

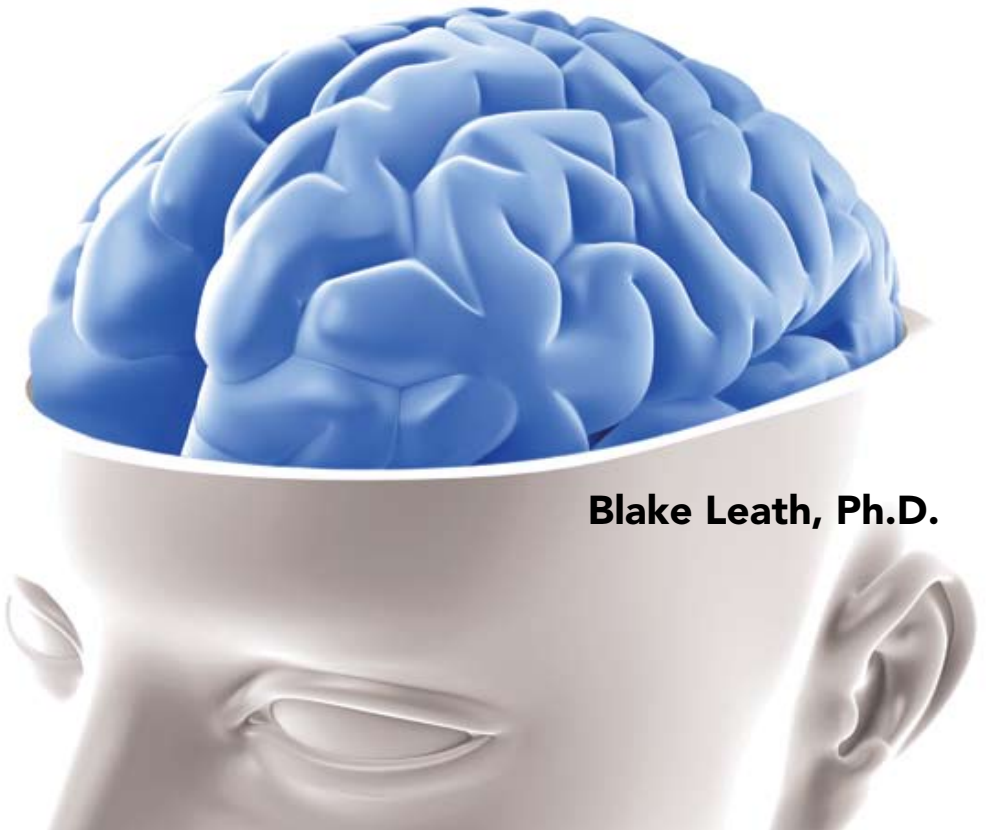
Part manifesto, part handbook, part toolkit — and all *call to action*.

AN EXCERPT FROM

cultivating the

STRATEGIC MIND

Growing from **Leader** to ***Visionary,***
Creator and ***Architect*** of **Strategy**



Blake Leath, Ph.D.

Praise for *Cultivating the Strategic Mind*

“In short, *Cultivating the Strategic Mind* is awesome. What a great tool. I can’t believe how much of it has stuck with me. I’m using *Cultivating the Strategic Mind* with my staff, and the *Omniscience Octagon* has proven to be an invaluable resource and tool for our strategic thinking and planning. Thanks again for a great process. Dr. Leath’s principles improve upon many of the strategic concepts I learned as a fighter pilot and tactics officer in the Air Force. I was able to apply them to our business and a sister company almost instantly. The models he has created have proven to be outstanding communication tools with our staff. The best part is that these principles have helped my wife and I develop a strategy to deal with some very complicated issues for our family.”

John Moore

CEO, JM & Associates, Inc./Raymond James

“*Cultivating the Strategic Mind* offers a myriad of growth opportunities and serves as an eclectic guideline for those in supervisory and leadership positions.”

Edward L. Wingard, Ph.D.

Union Institute and University

“Dr. Leath has more wisdom and leadership understanding than most people twenty years his senior. Having a sitdown conversation with Dr. Leath about *Cultivating the Strategic Mind* was like lighting a fire in my brain – truly mesmerizing.”

David Stewart

President, Corporate Image Communications

“*Cultivating the Strategic Mind* is a must-read for any leader who expects to develop a *thinking and strategy-based culture* that can execute and achieve sustainable results.”

Tony Jeary

CEO, High Performance Resources

“*Cultivating the Strategic Mind* was a dazzling headtrip. I had a blast! Leath breezes along and lifts you higher until you forget we’re talking about *strategy* here. I lost myself in his stories, arriving thirty pages further and filled to the gills with tools I can use tomorrow.”

Robin Blakeley

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Designed by Ed Brock, Scott Swain and Brad Dixon

Two Principles of 1°

*The Differences Between **Leader** and **Strategic Leader** are Subtle Yet Profound*



Water = Liquid 

Ice = Solid 

Steam = Gas 

In 1994, I was spending eight days a month working with a mining company. For various reasons, several minesites had engaged our organization to help them with culture change and to create what they described as “a high-involvement work culture.” I can honestly say, thirteen years later, that miners are among my favorite people. They are salt-of-the-earth folk with a humbling work ethic and timeless values. I have many friends from those mines, even to this day, whom I met and worked with so many years ago. Some of our first meetings, however, were somewhat rocky. As outsiders, my colleagues and I were initially greeted with a degree of contempt and our efforts to facilitate change were greatly resisted. In time, however, a tremendous amount of change occurred, and while we were only facilitators of it, I regard the mid-90s as one of my most intense growth periods.

It was during this three-year project of cultural transformation that “*Two Principles of 1°*” was born. I remember having lunch with several geologists and we were talking about change. Essentially, they believed in the aspiration to create a more participative workplace, but they didn’t agree that dramatic change was possible, much less necessary. In my struggle to find an analogy or metaphor that would resonate with their scientific minds, H₂O came to mind.

“Maybe it’s not a matter of buying in to the notion of needing *significant* change. Maybe *just one degree* is enough. Think of it like this. What’s the difference between winning organizations and also-rans, and how broad is the chasm that separates them? Generally, isn’t it much narrower than most leaders realize? Seriously, think about H₂O. How profound is the change between *just one degree* and another degree – especially, when it’s *the right degree*?”

Based on this initial kernel of an idea, an observation unfolded that has served our organization well for many years now. *Two Principles of 1°* resurrects the childhood realization that H₂O can occupy three states – a solid, a liquid, or a gas. No epiphanies here, but *the importance of 1°* and *leveraging the right 1°* cannot be overstated because both have important applications in the world at large and certainly within every organization.

Focusing on the relevance of temperature (in this case, Fahrenheit) and tolerating no complex distractions from physicists regarding pressure, triple point or the like, H₂O occupies a different state at 32°F and 33°F and again at 211°F and 212°F. In the former it transforms from a solid to a liquid, and in the latter, from that liquid to a gas. Clearly, the metaphor of 1° is a foundation for many extrapolations. Consider the relevance of 1° in navigation. A journeying sailboat that is off course by just 1° will miss its destination by one mile for every sixty miles that it travels. An airplane leaving LAX bound for Seoul would land – not in South Korea (but much to the passengers’ chagrin) – in an altogether different country. One degree is a slight variance, but one that counts enormously. Yet this subtlety is overlooked by too many leaders and organizations. For example, think about applying the 1° principle to Lance Armstrong’s seven victories in the Tour de France. Having raced precisely 15,133 cumulative miles between 1999 and 2005, Armstrong’s seven 1st place wins separate him from the 2nd place finishers by a total of just 39 minutes and 40 seconds.¹ This is an astonishingly small margin of victory considering the twenty stages, three weeks duration, and an average speed of 25 – 26 mph.

¹ Many thanks to Chad Truby, sports aficionado and all around great guy for helping me with these statistics.

Table 2. *Analysis of Armstrong's Seven (1°) Tour de France Victories*

Year	Distance (in miles)	Margin of Victory	Comments
1999	2287	07 minutes, 37 seconds	Greatest margin of victory over 2 nd place finisher, Alex Zuelle
2000	2050	06 minutes, 02 seconds	
2001	2141	06 minutes, 44 seconds	
2002	2035	07 minutes, 17 seconds	
2003	2272	01 minute, 01 second	Smallest margin of victory over 2 nd place finisher, Jan Ullrich Armstrong won the 2003 race in the final of 20 stages during a rain soaked time trial when Ullrich lost control of his bike and slipped on wet pavement and went down; the margin of victory would have been far less had this not happened
2004	2107	06 minutes, 19 seconds	
2005	2241	04 minutes, 40 seconds	

Or consider the sport of baseball.¹ Over the course of a 162 game season, a batter who hits .285 versus one who bats .300 makes approximately 8 more hits (assuming about 550 at bats for the season) or, stated another way, about 1 hit more for every 20 games played. Also, a .300 hitter will be a Hall of Famer, while a .285 player will not. The same subtleties are true in golf.² Tiger Woods's scoring average is 69 strokes per round. At the time of this writing, the 125th ranked player (Bubba Dickerson) averages 71 strokes per round resulting in an earnings difference of \$5 million for Tiger and \$500,000 for Bubba. The same is true for motor sports (e.g., NASCAR, NHRA). Typically, less than one second separates the winner from second place.

Whether it's cycling, baseball, golf, or racecar driving, in each instance, it's the 1° that counts. This discovery reveals that winning (in sports and most organizations) is seldom about colossal failures. Instead, it is mostly a matter of degrees, and often just 1°.

Now envision a perplexed elementary student studying a beaker of H₂O and watching for changes as a blue flame warms the water to 62 °F, then 63 °F, and now 64 °F. What happens? Nothing. *Absolutely nothing.* There is no drama,

¹ I am indebted to Peter Lehrman, for providing these facts.

² *Ibid.*

no breakthrough, no observable change within this temperature range. And so it is with many organizations that fail to identify the *right* or *relevant* degree upon which they should focus. Take, for example, the airline industry. If an airline wanted to increase customer satisfaction, it should focus on the right aspects of customer expectations that will move the needle. What do passengers care about? Three things matter most: *reliability*, *timeliness*, and *respect*. As a result, applying the 1° principle to improvements in these areas makes sense. For example, improving reliability through investments in equipment and technology, improving timeliness through efficient operations ensuring on-time departures and arrivals, and improving respect by communicating empathy and being sensitive to the value of travelers' time. Making investments in other areas might be appreciated, but new paint jobs, uniforms, and food packaging are less important than reliability, timeliness, and respect and – as a result – don't matter as much. They are not *the most relevant* degrees and, as one good 'ol boy described it many years ago, "That'd just be polishin' the poo."³

Appreciating the 1°, the right degree, and the subtle differences between victory and loss is critical to extraordinary strategists pursuing a more *Strategic Mind*. Helping leaders, managers, and employees focus on 1° issues is sometimes the most important contribution one can make. Let's look at another example.

Consider *Two Principles of 1°* and the Dilbert-like words that are used daily in countless organizations. While I'm a believer in *vision*, *mission*, *purpose*, *BHAGs*, *values*, *capabilities*, *competencies* and the like, I'm also jaded and all too aware of the eye rolling and skepticism with which these terms are met. For years, I found myself in dozens of vision/mission and strategic planning sessions. For the first few years, these were refreshing, exciting, valuable sessions. In time, however, as employees had engaged in a number of them, they became tiresome, repetitive, and often devolved into wordsmithing sessions where participants argued about grammar, word-count, and wound up creating homogeneous pictures and statements that could have applied to practically *any* for-profit business. If I've seen the following statements once, I've seen 'em a hundred times: "Our mission is to maximize shareholder value and increase operational efficiency." "Our vision is to become the leader in our industry." Ugh. Kill me now. The final straw was when I completed two *mission sessions* for two separate organizations – one was a tire manufacturer and the other was a laboratory – and

³ Which means, specifically, that you can *polish* and *shine* and *paint* all you want – but unless you change the essence, you're just creating an illusion of improvement.

ironically (with no input from me, only facilitation), they unwittingly created *identical* mission statements! Sure, when they're good, they're good; they help people make decisions, they provide direction, they increase engagement, and they align people toward the same purposes. But when they're milquetoast, vanilla, or neutered as a result of trying to be all things to all people, they wind up drivel. As I see it, *if you try to be all things to all people, you wind up being nothin' to nobody*. Good visions and missions provide clarity and focus. They are not supposed to be about motherhood and apple pie; they are, instead, supposed to unify and provide direction.

How can the notion of 1° prove helpful here, in this liturgy on business terminology? When invited to help a group craft a vision or mission, for example, the first thing I ask the group to do is, "Get out a piece of paper. Define vision. Both the word itself, and the current vision for this organization. Do the same for mission." About five minutes later, I collect and read all the scraps of paper. Typically, it's a mess. The definitions and statements are all over the place. Had I not done this exercise and launched into a vision/mission session without exposing different interpretations of seemingly straightforward terms, no telling what sort of gumbo might have been created that day. After the group's laughter and heckling subsides, I then communicate the utility of vision. "When done right, here's what it is and what it can do." I explain the same for mission, and values, and whatever other agenda items exist. I find that by defining them, then explaining their function, people are usually refreshed and more optimistic about the day and its value. Both the explanation, and now their common understanding of the terms is a 1° difference. There is more clarity, there is more commitment, and ironically, the day is usually *less* about the words, and mostly about the intent. Groups may not leave with a shiny, silver *vision statement of 22 words or less*, per se, but they always leave with a common, meaningful, in-the-bones/mind/heart understanding of what their collective direction is, where the organization is going, and why. I find this heuristic, discovery-learning approach to be a nice antidote to the otherwise Dilbert-like, words-oriented grammar sessions that many of us have endured.

Relevant Lessons

As an individual and an organization, what are your differentiating factors? Rather than trying to be all things to all people, strive instead to identify the *one* and *right* degree upon which you should focus. Great strategists are very purposeful about this, and work to help others do the same. I have introduced

the notion of 1° now because it is an important lens through which I encourage you to view the remaining ideas and tools. As you might have guessed, the differences between a strategist and a leader are not broad chasms; they are tiny increments – but yes, they are tiny increments that are consequential... as consequential as the differences between a solid, a liquid, and a gas.



Dr. Blake Leath is the CEO of **The Blake Leath Group** (“TBLG”) — a dynamic research, curriculum development and intellectual property greenhouse that grows leaders and shapes cultures. He is the author of 90 copyrighted organizational science solutions implemented around the world.

Blake has worked with **clients** as diverse as Adidas, AT&T, Bausch & Lomb, BHP Billiton, BNSF Railway, Capital One, Citigroup, Daimler, Ericsson, GE, Kodak, Libbey, Lockheed Martin, Los Alamos National Laboratory, Northwestern Mutual, Pfizer, Sony and the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Defense and Interior. Blake and TBLG colleagues provide consulting services and tools that transform leaders, cultures and processes to achieve dramatic breakthroughs in strategy and performance.

In his 18 years as an organizational strategist, Blake has instructed in excess of 13,000 participants across 41 states and his content has been used by leaders in 27 countries. TBLG has worked with more than 200,000 individuals and well over 2,000,000 imprints have been made of the Group’s combined intellectual property. Blake’s primary interests include strategy, culture, leadership, change, effects of a four-generation workforce, systems thinking, M&A integration, trust & influence and the process of acculturation.

In 2007, Blake published his first mainstream book, *Cultivating the Strategic Mind*. The modest-yet-ambitious text consistently receives high praise from professional strategists in locations as assorted as the United States, Canada, Mexico, Western Europe and Asia where his approaches have been embraced to reinforce more systemic strategic thinking.

His anticipated follow-up, *Management Malpractice*, is forthcoming in 2012-2013. Meanwhile, he and his colleagues research, write proprietary white papers and present extensively at international symposia and corporate events. Currently, TBLG is completing approximately four commissioned works every eight weeks (at the action research and formative & summative evaluation levels of scholarship) while collectively delivering 40–80 client days each month. Gleanings from the Group’s contributions to knowledge and best practices (including *Blake’s Blog*) can be seen at www.blakeleath.com. Lifelong learners are encouraged to engage the site to experience TBLG’s work, download freebies, participate and contribute to an organic community of dialogue.

Blake earned his bachelor’s degree in Business, his master’s degree in *Organizational Management* and his doctorate in *Organizational Sociology*. In the course of nearly twenty years, he has worked with practitioners in over 300 companies and numerous federal, state and local agencies/departments/bureaus as well as with individual researchers from Oxford, Harvard, UCLA, Stanford, University of Virginia, MIT and The Union Institute to understand and maximize employee involvement, success, longevity and passion. Blake is currently an Adjunct Faculty at the **Tandy Center for Executive Leadership** in TCU’s Neeley School of Business.

Blake, his beloved wife Dawn, their precious daughter Lauren (and Daisy & Patch) make their home in the gently rolling hills of North Texas.

The Strategic Mind Promise What This Book Is – And Isn't

“You gotta blow their socks off in the first two minutes.”

“I’ll do my best,” I said, “which starts with being who I am.”

So began a conversation between a world-renown speaker and yours truly as I prepared to take the stage at a recent business meeting with about 350 leaders from across the country. *Who I am* or, perhaps more importantly, *who I am not* is relevant because my fingerprints are all over this book. Depending on your experience with it, this could be good – or this could be bad.

As the reader, there are a number of things that are important to you. I presume that two of them include:

1. Your time
2. Receiving tools you can apply immediately

In less than a day’s time, you should be able to float through *Cultivating the Strategic Mind* – and the payoff will include more than forty tools you can turn around and use tomorrow. I do hope this meets your expectations.

But I have additional expectations and herein lies the rub: we’ve become so conditioned by *too little time* and *too much information* that soundbytes and hype often pass for deep thinking. Like you, I live in this real world. My life is comprised of plane flights, rental cars, hotel stays, 100 to 200 e-mails a day (about half of which I interpret as spam), work and play hours that bleed into one another, and a rich family life that I relish but which comes in doses smaller than I’d prefer. Netted out, I have too much to do and too little time. I know what it’s like to be the reader... you’re standing there, caught by the cover, then flipping through the book and reading the back cover to see if it’s worth your time. Or maybe you’re scrolling through images on a website, pausing to decide if you should add this item to your cart.

Let me make this easy for you: *you must read this book*.

Why?

I’m not Barnum and this is no circus, so I’ll avoid the hype and be straight-up with you:

1. I promise to treat you as the intelligent, curious learner that you are. In other words, I’ll give you the real deal – not some diluted, oversimplified, unrealistic plabum that wouldn’t pass muster in an elementary school classroom.

2. I won't write in soundbytes. I promise to communicate full, well-researched ideas that are valid. I'm not making things up here; I'm communicating what has been proven again and again in all sorts of settings.
3. I won't push a mnemonic device or acrostic solution on you. I know they're cute and memorable – they do have their place and I use them too. But *Cultivating the Strategic Mind* isn't a prescription – it's a new way of thinking about the world. I won't sell it short by embracing convention and shoving it in a box.

“In one sentence, tell me what *Cultivating the Strategic Mind* is about.”

“No – because that's the problem. We've diluted so many deep issues down to soundbytes that we're not communicating anymore. We're not thinking. We're not reflecting or wrestling or arguing or resolving. Instead, we're *seeing* and *reacting*. We're so focused on the immediate *how* that we lose sight of the important *why*. There's too much impulse in the world already – too much reliance of shorthand rather than really thinking things through. Enough's enough. I refuse to neuter strategy by making it less than it deserves.”

A book is special. It affords the opportunity to dive deep where we are otherwise superficial. In my *Strategic Mind* workshops, I'm forced to cover more in 2-3 days than I'd like – and although participants often hunger for more, time is precious and few of us can carve out more time than we already do. This is one of the reasons I'm so excited about this book. For the first time, I have the luxury of unspooling so many tried and true tools and ways of thinking about the world that will help you grow from a leader to a truly strategic leader. If history is any indication, most of my suggestions will resonate. Surely, however, some of them will fall flat – and that's okay too. In the words of Mark Twain, “If we both agree, one of us is unnecessary.” I welcome disagreement, but particularly when it's predicated on a mutual investment to fully understand the topic at hand. In other words, feel free to dismiss me or my ideas, but only after you've finished the dessert I've prepared and you've attempted what I've suggested. The outcomes just might surprise you.

A handful of publishers, agents, editors, and PR-firms worked tirelessly in preceding weeks to convince me that *Cultivating the Strategic Mind* could be “a best seller” if I would simply agree to make it *simpler... faster paced... breezier... more story-based... more anecdotal and less research-based... more conventional*. I appreciate the input and great intentions – but as I stated before, I have to be true to who I am. And who I am is this: I would rather sell ten copies of this

book to people who will truly value the ideas and implement the tools than sell a million copies to individuals who won't. This isn't about selling books; it's about changing minds. *Cultivating the Strategic Mind* – when consumed and applied – will not only change the way you think about the world, but it will also change your behavior and your organization. I've seen it more times than I can count – and having seen it, nothing else will suffice. There are no surrogates or substitutes for transformational change –no mooseheads, awards, ribbons, or gold seals that would supplant the high I get by seeing such deep change in a participant's life.

Am I rigid? Rarely – and you hold in your hands one of the few instances in which I am. But I believe that's okay, because I'm not a politician running for office or a classmate running for student council. Deep down in my gut, I believe that many people are ready for more protein. I'm tired of reading one book a week and forgetting about it within a month. Perhaps you are too. If so, maybe we'll click. Maybe you'll wrap *Cultivating the Strategic Mind* around your fingers and dissect it with a highlighter. Maybe when you're finished it'll be dog-eared and crimped and jammed with post-its marking those pages that warrant further study or implementation. Maybe you'll buy a hundred copies for the leaders you love. Who knows – maybe it'll find its way into a trash can or onto a dusty shelf along with all the other books you've devoured in the past decade. But if I'm *right* about my convictions – maybe you're the one who will form a *Strategic Mind* implementation book club and revolutionize your business or church or family for the better. If so, my defiance of conventional wisdom will have been worthwhile.