

Introduction to Strategic Planning

What It Is and Why It Matters

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George Lakey summed it up well when he said to a gymnasium full of peace and justice activists, “We need to learn how to harness the energy of our *intentionality*.” When we decide to do something, he explained, we summon the energy to make it happen. Usually, the larger the intention and the further down the road to its realization, the more energy we summon. This potential “energy of intentionality” is an insufficiently tapped resource available to all of us.

There is another kind of energy that we in the peace and justice movement are more accustomed to tapping. This is the energy of reaction, of responding to emergencies and crises, of carrying out agendas set by others. It is often important--even essential--that we drop what we are doing and respond to urgent situations (the Pledge of Resistance is predicated on this necessity). Yet over the long haul, too much time is spent reacting and too little time spent following through on our own initiatives results in both personal and organizational burnout. It also creates a movement that lacks an agenda of its own.

To put it another way, the energy of intentionality is usually more sustaining and fulfilling than the energy of reaction. If we are convinced that the changes we seek take time, then it only makes sense to explore ways of making our work more sustainable, and thus more effective, *over time*. We believe that long-range strategic planning is one way to do just that.

There is nothing mysterious or complicated about strategic planning. It is based on common sense. In its simplest form it can be summarized by four basic questions: What is our organization’s purpose? Where are we now, in relation to our purpose? Where do we want to be (at some point down the road)? And how do we get from here to there?

The most critical of these questions, and the one with which we often have the most difficulty, is the last: getting from here to there. This is the strategy part of strategic planning. When we talk about *thinking* strategically, we mean figuring out what steps will lead to our goal and in what order we must pursue them. What we are talking about is a *progression of steps, each one built on, or made possible by, the previous one*.

Planning is not always strategic. Often it is *incremental*. This kind of planning is characterized not by a progression of steps that build towards something, but by a somewhat random series of steps--the order of which is interchangeable--that don’t intentionally build toward anything. Incremental planning is what most peace and justice groups do--that is, if we plan at all.

The difference can be illustrated. (See diagram)

Outside of our peace and justice work, however, most of us engage in strategic planning all the time--although we don’t call it that. Thinking back on our own education or job training,

chances are we had some goal in mind that required a sequence of steps, the order of which could not have been changed very much.

In order to become a school teacher, for example, most people have to begin by learning something about the subjects they may want to teach, and then they proceed to do some practice teaching, get their teaching credentials, and finally, apply for regular teaching positions. Similarly, in building a house or tending a garden, we know we have to erect the frame before we can put on siding, or prepare the ground before we can plant the seeds.

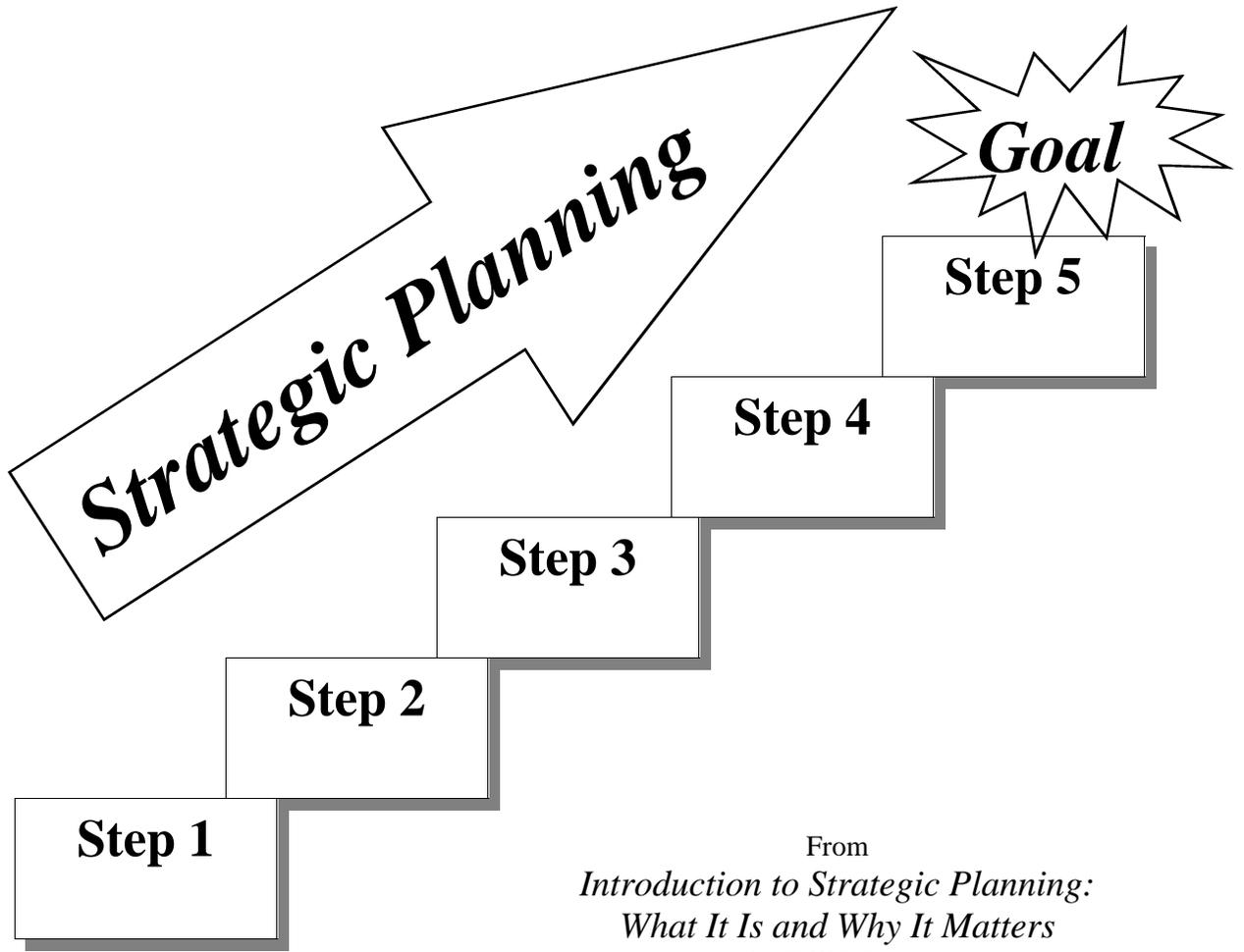
Strategic planning takes place not only in our own lives, but also within all kinds of institutions in our society--institutions that regularly, and as a matter of course, use strategic planning to accomplish their purposes. Businesses and the military perhaps come to mind first, but the list also includes most schools, hospitals, public charities, and other non-profit organizations. With all this strategic planning going on all around us, the real question is why we resist doing it within our movement for peace and justice.

In addition to our reluctance to plan strategically, what planning we do is usually very short-range. In our experience working with grassroots peace and justice groups, we have found that planning where it exists at all, usually amounts to deciding upon a series of events for the next six or twelve months. We want to encourage local groups to plan further ahead than that--to work out strategies to achieve two, three, five, or even ten-year goals. This is what we are calling "long-range" strategic planning. (It is interesting to note that in the military, to be considered "long-range," strategic planning must be *at least* ten years in scope.)

The primary focus of this manual is on long-range strategic planning for local, grassroots organizations. It is important to keep in mind, however, that strategic planning is also needed within at least three other arenas: that of a particular campaign, that of a particular issue-focused movement, and that of the peace and justice movement as a whole.

Strategy at each level is affected by strategy at then other levels, and, as you will see, strategic planning for a grassroots peace and justice group requires taking into account whatever strategies may exist at these other levels.

The reason we have chosen to focus on the local level is because it is there that most of us have the greatest opportunity for hands-on participation and impact. Furthermore, we believe that our movement must--and does--grow stronger from the bottom up. Thus, the more skilled we become thinking strategically about the work we do in our own communities, the more strategically-oriented our movement as a whole will be.



From
*Introduction to Strategic Planning:
What It Is and Why It Matters*
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Start

