

The 30 Minutes Strategy

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I'm on a flight to Florida after five hours of sleep, and I should be drafting a strategic vision statement for a client I worked with yesterday, but instead a GQ interview with the rapper Drake has my attention. When Drake was young, his goal was to have \$25M by age 25. He made it. His new goal, at 27 years old, is to have \$250M. With these two lines in the article it all came together for me: what Drake, my client work, and best practices in military and corporate strategy all have in common. They all point to the fundamental secret to creating breakthrough strategies for your business, your career, or your life.

What I lay out here is a simple process to rapidly – in 30 minutes or less – define a strategic pathway to your dreams. If you are running a team, leading a department, building a company, or charting your career, I believe these steps can get you onto the most direct, strategic route to your goals. I applied this to my business two weeks ago, and the results have been remarkable. We've gone from wandering to sprinting, from colleagues to a team, from hope to conviction, from uncertainty to clarity.

This exercise reorders and simplifies what you may already know. It pulls together things like Jim Collins' *Good to Great*; concepts from Timothy Ferriss' *The 4-Hour Workweek*; stuff on crafting a mission, visions, and key performance indicators; business and military strategic design practices; strategic narratives; and lessons from Eastern philosophy and Buddhism.

All of these point to a secret: ***great strategies are stories told backward.***

A strategy is a story, with one chapter leading to the next, that tells your stakeholders where you are going, how you will get there, and what you should do now.

Now, there are two ways to write a story. You can start at the beginning and see where you end up, as most novelists do. This is a fun way to write a story, but it doesn't give you control of how the story ends.

A strategy, by contrast, is best written in reverse. You start with where you want the story to end. You can write your strategy story in 30 minutes or less.

To do this, think about five time frames, in the sequence I suggest below. For fun, to illustrate the process, I created a hypothetical strategy for Drake (the rapper). Make sure to sign up for my newsletter to get more such workbooks and tools.

Timeframe	Explanation	Drake Example	My Personal Example	You (fill this in)
After you are gone	Whether you call it your mission or purpose, great strategies begin with an idea of what the end should be long after you are gone. This is an outcome you will not achieve in your lifetime but it is the reason you get up and push ahead every day.	<i>To make genre-cracking music that connects emotionally with my audience.</i>	To help our clients discover and find the courage to pursue “fourth options,” or strategic choices others overlook.	
The end	Imagine the scene of your movie just before the credits appear. This is a picture (or vision) of what you will achieve or what you will become in the long-term, usually 3 to 10 years from now. Define 1 to 3 metrics, and their values, that will tell you that you have achieved your long-term vision. You can call these BHAGs (Big Hairy Audacious Goals).	<p><i>By Dec 31, 2016: To be known as one of the greatest musical artists in the world; to be indefinable, with music that crosses genres; to have multiple houses and a private jet.</i></p> <p><i>Metrics:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Liquid assets \$250M+</i> • <i>Records sold: XM</i> 	<p>By Dec. 31, 2016: To be a thriving strategic innovation firm that does important work and is recognized as a leader in the field; a foundation that helps train children to find innovative strategies to solve problems that matter.</p> <p>Metrics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual revenue = \$XM+ • Fortune 500 clients = Y+ • Students impacted = Z thousand+ 	

<p>The next chapter (12-18 months)</p>	<p>The end may be too far off to generate tension, excitement, or energy, so define how you want this next chapter to close. What must you achieve in the next 12 to 18 months to know you are on the path and by what metrics you will judge that the plot is unfolding as you desire?</p>	<p><i>By Dec. 31, 2014: To have released one of the biggest albums of the year, the music you listen to on the beach that summer.</i> <i>Metrics:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Liquid assets \$75M+</i> • <i>Records sold YM+</i> • <i>Stadiums filled: 15</i> 	<p>By Dec. 31, 2014: Formed firm, profitable and growing, created foundation. Metrics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual revenue = \$X'M+ • Fortune 500 clients = Y'+ • Donated to children innovation = Z' thousand+ 	
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<p>Plot actions (12-18 months)</p>	<p>Just as a chapter, to reach its close, must show certain actions completely, you must take key actions to reach your desired chapter close. Being clear on what these are allows you to quickly decide what matters and what does not. If you find yourself investing time in something that does not matter, you can stop doing it immediately, and focus on what is necessary. What 3 to 5 actions (or strategic priorities) will you focus on continuously for the next 12 to 18 months to reach this chapter's conclusion?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Release best album yet</i> 2. <i>Continue improving music and performance</i> 3. <i>Launch successful tour</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Build sales force 2. Build IP 3. Grow "Outthinker" community 4. Develop consultants 	
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The first scene (the next 3 months)	Finally, knowing how your next chapter will unfold, you will see clearly what you must do right now to get things rolling. What 1 to 5 key metrics will you focus on in the next three months (and who is responsible)?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Songs recorded that I think are awesome = 15 (me)</i> 2. <i>Total hours practiced = 120 (me)</i> 3. <i>Tour venues booked = 10 (agent)</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Client meetings = 75+ (Chairman) 2. Proposals submitted = 25+ (Jonathan) 3. Clients served above \$X thousand in value = 10+ (me) 4. Revenue booked = \$X thousand+ (the whole team) 	
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Give this a shot now. In 30 minutes you will have sketched out a story, a narrative, a plot that leads step-by-step to your dream. Then with your story laid out, you know naturally what to do next: get in the role, play the part, feel the passion that is consistent with the narrative you have laid down.