

There's no such thing as a strategic plan

 By [Sid Peimer](#)

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'Strategic' and 'Plan' are two different concepts. A strategy is *what* we need to do to get from A to B (and deciding on what point B actually is). The plan is more specific and tells us *how* we will get to point B (the details).

We use 'planning' in everyday speech

A strategy can have a plan appended, but they are two different concepts. I have no gripe with anyone calling a strategy a strategic plan, but the word 'plan' has just become that - an appendage when it should actually be a distinct entity.

To complicate matters further, we use the word 'plan' in our everyday speech:

"Do you have plans for tonight?"

"Can I see the architectural plan?"

"Where is The United Nations Peace Plan and pass me the ammunition?"

The cunning plan

A most entertaining use of the word plan comes from the Blackadder series where Baldrick always comes up with a 'cunning plan':

Captain Blackadder: Baldrick, what are you doing out there?

Private Baldrick: I'm carving something on a bullet, sir.

Captain Blackadder: What are you carving?

Private Baldrick: I'm carving 'Baldrick', sir.

Captain Blackadder: Why?

Private Baldrick: It's part of a cunning plan, sir.

Captain Blackadder: Of course it is.

Private Baldrick: You know how they say that somewhere there's a bullet with your name on it?

Captain Blackadder: Yes?

Private Baldrick: Well I thought that if I owned the bullet with my name on it, I'll never get hit by it. Cause I'll never shoot myself...

Captain Blackadder: Oh, shame!

Private Baldrick: And the chances of there being two bullets with my name on it are very small indeed.

Captain Blackadder: Yes, it's not the only thing that is 'very small indeed'. Your brain for example - is so minute, Baldrick, that if a hungry cannibal cracked your head open, there wouldn't be enough to cover a small water biscuit."



Baldrick ... doing what he does best... Doing his bit help the Allies win WW1. (Image extracted from YouTube clip)

Mintzberg on strategy as plan

No review of the concept of 'Plan' would be complete without the contribution of the renowned academic Professor Henry Mintzberg of McGill University. He contends that the definition of strategy is a multiple one, composed of 5Ps: Plan, Pattern, Position, Perspective and Ploy.

When expounding on strategy as plan, he defines strategy as "...some sort of consciously intended course of action, a set

of guidelines to deal with a situation". So plans have two characteristics: they are made before any actions need to be taken and are developed purposely. Practically that would result in statements such as: "Let's have a planning session", which is an often-used terminology. If you want the whole enchilada, we actually mean: "We're going into a session to identify the problems, determine our objectives, develop our strategies, establish our tactics and then prep the plan".

I will now increase my productivity for the afternoon by identifying the problem (lack of energy), setting my objectives (relieve my tiredness), developing my strategy (have a nap) and decide on the tactic (sleep on the couch in my office from 1 to 2). All this is encompassed in the plan.

I'm not one for semantics, but I am one for getting everyone on the same page, and if we're all talking the same language perhaps it does contribute to better teamwork.

ABOUT SID PEIMER

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