

# Opinions & Papers

## THE THREE-DAY STRATEGIC PLAN

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Developing a strategic plan is usually work-intensive, time-consuming, and a bit brain-breaking. In short, it's a necessary—but not necessarily exciting—part of business. There's another way to approach it: as a three-day project from start to finish that involves and energizes the people who have operational responsibility for a brand or business. We just led a session for an online brand that women rave about. The team loved the approach and is eager for more.

Over the course of three days it's possible to come together, talk about the ideal future, what has to happen to reach it, and put together an action plan to get a team and their brand on a new and better track. With the right team in the room, those three days are a perfect environment for creating a new, practical, and powerful plan.

**There are three keys to success with this approach: facilitation, focus, and inventiveness.**

It's easier to have someone facilitate the development of a strategic plan than to do it yourself; that way everyone who knows the brand well can participate fully in the thinking instead of working through the logistics of creating and editing a document. It's also easier because someone outside of the business team can more readily see and focus the team on patterns of thought and critical needs that emerge during the work session.

As for inventiveness, we use each individual on the team's ideal future as our starting point, beginning with a visual question that gets beyond "What did we do last year?" Getting people past what's been done before telegraphs that the strategic plan development process is going to be more interesting and more productive than business as usual. Talking about the ideal future creates a new context for the marketing plan discussion, dislodges comfort with incremental steps, and gets people excited about significant change.

In three days you can have a clear, focused, actionable plan that will be unlike the process of putting together any strategic plan you've ever done.