I'm not particularly 'fluent' in formal strategic planning and I've never had a formal course in it. So when words like objectives, mission, goals, and strategy are used, I'm always a bit confused. What is the difference between a goal and objective again? Of course, every organization needs strategy; it's a fundamental of organizational behavior.

The traditional approach to strategic planning is SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats). Many SWOT users believe you should pay attention to Threats and Weaknesses in order to take the appropriate defensive or offensive action. However, as one SWOT user says, "Having used SWOT analysis for the previous 15 years, I had experienced that it could be draining, as people often got stuck in the weaknesses and threats conversations. The analysis became a descending spiral of energy."

In *The Thin Book of SOAR*, authors Jacqueline Stavros and Gina Hinrichs present a more positive approach to strategic planning. They say:

"Weaknesses and threats are not ignored. They are reframed and given the appropriate focus within the Opportunities and Results conversations. Ultimately it becomes a question of balance. Why not spend as much time or more on what you do well and how you can do more of that? What gives you more energy to take action? What gives you confidence to set a stretch goal?"

Why not indeed? Based on the accumulating evidence in strengths-based approaches, why not apply it to strategic planning? Stavros and Hinrichs' intent can be summarized in this statement: "We believe that strategy should be a living, energy-creating part of everyone's job." The benefit of that is that decisions made at the moment of service reflect the strategy of the organization; creating the momentum described by Jim Collins as turning the flywheel.

SOAR stands for Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results. Like Appreciative Inquiry, the process invites representatives of all stakeholders (anyone who has an interest in the organization) into the conversation about what the organization does well and what the collective values and aspirations are. Aspirations are 'longings' and the research is clear that people long to do purposeful work. They want to know that what they do each day is making a positive difference to others and reflects what they value. And, that generally is not just building 'wealth' for a small group of people. They also want to have positive relationships with the people they work with and those relationships are created through conversation, especially constructive conversation. SOAR creates the platform for those conversations to take place, which in turn nurtures the relationships while people discover how their joint efforts benefit themselves and others.

What I especially like about SOAR is the R or Results. It is a lot easier for people to put their discretionary efforts into achieving results when they see a direct connection to their values. And because the R is such a key part of the process, it is not left for later; which in my experience often happens in an Appreciative Inquiry session.

Strategy is everybody's job and *The Thin Book of SOAR* shows how to make that happen. The examples are clear and practical as the authors both have extensive experience working with a wide variety of clients. There is an in-depth case study to see how it unfolds in a formal process. There is also an example of how to do a Quick SOAR, a 5-hour session you could use with your team.

What better time to use SOAR than right now? Focus your team on what you do well and how you can take advantage of that to get results. This will help move people from fear of the volatility of our current economic situation into action that will produce results, creating an upward spiral of energy and rewards. Here's your chance to sample *The Thin Book of SOAR*. Click here to read Chapter 2: What is Different About Soar?