

Empowering Hope and Stability through Strategic Foresight

Integrating Joel Barker's Strategic Exploration Tools to Help People and Organizations "See Possible Futures"

A Fast Company article, "The quality employees need most right now from their leaders may surprise you" (Fast Company, 8/4/2025), research from Gallup revealed hope as the primary need (56%), followed by trust (33%), compassion (7%), and stability (4%). Gallup's Jim Harter stated: "*I think that it's hard to have a sense of stability if you **can't see the future.***" (Emphasis Added)

He further stated that "*the people who felt that they had a leader who encouraged their development had a much more positive view of their standard of living and their future. **When people have a concept of where they're headed, that's part of hope.***" (Emphasis Added)

For decades, futurist **Joel Barker** has shown that hope and stability begin with a **compelling vision**, then gain strength through strategic foresight. His frameworks, **Paradigms**, the **Implications Wheel®**, and **T.I.P.S. Tracking**, provide practical methods for preparing individuals and organizations to recognize change, explore multiple outcomes, and act with confidence. This paper introduces a four-step strategic sequence.

Vision: The Starting Point for Hope and Stability

In *The Power of Vision*, Joel Barker emphasized: "*Vision without action is merely a dream. Action without vision just passes the time. Vision with action can change the world.*"

Vision is the **anchor** that allows people and organizations to maintain stability even when external conditions shift. It:

- Creates a shared purpose that unites teams.
- Serves as a filter for evaluating opportunities and risks.
- Provides a sense of hope by clarifying the "destination" before choosing the route.

Recommended Actions for Vision:

- Facilitate workshops where leaders and teams learn the importance of vision, e.g., “[Vision Web](#),” and then co-create a compelling, values-based vision.
- Ensure the vision is **future-focused**, inspiring, and inclusive.
- Use the vision as a **decision-making compass** in both calm and turbulent times.

Paradigms and Paradigm Shifts

Joel’s classic work on paradigms (“Future Edge,” 1992) defined a **paradigm** as a set of rules and boundaries that determine how problems are understood and solved. A **paradigm shift** occurs when a new model replaces those rules.

[Understanding paradigms:](#)

- Encourages awareness of **paradigm paralysis**, resisting change even when the old model no longer works.
- Builds **paradigm pliancy**, the ability to adapt quickly when shifts occur.

Recommended Actions for Paradigms:

- Identify your current paradigms in operations, culture, and strategy.
- Use Barker’s “Paradigm Curve” to spot early indicators of change.
- Develop adaptive capacity through scenario discussions and change simulations.

The Implications Wheel®

The **Implications Wheel**® is a structured, collaborative tool for mapping **first-, second-, and third-order consequences** of a decision, event, or trend. It reveals both positive and negative ripple effects.

Benefits:

- Avoids siloed thinking by involving multiple perspectives.
- Encourages broad exploration of possible futures before committing to action.
- Creates a shared understanding of complexity.

Recommended Actions for the Implications Wheel®:

- Use it for all major strategic initiatives.
- Involve diverse participants to expand insight.
- Document and revisit implication maps to refine strategies as new data emerges.

T.I.P.S. Tracking (Trends, Innovations, Paradigm Shifts)

[T.I.P.S. Tracking](#) is an **ongoing environmental scanning** process. It trains organizations to detect:

- **Trends** that signal gradual change.
- **Innovations** that may disrupt markets or operations.
- **Paradigm Shifts** that redefine entire industries.

Benefits:

- Early identification of emerging opportunities and risks.
- A fact-based foundation for proactive decisions.
- Stronger organizational agility.

Recommended Actions for T.I.P.S. Tracking:

- Establish a cross-functional T.I.P.S. team.
- Hold quarterly reviews of collected signals.
- Integrate T.I.P.S. findings into vision reviews and Implications Wheel® sessions.

From Vision to Action: Building a Future-Ready Organization

When combined, these four steps form a continuous cycle of **seeing, understanding, and acting**:

1. **Vision** → Defines the destination.
2. **Paradigms** → Helps navigate shifts in the landscape.
3. **Implications Wheel®** → Maps possible routes and their outcomes.
4. **T.I.P.S. Tracking** → Keeps you aware of changes along the journey.

The Strategic Exploration Tools have a proven record of success, ranging from product evaluation resulting in multi-million-dollar savings to critical assessments of mergers/acquisitions, to community-based explorations, e.g., Rebuilding Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina. A key feature of each tool is the experiential participation of a diverse audience, often noted by comments: *“This is the first time we were listened to.”*

In today’s AI-driven environment, each of these tools can also be enhanced, including several custom GPTs focused on expanding the landscape from a “Wisdom of Crowds” approach to “Wisdom of the World.”

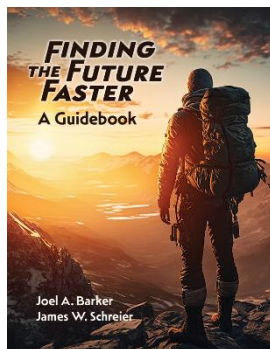
Conclusion: Stability Through Strategic Foresight

Clarity of vision provides **hope**. Understanding paradigms enables **adaptation**. The Implications Wheel® and T.I.P.S. Tracking provide strategic **tools** to navigate uncertainty. Together, they allow individuals and organizations not to predict the future, but to **prepare for and shape it**.

Next Steps

- **Leaders:** Co-create and communicate a compelling organizational vision.
- **Teams:** Map current paradigms and identify emerging shifts.
- **Strategic Planners:** Use the Implications Wheel® for major decisions.
- **All Staff:** Participate in T.I.P.S. Tracking® to build shared awareness.

***“You can and should shape your own future.
Because if you don’t, someone else surely will.” — Joel Barker***



James W. Schreier, Ph.D., SPHR worked with Joel Barker for 20+ years, served as his Director of Training, and co-authored “Finding the Future Faster, A Guidebook.” He’s also pioneered the application of AI/ChatGPT, to the Strategic Exploration Tools.

