



*Good for your growth.*

## Go-od Ideas: Strategic Planning in Uncertain Times

*Whenever we discover a powerful idea or tool, we can't wait to tell others about it. This is one of those moments. As we get closer to Q4 and begin to prepare for 2021, we wanted to share this good story about strategic planning in uncertain times.*

*~Toula and June  
September 2002*

Back in January 2020 (the “before” times) we launched Go-od Consulting’s annual strategic plan. June and her colleagues did the same for her leadership development company, TeachingHorse. Of course, what came next was a pandemic which brought much of normal life to a halt. Now what? We needed to make sure our plans for 2020 were still useful.

**Finding the Right Tool for the Job.** Having spent 20+ years helping clients develop and manage their strategic plans, we felt prepared to re-evaluate our own. And yet, we realized our go-to-tools weren’t drawing out our best thinking. We needed something else. Thankfully, June had just read “Seeing Around Corners” by Rita McGrath and it captured her attention. McGrath talks about the value of recognizing and responding to inflection points (and offers advice on how to do that). Not one to waste time, June immediately put McGrath’s ideas to work.

**It Worked!** Using the 2x2 matrix described below, the experience of exploring the current environmental uncertainties (inflection points) was enlightening, energizing and empowering. At first, June worried that TeachingHorse (which provides in-person, experiential leadership development training) might not survive more than a few months of social distancing. Instead, the process of exploring uncertainties revealed changes and investments TeachingHorse could make right away to get through those difficult spring months and be ready for whatever else 2020 was going to dish out. The adjustments worked. TeachingHorse was ready to respond no matter what happened next.

**Planning for Uncertainties - The 2x2 Matrix:** The following is a high-level overview of how to explore environmental uncertainties (those issues that are outside of your control but will absolutely affect your organization).

1. Choose the two most **critical environmental uncertainties** you’re currently facing. In today’s world that’s likely social-distancing and economic uncertainty.
2. Create a **2x2 matrix** to explore how each **scenario** might play out (see June’s example below). Within each scenario, think about:
  - What **signals** (evidence) would you see to let you know this scenario is playing out?
  - What **responses** would enable you to survive (and possibly thrive) in this scenario?
3. Determine which **current reality** you’re in (which scenario rings truest at this moment?)
4. Prioritize the 3-5 **critical actions** you must take now to address that current reality and to be ready to respond to the other three scenarios (should they emerge).
5. **Integrate** these critical actions into your objectives and key results (OKRs) or whatever tools you use to monitor progress.
6. **Scan the environment** regularly to see if there’s any evidence of the other scenarios emerging.

The table below is a high-level summary of the conversation June and her team engaged in. *In just two hours, the team walked away with a clear understanding of what adjustments were needed to be capable of responding to each scenario.* As things evolved, TeachingHorse knew which response to put into action at just the right time.

2x2 Matrix to Explore Critical Environmental Uncertainties		2nd Uncertainty: Social Distancing Requirements	
		Low It's ok to gather in person	High It is NOT ok to gather in person
1st Uncertainty: Client Demand for Sessions	High Clients want/are able to book sessions	<b>Scenario I:</b> Ok to gather; high demand. <b>Signals:</b> Clients book / rebook for the fall/winter <b>Response:</b> Stay the Course	<b>Scenario III:</b> Not ok to gather; high demand. <b>Signals:</b> Requests for executive coaching/small team development; clear economic winners emerge. <b>Response:</b> Promote Premier Products
	Low Clients do not want/are not able to book sessions	<b>Scenario II:</b> Ok to gather; low demand. <b>Signals:</b> Travel restrictions; Requests limited to local team development; Slow economic rebound; Price-sensitive clients. <b>Response:</b> Focus Local	<b>Scenario IV.</b> Not ok to gather; low demand ("we're screwed"). <b>Signals:</b> Clients do not rebook for fall/winter; stalled economy; virtual learning dominates market. <b>Response:</b> Reinvention

**What We've Learned Putting the 2x2 Matrix to Use with Clients:** Recognizing the value of what June had just done for her own business, we knew several of our clients would also benefit from re-evaluating their strategic plans within the context of the critical uncertainties currently in play. The resulting conversations have been consistently powerful. **This 2x2 matrix is definitely a keeper.** Here are some of the things we've learned so far from putting it work:

1.	<b>It takes a team to have this conversation.</b>	No one person has all the answers. Diverse thinking is essential to get a holistic view of environmental uncertainties and their impact on your organization.
2.	<b>There is (rarely) one right answer.</b>	That might sound scary, but it's true and it's OK (it just means you need to be clear on your options and that's what this tool is all about).
3.	<b>Facing the "we're screwed" scenario is empowering!</b>	Our client's collective <b>energy went up</b> as they looked the lower right-hand corner right in the eyes! Facing reality leads to seeing new possibilities.
4.	<b>There are likely new opportunities to be discovered.</b>	The conversations we facilitated surfaced opportunities no one had previously considered. The moment clients unearthed those opportunities was exhilarating and energizing!
5.	<b>You can (and will likely need to) have this conversation more than once.</b>	Just one week after exploring the uncertainties of social distancing and economic instability, social unrest emerged as an issue one of our clients had to address. They did so confidently with agility and creativity.

**We are here to help.** If you're wondering how to adapt your existing strategic plan or how to create a new one during a pandemic, economic uncertainty, social unrest (or anything else), we are ready to help.

Contact us at: [toula@go-odconsulting.com](mailto:toula@go-odconsulting.com) or [june@go-odconsulting.com](mailto:june@go-odconsulting.com).

