

Setting Goals – Part 1 of 3 - New Year, New Goals What's the point if we don't stick with them?

In organizations, most of us begin our fiscal year with some form or another of goal setting. As people managers, we hold a meeting with each of our team members to discuss what their top priorities should be. Some of us request that each team member come prepared with their ideas of their goals. We come to some form of consensus and enter those goals into our performance management system. Those goals will be revisited mid-year during a check in process, and then at the end of the year we will rate each team member based on their progress to those goals. Inevitably throughout the year some of these goals we be put on hold, some may grow exponentially, and some new ones that aren't even documented may turn up! Sound familiar?

The problem with this approach is that those goals are often very similar to making a new year's resolution...they may look and sound great for a few weeks, but other priorities eventually take over and they are quickly replaced or forgotten. Additionally, the goals are frequently very "big picture" which makes it difficult to stay on track if there are no milestones or progress measures identified. Take a look at the top 10 resolutions for 2015:

- Lose weight
- Get more organized
- Spend less, save more
- Enjoy life to the fullest
- Stay fit & healthy
- Learn something exciting
- Quit smoking
- Help others in their dreams
- Fall in love

- Spend more time with family

There's an excellent chance that you may have made one or two of these resolutions yourself, and there's an even better chance that you may have abandoned them already! The challenge with these "big picture" goals is that they're missing the plans that go with them. There's no way mapped out for how to achieve them and no milestones identified to encourage progress. Managers and their team members often fall into the same trap during the goal setting process and those goals are forgotten within a week of the conversation. They are simply not relatable to everyday business interactions. What this list of resolutions has in common with goals is they are much more about a lofty objective than a true goal that the team member can hope to achieve.

Let's use a sales example to illustrate how to revise those "resolution-ish" goals. Here's a "before and after" of a 2016 goals:

Before

- Increase widget sales by 20% by applying skills gained during Q4 workshops
- Enhance internal collaboration
- Expand network of contacts in our CRM (Customer Relationship Management Software) by 15%

After

- Increase overall widget sales by 20% by leveraging active listening skills and probing techniques
 - Target the top 10 customers to practice these techniques with in Q1

- Monitor how they are working to see if they're leading to increased sales
 - Take notes after each interaction to capture how you approached them differently and their reactions
 - Record specific instances on one spreadsheet for ease of reference
 - Adjust your approach in accordance with reactions and sales increases or decreases
- Forward the sheet to manager monthly
- Hold discussions with peers on a monthly basis to discuss what's working for them and share your progress

When setting goals, make sure they don't fall into the same trap as New Year's resolutions that end up being forgotten and abandoned until the end of the year. Make sure they have specific and identifiable milestones, actions and activities that will keep employees engaged with them. Also, ensure that they include agreed upon measures of success so that managers and employees are aligned in their perception of goal progress and completion. Finally, start the New Year with the realistic expectation that priorities shift and that goals may need to be modified or changed. And, if a goal has been reprioritized or even put on hold, if it has been written effectively, it can still be evaluated and measured based on the progress that was made on it. To answer the questions of "What's the point?", goals are like a road map to give us direction throughout the year, but just like a road map, you can't just look at the destination, you need an to know what to expect along the way.

Did you set a New Year's resolution and if so, are you sticking with it? Share your thoughts with us about how you stay on track with your personal and business goals.