Evaluate.

# **Notes:**



***A time line is a plan of action that ties the specific steps to when they need to happen.***

# Notes:



---

### Further Reading:

*Si Kahn, Organizing: A Guide for Grassroots Leaders, McGraw-Hill, 1982.*

*Virginia Coover et al, Resource Manual for a Living Revolution, New Society Press, 1978.*

---