

# HPM - Personal Strategic Planning:

## *Investing in Your Career*

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on-line version - <http://www.vetmed.wsu.edu/courses-jmgay/documents/HPM-PersonalStrategicPlan.pdf>

Quotes, many from [Leading Thoughts](#) of Leadership Now

"If you don't know where you are going, any way will get you there" ([Lewis Carroll](#)).

"I can't change the direction of the wind but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination" ([Jimmy Dean](#)).

Like money, time can either be invested (future return) or spent (consumed now)

Like money, consistent small daily time investments (20 minutes) yield great rewards (nationally recognized expertise)

"We are what we repeatedly do, excellence then is not an act, but a habit" ([Aristotle](#))

"The first and greatest victory is to conquer yourself" ([Plato](#))

"If you look to lead, invest at least 40% of your time managing yourself—your own purpose, ethics, principles, motivation, conduct. Invest at least 30% managing those with authority over you, and 15% managing your peers." ([Dee Hock](#), Visa founder)

Investing time yields future returns; spending time does not. You have the choice to either invest or spend this scarce resource hour-by-hour 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks per year. You are much more likely to achieve your future goals if you plan your time investments than if you don't. Just as with money, consistent well-considered investment yields rewards.

Unlike previous generations who could follow conventional paths to career success, you have to chart your path, particularly for agricultural animal veterinary medicine, to achieve your goals. The era of simply hanging your shingle out and having more business than you need show up (high demand relative to service supply) is over ([Ribble, 1987](#)). The future belongs to those who recognize and capitalize on emerging opportunities and discard the soon to be obsolete. The major factors disrupting the old standard pathways are:

### **Transition from information scarcity to information excess**

Once, the holder of information was the holder of power. Prior to the internet, information was difficult to obtain, diffused slowly, and veterinarians had "the corner" on it. That is no longer the case for veterinarians or other professionals. With information no longer a scarce resource, simply providing information is no longer high value. With veterinary texts available on Amazon, veterinary abstracts available on PubMed, and applied veterinary information available from Google searches, anyone with an internet-connected computer has 24/7 access to almost anything a veterinarian has access to and perhaps more time to acquire and to read it. With wifi, the internet is available cow-side and the flow can be bidirectional, easily capturing data that used to have to be recorded on paper and then transcribed into a computer. This access speeds innovation and the acquisition of veterinary-related information by non-veterinary competition as well as by clients, who may have both motivation and time to search for specific information. Now having filtering, analysis, and synthesis skills, such as those required to practice evidence-based veterinary medicine, and the skills to execute valid on-farm comparisons present value-adding opportunities. Time remains a limited resource for everyone.

### **Increasing professional service diversity**

Professional practice is no longer uniform within regions and across time, meaning that the services a clientele expects, what practices provide, and the skills veterinarians need are dissimilar over both.

Livestock production systems are diverging by region and increasing in size, technology is evolving, and specialized professional knowledge is growing. Professional services now vary considerably, with veterinarians developing specific areas of expertise and delivering focused services to a specific type of clientele. Practice change is driven by advancing veterinary and livestock technology and by clients rapidly adapting to changing market pressures and opportunities. Previously, agricultural animal veterinarians could do well providing a conventional set of services to a wide range of clients within a geographically-defined practice radius year after year. As shown by regional deficits of traditional mixed practices in the face of excess veterinary supply ([AVMA, 2013](#)), that is no longer true.

### **Increasing competition**

Success requires staying a step ahead of your competition, which is increasing. Demand for conventional services is declining as average herd size increases and the skills of on-farm labor increase. Because of industry economics, the number of viable livestock enterprises is declining as their average size is increasing. The supply of veterinarians is increasing as schools increase class size to counter decreasing state support, much like dairies adding cows when milk margins narrow, and new schools open or achieve AVMA accreditation ([AVMA, 2013](#)). Non-veterinary service providers are targeting select technical services, such as pregnancy detection and bull testing. Technology is providing solutions to producer problems that used to support veterinary services, such as using bull birthweight EPD's to reduce the fetal oversize problem that used to require obstetrical services and were previously addressed by pelvic sizing.

### **Rapid livestock industry change**

Relentless change is a fact of business life that digital communication speeds up. Quoting Bill Gates (2000):

- "Getting detailed information was prohibitively expensive. . . the tools and connectivity of the digital age now give us a way to easily obtain, share, and act on information in new and remarkable ways."
- "How you gather, manage, and use information determines whether you win or lose"

Given the instantaneous exchange digital connectivity enables, digital information flows decrease cycle times, remove boundaries, and empowers clients to solve more problems for themselves. Connected clients gravitate toward equally well connected businesses. To remain competitive, businesses must respond quicker with greater added value or suffer. Widespread production system changes occur when key producers, watched in the producer community as "early adopters," identify and adopt innovations. Because of their 24/7 access to digital information, innovations diffuse rapidly among these key opinion leaders (see [diffusion of innovations](#)). Innovations are two types - sustaining, which incrementally improve value, or disruptive, which displace the previous product or service (see [disruptive innovation](#)). For the business that doesn't or can't adapt, Joseph Schumpeter's [creative destruction](#) occurs as the value of their services and their market competitiveness declines. As management and technology innovations shift the minimum long run [cost curve](#) for an industry, the [ideal firm size](#) generally increases as [economies of scale](#) increase. Current professional skills and knowledge inevitably lose value, meaning that unless you continually improve learning new things and acquiring new skills, your career prospects stagnate and decline.

**The key is to manage your career as if it were a start-up business** (see [The Startup of You](#))

### **Strategic planning maximizes your investment return and reduces risk**

The best way to determine your future is acting intentionally by planning your investments in it. To achieve anything, first envision your goal. Time is your most limited resource that you can either spend or invest. Strategic planning is the process of determining how to best invest your limited resources in overcoming obstacles. Strategic planning is ongoing.

Strategic planning is the process of identifying critical business trends, impending technological shifts, identifying obstacles, such as lack of skills, to your adapting to these, and for responding to the challenges and opportunities afforded by a dynamic livestock industry responding to volatile economic forces. A personal strategic plan is simply your personal road map determining where you are compared to where you want to be, identifying the obstacles that must be overcome, detailing where, when, and how you want to get from where you are to where you want to go. Thinking about your map and writing your thoughts down are the most important parts of strategic planning.

Tactical planning is implementing your strategic plan by breaking it down into manageable intermediate steps. Operational planning are the day-to-day actions to achieve these steps. The most important thing is to make this investment routine and the best way to do that is to make it a habit.

**Strategy:** The actions implemented in response to a coherent analysis of high stakes challenges.

**Strategic Plan:** The road map developed from your decisions about what, why and how that coordinates your investments of time and money to surmount critical obstacles, focuses your energies on what is most important, maintains balance in your life, and leverages your resources in your determination to get from where you are to where you want to be.

**Values:** Your core beliefs and principles that guide your decision-making. Ambition, determination, and innovation are required characteristics for success but are not the basis for decision making.

**Vision:** Your aspirations and enduring purpose, stated simply and precisely, that bridges your present to your future.

**Mission:** A precise statement summarizing your goals that when accomplished fulfill your vision. For example, "Provide high end theriogenology services to progressive large-scale commercial dairy producers."

**Goals:** Outcomes that when completed move you toward fulfilling your vision and that include both completion dates and clear evaluation measures. "By 2020, I will qualify for and pass the ACT board" is a goal established, for example, because not having the credential is an obstacle to expanding a particular clientele.

**Tactical Plan:** The actions, targets and timetables that address your current circumstances and within year adjustments. "This year I will study 4 books on the ACT reading list and . . ."

**Operational Plan:** The day-to-day and week-to-week execution of your tactical plan broken into a series of distinct actions that when completed achieve a goal. "Starting at 5 AM every weekday morning, for 30 minutes I will read and make notes from a book on the ACT reading list . . ."

## Strategic plan development steps

Based on The One Hour Plan for Growth: How a single sheet of paper can take your business to the next level (J Calhoun, 2011) - [Amazon](#)

### 1: Define your primary aim, strategic objective, vision and goals

- Write these down

### 2: Diagnose your circumstances, establish connections, and assess your resources

- Conduct a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis
- **Establish environmental scanning and networking**
- Assess your circumstances, inventory your resources, and make a diagnosis

### 3: Determine strategies to achieve your vision and goals

- Define the "gap" between your current circumstances and where you want to be
- Identify potential paths for closing this gap
- Determine what is driving marketplace change

- Define the scenarios that may impact each strategic path, positively or negatively
- Merge strategies and scenarios
- Choose the strategic path that has the highest likelihood of success

#### 4: Put your plan into action

- Implement your tactical plan

#### 5: Regularly monitor your success and make adjustments

## Define Your Primary Aim, Strategic Objective, Vision, and Goals

Most everyone has a direction in mind but few clarify it by writing it down; those who do are considerably more likely to achieve their goals.

### Step 1: Define your primary aim, strategic objective, vision, and goals

#### Personal Leadership

Steven Covey's book "[The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People](#)" is the classic - [Amazon](#)

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People - [FranklinCovey](#) - [wiki](#) - [html](#)

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People Signature Program - Cornell [pdf](#)

The 7 Habits Primer (Zaine Ridling, 2001) - [pdf](#)

[The E-Myth Revisited](#): Why most small businesses don't work and what to do about it (ME Gerber, 2001) - [Amazon](#)

#### Define your primary aim

Your primary aim is what provides you purpose, energy, and grist for the day-to-day mill (Gerber). Your primary aim is the answers to these questions:

- What do I value most?
- What kind of life do I want? What do I want it to look like? To feel like?
- How do I wish my life to be on a day-to-day basis?
- Who do I wish to be? How would I like to be with the other people in my life - my family, my friends, my business associates, my clients, my employees, my community?
- What would I like to be doing two years from now? Ten years? Twenty years? At life's end?
- What would I like others to say about my life after if is too late for me to change it?
- What would I like to learn - spiritually, physically, professionally, financially, technically, intellectually, socially?

#### Develop your brand

Your brand is your reputation; it is what people think of when they hear or see your name or after googling you or your business. If people think of nothing or find nothing, you have no reputation. Few jobs with any distance from academia require a curriculum vitae; most require a reputation. Prior to google, direct word of mouth alone was most often the reason your reputation preceded you. With google, your reputation can quickly precede you. Branding distinguishes you from your competition having similar characteristics. To retain their value, personal and business brands should be separable.

[The Brand Who Cried Wolf](#): Deliver on your company's promise and create customers for life (S Deming, 2007) - [Amazon](#)

### **Define your strategic business objective**

Your strategic objective states how your business will enable you to achieve your primary aim. Your strategic objective should answer the following questions:

- How much money will it need to provide for you to obtain your primary aim while you are in the business?
- At the time you wish to exit your business, how many assets will it need to hold for you meet your primary aim at that time? (remember that due to inflation, dollar values must be adjusted over time)
- What is your business? Who is your most probable client?
- When will your business alleviate enough problems of a large enough group of clients to provide the above?

### **Develop your vision**

Your vision statement clearly states where you are headed. It is for communicating to clients, employees, suppliers, lenders, advisors, family, and community members what is important to you, how your practice is unique, and why your services are value-added. A vision statement should include:

- Your values and your practice's values and reason for being.
- A description of what you and your practice will be like if you achieve your goals.
- How you and your practice serves your stakeholders (family, owners, employees, clients, community and/or society as a whole), encouraging their cooperation and stimulating their creativity.
- An energy that inspires you and justifies your moving forward

The development process is as important as the final statement. To sharpen your vision statement, consider these questions:

- First, consider your personal goals in ten critical areas of life: Personal, Health, Recreation, Family, Friends, Community, Career, Financial, Household, and Spiritual. Consider what your family values and aspires to by asking, "What do we want?" and "What is our family willing to make a strong commitment to?"
- If your career could be anything you can imagine ten years from now, what would that be? What specialized skills would you have, where would you be, and what would you be doing?
- If your practice could be anything you can imagine ten years from now, what would that be? How would it operate, how big would it be, and how would the practice business structure be organized?
- What new activities will you be pursuing? What business(es) will you be in? What new services would you like to provide or activities you would like to be involved in?
- What will be the important concerns of your clients ten years from now? How do you meet their demands and desires?
- How will you excel? What have you learned from failures and mistakes?
- What will be the roles and responsibilities of family members? Employees?
- What is of greatest value to you? To family members? To the practice?
- What are the practice's social responsibilities and community services?

### **Define your long-term goals**

Define your long-term professional goals and sub-goals for these. Break the sub-goals into steps required to achieve them. You determine some steps while others are established for you. For example, if you establish a goal of becoming board-certified as part of your professional development, some steps are established by the certifying group but others are left to you. If

achieving board-certification is a goal, obtain the requirements and related information from the board, such as the study guide and the list of recommended reading, now. Even if you elect not to pursue certification, these guides provide excellent subgoals for developing that expertise.

## **Step 2: Make your diagnosis, establish scanning and networking, and assess situation**

Conduct a [SWOT analysis](#) to assess your strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats. This defines the important obstacles and opportunities in achieving your goals and assesses the factors leading you toward success and those holding you back.

### **Identify opportunities and threats coming from outside your practice**

When listing these, ask yourself:

- How well do I understand my target client, their business, and their business environment?
- What problems are clients solving when they purchase my services? What are other aspects of the problem that my services could solve? How could I change my services to improve that solution? (see the book [Service Innovation](#))
- What other problems are clients having that new services could solve? Will a sufficient number of clients have the problem that a potential service solves to make it worth developing? Will it be sufficiently value added to be sustainable?
- How well do I understand the economic marketplace that my clients compete in and what they are likely to do in the short and long term?
- What are my competitors' weaknesses and strengths?
- How ready am I to take advantage of inevitable technological change that provides new service opportunities? To respond to change that reduce the value of or reduce the demand for a current service?
- How well positioned am I to adapt to changing regulations or consumer preferences?

These questions work in determining both opportunities and threats, depending on your answers. Threats may include a change in consumer expectations, various unforeseen regulatory effects, seasonal sales patterns, cyclical economic effects on clientele, and the disappearance of a client segment.

### **Identify strengths and weaknesses within your practice**

Formulate a list that reflects not only how you see yourself, but also how clients see both you and your services. To identify strengths, ask yourself:

- What advantages do I have? My practice have? Disadvantages?
- What do clients see as my strengths? My weaknesses? What do colleagues see?
- Why do clients like those services they buy? Dislike those they don't?
- Why do clients trust me? What do I do that increases trust? Avoid doing that would decrease trust?
- What are the present and future reasons why I have a sustainable competitive advantage? My practice?

A strength may be a unique college degree, which represents specialized knowledge, a particular experience providing a competitive edge, or the ability to develop unique skills and knowledge.

To identify weaknesses, ask yourself:

- What inconvenient truths and objective data am I ignoring? What am I assuming that is possibly false? What data and facts would reduce the risk of mistaken assumptions?
- What fears (e.g., fear of failure, inadequacy, vulnerability, insecurity, uncertainty, being

overwhelmed) are blocking decisions and actions I should be taking? Which are unwarranted? What could I do to reduce the valid ones?

“The most difficult thing is the decision to act, the rest is merely tenacity. The fears are paper tigers.” Amelia Earhart

- What do I know I should improve? Stop?
- How do I improve my marketing and salesmanship skills? What factors prevent me from marketing certain services to certain clients?
- How do I identify problems clients are having that I am unaware of?
- What is preventing me from achieving my financial objectives?
- What aspects of business do I need to learn more about? (See Ag Vet Business Book list - [pdf](#))
- How current am I in the topics covered by the formal professional development forums (e.g., [AABP](#), [AVC](#)) and the certifying bodies relevant to my area of practice (e.g., [ABVP](#), [ACT](#))?
- What skills and knowledge do emerging opportunities require that I don't have (e.g., third party certification, [food branding](#), new technology displacing conventional practices, application of developing scientific knowledge (DNA trait testing, RFI))?

Consider whether time, your most scarce resource, is better invested in removing a weakness or in capitalizing on a strength. How do the cost-benefit ratios likely rank?

### **Establish environmental scanning and professional networking**

**Environmental scanning and networking are critical to identifying and monitoring change drivers and emerging threats and opportunities and to identifying solutions.** If you pick only two things to do on this list, do these!

**Environmental scanning** is identifying and routinely scanning key information sources to keep abreast of emerging information signaling threats, opportunities, [tipping points](#) indicating rapid change, and changes in the professional knowledge base critical to your clinical area.

- Identify and regularly monitor key:
  - Economic and market indicators relevant to your clients' industry, such as those on [Drover's Quotes and Charts](#), [Progressive Dairyman Market Watch](#). Trends in the prices of copper and crude oil indicate the health of the general economy will perform and the trends of the dollar relative to other currencies indicate correlates with global agricultural trade.
  - Government resources, such as [US Drought Monitor](#), USDA [AMS Feedstuffs](#), USDA [ERS Costs and Returns](#). Large areas of drought increase feed commodity prices.
  - Information aggregators such as [All Top - Agriculture](#), [Eureka Alert - Agriculture](#), [ProMED Mail](#), Purdue [Beef Blog](#), [ScienceDaily - Plants & Animals](#) - [Cow, Sheep, Pig News](#)
  - Table of contents for applied papers in important scientific and professional journals in your area (e.g., [J of Dairy Sci](#), [J Anim Sci](#), [The Professional Animal Scientist](#)) - [Journal Table of Contents Service](#)
  - Annual major conferences covering topics relevant to your role in your client's' industry and, if not attending, read the [proceedings](#)
  - Major trade magazines, print and electronic, covering your clients' industry and regularly scan the issues for clues on trends and issues affecting their business and your delivery of services
  - Use [news aggregators](#)
- Avoid [information overload](#) by prioritizing key resources
- Use tools such as [Feedly](#) to develop your own key information aggregations
- For more resources, see “The Ag Animal Veterinarian's Information Environment” - [pdf](#)



**Networking** is expanding your connections to people (see the book [The Startup of You](#))

The “[weak ties](#)” developed through [social networking](#) break down the “silos” of strong ties and are the source unique ideas and of more positions than any other method (see “[The power of weak ties \(in recruiting\)](#)”).

- Identify the leading practices and practitioners in your interest area and then look for their presentations at conferences and occasionally scan for their proceedings papers and other publications.
- Identify and introduce yourself to practitioner group awardees (e.g., [AABP](#))
- Identify the leading researchers working on the major problems and bottlenecks affecting your client’s operations and follow their speaking and writing
- Find one or mentors in practice doing what you want to do and spend time with them
- “[Work the room](#)” during the breaks when attending national conferences (*Forbes* [article](#))
- Identify the “grapevine” among practitioners and allied professionals serving an industry
- Consider joining or developing a network of like-minded individuals among whom this information is shared using social networking technology
  - [Social bookmarking - list](#)
- [Social media](#) - [social networking service](#)
  - [Linkedin](#) - world’s largest professional network

### **Identify and understand your competition**

Staying a step ahead of your competition is critical to sustained success. Competition is anyone or anything solving a producer problem for which you could provide a service. Competition can be the adoption of a technology on-farm or the increasing skill of on-farm labor. Identifying your competition is the first step but not all competition is easily identified. Stealthy competitors are difficult to out compete, particularly if they are compensated indirectly for their services, such as a component of product sales.

Competition usually occurs as providing more value-added service, providing unique forms of the services, providing better service, providing more services, targeting higher yielding clientele, establishing stronger personal relationships, creating greater trust, or charging less. Identify the competitions that you want to be in. Then consider:

- Alternatives to your services and why they might be attractive to your clientele
- What technologies would immediately decrease the need for your services, who might offer them, and how you might offer them
- How you can stay a step ahead of this competition

### **Inventory your resources and assess your situation**

Assess your current situation relative to where you want to be:

- What time, money, and skill resources do you have?
- What resources do you need to achieve your goals?
- What time and money can you regularly dedicate to the steps?

## **Develop the Best Strategy to Achieve your Goals**

**To maximize your chances of achieving your vision, establish a game plan.**

The resource inventory and SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis clearly define your starting point. The next step is to identify the gap between where you are and



where you want be and brainstorm strategy necessary to close it.

### Step 3: Conduct a GAP analysis and identify strategies to close that gap

**GAP Analysis:** Comparing where you are (actual performance) to where you want to be (potential performance).

A gap analysis is answering:

- What are the high stakes challenges?
- How does your vision compare with your current status?
- How does your vision fit with your available resources?
- How do you measure up to current industry benchmarks? These are criteria such as number of billable hours per week or month, number of herds and animals covered by full services, number of visits per year to full service clients and so on.
- What are the key internal and external constraints? What is constraining you from delivering a service? A client from consuming a service?

**Liebig's Law of the Minimum:** In biology, the scarcest resource limits growth regardless of the amounts of the other necessary resources. Goldratt's [Theory of Constraints](#) ([The Goal](#): A process of ongoing improvement, 2012 - [Amazon](#)) is the business management equivalent that a limited number of constraints, internal and external, prevent or delay a business from accomplishing its goals and that identifying and overcoming each primary constraint is key to achieving business goals in a timely manner.

Because constraints are often process bottlenecks that are part of a system, focus on eliminating the constraint rather than changing the system. For example, improving pricing is critical for the survival of livestock producers in commodity markets, both reducing input (purchasing) costs and improving output (sales) prices. Because the critical understanding is how to systematically and strategically use [futures contracts](#) and options to lock in input costs and output profits, that may be where time should be invested first.

To conduct a GAP analysis and identify strategies:

- First, determine where gaps exist from the six perspectives that contribute to your career viability: Learning and growth, resources, services, clients, financial, and lifestyle.
  - What are the constraints causing the gap or preventing closing it?
  - What are the critical obstacles to overcome?
  - Which gaps risk critical, high stakes challenges, such as burnout, insolvency, or bankruptcy?
- Second, analyze the critical issues involving considerable uncertainty
  - Write four headings, the first being "What I know", the second "What I don't know", the third "What I can influence", and the fourth "What I can't influence"
  - Enter at least one item under each heading
  - Consider how to obtain the information (Google searches, reading a book, talking to knowledgeable people) that would move items from "What I don't know" to "What I know".
  - Consider how to remove or minimize the risk from "What I can't influence" items
- Third, ask "To achieve my vision, what strategies will close this gap?" Create a list of potential strategies.
  - Consider different strategies for closing a gap. For example, if closing a gap involves acquiring knowledge, options might be enrolling in an academic program for a graduate degree in residence or on-line, taking conference seminars over years, or embarking on an ambitious self-study program

- Consider different timings for the strategy components. For example, if closing a gap involves more education, options might working and saving until you can pay for coursework vs. taking on debt now to take coursework now to achieve a higher income earlier.

## **Plan for Different Marketplace Scenarios**

**Unless you continually detect and adapt to marketplace trends, your business is at risk of experiencing Schumpeter's [Creative Destruction](#).**

**Scenario Planning:** Anticipating possible outcomes based on your evaluation of the hints and clues about the changing business environment around you.

At this point, you have a list of possible pathways to achieve your vision and need to determine which is likely to be most successful. Scenario planning anticipates future industry trends and evaluates how potential strategies fit within those trends. If you don't monitor marketplace trends, you react to change after the fact rather capitalizing on emerging opportunities. Flexibility is important because the best laid plans go awry. Examine past trends and historical cycles to anticipate which trends and issues may affect your segment of the profession and its clientele in the months and years ahead. The goal for this planning step is to look forward at your business environment and to identify multiple scenarios that may need addressed.

## **Determine the marketplace scenarios that may impact your strategy**

To begin scenario planning, brainstorm the possible situations that may impact your segment of the profession, your practice and most particularly, your clients and their industry. Ask yourself, "Could this happen?" and then "What happens if it does?" Will the impact be a short-term blip or a long-term game changer?

## **Select and evaluate the most probable marketplace scenarios**

From your list of scenarios, select those that are most likely to occur and that would have the largest effect on your plans, good or bad. Once you have chosen these, collect information about them to reduce uncertainty in your decision-making process. This information is key to understanding and managing risk and to recognizing opportunities. Sources may be articles from the professional literature, the trade press, websites, professional meetings, or conversations with mentors, trusted friends and experts. If the scenario occurred someplace, consider arranging to visit with those who experienced it.

## **Merge Your Strategies & Marketplace Scenarios**

### **Implement the strategy that is most likely to succeed.**

Now compare your professional development strategies with the anticipated scenarios to determine which strategies have the highest likelihood of success. These are where to focus your energy and the most limited resource that you have, your time.

### **Identify the strategy with the highest likelihood of success**

To test strategies against future scenarios, use a simple matrix with strategic pathways down the side of the matrix and scenarios across the top. Use a plus sign to indicate if your strategy may improve the situation in the scenario and a negative sign if the strategy may worsen it. A zero

indicates your strategy would have a neutral effect. At the end of the process, the strategies with the most plus signs are strong candidates for implementing in your strategic plan because they would have the most positive effect within the most scenarios.

### **Conduct a “pre-mortem” analysis**

Assume that it is the future, your chosen strategy has failed, and you are doing post mortem to determine why. What are the most likely reasons (differentials) that it failed? What could you have done to prevent that failure? What should you start doing, stop doing, keep doing to avoid this future failure? What can you incorporate into your strategic plan?

## **Put Your Plan into Action**

**Without implementation and follow-up assessments, your strategic plan isn't of much value.**

**Action Plan:** Outlines the strategies and action steps necessary to meet goals and objectives.

An implementation plan, followed by evaluation of how well you are executing your plan, is necessary or your strategic plan will likely not get off the ground. Don't forget that the purpose behind strategic planning is to achieve your vision for the future. Many people spend more time planning their vacations than their careers.

### **Step 4: Implement your strategic plan**

Because every business sells something, marketing is an unavoidable component of business. Everyone sells (markets) ideas to others, whether they are “significant others,” family, friends, or business stakeholders. Branding and trust are key components of marketing. Considering marketing is a critical component of strategic plan implementation.

“Veterinarians . . . must adopt modern methods of marketing . . . promote the service using the principles of selling a product or service. . . .” “Marketing is the business of creating customers by looking at all your activities through the customers eyes and supplying value satisfactions at a profit. . . .first finding out the nature and scale of client needs and then providing services to satisfy them, rather than adhering to the traditional . . . approach of supplying services and then trying to persuade clients to buy them. . . . One must carefully identify the producers with purchasing power and a willingness to purchase. Once identified, these producers should be questioned to determine what benefits they desire . . . and a decision made concerning which of these benefits the veterinarian will offer. . . . Personal selling is the promotional technique of choice . . .” ([Ribble, 1987](#)).

All professionals must market. . . . Sales mean survival. Have no doubt about it: You must learn to sell. . . . These underlying economics are so relentless that they will require you to sell . . . To a client you are an authority; to a prospect, a vendor. . . . Selling is practicing your profession at the highest level. It is in the sale that you translate the client's hopes and fears about a situation into the outline of a design, or plan, or case, or legal document, or whatever it is that your firm creates, to meet the client's need. Selling is being a true professional advisor. Name a leading professional in your field, someone universally respected as a major contributor to your profession, and chances

are you have named someone who works hard at selling. There is no task more important to a professional firm than developing business. . . . At least once each day, you need to remind yourself that marketers market and you should be working on something. (Introduction, Harding, 2008).

### **Marketing yourself and your business:**

**The First Law of Service:** (Maister, 1997, 71)

Client Satisfaction = Perception - Expectation

"Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning." (Bill Gates)

Marketing is getting people who have a specific need or problem to know, like, trust, do business with, repeat, and refer you to others who have this same need or problem (xvi). . . . Objections, questions, and resistance that your prospects pose are really clues that you have not gained their trust or answered their emotional needs when making a purchase (6). . . . You don't sell what you claim to offer; you sell what eventual buyers think they are going to get from your services (28). (Jantsch, 2006)

Marketing is demonstrative, not assertive, being what you do, not what you say.

- What problems are your customers attempting to solve when they retain your services? What solutions are you providing?
- Have you identified your ideal customer? Are they willing to pay a premium for what you do?
- Do you understand what your clients value, fear, want, and need?
- How well are you marketing yourself? Your business?
- How well are you communicating with all stakeholders (e.g., family, employees, colleagues, clients, potential clients, suppliers, lenders)? What is the best way to communicate with each?
- How will current clients be informed of changes that they should be aware of? Potential clients?
- How do you develop premium clients? Strategic partners?

### **Branding (reputation):**

Branding is the creation and support of a powerful perception and image of something based on unique, precise emotional experiences so powerful that they become a belief. . . . Branding is a feeling (10). Loyalty is created by human interaction (11). . . . Groups create unique brands by overdelivering on the promises they make and by creating emotional, unique, and meaningful experiences for their customers and prospects (14). When you make a promise, you create expectations. When you exceed expectations, you create a brand (29). . . . Each of us perceives our experiences in different ways; our emotional triggers are not all the same (26). . . . A transaction is simply an exchange of money for a good or service. A typical service is simply giving to the customer what he expects to get. A unique experience transcends the expected and becomes a one-of-a-kind, loyalty-building emotional relationship (45). If I was my customer right now, what would I love to have from me? (84). . . . To truly walk in your customer's shoes, you need to be open to what moves them emotionally. You need to view the interaction between you and them from their perspective, not yours (90). . . . You are not as good as you think you are - in every sense of the word (110). (Deming, 2007).

Small business branding comes down to paying attention to the smallest details and putting them into the smallest things - like your voice mail message, fax cover sheet, and even your out-of-office e-mail

reply (82). (Jantsch, 2010)

See “The Basics of Branding”, J Williams in [Entrepreneur](#)

- How well defined is your brand? Your business brand?
- How is branding addressed in your strategic plan?

#### **Trust:**

Trust (confidence), or its lack (distrust), is a crucial component of any business relationship and is essential for long term success. High trust increases the likelihood of transactions occurring, low trust decreases. High trust speeds and eases transactions (e.g., business on a handshake), low trust impedes (e.g., lawyer written and examined contracts containing performance clauses, risk of legal proceedings).

“Trust is a function of two things: character and competence. Character includes your integrity, your motive, your intent with people. Competence includes your capabilities, your skills, your results, your track record. And both are vital (30).” ([Speed of Trust](#), SR Covey)

Strategy X Execution X Trust = Results

“Leadership is getting results in a way that inspires trust (40).” Stephen MR Covey lists 13 behaviors that improve relationship trust, making an individual credible with prospective clients, clients, suppliers, investors, employees, employers, and other stakeholders - (The 13 behaviours of a high trust leader, [pdf](#))

Although veterinarians in general are perceived as highly trustworthy, keep in mind that others don't trust you as much as you perceive that they do or as high as your self-perception. We judge ourselves on intent, others judge us on behavior (character) and results (competence).

- Do you manifest all the elements of trust to your stakeholders?
- What do you need to do to increase trust? Stop doing?
- How is trust addressed in your strategic plan?

#### **Team function:**

If a team is involved in delivering components of the strategic plan, which is usually the case in veterinary practice, that team's organizational health is critical to strategic plan success. Ideally, the team is part of the strategic planning process. If organizational health can't be achieved in an existing business entity, the best approach may be to create a new business as part of implementing the strategic plan.

Organizational health requires a cohesive leadership group to clearly answer six critical business questions, to repeatedly communicate these answers to stakeholders, and to continually remind everyone what is really important by incorporating these answers into every policy, every program, and every activity. The leadership group must be small and must be collectively responsible for achieving the common objectives. They have to lead in building trust, mastering conflict, achieving commitment, establishing accountability, and focusing on collective results through the entire organization. The six

critical business questions are: Why do we exist?, How do we behave?, What do we do?, How will we succeed?, What is the most important, right now? and Who must do what? (Lencioni, 2012) If organizational health is a potential problem, start by reading this excellent book and take the associated [on-line organizational health survey](#).

### **Develop your tactical plan:**

Establishing priorities to implement your vision is critical. Resources are scarce and everything has a first step. Success emerges from the continual ratcheting to the next step, no matter how small. Consistent steps become an automatic habit. Break your goals into logical stepwise day-by-day, week-by-week, month-by-month actions. If necessary to get you started, record these on a calendar with committed blocks of time for each. Consider the time required versus the time you have to invest. If necessary, revisit your objectives and reorder your priorities accordingly. "[SMART](#)" criteria are specific, measurable, actionable, realistic and timely.

### **Commitment:**

Commitment that converts actions into habits is critical to achieving your goals. Public commitment and sharing accountability are best for establishing and maintaining momentum. Operational and tactical plans:

- Commit you to the implementation.
- Define who, what, where, when and how.
- Record the successes and failures encountered along the way.

When developing your action plan, consider:

- What are the realistic time frames for each goal?
- What will you develop into a habit?
- How you will track successes?
- Who needs to develop or improve what skills? What is a reasonable timeline for developing these skills?

### **Create a habit that consistently moves you toward your goals**

Employing the power of habit by creating one that moves you toward your goals is a most important step! Approximately 40% of our behavior is based on habits. Cue, habit, and reward. Moving behavior to subconscious habit speeds tasks and frees our consciousness to focus on other things.

See [Charles Duhigg](#) (2012). [The Power of Habit](#): Why we do what we do in life and business - [Amazon](#) - extensive [review](#)

Developing a skill to an expert level requires considerable time investment in dedicated consistent, deliberate practice that develops your abilities. Whatever the skill, approximately 50 hours are required to develop entry level competence and 10,000 hours or 10 years are required to become a master. This includes learning how to accomplish specifically directed practice, careful analysis of progress and learning from mistakes. (For further information, see KA Ericsson [pdf1](#) [pdf2](#) [html](#), [Expert](#), or Colvin, 2008)

For comparison consider that a degree is ~120-180 credits, 1 credit is 15 lecture hours, and ~2-4 study hours are expected per lecture hours. Thus a 1 credit class requires 15 50-minute direct hours and 30 to 50 indirect hours for a 42 to 75 hour time investment

20 minutes per night 6 nights per week is ~2 hours per a week, ~100 hours per a year or approximately a 2 credit class.

Invest rather than spend “slack time,” such as when driving, by listening to audiobooks. If someone else is doing the driving (or flying), use e-books. Several 20 minute drives a day can get you through most audiobooks in a week or two. Several services identify the best books, such as [100bestbiz.com](http://100bestbiz.com), [800CEORead.com](http://800CEORead.com), and googling “best business books” provides hundreds of lists. Including terms such as “small” or “professional service” provides more specific lists. Technology can remove the advertising that is one third of television shows and speed audio and video playback without reducing comprehension.

Fadde PJ, GA Klien (2010). Deliberate Performance: Accelerating expertise in natural settings. *Performance Improvement* 49(9):5-14, [pdf](#)

## **step 5: Regularly monitor your performance and adjust accordingly**

The final step in a well thought out strategic plan is identifying key performance measures and establishing a way to regularly monitoring these, and for gathering feedback. Because performance measures often interact in unanticipated ways, think these through carefully. For example, if the key measure is percent billable hours without also tracking total hours worked, percent billable hours can be improved by simply dumping non-billable hours on a junior colleague.

An example of a performance measuring system is the [Balanced Scorecard](#). Like a simple report card, it provides a gauge of how well you and your practice performed in selected area.

“Think of the Balanced Scorecard as the dials and indicators in an airplane cockpit. To navigate and fly the plane, pilots need ... information on fuel, airspeed, altitude, bearing, destination, and other indicators.... Reliance on one instrument can be fatal. Similarly, the complexity of managing a business today requires that managers be able to view performance in several areas at once.”  
—Drs. Robert Kaplan and David Norton

To maintain balance, the scorecard has six major perspectives:

- Learning and growth
- Resources
- Services
- Clients
- Financial
- Lifestyle

Everything begins with the learning and growth perspective because it is the foundation to achieving the other goals. To develop a Balanced Scorecard, transfer the strategies that received a “plus” in the strategic and scenario planning matrix into the proper perspectives. Next, evaluate performance measures for each strategy.

Finally, a strategic plan is not static but should be revised regularly in the face of changing circumstances and your experience. And nothing prevents you from throwing the entire thing away and starting over.



## References for the above:

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- Colvin, G. (2008). **Talent is Overrated: What Really Separates World-Class Performers from Everybody Else.** - [Amazon](#)
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- [Rumelt, R](#) (2011). **Good Strategy Bad Strategy: The difference and why it matters** - [Amazon](#) Book website - <http://goodbadstrategy.com/>

## Other Books, Papers, and Websites:

Many books, articles and webpages address strategic planning.

- Searching PubMed using "career development" and "professional development" yields ~1,000 hits
- Googling "personal strategic plan" results in some 250K hits.  
Example: Blair, Gary Ryan. Create a Personal Strategic Plan.  
<http://ezinearticles.com/?Create-a-Personal-Strategic-Plan&id=245147>
- Balanced Scorecard Institute  
<http://www.balancedscorecard.org/BSCResources/AbouttheBalancedScorecard/tabid/55/Default.aspx>
- Loeb, M, S Kindel, 1999. *Leadership for Dummies*. IDG Books Worldwide.
- Maxwell, JC, 2004. *Today Matters: 12 Daily Practices to Guarantee Tomorrow's Success*. Center Street.
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## **Suggested Strategic Plan Template** (if you are not using Calhoon):

### **Page 1+:**

#### **Primary Aim:**

Several sentences at most

#### **Strategic Objective:**

Several sentences at most

#### **Vision Statement:**

Several sentences at most

#### **Mission Statement:**

Several sentences at most

#### **Values:**

Bullet point list

#### **Long-Term Goals**

Bullet point list with target completion date

### **Page 2+:**

#### **SWOT Analysis:**

- **Strengths:**  
Bullet point list with brief detail
- **Weaknesses:**  
Bullet point list with brief detail
- **Opportunities**  
Bullet point list with brief detail
- **Threats:**  
Bullet point list with brief detail

### **Page 3+:**

#### **Environmental Scanning and Professional Networking Resources:**

- Key economic and market indicators and their sources
- Key government monitoring resources
- Professional associations
- Leading practitioners with contact information
- Leading researchers
- Major conferences
- Major trade magazines, print and electronic
- Social media

### **Page 4-5:**

#### **Tactical and Operational Plan**

- Bullet for each long term goal with target completion date
  - Sub-goals with steps and target completion date
- Day-to-day, week-to-week and month-to month plan for time investment

### **Page 6+:**

#### **Supporting Materials**

Requirements established by external sources  
Resource lists  
Supporting material - links, pdf's