



At its core, strategic planning is the exercise of determining if we are pursuing the correct priorities. This is the most important question we must answer. Being good at pursuing a great strategy is much better than being great at pursuing a bad strategy.

### Six Elements of an Outstanding Strategic Planning Process

Good planning efforts consistently lead to better operating results, clearer priorities and better measurement of success. There are six elements that define an outstanding strategic planning process.

1. Requires a reasonable amount of preparation.
2. Provides a solid review of the current conditions.
3. Tailors to the organization's unique set of risks, goals and values.
4. Answers the most important questions about the existence of the organization.
5. Evaluates the steps necessary to achieve desired priorities.
6. Provides a manageable process for follow-up.

### What the Process Should Do for the Participants

Planning requires board members and senior managers to tackle important and sometimes emotional issues about the future direction of the organization. Despite these challenges the process should:

- Ensure that everyone feels that he or she has been heard,
- Foster consensus around difficult issues,
- Energize the participants with a renewed sense of shared direction, and
- Create a path for the participants to continue their consideration of planning issues between planning events.

### Should You Use a Facilitator to Guide the Planning Process?

Boards and senior management teams can conduct high quality planning efforts without retaining an outside

facilitator. However, it is difficult. There are three distinct advantages to using an outside facilitator.

#### Moderate Discussions

Forming a strong consensus around planning priorities requires that all voices are heard. This requires that both board and management members advocate for their opinions. It is difficult to argue a topic and encourage alternative views at the same time.

A facilitator as a neutral party can moderate the discussion of critical issues and ensure that everyone has a voice.

#### Raising the Difficult Question

In every organization there are questions that are difficult for board members or managers to raise. Failing to ask and answer the difficult questions can seriously limit the usefulness of the planning process.


An outside facilitator can often raise the difficult question without creating hard feelings that might impact the working relationships of the planning group.

#### Outside Point of View

In a successful planning process, the board and management must move beyond their day-to-day perspectives. However, immersion in the daily challenges of running a successful organization limits our ability to see new ways of looking at issues.

An outside facilitator can often offer suggestions that help the group explore new alternatives.

#### Take a Fresh Look

Take a fresh look at planning. When done well, it can make leading a bank to success much easier and more enjoyable. 



Mark Mangano is counsel with Jackson Kelly PLLC. Mark is an attorney focusing on strategic planning and bank regulatory issues. He has 26 years of experience as the CEO and owner of a community bank. He can be reached at [mark.mangano@jacksonkelly.com](mailto:mark.mangano@jacksonkelly.com) or 304-284-4104.