



Putting The Strategy Back Into Our Tactics

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We are all guilty of it. We get caught in the never-ending communication to-do lists. We get stuck in the churn. And as a result of churning out deliverable after deliverable we can often lose sight of the why - of the strategy part of strategic communications.

"We have done this event a thousand times. I can write a newsletter article in my sleep. This is something we have always done." No doubt these things sound familiar. Probably as familiar as these diddies. "We just don't have time. I really need to get this done. We will get around to it next time."

It's true, taking the time to be strategic is not always possible. And not every deliverable needs a four-page communication plan. But we owe it to our employers, our profession and ourselves to take a moment and put genuine thought into everything we do. And here is how.

Though I am sure none of what I am about to share will be a ground-breaking "ah-ha" moment for anyone, I am hopeful that the templates and the reminder to pause will help you in your daily work. The next 700 words will provide examples and practical tips while covering these three topics:

- > **Purposeful communications** - ensuring everything we do ties back to supporting a business objective
- > **Move the needle** - ensuring we measure what matters and demonstrate value
- > **Make it count** - ensuring the right message is presented to the right audience in the right way

Purposeful communications

To begin your strategic journey you must consider two seemingly simple questions:

- > What am I trying to accomplish?
- > How will I know if I am successful?

Let's first consider "what am I trying to accomplish?" Being able to tie everything back to a business objective is paramount. If you are not helping to boost shareholder returns, increase employee engagement or improve safety then what are you doing?

I challenge you right now to stop reading for a moment and pull up the business objectives for your organization - I'll wait. Now study those objectives carefully and post a copy of them at your work station. If you work for an organization that does not have business objectives look to the company mission for guidance.

Assuming you have a copy of your company's business objectives in hand you might see items that aim to:

- > Reduce the number of workplace injuries and time lost
- > Improve customer satisfaction
- > Grow company market share by expanding into new markets

That means everything you do should support one of these objectives. If you are tasked with something that does not support a business objective you need to ask yourself why you are doing it at all?

Move the needle

The second question, "how will I know if I am successful?" is equally important and often

where we fall flat. This is due to the oh-so familiar lines: "I don't have time for measurement. We don't have the money to do proper research and evaluation. Measuring outputs is good enough."

Every tactic, big or small, should come with a way to measure how it contributes a specific business objective. You need to give some thought to what you need to measure and how you will do it. Do you need to conduct benchmarking measurements as a starting point? Are you looking to compare to industry standards? Do you have monetary targets you want to hit? What do you need to measure and what metrics/tools will you use? Answer these questions and you will be well on your way to producing more strategic deliverables.

Make it count

So what about those deliverables? This is the part we are all good at. It's also where we run the risk of working on auto-pilot and missing the opportunity to inject strategy. Taking a moment to carefully consider your message, your audience and your medium can have a profound influence when you circle back to measure.

Does the message align with and support the business objective? What do you know about your audience? What do they care about? How do you translate business objectives in a way that is meaningful to your audience? What is the best way to deliver this message? If the medium is already prescribed to you, how can you make the most of it? Are there additional channels you could be exploring?

There is a great deal of strategic magic that can be found by exploring these questions. Whether you are working on a piece of writing like a newsletter article, a speech, an annual report or

a PowerPoint deck; carefully consider the story you are trying to tell. What is it that the audience needs to think, feel or do as a result? How are you going to get them there?

Likewise if you are planning an event or activity such as a grand opening, an employee meeting or a safety campaign; take a moment to think about what message you need participants to leave with and how will you know if they got it. Taking a small amount of time on the front end of your task will payoff greatly in the end.

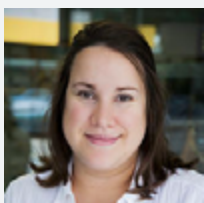
If you find yourself with the clock ticking on a deadline at the very least take five minutes to consider and write down the answers to the following two questions:

- > What am I trying to accomplish?
- > How will I know if I am successful?

Because I believe in tools over talk, I have provided three original templates to help you put the strategy back into some of your most common tasks.

[Article template](#)
[Event template](#)
[Project template](#)

If you would like learn more about measurement I suggest looking into works by [Katie Paine](#) or taking the opportunity to see her speak. I would also read anything by [Steve Crescenzo](#) or attend a session of his. These are individuals I have had the opportunity to see during my career who have shared great insights into being a better communicator.



Megan Wolfinger

Although technically born a millennial, Megan feels more like a Gen X-er at heart given that computers weren't used for anything more than playing hangman until she got to junior high. Her time working in a number of settings including non-profit, post-secondary, corporate and government environments has taught her three things: employees are an organization's most valuable asset; people want to know that you care more than they care what you know; and comic sans is an acceptable font for a birthday invitation and not much else. Megan calls the Saskatchewan prairies of Canada home and is the proud mother of a three-year-old son and baby daughter.