Strategy: A Brief Overview for Young Warriors

By Travis Knight, Capt, USMC Ret.

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“Good morning Warriors! It’s always nice to be here… an honor for me.

“I was asked to give a *short* talk on strategy which is really an oxymoron, right? Strategy is no short thing in any sense of the word. It’s the long game… it’s difficult to do a short speech on something that’s so broad. So what I’m going to do is break it down, break down what strategy is, I’m going to give you some quotes, I’m going to give you my perspective from my life and then I’m going to let you choose what to do with that.

“Another reason why it’s hard is that strategies are different. Strategies change with every situation. There’s not one strategy that works for everything. And even if you took any one situation, if you have more than one strategist they’re not going to come away with the same answers. It’s very individual. It’s your own personal background, it’s whoever you’ve been mentored by, and it’s your own set of experiences that will direct what you will do in any given situation. So my disclaimer is that listening to a talk about strategy will not necessarily guarantee that you will win at “Axis and Allies” today.

“So how many of you want to think strategically? Let me rephrase the question. How many of you would like to be so in control of every situation you’re in that you have the ability to shape each and every one the way that you want it to be shaped? Yeah, so now that’s everyone. I hear Arden saying, “That’s scary!” Well I agree, that is scary. I’m not going to teach you how to do that exactly this morning. But if you think about strategy the way that we’re going to think about strategy today, you will be able to shape situations, not necessarily just for you, but for God, and that’s our end goal here. That’s what we’re going for.

So what is strategy exactly? Let me just give you my definition, borrowed from Webster. “Strategy is a PLAN of ACTION that’s designed to achieve a major or overall AIM.” It can also be defined as the ART of planning and directing overall movement of forces in war or battle. So what do you need to be a strategist?

# Aims:

“I would say that the most important thing you need to be a strategist is to have a purpose, an aim, a goal. There are too many people in this world now who are just out there just doing things. They don’t have a real purpose, they’re not being driven by any specific thing, so that’s the first thing we’re going to talk about, an aim or a purpose, a goal, an outcome. An outcome is something that you imagine will be… Strategy is always, always a means to an end. Read #1 ‘In everything that you do, consider the end’ – Solon. Solon was an ancient Greek philosopher, politician, and writer, and his words there mean that even in the smallest little things, if you can’t tie that little action to your ultimate goal you shouldn’t be doing whatever it is. Here’s another way of putting it… Take no action unless it leads to your desired end state. We usually talk about strategy in terms of the military. Well, let’s look at that real quick. There are always aims in the military. Those aims always come from someone above wherever you are (in rank and responsibility that is). The President of the United States, establishes a National Security Strategy. He has an overall end, a vision for how the country is supposed to be viewed by the rest of the world. Among other things it drive a National Defense Strategy and in turn that drives a National Military Strategy, so even the highest military officers are getting their aim from somewhere else. They’re not just doing it just to do it. They’re receiving direction from someone else, they’re making plans that make that aim a reality somewhere in the world and that’s what they go execute. That’s an aim. So obviously what the Military wants to do is to shape the globe to our advantage. The president says, ‘This is what I want’ then they make plans and they say, ‘This is how we’re going to get you there Mr. President.” You should know, and this is a second disclaimer here, that we go to extraordinary lengths as a country before we move to a military option. We talk… *a lot* before we fight. We talk so much that people (even diplomats) get sick of talking and they are told, ‘Hey, sorry, you can’t pick up the weapon yet, you must still talk.’ Lot’s of talking before you get to any action that will result in people losing life or limb. That’s important. I say again, no generals ever took action of their own accord. There was always an aim, an end state that was given to them by someone else, some higher power.

# Plans:

So that’s your aim. You got an aim? That’s great, but you have to have a plan next right? Our working definition of strategy is a ***plan*** of ***action*** designed to attain a goal or an ***aim***. The plans are the steps that you need to take in order to get to that end state. So if you have a really clearly defined end state, the way that the military does it, and people that manage the long game for companies, they take that end state and they work backwards. If that’s where we want to be and here is where we are they say, “Well, in order to achieve that I need to have this, and in order to get to that, I have to do this, and then in order to be there I have to kind of do this…” They do that until they close the gap between the end state they want and where they are currently. That’s called backwards planning.

Plans are important. Without a plan you’re not going to get to an end state. Reading #2? ‘He who fails to plan is planning to fail’ – Winston Churchill. Winston Churchill, leader of Britain during the Second World War quipped if you don’t plan, plan on failing. It’s pretty self-explanatory. Plans are important but they’re fragile, and they change. Who’s got #3 please? ‘No plan survives first contact with the enemy’ – Helmut Von Moltke the Elder. No plan survives first contact with the enemy. You can plan all you want but once you take that first step toward the enemy that plan’s going to change because you’re fighting someone who’s thinking… and they’re thinking against you. I’ll say it again, plans are important, but they’re fragile. “Everybody has a plan,” the Marines say, “until you get hit.” If you’re in a fight, you have all of these plans, but the first time you take one to the kisser that’s when most re-evaluate. If you don’t have that aim in mind, you’re going to stop, because it hurts. Read #4 please. ‘If the plan isn’t working change the plan, don’t change the goal.’ Plans are important but goals are more important. If you know what you want, and you’ve been given a direction to get there and things go awry, don’t change the goal, just change how you get there. Plan isn’t working? Re-evaluate the plan. Alright, #5. ‘Plans are nothing, planning is everything’ – Dwight D. Eisenhower. Dwight D. Eisenhower, also associated with our country’s leadership during the Second World War. So what does he mean by that? I feel like I’m contradicting myself. Plans are important, but, you know, plans are nothing. So what does Eisenhower mean? He means that the thinking process that goes into creating plans (based on an overall goal or aim) is more important than the plans themselves. Because when you’re planning you can’t necessarily think of everything, but if you assume that everything is going to be working either for or against the plan, then you will be able to flex that plan as you need.

(Comment from the crowd: ‘Some people get rigid with a plan and they stick to the plan even though it needs to change because it’s not working.’) Right. That’s a great intro to my next point… So, you don’t plan for perfection okay, and like we said, when the plan isn’t working change the plan. Don’t stick to it if it’s not leading to your end goal. Alright, don’t plan to perfection was the next reading, please read #6. ‘A good plan violently executed today is better than a perfect plan executed next week.’ – George S. Patton. George S. Patton, Supreme Allied Commander on D-day. Had a hand in all of the beach landings in Normandy and in that theater. He didn’t want the perfect plan. It wasn’t important enough for him to wait around for the perfect plan. Give me a plan that gets me closer to my goal, and let’s execute that now. Last word on planning, read #7 please. ‘Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare.’ - Japanese Proverb. Let me just say it again (so that it sinks in) Vision without action is a daydream. You have a goal, you’re not going to execute any plan? Well that’s a really good idea you have but you’re never going to get there. Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare. I just want to qualify that. If you’re doing stuff and you’re just doing stuff for the sake of doing stuff, and you don’t have an end goal, you’re just wreaking havoc. There’s just going to be destruction around you. You’re not going to feel like you’re accomplishing anything. You’re going to be spinning your wheels. If you feel like that’s you this morning you should re-evaluate if you have a goal or not.

## **Action:**

So, so far we’ve got, we need a vision, a purpose, we need a plan, but that’s still not good enough is it? You can create great plans all you want, but what does it take next? It takes action. Remember our definition, “a plan of action.” You have to put in the work. A vision and a plan are nothing without action. We’re going to read a few of these in quick succession, read #8 please. ‘Train Hard, Fight Easy and Live. Train Easy, Fight Hard and Die.’ - First Marine Division. First Marine Division, the warriors who took the fight to Baghdad through the desert under the command of Mad Dog Mattis. Train Hard, Fight Easy and Live, Train Easy, Fight Hard and Die. So you put in the work. Put in the work when you’re training. Put in the work when you’re not in the fight, that will get your mind set for what you have to do when you do get into the fight, and then you’re going to see success. Read #9 please. ‘The more you sweat in peace the less you bleed in war.’ - General Norman Schwarzkopf. General Norman Schwarzkopf who was a brilliant strategist during the Gulf War. He went to bed every night and got a good eight hours of rest because he knew that Saddam Hussein was right here, in the palm of his hand. He used all of his resources and he shaped that battle so that he wouldn’t have to do anything. He woke up, he directed some stuff and the war was over in a matter of days. But he relied on warriors who had trained, were patient and ready for action. Read #10. ‘An opportunity is worth to a person only what their preparation enables them to make of it.’ - Dick Vermeer. Dick Vermeer lead the Philadelphia Eagles to victory from nothing. They were the worst team in the league. He held open tryouts, which no one had ever heard of before, he got a guy from the Pittsburg community (a part time schoolteacher and part time bar tender) onto the team. This guy turned out to be a real star. Besides a considerable amount of natural talent, he practiced with his buddies all the time in a dirt lot running through plays and plans. They turned around and won the championship. But that quote is still up in the Philadelphia Eagles locker room today. An opportunity is worth to a person only what their preparation enables them to make of it. It takes work. It takes hard work. It takes grunt work. It takes mind work to get yourself ready to get into that fight and succeed.

# **Art:**

The last one that we’ll talk about real quick is art.  Our working definition is that strategy is the art of overall movement in battle or war.  Just as with any art form a prerequisite to doing it well is practice, discipline and repetition.  I was part of a unit before the second Gulf War in Kuwait and that’s all we did was plan how we were going to mitigate a Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear or High Explosive event in the Central Command’s area of responsibility.  So we’d pick a country, make up an event that happened and figure out how we were going to mitigate it. That’s all we did for 6 months, all we did, that was it. And then go work out and get something to eat and then come back and do some more planning. So, practice, discipline, repetition.  We never got to actually use any of those, but they’re on the books now so if anything of that nature happens we’ve done all the prep work for it, the mind work and the grunt work to get it ready. This art is different from hard work but it requires hard work and really it is the result of that hard work.

“Here’s another key point… strategy is learned over time from experience.  Now I’m sure you hear it from your Battalions that mentorship is key!  You don’t have the experience. Even people with a great deal of experience don’t have all of the experience. There is (almost) always someone around you that has lived life before you and from whom you can learn.  That’s what we’re trying to get you to latch onto. So, we emphasize mentorship in CSB. All of the greatest leaders and strategists had mentors. Churchill’s mentor was William Burton Cochran who was an American politician, ran for a Senate seat somewhere in the early 1900s.  Eisenhower and Patton both had the same mentor. His name was General Fox Connor. If you want to get acquainted with some individuals who had a profound and drastic effect on the world through mentorship, go look those guys up.

“So we’re talking about strategy.  All strategy has these things: an aim, a plan, action.  It is an art form. And it’s going to be different for everyone. But just having those things doesn’t necessarily make you a good strategist.  Here are three things that make good strategists. Good strategists, among other things, see the bigger picture. In Vietnam, to get a better look at the battle commanders could get in a helicopter, circling above, and look down on the field so they could get a different perspective on the battle the wider picture. Who’s coming? Where are they coming from? Then they could plan: How am I going to defend against it? How am I going to attack? Where do I need support? Where can I afford to thin the lines? The Navy SEALS train all of their operators to think about two things when it comes to purpose, the High Why and the Big Why. The High Why is the 30,000 foot view. Why are we even here in the first place?  What is the overall goal? Then the Big Why, the “why am I doing this particular thing and how is it going to help us reach the ultimate goal? That’s one of the things that makes the SEALS the elite force out there. (They waste none of their actions.) They have that mindset, so whatever they do is purposefully aimed at accomplishing the ultimate mission. So, good strategists see the bigger picture.  Good strategists see things from different perspectives. I talked about getting off the ground and up into the sky, but another way to get different perspectives is to talk with people around you, the people on your left and right. Hey, what have you experienced with this? And they can give you a different perspective because they are looking at things from a different angle, and likely from their own personal experience. Lastly, good strategists create and then take advantage of opportunities. Create an opportunity, make the most of it, then move on to the next opportunity that moves you toward your goal. Those are three of the things that will make you a good strategist. Great strategists, and I’m just saying it again, find mentors, and they submit to those mentors. They listen to what those mentors have to say and they are guided by their experiences. Now that’s not to say that you don’t have your own mind or that you can’t have your own thoughts.  These mentors that I have mentioned had a lot of experience, but the people that they mentored, the ones that we have quoted and briefly talked about, went on to do extraordinary, great and wonderful, awesome things!

“So, like usual we like to take the real world and put it into your spiritual world, and into your spiritual life. But I haven’t said word one about that have I?  All we have done is to focus on strategy. But if I haven’t done anything else, as you’ve thought about strategy in the last few minutes, haven’t I just described the spiritual warrior’s life?  Who is our Great Commander? God is. He is the architect of every plan that ever was or ever will be to include the one that you’re involved in right now. Think about that for a second… God has a plan, an ultimate goal for His creation and you have a part to play in that plan.  Are we not to seek out that plan? …to listen for his orders and follow them? …to boldly go where He calls us and to make the most of every moment of our lives? God has already seen it, from the end to the beginning. He’s worked through it. He already knows what we are going to do. All we have to do is just listen to Him.  Apply what you are learning in these games, learning about yourself and about these plans (apply them) to your life, to your faith. So hopefully this Game and Strategy event is not just a blip. Hopefully it’s not something you’re just going to do and then leave and not think about it. I’m giving you something to think about, and that’s that the things you are doing here are important and can be used in your life, no matter how simple they seem to be right now.

“So how do I do that?  There are three things you can do, three changes in thinking that can help you get there: 1) Think beyond your generation.  Man, that’s hard to do, right? Here’s an example though. The cathedral builders, the ones who built the massive cathedrals in France and England, when they started that project and broke ground on the foundation, they knew that they were never going to see even half of it done!  It was going to be their sons or their apprentices, or even their children even who might see a finished project. So they knew exactly what they wanted to accomplish. They had an ultimate aim. And they had all of these plans to get there, but it was going to be long after they were gone; long after they were dead before realization of those goals was going to be met.  So that’s one, think beyond your generation. Then 2) You can also think about many different possible futures. Don’t limit yourself to just one. ‘I’m going to go into the Navy and become a SEAL, then I’m going to go to war, and then I’m going to own a company.’ Well that’s a great goal to have, but have two or three of them, that you can branch out to, that all get you to the same ultimate end.  The third is to have an ultimate aim. Try to imagine what will come after solving the problem that is immediately before you, then ask yourself, ‘To what end?’ Is what I’m doing and how I’m doing it and what’s going to come once it gets accomplished going to get me to that ultimate aim?

Read 11 please…  “Where there is no vision the people perish but he who keeps the law, happy is he.”  Proverbs 29:18. Without vision the people perish, straight out of the Good Book.  That was a good one, about having a vision and then going after it but there’s one verse that captures everything that I’ve said, it’s two verses actually, Proverbs 3:5-6.  I want you to start reading it and if you remember what that verse says I want you to say it out loud along with us. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.  In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths (make your paths straight). Just 20 or so words that perfectly captures what I just spent 20 minutes talking to you about.  These are big thoughts about big ideas and some of you are thinking, ‘How does this apply to me?’ ‘What am I supposed to do with all this?’ Well, I’m telling you that right now is the time to start. How many of you are thinking strategically about your life?  Do you have a plan? Do you have a plan for the next year? For the next 5 years? Or the next 10 years? Do you know what you want to accomplish? Let me encourage you that the best personal strategies are those that align with God’s plans and decrees. Read the Scriptures to find out what He desires for you and your life.  Make that your aim, put in the work and then go get it. I’m excited to see where this idea takes you. Thank you!