

Planning will help you hit the mark

The manner in which you set goals can be difference between success and failure

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It's a new year, time to bite the bullet and make some plans. Not vague plans like "I will be more punctual" or "I plan to work harder." I mean real plans, ones that will truly change your professional and, by extension, your personal life.

"People can make real changes in their lives," said training coach Stephen Goldberg.

But in order to make those changes, we must realize that planning is everything.

"Seventy per cent of success is planning," Goldberg said. "Either you plan to succeed or you plan to fail."

Start out by looking at both the past and present, he advises, and figure out what you like and don't like about yourself and your workplace. Look at what you want to change, what you're happy or disappointed about.

And build on that.

When you begin to set goals, make sure there's a balance, both personally and professionally. In other words, don't set goals that are going to affect your health or that are unethical in any way.

Goal-setting is really the first step. And the way you set the goals is crucial.

For example, studies have shown if you write down your goals, you have a much better chance of achieving them, said Goldberg, who coaches clients at Optimus Performance, a Montreal-based training and development and coaching organization.

"Maybe it's because you're more committed to it, even as a way to track things," he

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said.

Then, you've got to make the goal "smart" - specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed, meaning there should be a time frame to it, like a target date.

Let's take a simple, common - and some might say work-related - goal. Say you want to lose 20 pounds by the end of June, he said. That would be a timed goal, but it's still not a well pronounced goal because there's no starting point.

"A better way to phrase it is: 'I want to reduce my weight from 190 pounds to 170 pounds by exercising and eating properly,' " Goldberg said.

Now, it's measurable as well.

Or, "maybe your goal is to move into a leadership position, but you don't know if the company is planning that," he said.

"So you could say, 'I want to prepare myself for a leadership position. I will take a course in leadership, I will discuss this with human resources and my boss to know what they expect from me.' "

It's all about getting down to a sphere of control and setting a realistic goal.

You work out the initial steps and set the target dates. Then, look at the benefits and obstacles.

Take getting into management. It's going to be hard, so you've got to ask what is the real benefit to you, Goldberg said.

"That's what's going to motivate you - getting in touch with those benefits so you can crystallize that in your mind," he said.

One of the great things about setting goals is that when we list the benefits, we have a much greater chance of staying motivated.

On the other side, we need to list the obstacles that could stop us from achieving our goals.

"Because goal-setting is a way to push ourselves to greater heights, there will be greater obstacles," Goldberg said.

"So in the planning process, identify those obstacles. And when we know that they're coming, we can identify the solutions."

Then, you incorporate the solution as part of your action steps, the next integral part of the planning process.

These steps are to be scheduled in your agenda, so that either daily or weekly you block time to do what needs to be done to keep your plan in motion.

And don't be waylaid by unimportant events, even if they seem urgent.

We tend to get distracted by having to put out fires, fix mistakes, lots of time wasting things, and ignore events that are most relevant to planning, which might not seem urgent.

Goldberg believes a lot of us are so caught up in reactive behaviour that we end up thinking we don't have enough time to plan.

Once we've planned out our goals, here comes the killer question: Are you willing to do what is necessary to achieve this goals?

Are you willing to take 100-per-cent responsibility to take those action steps?

This, Goldberg said, is where the muscle of discipline has to be developed.

"The hard part is making it a habit.

"If you're not willing, it's not a goal. It's just a dream."

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