

Winning the Long Game

This article captures the highlights of the discussion from Steve Krupp's presentation to members of SHRM Linkage.

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Steve Krupp:

Steve Krupp is the Founder of Long Game Strategists and author of *Winning the Long Game: How Strategic Leaders Shape the Future* published in 2014.

Prior to Long Game Strategists, Steve was Partner at Heidrick Consulting and before that he was CEO at Decision Strategies International.

Businesses face a growing shortage of leaders who are both strategic and agile. Most leaders rise through the ranks by excelling at short-term execution. The pressure to prove oneself quickly, and the rewards tied to quarterly or annual KPIs, incentivize leaders to accelerate results rather than take the time to build for long-term success. Yet the more senior you are, the more strategic you must become.

The good news is that strategic thinking and agility can be learned. Habits that build these skills are quick and simple to implement.

See page 7 for a simple checklist to ensure that you're building habits to help strengthen your strategic thinking.

01 ANTICIPATE

See sooner and scan wider

Anticipating is often the weakest strategic skill among leaders, yet it is the most critical in the face of uncertainty.

Scenario Planning

Most leaders default to choosing the most likely future, building a detailed plan around it, and adjusting as unexpected changes arise. But this can create erratic pacing and unclear expectations for teams, especially as the business context shifts. The result is often organizational fatigue. You can't predict the future, but you can lay out multiple scenarios and build optionality into your strategy and decision-making.

FURTHER READING

by Steve Krupp

- [They said you're not strategic: Don't panic.apply 6 disciplines](#)
- [How to anticipate Better](#)
- [The courage to challenge](#)

Steps for effective scenario planning:

1. Analyze known trends and evaluate how they affect your business
2. Extend those trends into your desired time frame and list the uncertainties that emerge
3. Identify which uncertainties pose the greatest risk or offer the biggest opportunities
4. Create a high-level response plan for each and clarify who will make decisions and how resources will be allocated

Assign a team to monitor how each scenario develops and which ones gain momentum faster than others.

Conduct Pre-Mortems

Before making a large strategic decision, consider what could go wrong. Play out the scenario as if the decision has already failed. Then map out how you and your teams would respond. What steps would you take to mitigate the consequences? Are there any no-regret moves you can make now?

02 CHALLENGE

Open the window and look in the mirror

It can be uncomfortable to challenge assumptions or opinions, even when you know it leads to better answers. It feels easier and more efficient to have one plan and move forward.

Separate challenging a plan from challenging a person. Be clear that you are disagreeing with someone's idea, not with them.

FURTHER READING

by Steve Krupp

- The discipline to interpret

To reveal gaps in your argument, process, or plan, create a space where people are explicitly invited to take contrarian views. If no one steps into that role, assign one group to research why a proposal should move forward and another to argue against it. Seek out uncomfortable evidence.

You can also use large language models like ChatGPT as a non-threatening source of opposing viewpoints.

03 INTERPRET

Frame the problem and connect the dots

Most teams spend little time framing a problem before trying to solve it. A reluctance to learn leads to strong confirmation and overconfidence biases, which overpower the need to interrogate the problem deeply. This wastes time, data, and resources.

Spend time debating the problem to avoid mistaking a symptom for the cause.

Use the 5 Whys Framework to get to the root of the issue.

For example:

Problem: The client didn't renew their contract.

1. Why? Because they were unhappy with the results of the last campaign.
2. Why? Because the campaign didn't generate enough leads.
3. Why? Because the targeting was off.
4. Why? Because we used outdated audience data.
5. Why? Because we didn't have a process to regularly update our customer profiles.

Root cause: Lack of a data maintenance process.

FURTHER READING by Steve Krupp

- [The secret to decisions that last](#)
- [Alignment power](#)

04 DECIDE

Explore options and show courage

People tend to default to either-or thinking: yes or no, right or wrong, go or wait. It leads to either rushed decisions or paralysis through overanalysis.

Have the courage to explore the middle ground and look before you leap.

Set up a clear decision-making process:

1. Establish who owns the final decision
2. Brainstorm to generate a wide range of options
3. Debate the options with a strict time limit
4. Then choose the best course

If everyone has had a chance to share their views, you don't need consensus to move forward. Encourage people to disagree, but commit once the decision is made.

05 ALIGN

Rally key players and bridge differences

We are wired for fight or flight. Under pressure, most people either avoid or seek conflict. Neither response builds alignment.

When you face resistance, don't ignore it or shut it down. Try to understand what is driving the other person's view by asking many questions. Find common ground and use it as the starting point for bridging your differences.

FURTHER READING by Steve Krupp

- Learning at the speed of AI

06 LEARN

Unleash your creativity and experiment with Agility

The willingness to learn is the second weakest strategic skill among senior leaders. Many say they want to learn, yet allocate little time to it. Most people prefer not to admit mistakes or ignorance. While the celebration of failure is sometimes praised, especially in Silicon Valley culture, leaders are more often penalized than rewarded for getting things wrong.

Ask questions as often as you can. Feign naivety if necessary to encourage people to relook at what may seem obvious on the surface. Challenge existing assumptions.

STRATEGIC THINKING CHECKLIST

We invite you to print this page and periodically check yourself against the key habits that build strong strategic leadership.

ANTICIPATE

- ☐ Do I have multiple versions of how the future may play out?
- ☐ Am I aware of the major trends that affect my business?
- ☐ Do I understand how and where my strategy might fail?

CHALLENGE

- ☐ Do I surround myself with people who challenge my thinking?
- ☐ Do I seek evidence that makes me uncomfortable?

INTERPET

- ☐ Am I spending enough time framing the problem before trying to solve it?

DECIDE

- ☐ Am I exploring enough options before choosing a course of action?
- ☐ Am I placing a limit on the time spent debating options?

ALIGN

- ☐ Do I invest time in understanding the reasons behind others' views?
- ☐ Am I asking enough questions?

LEARN

- ☐ Do I allocate significant time to learning?
- ☐ Am I aware of my assumptions, and do I challenge them?

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