

Strategic Planning

Crisis Intervention and Disaster Mental Health Applications

George S. Everly, Jr., PhD., ABPP, CCISM

Jeffrey T. Mitchell, PhD, CCISM

FIELD GUIDE SERIES

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CHAPTER ONE: What is Strategic Planning?

The great Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu (c. 544 – 496 BC) wrote the classic text: *The Art of War*. In that text, he boldly asserted, "Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat." Pasteur is credited with the saying, "Chance favors only the prepared mind." But what do these terms really mean? Let's take a closer look.

Key Terms

Carville and Begala (2000) explained that there are three essential elements in planning: objectives, strategies, tactics. The strategy is often confused with the objective and the tactic. So, let us begin by clarifying all three terms.

Objective: The term *objective* is derived from the Medieval Latin word *objectivus* which means something which is sought after; a goal. Think of this as an overarching goal or the overall desired outcome. In order to achieve one's objective, one must have a strategy and set of tactics.

Strategy: The term *strategy* refers to the plan or schema to achieve the objective. It is derived from the Greek word *strategos* and the English

stratagem. The strategy is goal-path. So, formulating a strategy yields goal-path clarity.

Tactic: From the Greek word *tactica*, *tactic* refers to the specific actions or behaviors that will be taken within the strategy to achieve the objective. Think of tactics as the specific actions, or tools, of the strategic plan.

Strategic Planning

So, as you can see, the term strategic plan is a redundancy since a strategy is actually a plan. That having been said, we will use the term loosely as it has been used recently albeit imprecisely. So, think of strategic planning as the total of all planning processes in support of the objective or goal.

Crisis intervention and disaster mental/behavioral health have been plagued by the vigorous pursuit of tactics, while often ignoring the importance of having a strategic formulation, or framework, within which the tactics may reside. Indeed, the perfectly performed tactical intervention implemented at the wrong time can be as complete a failure as the tactical intervention performed poorly. Thus, while tactical proficiency (how to intervene) is essential, so is the strategic understanding of when and where to implement the chosen interventions to maximize outcome and best achieve the objective. According to Flynn (2003),

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“There seems to be a consensus that the process of planning is nearly as important as the content of the plans” (p. 6).

Putting It All Together

So, let’s put the three terms together by way of examples.

Throughout history, countries have often had conflicts with neighboring countries. They seek to resolve the conflicts (objectives). They usually seek political solutions (political strategies) to solve those conflicts. They send emissaries to negotiate and may even hold summit conferences (political tactics). But in some instances, they resort to a strategy of warfare (strategic warfare) to resolve conflicts. To wage war, they raise an army, develop weapons, and fight numerous battles (tactics). Every once in a while, a nation develops a weapon that not only can win a battle (tactical), but it develops a weapon that can win an entire war and achieve the overall sought-after objective. One example of a strategic weapon from history would be poisons that could poison an army or an entire city-state. Contagious diseases, such as smallpox, can decimate armies and communities. Smallpox was used by the British in the French and Indian War to cripple the Indian nation’s ability to wage war. And of course, the atomic and nuclear bombs are

examples of strategic weapons. The atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima was arguably a strategic weapon that brought World War II to a conclusion.

What does all of this have to do with psychological crisis intervention and disaster mental/behavioral health response? The goals (*objectives*) of psychological crisis intervention and disaster mental health/behavioral health intervention are typically four-fold:

1. Stabilize acute distress and dysfunction (keep the psychological status of individuals, groups, and communities from worsening);
2. Mitigate acute distress and dysfunction (reduce suffering and discord);
3. Foster resiliency (rebound) amongst individuals, groups, and communities; and,
4. Facilitate recovery, and perhaps even growth.

The strategy, *or strategic plan*, to achieve these objectives involves developing a plan for organizing various tactical psychological and disaster mental health interventions in the most effective and efficient manner. In effect, this means using the most effective intervention at the most impactful time, with the most appropriate target population.