

## Strategic Thinking Time — From the Dance Floor to the Balcony

In preparation for BetterManager coaching, managers complete a self-survey. One of the questions on the survey is, “How often do you schedule time to think?” A recommended best practice is *weekly*; however, many managers answer “never” or “rarely”, explaining that their hectic schedules don’t allow for it, and some simply haven’t realized the value in it. When you are “in the doing” of your job, you are on the **dance floor**. Your perspective is limited. When you go up to the **balcony**, you can suddenly see things from a different perspective. You can see what’s working and what’s not working. You can see around the corner and over the horizon. This is where planning takes place. Going up to the balcony is strategic thinking. It’s looking at the bigger picture.

Our coaches strongly encourage managers to consistently schedule some amount of weekly strategic thinking time. This is because leadership is both active and reflective, and a manager needs to have eyes on the details as well as the big picture.

### Why It Matters

Strategic thinking involves pausing to reflect on where you are, where you want to be, and ways to get there. It means planning and preparing for the future, meaning – it’s more than just planning tomorrow’s team meeting on the current project. It also means charting what your team will be focusing on in six months, one year, and perhaps beyond.

In his article, *Make Strategic Thinking Part of Your Job*, Ron Carucci sums it up perfectly:

*Executives must extract themselves from day-to-day problems and do the work that aligns their job with the company’s strategy. They need to be armed with insights that predict where best to focus resources. And they need to build a coalition of support by inviting those who must execute to disagree with and improve their strategic thinking. Taking these three practical steps will raise the altitude of executives to the appropriate strategic work of the future, freeing those they lead to direct the operational activities of today.*

## PRACTICE

### Schedule your strategic thinking time

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- Decide how much time each week you want to devote to strategic thinking. We recommend 30-60 minutes/week.
- Pick what day and time would work best for you, and then add it to your calendar as a recurring event. Consider this "sacred time", and don't schedule over it.

*Tip:* If it's easier, begin with 30 minutes per week. You can add more time as desired.

### Follow these 6 guidelines for strategic thinking (adapted from the Macquarie Group):

**NOTE:** The first time you go up to the *balcony*, just brainstorm a list of things you would like to accomplish while there. This can serve as your blueprint for strategic thinking time.

1. **Reflect:** Slow down and let your mind think things over.
2. **Use the whole of your brain:** Learn to switch between divergent thinking (multiple solutions) and convergent thinking (one solution).
3. **Broaden your horizons:** Step out from behind your desk, be curious, find other opinions.
4. **Step in the shoes of others:** Discuss your ideas with colleagues and clients.
5. **Encourage others:** Try to build a business culture that values strategic thinking.
6. **Make decisions:** Strategic thinking is not just about *thinking*...it's about *executing*.

Ask these questions while up on the balcony:

1. What's working and not working in how the team and business function?
2. What could be improved or optimized?
3. What would help our team be more cohesive and productive?
4. What projects would play to their strengths?
5. What's the biggest obstacle to hitting our goals?
6. Based on current trends and patterns, how are we with headcount now? 6 months from now? 1 year from now?
7. As a team, what do we need to START, STOP, and CONTINUE in order to become more effective?

## Activities

- Encourage other peers and leaders in your organization to schedule weekly strategic thinking time. Share your process and talk about how it has empowered your leadership awareness.
- Share this best practice with your direct reports, and follow with a team meeting in which everyone can discuss how this might enhance and improve their own approach to work and career development.
- Browse the links below to increase your awareness and skills with strategic thinking.

## RESOURCES

Carucci, R. (2016).

[Make strategic thinking part of your job.](#) Harvard Business Review. October 26, 2016.

Bradford, R. (n.d.).

[Strategic thinking: 11 critical skills needed.](#) Center for Simplified Strategic Planning.

Davey, L. (2014).

[Strengthen your strategic thinking muscles.](#) Harvard Business Review, January 21, 2014.

Oestreicher, C. (2017).

[How to master strategic thinking.](#) Forbes Coaches Council.

Macquarie Group Limited (October 12, 2016).

[6 ways you can improve your strategic thinking.](#)