A ONE-PAGE STRATEGY FOR LEADERS

The 90-Day Strategy Canvas

Your first 90 days in a new role on one page. Fill it in order, 1 to 4, then agree it with your manager.

Designed for	Designed by	Date	Day ___ of 90

1 Diagnosis

What's really going on?

What did you hear in your first conversations and see in the numbers? What is the crux: the one obstacle that, once solved, unlocks the most progress? Which constraints are real: budget, people, time?

The crux, in one sentence:

2 Guiding policy

How will we tackle it?

Which one or two big choices respond to the crux? What advantage or leverage do they rely on? Keep it to a sentence or two. A good policy rules things out.

The test: could someone predict what you'll say no to from this policy alone? If not, it's still a goal, not a strategy.

3 Coherent actions

What will we do?

Three to five actions that carry out the policy and reinforce each other. For each: who owns it, by when, and the one number that shows it's working.

ACTION	OWNER · WHEN	METRIC

4 What we will not do

Every yes costs a no. Name the trade-offs here, then agree them with your manager. This block is your scope.

Stop · work that doesn't serve the policy

Pause · good ideas, wrong quarter

Hand over or automate · needed, but not by you

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HOW TO USE THE CANVAS

Start by deciding, not by doing

Most new leaders spend their first 90 days absorbing work. The canvas makes you spend them choosing which work matters. One page, four blocks, in order.

Why a canvas, not a plan

A plan lists what you'll do. A strategy says what's wrong, how you'll fix it, and what you'll leave alone. Without the first two, a plan is just a to-do list with a budget.

Richard Rumelt calls the first three blocks the kernel of good strategy. Block 4 is the one most leaders skip, and it's where most strategies fail in practice: not in the thinking, but in the saying no.

When to use it

- Your first 90 days in a new role, before anyone hands you a scope.
- After a reorg, a smaller team, or a change in your own hours. A context change means a new canvas, not a tighter to-do list.
- Any time your manager asks "what's the plan?" Answer with the canvas, then discuss.
- Alone first, then with your manager, then with your team. In that order.

Fill it in order

1 **Diagnosis** · weeks 1 to 4

Talk to at least ten people: your manager, your peers, your team, two customers. Pull the numbers yourself before anyone interprets them for you. Write the situation in a paragraph, then the crux in one sentence. If your crux is "we need more resources", keep digging.

2 **Guiding policy** · weeks 4 to 6

Pick the one or two approaches that attack the crux, and name the advantage they rely on. Then run the test: could a colleague predict what you'll say no to from the policy alone? A policy that pleases everyone rules nothing out, and a policy that rules nothing out is a goal.

3 **Coherent actions** · weeks 6 to 8

Choose three to five actions that carry out the policy and help each other. Each gets an owner, a date and one number that shows it's working. Measure from day one, not month six. If two actions compete for the same people, one of them belongs in block 4.

4 **What we will not do** · alongside block 2

Write down what you'll stop, pause, or hand over, and why. Take blocks 2 and 4 to your manager together: this is where you negotiate scope, not in your inbox three months later. Your manager gives you the constraints. You define the scope, and you defend it.

Your first 90 days

Days 1 to 30 · Diagnose

Listen, read the numbers, write block 1.

Day 30 checkpoint: the diagnosis is shared with your manager, who has challenged it.

Days 31 to 60 · Decide

Write blocks 2, 3 and 4. Agree them.

Day 60 checkpoint: the scope is agreed in writing: what you'll do, what you won't, and why.

Days 61 to 90 · Deliver

Ship the first actions and measure them.

Day 90 checkpoint: first results in hand. Redraw the canvas with what you've learned.

Before you share it

- [ ] It fits on one page. If it doesn't, you haven't chosen yet.
- [ ] Someone else could predict your no's from block 2.
- [ ] Every action has an owner, a date and a number.
- [ ] Your manager has seen block 4 and agreed to it.

Five traps

A diagnosis that's a wish

"We need more budget" is a wish. "Our funnel leaks at activation" is a diagnosis.

A policy that rules nothing out

"Grow revenue and delight customers" fits every company on earth. It's a goal.

Actions that don't help each other

Five good ideas from five meetings are a list. Coherent actions share one policy.

Receiving the scope

Taking on everything you inherit, then prioritising harder. The context changed; the canvas should too.

Measuring late

Lots of activity, no numbers, so nobody knows what worked. Instrument first, then act.

Designed by David Pires

Built on Richard Rumelt's strategy kernel, from *Good Strategy / Bad Strategy* (2011).

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WORKED EXAMPLE

A new Head of Marketing, day 45

Maya joined Fieldnote, a 60-person B2B software company, as Head of Marketing. The team shrank from four to two the month before she arrived. Fictional company; real pattern.

Designed for	Designed by	Date	Day ___ of 90
Fieldnote marketing	Maya R.	14 February	Day 45, version 2

1 Diagnosis

What's really going on?

Inbound leads are up 30% year on year, but trial-to-paid fell from 9% to 5%.

60% of trials come from our free ROI calculator. Most calculator users never open the product after signing up.

Sales says the leads are "low quality". The data says they're unqualified at sign-up, not uninterested: nobody asks them anything before the trial starts.

Real constraints: a team of two, no extra budget this year, and a website rebuild that's already committed.

Twelve conversations in. Everyone names a different problem; the numbers name one.

The crux, in one sentence: *We attract the right people with free tools, then lose them between the tool and the trial.*

2 Guiding policy

How will we tackle it?

Win the hand-off. Turn tool users into qualified trials before we buy any more traffic.

Bet on what we already own: the tool traffic and the product data. Not on new channels, not on more volume.

Two people can fix one hand-off well. They cannot run six channels badly.

What this rules out: anything that adds traffic before the funnel is measured, and anything that doesn't touch the tool-to-trial path.

The test, passed: a colleague reading this would predict no to paid campaigns, no to new webinars, no to the full website rebuild.

3 Coherent actions

What will we do?

ACTION	OWNER · WHEN	METRIC
Instrument the tool → trial → paid funnel end to end, before anything else.	*Maya · wk 6*	*Baseline numbers by wk 8*
Add a two-question qualifying step and a trial prompt inside the ROI calculator.	*Jonas · wk 9*	*Tool → trial 4% → 8%*
Rewrite trial onboarding emails around the user's own calculator result.	*Priya · wk 10*	*Trial → paid 5% → 7%*
Weekly 30-minute funnel review with sales; agree one lead definition.	*Maya · from wk 7*	*Definition signed off wk 8*

Four actions, one path, one owner each. Each one makes the next one more likely to work.

4 What we will not do

Agreed with the CEO on day 40. Two of these were his ideas.

Stop · work that doesn't serve the policy

Paid LinkedIn campaigns. Cost per lead doubled last year, zero attributable deals.

The monthly webinar series, until the funnel baseline exists.

Pause · good ideas, wrong quarter

The website rebuild, beyond the calculator and trial pages. Everything else waits for the numbers.

Partner co-marketing requests (three open). Polite no until Q3.

Hand over or automate · needed, but not by you

Event logistics → operations.

Weekly reporting → one dashboard, built once in week 8.

Social scheduling → the agency we already pay.

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