

Planning for a successful 2012

By Lynnaire Johnston

It's January. You're relaxing and enjoying your well-deserved annual holiday. You're mulling over the year just gone and what might lie in store for 2012. You start thinking about what you'd like to achieve in the coming 12 months. Before you know it, you're setting goals.

The process by which you set your goals - if you even do - is unique to each person. Some, like Carey Smith, CEO of real estate agents Ray White New Zealand, write themselves a letter. Others, like change leader Jack Talbot think in terms of stories, while yet others, like training consultant Margot Minett, see it as a road map. Whatever method you use, the verdict is clear: goals need to be written down and formalised to be successful. Whether you write yourself a letter, create a vision board, or construct a formal set of goals, having them in visible, readable form takes you a long way down the path towards achieving them.

More than 15 years ago Carey Smith and his brother decided to write each other an annual letter in which they outlined their plans and aspirations for the forthcoming year. Over time this morphed into each writing a letter to themselves, albeit sealed and put into the custody of the other. At the beginning of the year, when he's away on holiday, Smith opens the letter, reviews his accomplishments and pens himself a new letter.

In addition to the standard technique of goals being SMART (see sidebar overleaf) Smith's letter is holistic and divided into four sections: family, health, work and financial. It rarely runs to more than two pages and although he doesn't look at it again for a year, he generally finds that if something is important it will be achieved over that year, if it isn't it won't.

Smith's list also contains "stop doing" items. He says one of his aims for this year was to

stop going to bed after 11pm, something he's generally managed to achieve, and not to buy a house (somewhat tempting in his business, one imagines).

Smith says, "My letter isn't results-based. It's about where I'm at today and the things I want to make progress on. Writing it down is a big part of it, it becomes a commitment to doing the things you've wanted to do but haven't." In addition to his personal letter, Smith also has a work strategy which he looks at every day or so.

Smith likes the letter concept because it's easy, but says when he opens the previous year's letter he doesn't dwell too much on it. "It's important to move on, the past doesn't determine the future." By which he means that if you've not been setting goals before, don't let that stop you from starting now.

Jack Talbot, Principal Consultant at The Project Makeover Office Ltd is of the opinion that it doesn't matter when you do your goal setting. "Although it's traditional to set goals at the beginning of the year, it's not necessarily the best time," he says. "Goals change over time because change is so constant and is happening more and more rapidly, so plans need to be regularly reviewed to keep on track."

He sees goal setting more in terms of the activities needed to achieve the desired outcome, setting waypoints on a larger overall journey. For example, when preparing to climb a mountain, it pays to think carefully about the logistics; what will be required in the way of equipment, personnel, transport, food etc. "When putting yourself in a life and death situation, being prepared is key. In the same way, when your goal is to be successful, famous or rich etc., you need to think about and plan how you're going to achieve that."

He believes we need to spend time on planning to give us the tools and guides as to what to do next to achieve our goals.

In the past, of course, goals were detailed in formal documents. They were written up, bound, copies made and distributed, and usually then sat unread in people's bottom drawers. Talbot says what is more useful is something we refer to often, is kept right in front of us, has appropriate but not too much detail, and is actionable.

He says, "Bringing plans to fruition is not often linear and rarely ever neat. Goal-setting is not a mechanical process; plans must be adaptable so they can be changed as circumstances warrant.

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Carey Smith

Also a fan of goals being SMART, Talbot says if goals are not realistic they won't be achieved. They need to be relevant, not onerous, and seen as a useful tool to achieve what you want to achieve.

"Many people struggle with defining their goals. The technique I use with business owners I mentor is to think beyond the time frame you're looking at and ask yourself, 'What does success look like for me? What do I want for the future?' Then step back from the longer term vision to a closer time and think about what you should be doing now to help achieve that vision. Break it down in steps backwards."

Carey Smith's holistic goal setting

Ray White Ltd CEO Carey Smith arranges his goals under four headings for a whole-of-life approach:

- Family
- Health
- Business
- Financial

For a fully holistic approach other headings could include mental and educational, spiritual and ethical, and social.

Talbot agrees with Smith that goals should be written although he says they can be objects, pictures or words. "They should be tangible, and right in front of you to look at every day. That way you'll keep motivated when you can't or don't want to get out there and work towards them."

He advises that if you get stuck think, about what's the best thing you can be doing right now. "They're a roadmap for when we get lost - that is when they become most valuable," he says.

Talbot tells the story of a competitive athlete who was highly focussed on achieving success. In one particular race he was very worried about a rival who he knew to be strong competition. He spent the race keeping a close eye on him, always staying just that little bit ahead. He beat the other guy but came second because while watching what his rival was doing, he forgot about the rest of the field, one of whom snuck past to win the race. Moral of the story: don't worry too much about others; keep your eye on your own ball.

The Auckland Chamber's Vital Training Consultant and Facilitator Margot Minett is one of those who believes the summer holidays are a time to pause, reflect, celebrate and plan for the year ahead.

She believes goal setting is a great task for the time when we are removed from our daily patterns and can be objective. She says, "It ties in with the end of the year, when it's traditional to set New Year's resolutions in our personal sphere, which can be aligned with the formal goals of business." ❖



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Jack Talbot

Goals that are SMART and SMARTER

Goals that do not have these five characteristics have less chance of success than those that do.

Specific - asks what, how and why: what you are going to do, how you are going to do it and why, and what are the anticipated results.

Measurable - related to specificity, but measures the results. For example, losing weight as a goal is not measurable, losing 10 kilos by the end of March is.

Achievable or attainable - having a goal that is attainable makes it more likely you will be committed to achieving it.

Realistic - do you have the resources to achieve it? If not, what will you need and how will you get it?

Timely - this puts your goal into timeframes.

Two new additions have been added to the basic SMART principle - ethical and rewarding - to make goals SMARTER. Most businesses operate at highly ethical levels so aligning goals to those values is logical. And goals that bring rewards for the goal-setter have a much greater likelihood of success.

❖ However, she warns that a lack of success in sticking to our resolutions can result in failure to set them and is why creating a 'road map' is so important."

She says the road map is about being clear on the vision and why it's important to achieve it. "Ask 'what do I need in terms of support, resources and time on a monthly or weekly basis?' Set time frames down even to a daily basis. Think what, who, when, why and how - make these your core guides," she advises.

Any plans for your business success need to be linked back to your business vision and mission statement. These core objectives explain why you're in business and act as a great feeder and starting point for explaining how you're going to be successful. There will be some degree of overlap between business and personal goals, especially if you own or manage your own business, but there does need to be some degree of separation.

Because we increasingly become sidetracked and busy Minett suggests taking time to clarify your destination, your goals. This, she says, reassures us we're in the driver's seat and will make the best choice. Things change and sometimes a detour is needed, but we need to switch from a reactive to a proactive/responsive mindset.

"I'm a huge believer in planning and adapting. It's like a recipe, you start out with an occasion and a purpose for cooking but if some ingredients are missing or you don't have enough or you don't like the taste, you can make changes as you go providing the outcome is still being achieved."

Minett says it's critical to reflect on what went really well during the year and what didn't. "It gives you a sense of accomplishment. Ask 'what can I be doing in the next 12 months to achieve my goals?' Check in regularly to see if you're on track and still want the same outcome. If necessary, adjust your plan - it must be rewarding and have a sense of meaningful purpose for you to be motivated to achieve the goal."

She quotes General Electric former CEO Jack Welch's saying, "Create your own destiny or someone else will."

Good advice.

Carey Smith

CEO
RAY WHITE NEW ZEALAND



Jack Talbot

PRINCIPAL CONSULTANT
THE PROJECT MAKEOVER OFFICE LTD



Margot Minett

VITAL TRAINING CONSULTANT
AUCKLAND CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

