

## Renewing Your Strategic Vows: Why Your Strategic Plan Might Be Failing And How To Fall In Love With It Again.

Strategic planning is a bit like a relationship. It is a long-term commitment and not an activity. It needs attention and requires collaboration and determination to succeed.

In practical terms strategic planning is defined as *"...a disciplined effort that produces decisions and actions that shape what an organization is, who it serves, what it does and why it does it."*

At its core strategic planning is about developing a vision of the future and working through a process to set priorities, focus resources and strengthen operations.

There is no one more qualified to navigate through the strategic planning process than forensic laboratory leaders themselves. However, rarely have these leaders received training or guidance on how to embark upon such a critically important task. While literature and other resources on strategic planning are available in abundance, there is a dearth of material that specifically addresses the forensic science arena and the particular challenges that laboratories face. These include: talent acquisition and retention in pressure-laden, highly prescribed work environments; funding restrictions; the changing demands of those we serve as they continually adjust to their own pressures; perpetual modernization, including technological innovation; and important emerging issues such as work-life balance, wellness and vicarious trauma.

This Strategic Planning Workshop represents one of the few opportunities for forensic laboratory leadership to collaborate in this critical activity. It is the sole jurisdiction of laboratory leaders to determine a vision and set the goals and objectives for their organization. The facilitators will guide you through this process in a thorough 'farm-to-table' strategic planning and implementation session.

The workshop will include a summary overview of conventional strategic planning principles and definitions as they apply broadly to all organizations. Mission and vision statements will be addressed, including why they are important, what sets each apart and why they are so often poorly engineered. The facilitators will then delve into materials tailored specifically to forensic science laboratories and the people who work within them. They will explain how a strategic approach to recruitment drove culture change in a laboratory, and why it took ten years to achieve.

Developing a strategic plan is often a transactional, sporadic exercise. Failure to deliver on objectives invariably occurs through poor execution rather than poor strategy. As such the facilitators will encourage honest dialogue among attendees to address difficult questions. Does your organization devote adequate time and resources to meeting strategic objectives? Has your organization built enough capacity for leadership to effectively communicate and advocate strategic change? What do your customers think about your strategies? What does staff make of it all? Is your current strategic plan merely a retooling of a previous plan? Is your current plan truly strategic or is it more a to-do list of operational objectives?

The workshop facilitators will use their own organization's 2019-24 strategic plan to frame these discussions. They will be candid when revealing their journey over the years, accepting some failure and leveraging this into a much more robust product today.

Key elements of the workshop include:

- Discussions on how, through an iterative process, you can develop a greater understanding of the value that good strategic planning, communication and implementation brings to an organization.
- Demonstrations of how futuristic, aspirational goals are required in order to get in front of operational pressures, changing customer demands and our desire to embrace more demographically diverse workforces.
- Identification of robust wellness, skills development and recruitment strategies; how they drive engagement, and how engaged employees drive innovation.
- Methods of leadership development.

Workshop participants will discover why designing approaches to managing data and leveraging information technology are points of emphasis in modern strategic planning and why developing tools to ensure that people individually see themselves contributing to strategic objectives is key to managing through change, which itself is the essence of why a strategic plan is necessary in the first place.

The workshop facilitators will discuss progress they have made towards inoculating their aspirational goals from implementation failure through design-thinking approaches to change management. This includes developing strategies that strengthen leadership capacity to ensure the process is steered collectively and collaboratively. There will also be space for attendees to enrich the session by sharing and critiquing their own strategic planning initiatives with the wider group.

In summary, strategic planning in forensic laboratories is typically a sporadic exercise undertaken by laboratory staff with few tangible resources to help and guide them. It is prone to being treated as an event rather than a long-term commitment. Through a combination of instruction, group discussion and practical exercises, participants will learn that organizations often fail to devote sufficient energy to this business-critical endeavor – too often organizations default to simple adjustments of previous iterations of their strategic plans and miss opportunities to connect with and inspire staff at all levels. The facilitators will candidly discuss how their approach to strategic planning and implementation has evolved over time and will seek to disrupt the comfort that merely reimagining a prior strategy affords.

Engaging fulsomely in a strategic planning process epitomizes the notion of moving '...together towards tomorrow...' The facilitators have constructed this workshop with the specific intent to leave participants with tangible initiatives to move forward with, knowing that the outcome of their 'disciplined effort' is highly rewarding and can reap great benefit for their organization.