



## **Strategic Questions**

By Jonathan Lightman

I love Pictionary and all the related drawing games even though I'm a terrible artist. Make sure not to choose me on your team should we ever be in a tournament together. I can assure you that my enthusiasm will not make up for my incompetence.

That said, I'm baffled by organizations that invest thousands or more on expensive strategic planning consultants who produce illustrative flip charts with elaborate design elements. Of course, I'm not speaking about architectural planning or other processes where the emphasis, by definition, is design. My concern is with those nonprofits (or others) who know the importance of planning but mistakenly substitute a decorative design for an achievable plan. If the plan fails to move the organization forward, no level of artistic ability can substitute for the time, energy and resource squandered.

While there's never a guarantee that a strategic plan will move an organization forward, there's a few simple questions that should be asked at the beginning of the process to help maximize success. First and foremost, does the plan foster horizontal integration (meaning, does it help connect the dots within the organization). This is fairly simple to understand, much harder to execute.

The last time I served as an organization president, I created a Council of Chairs for the different committees, teams, and task forces. Not surprisingly, not everyone had met before and most had no clue what the other was doing. Equally interesting, no one had ever thought of this before. This was Horizontal Integration 101, intra-organizational communication at its most basic level.

If you don't enter your strategic planning process with an understanding of how it will foster horizontal integration, you may want to take a step back. The last thing you need is a product that costs lots of money and ends on the shelf. More than that, you might never find another use for all those multi-colored markers.

If you're thinking about strategic planning, give us a call. There are other equally important questions you should ask before you embark on this process to help maximize the chance that the plan will help your organization move b-yond.