

10 Ways to Prove You're a Strategic Thinker

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Are you a strategic thinker? Do key people in your organization — such as your boss and senior leadership — think so? To get ahead in your career, it's critically important to ensure that the people around you perceive you as leadership material. One key to achieving that is communicating in ways that demonstrate your strategic mind. You can't just think strategically. You need to speak strategically, too. Here are some ways to do it:

Elevate your perspective

Instead of focusing on specifics, describe the broader landscape and articulate the bigger-picture narrative. By using language such as “Considering our organization’s three-year vision...” or “Reflecting on the trajectory of innovation in our industry...” you shape the context in which the tactical details can then be explored. This also helps to align stakeholders, ensuring everyone is on the same page.

Be forward-looking

Strategic thinkers see emerging challenges and opportunities. You can demonstrate that you are thinking about the future by using statements like “Projecting our growth, by 2028...” or “In light of our competitors’ plans, should we be...” By communicating a forward-looking stance, you demonstrate your capacity to help the organization develop long-term strategy.

Anticipate potent impacts

Strategic thinkers don't just make decisions; they assess and communicate their broader potential effects. You can showcase your critical thinking ability by highlighting possible outcomes or unintended consequences, for example, "This product has the potential to..." or elaborating with "Beyond the immediate benefits, our long-term gains include...." Doing so shows that you value thorough evaluation over immediate action.

Connect the dots

Show you look beyond surface events to the deeper picture of systems and interconnections and that you recognize their importance, for example, "This unexpected increase in digital adoption directly influences our e-commerce strategy..." or "Because of these supply chain constraints, we must revise our production timelines and product development strategy...." Doing so shows you have an integrative and holistic thought process.

Simplify the complicated

Strategic thinkers can break down complex situations in simple yet powerful terms. To distill complicated issues into their essentials, use explanations like "In essence, this technology can..." or "At its core, our strategy rests on three pillars...." In doing so, you indicate masterful comprehension of the topic.

Use analogies and metaphors

Analogies and metaphors help to communicate strategic ideas in relatable ways. When you make comparisons like "Think of our infrastructure as the backbone, supporting every function..." or "Imagine our marketing approach as a net, widening to capture diverse markets...", you show you can translate strategic jargon into everyday language, fostering broader understanding and alignment.

Stimulate strategic dialogue

When engaging with colleagues in strategic conversations, ask reflective questions such as "If our brand were a story, what chapter are we in?" or "How does this decision echo our company's foundational values?" This creates an environment where strategic thinking is collective and prompts discussion that will help you refine ideas and encourage others to adopt strategic mindset.

Show you are informed

Your strategic insights will be more impactful when grounded in current realities. Observations such as "Given the recent shifts in digital consumption patterns..." or "The latest research on consumer behavior suggests..." prove you are informed about the evolving landscape, an essential strategic thinking capability.

Practice strategic listening

Strategic thinking is best when it incorporates disparate views so it's important to listen closely and actively to others. Comments like "Building on what you've said..." or responding with "Your point about market saturation aligns with..." highlight your ability to do just that, enhancing your reputation as a strategy collaborator, enriching the discussion, and activating the group's collective intelligence.

Seek feedback

After strategic conversations, show you are focused on learning by asking for feedback from others. Use questions such as “Did the strategic direction resonate with everyone?” or suggestions such as “How can we better align these discussions with our broader mission?” to demonstrate your commitment to growth and improvement.

In summary, business leaders must be strong strategic thinkers and communicators. Those who can speak about strategy as well as they formulate it are the ones who will rise to the top.