



What do we do when our beautiful plans get derailed?

As the Robert Burns poem forewarns, “The best laid plans... often go astray... and leave us nothing but grief and pain for promised joy.”

How do we manage unexpected change? What happens when great time and attention have been devoted to strategic planning, then life intervenes? Suddenly our goals are off track, and our plans no longer make sense.

Should we adhere to our intentions anyway, having invested such time and loving care to define them? What will our funders and supporters think if we start again from scratch? How will our team hang together through another period of uncertainty? What if we are still exhausted from the previous phase of operating without a road map?

Been there?

Change is to be expected, folks. We are kidding ourselves (and creating our own suffering) when we tether our notions of success to the delusion that everything *will* go according to plan. It won't. Ever. Especially for non-profit organizations. Let's face it: addressing complex, interconnected issues in an open systems dynamic, we function in a constant state of uncertainty and flux. We know this, yes?

So when it comes to planning, let us choose to expect the unexpected.

At SEED we practice viewing each twist and turn through the lens of this poem by David Whyte:

“What we can plan is too small for us to live.”

This is the “S” in SEED’s acronym – it is all about **Stretching** our views of what is possible. We posit that there is no greater change any of us can achieve in this life than to *change the way we look at things*. Easier said than done, yes. But expanding out views today will inevitably open up pathways to new destinations.

The opportunity is for leadership teams to become “planful.” By planfulness we refer to the integration of visioning, creative planning, self-assessment, and strategic learning as continuous shared elements of everyday work flow. Being planful is quite different from traditional strategic planning that you stop work to “get done” every few years.



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Continuous shared reflection is crucial, both when your world turns upside down and when things are flowing smoothly.

In [last month's tip](#), we introduced the concept of a monthly “stretch meeting,” co-facilitated by two of your catalyst leaders. Below are questions the catalyst leaders might offer for monthly team reflection:



1. In spite of recent changes—perhaps radically altering our playing field—which of our **desired outcomes** have been achieved? (The team can devise a rating scale to measure gains over time.)
2. What results are currently **dissatisfying**, and what would it take for us to be **satisfied**?
3. What aspects of our long term vision still deeply inspire us, and what **new opportunities** might unfold?

4. What **assets** do we already possess? How can we build on these strengths?

People	Product	Process	Potential

*For more inspiration, see [SEED's 4P framework](#).

5. What would we do if we were fearless? What then would be our **priority strategies** for the next three months (to advance towards our long-term vision)?

6. Is the energy of our vision infecting our clients, partners and supporters? How can we better **embody our vision** and values in every interaction?

7. What is working well in how we **lead from the front**? What do we want to improve?

8. What is working well in how we **lead from the rear**? What do we want to improve?

9. What are we **avoiding or resisting**? What is our ambivalence? What are we ready to try?

10. **WHO** (in this meeting) **will do WHAT** (advance specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, timely goals) **by WHEN** (our next meeting)?

Try out a couple of these questions monthly. Consider diverse viewpoints. Over time your team will become increasingly nimble and accountable. You will find yourselves creatively adjusting course, perceiving new options for action, and stepping into new possibilities with greater ease. With ongoing practice you may come to embrace change.

SEED specializes in internet coaching for catalyst leaders. To explore: possibilities@seedimpact.org.