THE COMPLETE LEADER

COACHING GUIDE

# FUTURISTIC THINKING

The ability to look beyond present circumstances to see future possibilities.



LEADERS ARE CLEAR THINKERS

One of the 25 leadership competencies

SECTION 01

# WHY FUTURISTIC THINKING MATTERS

Futuristic Thinking is one of the 25 core competencies that define a complete leader. As you grow this capability, you'll notice real shifts in how you lead yourself and influence others.

This guide is built for a 90-day journey. You'll explore the foundations, assess where you stand today, practice new behaviors, sidestep common traps, and track your progress, at your own pace or alongside a coach.

### WHAT STRONG FUTURISTIC THINKING LOOKS LIKE

- You see the changes and opportunities coming while there is still time to act on them
- You see the big picture, which tells you which direction to take
- You solve problems in ways others couldn’t have thought of

> **REFLECT**
>
> *Why does Futuristic Thinking matter to you personally? How might developing it change your effectiveness as a leader?*

SECTION 02

# FOUNDATIONS OF FUTURISTIC THINKING

THE DEFINITION

**The ability to look beyond present circumstances to see future possibilities.**

Like any skill worth mastering, Futuristic Thinking rests on a few core building blocks. Understanding them gives you a vocabulary for your own growth.

## THE CORE ELEMENTS

1 **Connecting the dots**

Observing and analyzing the forces driving current reality that may have long-term effects, and drawing the inferences that connect them.

2 **Foresight and intuition**

Using intuitive perception alongside factual events to draw inferences. Good futuristic thinkers envision possibilities others may not.

3 **Championing progressive ideas**

Recognizing, supporting, and championing new ideas: staying curious, flexible, and open to novel technologies and processes.

REFLECT

*Which element feels most familiar? Which one feels like a stretch right now?*

SECTION 03

# YOUR STARTING POINT

Before you move forward, take an honest look at where you are today. Read each statement and mark how often it's true of your leadership.

**I can mentally role-play a long-range plan and make accurate predictions about possible outcomes.**

☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always

**I regularly challenge the assumptions and beliefs built into my own thinking, rather than accepting how things have always been done.**

☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always

**I operate from a broad, long-term perspective, considering how today's decisions affect decisions down the road.**

☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always

**I read industry publications and attend conferences to stay abreast of current thinking in my field.**

☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always

**I watch the forces shaping today's reality and draw inferences about where they lead.**

☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always

**I champion new ideas and technologies rather than waiting for others to prove them first.**

☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always

> **REFLECT**
>
> *Looking at your answers, where is your greatest opportunity for growth? What patterns do you notice?*

SECTION 04

# FUTURISTIC THINKING IN PRACTICE

Competencies grow through deliberate practice. Work through the activities below in order, or choose the ones most relevant to your context.

ACTIVITY 01 45 min

## Brainstorming

A big part of futuristic thinking is taking time to anticipate potential changes or future possibilities. You don't have to be right: what matters is considering them.

**TRY IT**

1. List potential organizational changes that might happen: who might leave, who is being groomed, which departments might merge.
2. For each of your three most important projects, name three potential problems and what you could do to avoid or prepare for them.
3. Ask where your company is headed in one to two years, then talk to managers and peers and compare notes.

ACTIVITY 02 30 min

## Hindsight 20/20

Study a time you failed to anticipate something: a project problem, a delay, a personality conflict.

**TRY IT**

1. Write what happened and why you didn't see it coming.
2. Ask what you could have done to envision that event, and what you could have done to avoid the problem.

3. Decide how you'll incorporate that lesson into your daily work.

ACTIVITY 03 60 min

## Strategic Opportunities

Map the landscape around your organization to surface the opportunities worth pursuing.

**TRY IT**

1. List your internal and external customers, and what each needs or requests from you.
2. Identify the external trends that may shape those needs, how you could learn more, and what competitors are doing about them.
3. Determine your unique qualifications and what would make you stand out, then develop action plans for all stakeholders.

ACTIVITY 04 20 min

## Ask the What-If Questions

A series of time-horizon questions forces short-term thinking into long-term thinking.

**TRY IT**

1. Take a plan or decision in front of you right now.
2. Ask what it means in one week, one month, three months, and a year.
3. Assume a long horizon even if you can only see a short one.

ACTIVITY 05 30 min

## Capture the 30,000-Foot View

Stepping back from your projects reveals the pattern you can’t see up close.

**TRY IT**

1. Look at your own functional area from a strategic perspective: its particular strengths and weaknesses.
2. Identify the external organizations or factors that affect activity in your area.
3. Write what you see from the big-picture view that you missed from inside the work.

**ACTIVITY 06** 40 min

## Develop a Crisis Plan

Risk analysis means thinking about what could go wrong before it does.

**TRY IT**

1. Think about the worst possible situations that could occur in your functional area.
2. Brainstorm solutions or management plans for each what-if scenario.
3. Review a recently completed project to determine what contributed to success and what caused problems.

SECTION 05

# COMMON FUTURISTIC THINKING TRAPS

As you practice, watch for these common pitfalls. Naming them now makes them easier to catch in the moment.

01 **Doing it because it has always been done that way**

Tradition inside your own thought process is the hardest assumption to spot. Challenge it and ask what else is possible.

02 **Discarding far-fetched ideas**

Write down any and all ideas for improvement, even the ones that seem difficult to achieve. Filtering too early removes the ones worth developing.

03 **Thinking only about the short term**

Judging actions by their immediate effect keeps you from seeing how today's decision shapes the ones that follow.

04 **Vision without a plan**

When you find a strategic opportunity, plan the approach in detail: time, finances, and human resources, or the foresight goes nowhere.

REFLECT

*Which trap feels most familiar? How will you stay aware of it as you practice?*

SECTION 06

# YOUR 90-DAY PRACTICE

Lasting change comes from a few focused habits, practiced consistently and tracked honestly. Build your plan below, on your own or with your coach.

## CHOOSE YOUR THREE HABITS

Based on everything above, which three habits will make the biggest difference in growing your Futuristic Thinking over the next 90 days?

1

2

3

## BUILD IN WEEKLY ACCOUNTABILITY

Write questions you can answer each week to measure progress and surface obstacles. The best ones are answered with “yes,” “no,” or a number.

Q1

Q2

Q3

**Accountability partner**: who will you share these with?

**Completion date**: when will you evaluate & celebrate?

**Measurements of success**

**How will you celebrate?**

SECTION 07

# GO DEEPER

Keep building your Futuristic Thinking with these resources. Explore them, then capture what stands out to you.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| BOOK | **The Complete Leader, Ch. 1.1: Futuristic Thinking** | The full framework and examples behind futuristic thinking. |
| PODCAST | **The Complete Leader Podcast** | Episodes 82, 83 & 84 explore futuristic thinking. |
| ONLINE | **Futuristic Thinking competency library** | Videos, articles, and podcasts at TheCompleteLeader.org. |

**CAPTURE YOUR INSIGHTS**

*As you work through these resources, which ideas most apply to your own growth in Futuristic Thinking?*

KEEP GOING

# YOU'VE GOT THIS

Developing Futuristic Thinking is an investment in yourself and everyone you lead. Return to this guide often: revisit the activities, reread the traps, and celebrate small wins along the way.

*Every complete leader started exactly where you are now.*