

## “What” Before “How”

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Great healthcare leaders are often good problem solvers with a penchant for taking rapid action to solve operational and strategic issues. This positive leadership quality can create challenges in strategic planning, where multiple initiatives may be competing for an organization’s available resources. Leaders may jump into action on several priorities simultaneously. When this happens, significant resources can be expended with limited result.



### **GOAL-SETTING ESTABLISHES “WHAT”**

An effective strategic planning process will counteract this natural tendency toward immediate action by setting goals before developing supporting strategies. Goal-setting requires leaders to think about “what” it is they want to accomplish before establishing the supporting strategies or initiatives (“how”) that they will use to accomplish it.

The environmental assessment and organizational direction phases of strategic planning provide the information needed to identify the most critical strategic issues for the organization to address. These issues, in turn, challenge the leadership team to identify goals that will address each identified issue. Goal development forces leadership team members to have the difficult discussions required to set goal priorities and limit the number of goals chosen (one or two per issue).

### **STRATEGIC INITIATIVES: THE “HOW”**

Only once the goals have been identified (the “what”), are the major initiatives (the “hows”) developed to address each goal. The development of major strategic initiatives becomes markedly easier when consensus has been reached about *what* the

organization is collectively working toward. This stepwise process ensures that resources are directed at those actions that will have the greatest organizational impact (i.e., lead to achievement of the vision).

Additionally, these goals become a guidepost for future activity and utilization of resources. Actions will be given priority if they clearly tie to achieving strategic goals (and therefore vision).

Fundamentally, strategic planning is about allocation of scarce resources. Focusing on “what” is needed to achieve the vision before jumping directly to the “hows” will enable leaders to utilize resources as effectively as possible, and contribute to the future success and sustainability of the organization. ●

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