



*Helping Organizations
Take the Next Step*

Thinking Inside the Box: *Keeping a Strategic Focus to Guide Decisions*

By John Heymann

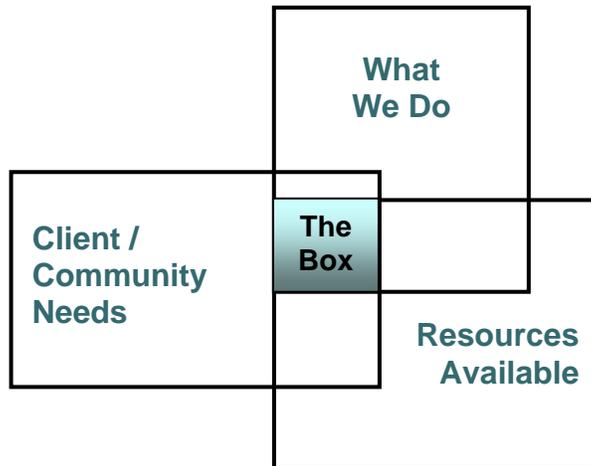
The challenges of running a successful organization are likely to become even tougher in the future, as economic conditions remain uncertain or worsen. As competition gets stiffer, providing services to your clients and community, growing and strengthening your leadership team, raising the funds needed for growth, and getting the message out about who you are and what you do will all require disciplined strategies. How can you keep focused on what's important, rather than what's urgent?

Keeping Your Focus

We are constantly being admonished to “think outside the box.” Starting with a blank slate can be great for creativity, but applying the same approach to decision-making can be paralyzing. Most of us make thousands of decisions each week. To be sure, many are inconsequential (*should I buy the large size or the medium?*), but the decisions we make for the success of our organizations can have profound impacts (*should we add a new program, should we invest in upgrading software, should I hire this person?*). Having a strategic focus gives us a framework and filters for making those decisions in a way that moves the process forward in a proactive, rather than reactive (opportunistic) way. The world is full of opportunities, but which are the right ones for your organization to pursue? Thinking outside the box can certainly produce a rich and long list of options. The question is, once you have that unfiltered list, how do you decide which ideas make the most sense for your organization? You could also wait for opportunities to come your way and jump at any that appeal to you, but your odds for success are inversely proportional to the number of unknown variables in each opportunity.

Try Thinking Inside the Box

Picture three overlapping squares: the first contains the things that you do as an organization (your mission); the second represents the needs of your clients or community; the third encompasses the resources you have available (time, funding, knowledge). Try thinking inside the box created by the overlap of those three areas. A strategic approach to deciding which opportunities to pursue consists of a constant focus, evaluation, and refocus on the overlap between these three areas -- thinking inside the box. With the right filters in place, you can manage your decision-making, tweak your strategies to fit the new knowledge you gain, and have a way to evaluate the constantly changing external factors beyond your control, without losing sight of your overall goals and objectives.



John Heymann, CEO of NewLevel Group, has more than 30 years experience as an entrepreneur, business owner, and leader. A former Peace Corps volunteer, Managing Director of the Land Trust of Napa County, and Chief Executive Officer of Motto Kryla & Fisher, John is well known for his ability to work with disparate groups to gain consensus and deliver results. John can be reached at 255-5555 x105, or jheymann@newlevelgroup.com.