

## Achieve Strategic Depth

### Happy Hour Wisdom

*Look deeper for a higher thinking.*

### The Ugly Truth

You may be very smart, but you may not be thinking at the depth and with the breadth and context required of you.



### The Bottom Line

Strategic thinking is a critical skill for young leaders to develop. Think of an analog clock—you know how to read it, but do you know how it works? Do you understand how the gears interact behind its face? It is this looking and thinking behind what you see that can get you to this next level. This may seem pitifully obvious, and some people intuitively do it, but others do not. This more carefully considered thought process separates good leaders from their less accomplished peers.

**Try This**

Begin by articulating a concern, a challenge, an incongruity, etc. Consider what you know and move outwards, thinking comprehensively about how those facts relate to the broader organization and the market within which it is situated. Carefully connect one thought to the next, and challenge yourself by asking questions and predicting an array of answers. For example: Are the relationships I've established fixed? Am I overlooking any critical information? What variables might intercede? What would the consequences be? You know you've reached an end to your efforts when you come up with something new, a novel way of thinking about the issue or a potential solution. If you're unsuccessful, set aside, but return to the concern once your head is cleared.

Strategic thinking should be differentiated from run-of-the-mill problem solving. Strategic thinking may begin with a less-than-structured problem and may end with a less-than-definitive answer. The reason is that strategic thinking is a process, a way to make connections and consider possibilities that may otherwise prove elusive. This type of thinking is both broad and deep; concerning both internal and external potentialities.

Note that strategic depth, loosely defined as a method of thinking with greater tactical implications, is contrasted with strategic planning in Part IV. Strategic planning is a more structured process, though also focused on future outcomes.

**5-Second Anecdote**

One of the most challenging aspects of moving from a non-leadership position upwards is to broaden one's operating picture to produce a better understanding of the moving parts that function together to drive the organization. When I hired "Anxious to Act Andy" to a top-level position, he was one of the brightest go-getters I had met—and I knew him to produce some of the best technical work products I had seen. But once promoted to leadership, and when my requests veered from the formulaic, Andy struggled. For example, I assigned him to produce a presentation for the organization's leadership on a topic with self-evident facts, but less obvious implications. In preparation, he dutifully identified relevant pieces of the story, but he didn't have a thoughtful or thought-provoking narrative. There was nothing insightful. I stepped in

and coached him on some potential directions, and that was all he needed to get up and running. In hindsight, the narrative usually seems intuitive, but it's not—without practice. Creating the spark that provokes a fire of strategic thought takes leader-like skill.