

The following is an excerpt from [Saving The World At Work](#) by Tim Sanders – buy a copy today!

The Law of the Long View states that while making any decision, you must consider its long-term implications. Long-view thinking considers various consequences in response to an act over time.

There are several ways to implement long-view thinking; one is to look into the future and consider chain reactions to business activity. Interface's Ray Anderson always asks the question "And then what happens?" when conducting a review of any products or practices his staff is pitching.

Long viewers gaze beyond the quarter and into the future where, for example, pollution or carbon emissions may show up as collateral damage from past actions. They are likely to believe in community development, because over time it will produce expanded markets and vendor options. They are likely to favor training and development for their employees, because they understand the long-term benefits that stem from on-the-job education.

Another way to incorporate the long view into your thinking is to engage in scenario planning. Scenario planning is an exercise that requires participants to imagine a different world based on five- to ten-year projections: What might the world look like, what kind of rules might the world live by, and what values might the future world hold?

This practice emerged as a business exercise run by Pierre Wack, who oversaw Royal Dutch/Shell's strategic planning team in the 1970s. Wack required that his managers create at least two different worlds that could exist in five years, and then project how current plans would play out in those worlds. As Peter Schwartz said in his book *The Art of the Long View*, "Wack was not interested in predicting the future. His goal was the liberation of people's insights."

Such liberation is critical in helping us break free from the shackles of short-term thinking. Many of us may have been taught to think of only today's world when making business decisions. Yet a change in context can create new and often unforeseen possibilities. By focusing on potential tomorrows, we think like social innovators.

This is why Toyota made its bold move into hybrid-car technology. Back in the mid-1990s, company planners and executives dreamed up a world in which consumers became environmentally aware and viewed reducing their carbon footprint as a matter of pride. The planners also imagined a world of increased demand for oil, driving the price of gas beyond three dollars a gallon.

Based on this view, Toyota launched the Prius. They took a short-term hit on earnings and industry pundits laughed. Today, they are an industry leader in the fast-growing area of hybrid-engine technology. Ford now licenses technology from Toyota while short-term thinkers from GM to BMW scramble to play catch-up.

It can feel problematic to take a longer view at work. Our operating systems are programmed to focus on the quarterly report or the average manager's annual view. Scenarios that will unfold over a decade are seldom encouraged in the rush-rush world of modern business. We live in a cell phone-BlackBerry-e-mail-instant gratification culture in which everybody wants an answer a minute ago. Living in this right-now world erodes our ability to look ahead, so instead of creating future scenarios, we're putting out fires and moving on to the next thing on our to-do list. This practice rarely builds great businesses.

Taking the long view is a courageous choice, one that will expand your value to your business as well as to society. Once you put on long-view glasses, you can see all the ramifications of a business decision over time. Such vision can enable you to protect your company's reputation, avoiding future harm to people, communities, and the planet, making it critical to a company's survival in the Responsibility Revolution.

As Peter Schwartz writes, "Companies that take the short view are quite frequently disrupted by changes in the context of business that they never dreamed of."

This is an excerpt from [Saving The World At Work](#) by Tim Sanders – buy a copy today!