



Strategic Thinking in a Fast-Paced World

Since change is constant, you must weave a strategic approach into your organization's fabric.

By Terrence Fernsler

The Nonprofit Strategy Revolution: Real-Time Strategic Planning in a Rapid Response World

By David La Piana. 205 pages. Softcover. Fieldstone Alliance (www.fieldstonealliance.org). Available for a discounted price at www.snpo.org.

Most nonprofit organizations that carry out strategic planning are dissatisfied with the results. The planning process often lacks focus, doesn't implement strategy effectively, and fails to follow up and demand accountability. The strategic plans that emerge from this process usually turn into lists of opportunities with no real sense of priority.

Traditional strategic planning produces a document covering a specific length of time and a pre-determined list of areas with precise, usually distant, goals. But in a rapid-response world, this process hinders organizational agility. Traditional strategic plans are rarely able to address new and unforeseen opportunities.

A better approach is to integrate strategy into your organization's everyday life, focusing on three levels of strategic issues—organizational, programmatic, and operational—as David La Piana explains. He talks you through the cycle of discovering your organization's identity and sorting potential strategies. Once you implement strategies, be ready to adapt them, using the tools available in this book.

Sound strategic thinking can breathe life into a static organization.

Sound strategic thinking can breathe life into a static organization. It can help even successful organizations avoid missing opportunities or being blindsided. It can show best paths. This new process works in a rapid-response environment better than long, deliberative processes, allowing your organization to be flexible without drifting from its purpose. The process is intuitive, making it easy for any nonprofit leader to use.



Strategic Management: An Organization Change Approach

By Herbert Sherman, Daniel James Rowley, & Barry R. Armandi. 761 pages. Softcover. University Press of America, Inc. (www.univpress.com).

It's hard to imagine that a textbook for business management would have much to offer nonprofits, and in truth, much of what this book offers does lie in the first two sections, before it delves into the finer details of management. But there are lessons here for nonprofits if one has the inclination to translate the theory to practice. This could be an especially valuable exercise for an intern or for someone moving from the corporate to the nonprofit realm.

When you manage strategically, you alter your very thinking.

The book's use of the term "strategic management" is helpful, because it suggests daily activity rather than the passivity associated with old-fashioned "strategic planning." Too many strategic plans are gathering dust. When you manage strategically, on the other hand, you alter your very thinking so that you're always prepared for the latest changes and trends.

Managing strategically means understanding your organization's role and applying that knowledge to ensure long-term success. Many nonprofits, especially small ones, manage by the seat of their pants and are unprepared to continue when a crisis hits. They're the ones who could benefit most from applying this book's principles.

Since the book is targeted to for-profit firms (whose primary purpose is to produce something that will generate revenue), it's sometimes difficult to translate its message to the needs of nonprofits. But remember, no organization is entitled to exist. It exists only because it fills a need. Adhering to the authors' core message will ensure that your organization continues to fill a need in the best possible way. ■

Terrence Fernsler has been a nonprofit professional for nearly 30 years.