

## 10 Characteristics of an Effective Strategic Plan

The following is an excerpt on **Strategic Planning** from:

*Strategic Planning for Faith-based Schools*

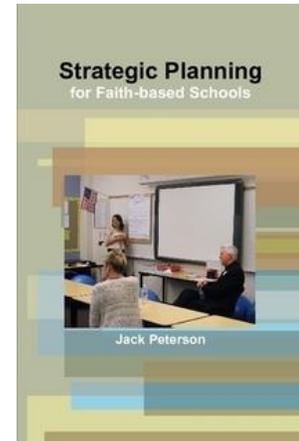
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*The following is a list of ten characteristics of the strategic planning process and the document it ultimately produces.*

**Accurate.** We have to accurately assess our current situation and make intelligent assumptions about future trends. If these assumptions are sloppy or wrong, the plan will steer us off course.

**Broadly owned,** so that the people who implement it are invested in its success.

**Coherent,** meaning that it can't just be a hodge-podge of good ideas that don't support or may in fact contradict each other.

**Comprehensive.** The strategic plan must strengthen all the important dimensions of the school. It can't just consider one aspect of the organization, say, the curriculum or facilities. The organization as a whole must be understood and aligned. Not only must we identify all the major pieces, but we must understand how they interact.

**Flexible.** In a dynamic environment, the plan must be able to adapt to changing circumstances. One way to be flexible is to be vague. Not good. A better way to achieve flexibility is with an annual process for revising the plan.

**Focused.** We don't want to attack on many fronts. We want to find a few key beachheads on the way to our desired future and concentrate our forces there.

**Forward-looking.** Wayne Gretzky's response when asked the reason for his success as a hockey player captures the essence of strategic planning: He explained that he doesn't skate to where the puck is. He skates to where it's going to be. And so must we. The strategic planning process must identify the trajectory of trends in our environment and guide changes in the organization so that it can thrive in a new reality.

**Implementation-oriented.** The biggest challenge for many schools is the transition from a carefully crafted plan to actual implementation. A plan, even a great plan, does no good sitting on a shelf. Goals need to be specific, measurable and there has to be a clear process of progress tracking, accountability and updating.

**Significant.** It must focus on the big factors, the big ideas, the big trends, the ones we consider strategic because they will make a difference to the school's mission-effectiveness as a whole. These are game-changers for the school.

**Timely.** The plan must respond to external trends soon enough, but not too soon. The prioritization of the plan goals must reflect the inherent timing of the issues the plan addresses. Hopefully, the planning process will assure that it does, but what is accurate and timely when the plan is written may change, especially if the plan horizon is 10 years.