

DO YOU ACTUALLY HAVE A STRATEGY?

WHAT THIS IS

This short self-assessment helps you test whether what you have is a strategy or simply a plan.

It's based on Roger Martin and A.G. Lafley's well-known 'Strategy Choice Cascade' from *Playing to Win*.

It's a simple but powerful tool used by strategists and leaders worldwide to clarify what really drives success.

WHY IT MATTERS

Most teams and individuals think they have a strategy when what they really have is nothing more than a to-do list.

A true strategy makes deliberate choices about where to focus (or 'play'), how to succeed (or 'win'), and what to prioritise. And, importantly, what not to do.

Without one, effort scatters, energy drains, and results depend on luck rather than intent.

A clear strategy creates:

- Alignment and focus
- Confident, faster decisions
- Greater impact with fewer distractions



HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

Take 10–15 minutes to work through the five cascading questions below. You can apply them to your business, team, project, or even your life strategy. This works well on your own but is even better when discussed and explored with at least one other person.

Write down your answers as honestly as possible. If you can't answer a question easily and / or clearly, that's your signal that your "strategy" needs work.

THE STRATEGY CHOICE CASCADE

1. What's your winning aspiration?

What does "success" really look like? What are you trying to achieve or become, and why does it matter?

2. Where will you play?

In which markets, segments, products, audiences or areas of life will you focus your energy and resources?

3. How will you win?

What's your unique advantage i.e. the value you'll create or deliver differently or better than anyone else?

4. What capabilities must you have?

Which skills, systems, partnerships or assets are critical to win in your chosen "where" and "how"?

5. What management systems are required?

How will you measure progress, review, learn and adapt? What disciplines will keep your strategy alive?

REFLECT: DO YOU HAVE A STRATEGY OR A PLAN?

- If your answers are *specific, connected and coherent* – you're shaping a real strategy.
- If they're somewhat vague ("grow sales", "be innovative", "improve communication") you probably have more of a plan than a strategy.
- If some questions are hard to answer, that's where to focus your thinking next.



WHAT TO DO NEXT

1. Refine your answers until each one feels clear and consistent with the others.
 2. Share them with your team or a trusted peer for feedback. If they can't repeat your strategy in their own words, it's not yet as clear as it could be.
 3. Revisit every quarter to check that your choices and underpinning assumptions still hold true.
-

REMEMBER:

"Strategy is about making choices, trade-offs; it's about deliberately choosing a different set of activities to deliver a unique mix of value."

— Michael Porter

Use this page as a simple lens whenever you want to sanity-check your strategy at work, at home, or in life.

