



## Strategic Thinking Is...

By J. Russell and L. Russell

Strategic Thinking is a way of looking at the circumstances and the environment you face and then making decisions and taking actions with a certain mental model or mindset. The components of a strategic thinking mental model are:

- **Holding an image of the vision or ideal future in one's mind.** Strategic thinking begins with a clear understanding of the desired long-range future for the organization. With this vision or idea in mind, decisions and actions are more likely to be directly and indirectly shaped by this overarching objective.
- **Drawing on and being shaped by the organization's core values.** Whereas the vision describes the end state that individuals are striving to create over time, the core values speak to the moment. These values, when clearly defined, understood, and accepted by people at all levels of the organization, are more likely to lead to strategic decision making and actions.
- **Continuously scanning the environment for opportunities and threats.** The strategic thinking mindset depends on a keen awareness of the environment. The antennae are always up. Strategic thinkers discover opportunities by being open and receptive to new information – and they are able to detect potential threats early-on by being conscious of emerging issues and events that may have a harmful effect on the organization.
- **Seeing patterns and relationships in events and circumstances.** Strategic thinkers “connect the dots” by looking for and recognizing the patterns and relationships among events and circumstances. Strategic thinkers, for example, will be the first to detect an emerging pattern of client/customer requests or complaints. They can then begin the conversation around the meaning of this trend for the organization and its future success.

- **Recognizing the interconnections and interdependencies before making decisions and taking action.** Strategic thinkers are deeply aware of the interdependencies and interrelationships among actions and events. They recognize that every action within a system (for example, lowering prices to attract new customers) may or may not have its desired effect (for example, increase in new business), but that there are *unintended* consequences for this decision (for example, reduced margins, lower perceived value of the product) that will occur. This rule – the rule of unintended consequences – is greatly respected by strategic thinkers.
- **Making decisions and taking actions for the long term that are shaped by the vision, core values, and awareness of the environment and the interdependencies.** The final component of strategic thinking integrates the previous components into a strategic perspective that shapes how the individual makes decisions in the moment – with thought to the long-term vision, core values, and deep awareness of the environment.