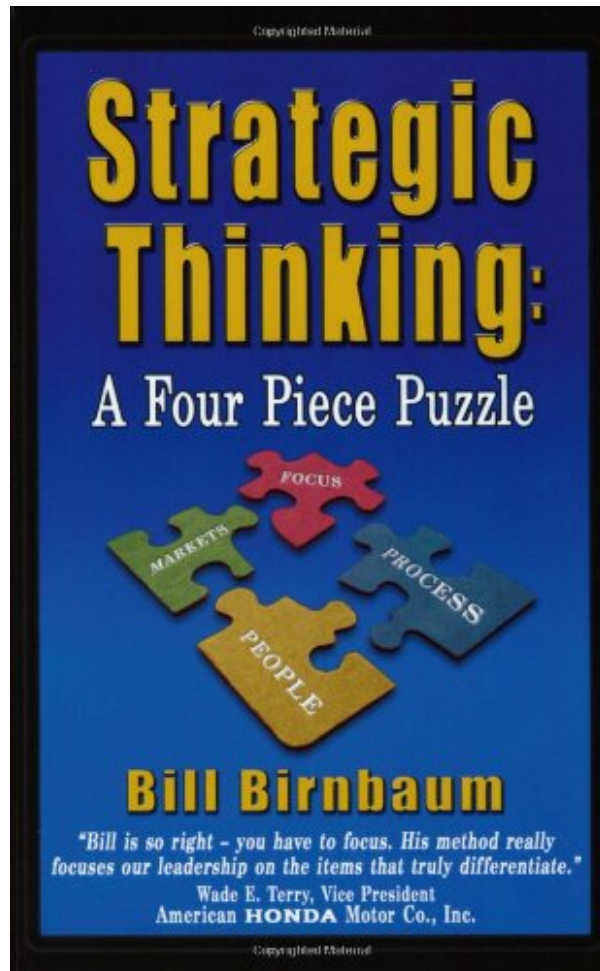


# STRATEGIC THINKING: A FOUR PIECE PUZZLE BY BILL BIRNBAUM



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# Strategic Thinking: A Four Piece Puzzle



**Bill Birnbaum**

*"Bill is so right - you have to focus. His method really focuses our leadership on the items that truly differentiate."*

Wade E. Terry, Vice President  
American **HONDA** Motor Co., Inc.

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From the Publisher

A business manager recently asked Bill Birnbaum, "Which parts of your new book, 'Strategic Thinking' are most valuable to the reader."

"That's a tough question," Bill responded, "for the answer very much depends on the needs of each particular organization." "However," he continued, "there are certain parts of the book which are almost universally applicable."

Bill went on to explain that...

Chapters 1 through 4 deal with the important subject of focus. For while the most successful organizations are tightly focused (on product or service offering, on markets and customers served, or on systems and operations), far too many organizations are unfocused. They unwittingly spend resources chasing far too many opportunities -- and chasing them all at the same time. These first four chapters of the book offer tools and techniques for focusing, thus deriving benefit from concentration of resources.

Chapter 6, "The Opportunity Grid," presents the model which is consistently most popular with clients. In Bill's 24 years experience as a strategy consultant, he's found that clients embrace this model more than any other. And for good reason. The Opportunity Grid helps managers think through -- and visualize -- their specific strategic options. For example, they can easily visualize whether they'd be better off focusing on product / service development, or on market / customer development.

Chapter 12 is another which is almost universally applicable. For it deals with "Building Knowledge in Your Organization." Here in the 21st Century, knowledge is clearly a major determinant of success in any business. The challenge, of course, is to build organizational knowledge. In chapter 12, Bill shows how knowledge builds through three levels -- data, information and understanding. He explains that increasing from one level to the next makes the communication (sharing) of knowledge possible. And he shows that only upon arrival at the final level (understanding), can knowledge be used to develop strategy. Finally, Bill offers 12 proven steps for building knowledge in your organization. For those who've struggled developing their mission statement, Appendix A will be helpful. There, Bill shows a simple technique for developing

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#### About the Author

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In helping clients develop strategy, during the last 24 years, Bill Birnbaum learned that the most successful management teams place far more emphasis on strategic thinking than on strategic planning. Oh sure, they develop a strategic plan. And they publish their plan. And they share it with their employees. But their first priority is to create an environment of strategic thought. He also discovered that successful management teams focus on four fundamental factors, or four pieces of the strategic puzzle... 1. Rather than try to accomplish "everything," they diligently maintain focus. 2. They develop and maintain an intimate understanding of their markets – and of their customers within those markets. 3. They truly care about – thus they nurture – their people. 4. And they carefully manage their processes.

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Chapter 6, "The Opportunity Grid," presents the model which is consistently most popular with clients. In Bill's 24 years experience as a strategy consultant, he's found that clients embrace this model more than any other. And for good reason. The Opportunity Grid helps managers think through -- and visualize -- their specific strategic options. For example, they can easily visualize whether they'd be better off focusing on product / service development, or on market / customer development.

Chapter 12 is another which is almost universally applicable. For it deals with "Building Knowledge in Your Organization." Here in the 21st Century, knowledge is clearly a major determinant of success in any business. The challenge, of course, is to build organizational knowledge. In chapter 12, Bill shows how knowledge builds through three levels -- data, information and understanding. He explains that increasing from one level to the next makes the communication (sharing) of knowledge possible. And he shows that only upon arrival at the final level (understanding), can knowledge be used to develop strategy. Finally, Bill offers 12 proven steps for building knowledge in your organization. For those who've struggled developing their mission statement, Appendix A will be helpful. There, Bill shows a simple technique for developing your mission statement even with many people participating. Also, he clearly differentiates among mission, vision, values and philosophies. Managers who've previously been confused by the definitions of these terms will find comfort in Appendix A.

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Most helpful customer reviews

10 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

Good Buy for Developing Strategic Thinking

By Elijah Chingosho

The book offers a refreshing explanation of the most important concepts and techniques in strategic thinking based on what the author terms "a four piece puzzle" made up of focus, process, people and markets. This is a practical no-nonsense book, based on the author's extensive experience and sharp intellect.

The book should be required reading for those interested in strategic management, organizational change, the future of business and industry as well as strategy consultants. The stories and examples are right-on, enlightening, useful and very meaningful. This is a unique book which is a significant and welcome advance from the traditional strategic management process.

I particularly enjoyed reading about the opportunity grid which helps managers conceptualize and envision their specific strategic options. I also highly appreciated the insight and advice on how to successfully build knowledge in my organization which is key to be successful and competitive in today's highly competitive operating environment.

All-in-all, a well written book that is among the good books that you will find on the subject.

24 of 25 people found the following review helpful.

The Opportunity Grid is a real gem!...worth the value of the whole book!

By Lee Say Keng

I generally share most of the sentiments expressed by earlier reviewers who gave positive responses to this book.

In the light of my own consultancy work, understanding the Opportunity Grid (Chapter 6) alone, with its many diverse applications in business, is worth the value of the whole book.

Let me share a little secret with readers. If you synergise the power of this Opportunity Grid (with some adaptation, of course) with the power tools introduced in 'Innovation Formula' by Michel Robert, your analytical as well as opportunity sensing capabilities become exponential. Trust me!

The Opportunity Grid is really a brilliant piece of work by the author (even though it has its origins from George Steiner's pioneering work). Kudos!

The author's artful illustration of Pareto's Law or the 80/20 Rule in business, although it is not a new concept, is refreshing.

This wonderful book can be best summed up by using the author's own approach to strategic thinking, as outlined below:

"Successful managers or successful management teams focus on the four critical pieces of the strategic puzzle:

- rather than try to accomplish "everything," they diligently maintain F-O-C-U-S;
- they develop & maintain intimate understanding of their M-A-R-K-E-T-S;
- they truly care about their P-E-O-P-L-E;
- they carefully manage their P-R-O-C-E-S-S-E-S;

This is one more good book to be added on to your Strategic Thinker's Bookshelf.

As a conclusion, & without hesitation, I rate this book a 5.

12 of 14 people found the following review helpful.

A puzzle no more . . .

By Dave Kinnear

When I received this book from Mr. Birnbaum, I was immediately excited, intrigued, and impatient to get to the reading. For several years now, I've been working with Bill on various projects for the Association of Professional Consultants and I've had the pleasure of reading his bi-monthly Newsletter. So I was familiar with his writing and speaking style, which is why I was so interested in getting to his new book.

I wasn't disappointed. This book is written in Bill's warm, down-to-earth style, giving the reader the impression that they are spending quality one-on-one time with a senior consultant and coach. Birnbaum's unconventional wisdom comes through in this most readable book on Business Strategy. How often do you hear someone say that it's "okay to be mediocre?" Well, Bill let's you know that as long as you are excelling at those few important strategic goals, it's okay to be mediocre at everything else. Refreshing, isn't it? Honest, straightforward thought.

Bill continues in the same vein to give us practical advice on process and procedures. Not only does he share with us what we might consider doing, he goes about explaining how we might do it. Most of us in the consulting business are willing to share what we believe you should do, it's when we get to the "how" that we



start issuing proposals and contracts! But throughout this book, Bill shares with us the how as well as the what and the why!

Besides reinforcing some of the things we know, such as "focus on doing the right things more than on doing things right," we are treated to lively and real life examples and stories exemplifying the strategies Bill lays out. As you would expect, the book is laid out in four sections, one for each of the major puzzle pieces - focus, process, people, markets. There is a very useful index as well, and some of the best information in the book can be found in the Appendix, so don't skip them! He keeps our interest up and he delivers on his promise to - "steepen your growth curve, brighten your profit picture, and help you to lead your management team." I highly recommend you put this book on your must read list!

See all 15 customer reviews...

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