

Strategic Personal Planning

Peter Taylor, 4/02, rev. 9/02, 4/03

A. In order to complete a satisfying project you need to focus on something tight and do-able, but Strategic Personal Planning allows you to find this focus by first opening out and acknowledging a wide range of factors and wishes that your work could (should?) take into account.

B. Strategic Personal Planning is based on the Strategic Participatory Planning workshop process developed by the Institute for Cultural Affairs (ICA). The basic propositions of the ICA workshop process include:

Notwithstanding any initial impressions to the contrary, everyone has insight (wisdom) and we need everyone's insight for the wisest result.

There is insight in every response. (There are no wrong answers.)

We know more than we are, at first, prepared or able to acknowledge.

When a person is heard, they can better hear others and hear themselves. This causes us to examine decisions made in advance about what the other people are like, what they are and are not capable of.

The step-by-step workshop process thus aims to keep us listening actively to each other, foster mutual respect, and elicit more of our insight.

Your initial conclusions may change -- be open for surprises.

What we come out with is very likely to be larger and more durable than what any one person came in with; the more so, the more voices that are brought out by the process.

In particular, we will be engaged in carrying out/carrying on the plans we develop.

In sum, the workshop process aims for the "greatest input, with greatest commitment and the least confusion, in the least time."

C. Adapting these principles to Strategic Personal Planning means you should hope to come out with a plan for your project that is richer, deeper, and has more dimensions than what you came in with. The more angles on yourself that are brought out by the process, the more likely you are to create something you did not anticipate. The experience of that creativity, in turn, leads you to be more likely to carry out the plan you arrive at.

D. The Str Pers Planning Process begins with the Practical Vision stage. This is meant to generate a larger vision of your work, something that informs the specific project you do for this course. In that spirit, do not focus for now on what your project topic will be. Instead, consider a more global question: What's needed for your Personal & Professional Development in [insert general area required to be addressed by the project]?

Steps

Post-it brainstorming

1. Imagine yourself some time after the course is over looking back with a sense of accomplishment on how far you have come in the area of [insert general area required to be addressed by the project]. (Construe "accomplishment" broadly so it can include your own reflection and growth.) What different kinds of things do you envisage having gone into that personal and professional development?

To prepare for this brainstorming, note:

- a. These things can span the mundane and inspiring; tangible and intangible; process, as well as product; relationships as well as individual skills. (By mundane, think of all the different tasks on your plate -- over and above those for this course -- that potentially affect your ability to carry out your project in a way that is satisfying.)
 - b. Reread the syllabus for course description, objectives and expectations.
 - c. For other ideas -- but feel free to depart from these -- review handouts from previous post-it brainstorming by students in CCT693 (photocopied handouts).
2. Keep in mind the question in 1. above, brainstorm your 3-5 word answers onto post-its in block letters.
3. Pair up and get more ideas from hearing about the kinds of things the other person came up with. Make more post-its.

Clustering (once you have about 30 post-its)

4. i) Move post-its around into groups of items that have something in common in the way they address the question; ii) describe the groups using a phrase that has a verb in it or, at least, indicates some action*; iii) group groups in pairs or threes and give these descriptive active names; iv) group the groups and name them, until you arrive at a descriptive active name is achieved for the vision as a whole. (*E.g., instead of "Holistic Artistic Survival Project," an active name would be "Moving holistically from surviving to thriving as artists." For more examples of clustering and naming, refer to http://www.faculty.umb.edu/peter_taylor/693visions.doc.)
5. Pair up again and discuss your overall vision.
6. After the class, redraw the groups in a neat form (without the original post-its) so you can refer back to it as you define and undertake your project.

D. During class we will complete only the first of four stages of Str Pers Planning. With your vision in mind, now freewrite (for 7-10 minutes) on the specific actions you might take so as to complete a project at the same time as fulfilling the other objectives and expectations for the course. Keep these in sight together with your vision as you plan your work during the remainder of the course.

E. After class, you might pursue the other three stages of Str Pers Planning, starting with brainstorming on the obstacles to your realizing this vision. Email or ask during the next class to get some coaching about how to re-vision those obstacles until you see the underlying issues and a gateway through to new directions, and then to specific actions.