

Ask Our Consultants

STRATEGIC PLANNING & REDEFINING THE VISION

We are in the process of fine-tuning our strategic plan and wonder if it's acceptable to veer off the strategic planning course and redefine the vision?

Absolutely!

You have asked an important question. And in keeping with the navigational phraseology you used, I will share a quote I often employ to focus organizations on their desired destinations. It is ascribed to Seneca the Younger, a Roman statesman and philosopher:

“If a man knows not what harbor he seeks, any wind is the right wind. If one does not know to which port one is sailing, no wind is favorable.”

When developing or fine-tuning a strategic plan, an organization needs to know what it is planning for. It needs to know where it wants to be in five or 10 years. This is the vision — the long-term aspirational focus of the organization.

The language of strategic planning sometimes confuses the terms “vision” and “mission” and uses them interchangeably. While both are guideposts for the organization’s actions and the starting points for governance, the strategic plan looks at the organization in one- to three-year increments and sets goals toward the vision. The following definitions should be helpful:

Vision: A picture or a dream of a desired future representing the ultimate desired objective of the organization. It asks and answers: What do you aspire to? Setting a vision should be a priority for any organization.

Mission: An organization’s fundamental purpose and reason to exist. It describes the needs the organization was created to meet and answers the basic question: What guides the organization from day to day? There should be no ambiguity about the mission as you implement your strategic plan.

Strategies: Actionable statements that, at a broad level, define the direction the organization will take to achieve its vision. Strategies focus the organization on the specific means to achieve its vision.

It is simply not possible to plan strategically without knowing where you are going. An organization needs to set its sights on a vision — a specific harbor — and then use thoughtful strategies — the winds — to determine how to navigate there.

I recommend that your organization take four basic strategic planning steps:

1. Determine your vision.
2. Decide how you will get there. Determine what strategies will be used.
3. Revisit your mission to determine how you will work day to day as you move toward the vision.
4. Live with your vision, mission, and strategies in an active way.

You are not veering off course by redefining your vision. You are charting a smooth course. Anchors aweigh!

This article first appeared in the May/June 2008 issue of Board Member.