

# IDEAS 48

**International Online Teachers Society  
Debate  
Educational Materials For  
Advance and Upper Intermediate  
Students**



**International Online Teachers Society  
Publishing Committee**



## CONTENTS

### THE 48TH INTERNATIONAL ONLINE TEACHERS SOCIETY ESSAY CONTEST

|  |
|--|
| STRATEGY I IT PAYS TO HAVE GOOD STRATEGY! I Kathlyn Q. Barrozo I 2                     |
| STRATEGY I STILL LOVING CHICKEN SOUP I Kathlyn Q. Barrozo I 3                          |
| STRATEGY I IMAGES ON MY TV SCREEN II I Kathlyn Q. Barrozo I 4                          |
| STRATEGY I MAKING A CAREER OUT OF STRATEGIZING I Kathlyn Q. Barrozo I 5                |
| STRATEGY I STRATEGIC PLANNING - SUSTAINS THE ENTIRE ORGANIZATION I Marian Baltazar I 6 |
| STRATEGY I STRATEGY: A FUNDAMENTAL FACTOR IN LIFE I Joseph Arre I 7                    |



## IT PAYS TO HAVE GOOD STRATEGY!

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In virtually any setting in today's world, strategy is needed to keep things going as planned. The allocation of resources, the setting out of procedures, and the resolution of issues work well with the proper strategy in place. There may be times when the outcome seems to be far from what has been conceived, but the bottom line remains that it is the choice of strategy that greatly affects everything.

We all have plans and concepts in diverse aspects of our lives: the dreams we hold dear; the career paths we wish to take; the advancements we want to go through; the paths we wish our children to eventually take; our retirement plans. On TV, we see popular TV commercials that encourage us to see this or that financial institution, whether a bank, an insurance company, or a financial planning firm, as a way to obtain financial stability for the future. Relying on oftentimes speculative forecasts and risky ventures, such financial firms guarantee their offerings to be the best in the market, promising to enhance value and improve prospects for their clients. Seeing into the future is pure crystal-ball imagery, but happy are those who seek future financial stability through proven methodologies and systems.

We have seen how insurance providers have constantly folded up their businesses because of the economic crunch brought about by the 9/11 event. Admittedly, numerous businesses were severely or relatively affected by the catastrophic event, with the rebounds being felt up to the present, in one way or another. Sadly, no matter how far and how well we all try to strategize on the various aspects of our lives, there will always be glitches we can never foresee nor prepare adequately for. No matter how hard we prepare or how comprehensive the strategies we devise, failures lurk around every corner without announcing their presence.

However, if we have faith in ourselves, believe in our strategies and their effectiveness, and exhaust our efforts into working for a specific end, then who is to say that we will not eventually succeed? What counts after all is not the number of times we fall, but the number of times we get up and move on. As we go about our daily lives, let us remember the many that have gone before us who have succeeded in facing off the greatest adversities they have had, using strategies that really work. Let us never place all our eggs in one basket. Always have a Plan B or a back-up plan.

It pays to have good strategy!

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Have you ever had plans that went awry? Talk about how those events unfolded.
2. What lessons have you learned from such experiences?
3. Why is it important to have a good strategy in business/ in life?
4. How effective has your strategizing generally been?
5. How do you usually react to ineffective strategies in your personal life?



## STILL LOVING CHICKEN SOUP

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Many years back, I loved the Chicken Soup for the Soul series for the simple and practical day-to-day lessons they imparted to otherwise impractical people like me. Eliciting chuckles or tears, depending on the write-ups, the stories and motivational essays were refreshing in that they provided fresher perspectives on life in general. Highly-inspirational, the books in the series were also geared towards specific audiences, as well. They were also most likely what inspired many self-help and inspirational books that have come into existence in today's world. Even the daily bible guide that is often given out for free contains stories and essays that mimic those in the original Chicken Soup series. Although I no longer remember any specific story I have heard or read in the series, the feel-good setting which those books have motivated still stay in my heart.

What sets the series apart, aside from its being the originator of numerous inspirational and self-help books, is that it has been able to motivate in the simplest of ways without pretending to preach or change people's views on life. In a matter-of-fact way, the series explores the personal psyche, what makes it tick, what makes it unique, or what makes it common to others. It seeks to make readers see the beauty inherent in even the most minuscule aspects of life while teaching valuable lessons that withstand even the test of time. The stories are uncomplicated, daily-grind material that do not overwhelm nor understate.

There have been other books that have come out today and which have enjoyed great success, too. Several of them have explored the updated outlooks which have enveloped a more enlightened human mentality. They have succeeded because their views have remained the same as the original Chicken Soup series': fresh, believable and quite easily digestible without being too heavy on the seasonings. Pun intended!

All those literary successes have shared one other thing in common: they have optimized the strategies that humans employ for living their lives in an otherwise challenge-filled world. They have readily explored the strategies that we keep in our arsenals to face life in all its complexities and adversities. Reading about the frailties of others somehow inspires us to accept our own imperfections and to seek a higher purpose in whatever we do.

In our personal dealings and circumstances, let us not forget that help to overcome our inhibitions on strategizing is never far behind. We need only to go back to the experiences of other people to find guidance and the great advice we seek.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What is your favorite inspirational/self-help book? What makes this piece special to you?
2. Do you find yourself referring to that specific literary work in certain instances in your life? How are you assisted by such works?
3. What do you think such inspirational literature ultimately give us?
4. Aside from reading, how else do you obtain inspiration for daily living strategies?
5. If you were writing an inspirational book, is there a particular aspect of your life that you would want to write about? Why would you write about that?



## IMAGES ON MY TV SCREEN II

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I saw a TV program which featured how a group of professionals decided to pool their energies, resources and skills to construct miniatures of famous landmarks in my country. From the ground up, the exceptional team worked their way in order to create productions made up entirely of Lego bricks. From the drawing board to the actual place of construction, everyone in the group knew what goal they had to achieve. They were all united in one common objective: to create innovative and inspiring creations that could incite the appreciation for how rich our country is and how beautiful it truly is. Memory eludes me as to the exact airing of the episode, but the program is a weekend magazine show that continues to earn raves for its modern, up-to-date topics.

The TV program itself is one well-conceptualized show that never ceases to catch interest because of the remarkable talent of its host, the impressive way she connects each and every topic in an episode into one cohesive whole, and the tremendous amount of research that goes into every segment. Most likely, she has chosen the best writers she could find in order to have a perpetually fresh take on things, whether they be globally or locally flavored. I have often marveled at the amount of strategizing and leg work that must be entailed in order to come up with one great episode weekly. Granted, they have an entire week to work on just one episode, but one can imagine the enormous brainstorming that it could take. Hopefully, the show's core team never runs out of even fresher ideas so we can all learn something new every weekend.

Contrast that to some run-of-the-mill, hastily-conceived shows that we often see on TV. Quick: name shows which you believe have become old hack or mere recycled shows that guarantee yawns and groans of disappointments. Seeing those shows make you think: what were the writers thinking? How could they have come up with such mediocre shows? Don't they know that the key to keeping their audiences satisfied is to find a unique take on otherwise hackneyed concepts? The audience can merely switch channels, but with the number of such ho-hum shows on the loose on TV these days, surfing channels is the most likely scenario.

Let us hope that most TV people never forget how vital the strategies they have are in keeping their viewers satisfied. No amount of make-up or pricey sponsorships can save them once they are no longer able to sustain their audience's interest. Strategize, strategize. Innovate endlessly. Those are what keep people coming back.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Name one TV program/show that you find very interesting. How has the program/show remained interesting to you?
2. Why is it necessary to have a good strategy in doing any TV program/show?
3. Why have some programs/shows been closed down? What are the common reasons?
4. If you were a writer for a show, what particular topic would you like to write about? How would you keep your concepts fresh?
5. Why is it better to strategize with a group than alone?



## MAKING A CAREER OUT OF STRATEGIZING

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The greatest strategists win the biggest wars. Often guided by sheer instinct and the ability to foresee further than most people, such individuals possess gifts to plan and to bring forth whatever it is they conceptualize. They are not daunted by setbacks, because they readily have back-up plans should their present ones backfire. Such people are enviable: they seem to have it easy and all.

But ask any strategic planner or events coordinator and they will always tell you one thing; strategizing takes much effort no matter how small the event or how inconsequential the purpose. Even those who have been doing it for so many years often find strategizing really taxing work that requires tedious or often repetitive tasks that don't have identical results all the time. Every experience is new, every outcome a fresh take on the more recent ones. Strategizing requires years, months, weeks or days of nerve-wracking expectations and anticipation. Nope, strategizing is definitely not for the fainthearted.

How many times has this particular writer spent sleepless nights planning a certain event or strategizing for a specific undertaking, only to experience setbacks once the plan is set into motion? The very concept of strategizing alone is challenge enough, what more when all you have planned for and prayed for only crumble before your very eyes? Perhaps, the only thing that has saved me from insanity during those times was my faith, that plus the belief that after the rain, there will always be sunshine. Not floods, like we used to say when we were students and like we currently say because of the seemingly decreasing level of our terra firma. But I am digressing again.

This is why each and every plan of action I carry out always comes with a fervent prayer to an Omnipotent Presence that His will be done. By submitting myself to a Divine Will, I lessen the chances of feeling too much heartbreak should my strategizing fail to produce results that I crave. Furthermore, I find it good advice to always have a fallback, something I can hold on to should worse come to worst, or when push comes to shove. That way, I save myself a tremendous amount of hair pulling and tongue gnashing.

This is not to say, though, that we should all learn to be pessimistic. Au contraire, it is to teach us how to be optimistic. Once we have a safety net in place, we learn to hope that everything goes well. If they don't, there's always another way out. Such is the concept of truly effective strategizing. No regrets, take no prisoners, and leave nothing behind. All bases covered, see?

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Are there particular individuals you admire for being effective strategists? What makes these people great?
2. How do you strategize for anything in your life? Cite a specific event/situation and outline what it is you exactly do for it.
3. Even the best-laid plans often get setbacks along the way. How do you cope with failure, in such cases?
4. Why is strategizing difficult?
5. Would you want to become an events planner, financial advisor or strategic coordinator? Why or why not?



## STRATEGIC PLANNING - SUSTAINS THE ENTIRE ORGANIZATION

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If you ever wonder how an organization gets through and lasts the whole time, it is because strategic planning sustains the entire organization. Believe it or not, it is what determines where the organization is going over the next and ...succeeding years of its existence. It gives you the idea and know-how if it's going to get to that long-range planning that it came up with and if it's going to get there or not. I know that you will also wonder as to how then will a strategic plan be developed or created. There is also that dilemma of whether it will survive and be sustained too.

How then can you develop a strategic plan? The way that a strategic plan is developed largely depends on the nature of the organization's leadership and the culture of its organization. It also depends on the complexity of the complexity of the organization's environment, the size of the organization and most especially the expertise of the planners itself. The focus of a strategic plan is usually on the entire organization. Apparently, it is not only just getting enough money that one should really consider and assimilate in developing a strategic plan alone.

One of the most salient important reasons as to why organizations do strategic planning is to ensure that the entire organization will remain sustainable. That is, it does not only survive but that it will also thrive well in the future. More often than not, many organizations experienced to be a fiasco and short-lived all because they did not really prepare and develop a strategic plan. Many organizations merely create action plans only for the first year of a multi-year strategic plan and they simply refer to that action plan as an "operational plan." That should not be the case for without careful action planning and without diligently ensuring that actions should be carried out and implemented, the plan just ends up collecting dust on a shelf.

Actually, managers spend most of their time realizing and reacting to problems that an organization or a business is faced with. For some of these managers and for many of us, it can sometimes be very difficult to stand back and take a real good look at what we want to accomplish. There can be also times when we are too busy looking at what we think is making progress instead of how we could accomplish and get over that problem. To address the problem, we need not just a new manager but we need experienced managers to solve whatever it is that the business or organization is faced with. However, one of the major differences between new and experienced managers is the skill to see the broad perspective, to take the long view on what we want to do and how we're actually going to do it.

To wrap things up, one of the best ways to develop this skill is through ongoing experience in strategic planning which can sustain the entire organization. So start dealing with creating the right strategic plan for your business or organization to ensure its sustainability.

Questions for discussion:

1. Do you have a strategic plan in your business or organization that you are a part of right now? How do you deal with it?
2. Have you experienced making and developing a strategic plan or just simply making an operational plan? Explain your answer.
3. Given the choice, would you opt for an Operational Plan or a Strategic Plan? Justify your answer.
4. Do you believe that a Strategic Plan is essential for an organization or a business to be successful? Why or why not?
5. How could you develop a sound strategy? Elaborate on your answer.



Strategy: a fundamental factor in life

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Strategy is a fundamental factor in life. It controls every action and reaction which we encounter. The outcome of every war, problem and task is based on the strategy applied. In real life, our romances, family relationships, success in jobs and even betting on a gamble is all based on a strategy. In chess every move, maneuver and form of attack is also based on strategy. We often succeed or fail in life because we have picked the wrong stratagem. That is why we often need to plan ahead, see what might happen in the future and collect the determination to set out every decision. Our plans not only affect us but also the people around us. The plans of parents are crucial for the well-being of their children and the plans of teachers are essential in order for the students to grasp each concept in each lesson. If the leaders, the parents, teachers and government officials fail in creating a strong strategy then the group is affected. Such a concept in life should not be considered as an utter triviality but a significant virtue.

In the military, strategy is based on expert military command, planning and the conduct of war. In war every soldier, weapon and vehicle are essential in order to achieve total victory. The crafty general plans his maneuvers according to the conditions of war and the power of the enemy. He measures the outcome of the war and the determination needed in order to win every battle because he knows that in the battlefield a wrong move can spell defeat and utter destruction. However, utilizing the power of strategy is not only based on the conditions of warfare, it also includes everyday decisions and scenarios.

In education, strategy is also a key component. Without the right strategy the pupil will have doubts on the teacher and the teacher will not be able to function well. Hence, it is important in the realms of education to analyze each situation, predict the course of a given lesson and provide the necessary maneuvers in order to remove the doubt and boredom of the pupil. Sun Tzu mentioned that strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory while tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat. The famous philosopher pointed out that a strategy without a particular goal is the slowest route. Hence in teaching it slows the development of pupils while a plan without a strategy can actually be devastating. That is why both a good stratagem and a well planned tactic are needed in order to release the full potential of students. Once the student understands all the concepts then total victory is at hand.

Questions for Discussion: :

- 1) What is a fundamental factor in life?
- 2) What are some concepts in real life where we need to strategize our move?
- 3) What will happen in students if there is a problem with the strategy used?
- 4) Why do we need to have a strategy in chess?
- 5) What does the crafty general do during wars?





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