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For Managers, Principals, Team Leaders and Internal Consultants

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Making 2008 your best year yet

We are fast approaching one of my favorite times of the year – New Year. At this time of the year we are given an opportunity to stop and think - I certainly give myself that opportunity. Other than being an obvious opportunity to have a break, it's also the perfect time to build a platform for success for the year ahead. New Year is a time of pausing, renewal, reflection and for recommitment to plans made or for resolving to create something different - something better.

Over the years I've developed a very effective 7 step process, (with the help of some mentors), that I work through every New Year (and often during the year). I have now introduced it to all my clients as well. I have written about these steps previously, however, I believe they are so important that I have written up the basics again and updated the thinking.

The end of year reflection has become an important part of setting up my year ahead. I urge you to give yourself a gift of time and space to work through the steps I suggest below. Use some time on the weekend, or away on holidays, or come to it after you have slowed down for a period of time.

Step 1. 'Completing' the Past Year...

It is important to have a process to "complete" the year that's just finished and make way for the New Year. Otherwise every year rolls into the next and the distinctions and subtleties are lost. This is a 3-part process in itself that is called an "Ascent".

An Ascent begins by listing all of your ACHIEVEMENTS, (both business and personal), over this last year. When you look back on the past 12 months, what were the highlights, successes, milestones, the battles you fought and won? Remember, success is not always about achieving a goal. Success and achievement can also be measured by effort. If you have made a fair and realistic effort toward meeting a goal, write it down in your achievements.

Next, look back on all the challenges, disappointments and low points throughout the year, the times when things did not work out as you'd planned. From these events and experiences list your LEARNINGS. A learning, (rather than an observation), is knowledge or skills that can be translated into an alternative course of action to get a different result next time.

The third and final part of the "Ascent" process is to list out your INTENTIONS for the coming year. What specifically are your "Intentions" for the 12 months ahead...the things, events and outcomes you'd like to become a reality? This part of the Ascent is about setting your bigger picture. It's not about working out every action. If you get bogged down in the detail you will miss the opportunity to be spacious in your thinking. That can be done later in the planning phase.

Step 2. Plan for Your Rejuvenation...

I'm certain of one thing. As the leader of your business or team, in an increasingly complex business environment, you can only perform at your best when you are operating with high levels of energy. It's important that you build in some daily, weekly and monthly disciplines, (and suggest that members of your team do the same), that maintain balance in your life and keep your energy levels up where they need to be. Do you need to do more exercise, spend more time with your family or friends or do more yoga and meditation or just have a laugh? Have you included some of these activities into your intentions in Step 1?

Step 3. Your Personal Development Plan – Part A

Charlie (Tremendous) Jones, one of the World's greatest motivational speakers has a saying : "The only difference between you now, and you in 10 years time, will be the people you meet and the books you read." In other words, you are a product of your environment. The people you surround yourself with, the friends and colleagues you spend time with, the courses and seminars you attend, and the books you read will shape who you are, how you think and how you act. Ultimately they'll shape the quality of, and the amount that you learn. The greater your learning's the greater will be your opportunities. Over the last twelve months I have written about joining a peer group like the CEO Institute (www.ceo.com.au) or networking with the best world wide in your industry. This will stretch your thinking and expand the possibilities to grow and develop your business. (**Click [here](#) and [here](#) for previous reports**) Have you included some of these activities in your intentions in Step 1?

Step 4. Quick Strategic Checklist

Most strategic objectives that my clients have can be summarised under the following headings:

- Building the skills and capabilities of our people, (enhancing the staff experience),
- High level of client satisfaction, (enhancing the client experience),
- Improving production/operational/productivity, and
- Getting more and better business.

Go through each of these strategic objectives and assess your strategic intentions for next year. Is there enough stretch in your strategies? Ask your staff, clients and business advisor to check your thinking. Once assessed, look at what action will have the greatest impact and complete an action plan with your team. A one-page action plan is all that is necessary. ([Click here for a sample action plan](#)) Have you included some of these activities in your intentions in step 1?

Step 5. Start the year off right...

You've just completed a very full on year in business, the team has headed off in all directions for leave and a well earned rest.

Before you know it, 2008 will be in full swing. What are you going to do to start the year off on the right foot? What are you going to do to use the benefits of the break to connect everyone with what matters most to you and the business this year? How do you ensure that January and even February don't just get absorbed into the holiday season? You set aside a day for planning and connection. Set a meeting date where you sit with your team and communicate the intentions that you have for the business in the coming year and what you expect of them. Set a theme for the meeting that underlies the big intention for the year or ask them what they think the theme ought to be. For example themes could be growth, innovation or leadership. Call in some guest speakers who will give practical sessions around the theme and leave some time to identify any issues or humps that are likely to be encountered. Involve your team in making decisions on what action to take (See Step 4 above). Consider engaging a facilitator who can provide third party feedback and ensure the day is kept on track.

If you start your year with such a meeting you are sending a clear message about how you expect the year to develop. You are setting a clear direction and also setting expectations about teamwork, commitment, empowerment, involvement and most importantly, the willingness to take action. 'No action' is likely to be a signal in itself - that 2008 is just about more of the same.

Step 6. Your Personal Development Plan – Part B

Have you asked your team how they rate you as a manager or leader? Most managers are willing to rate their team members', (some are tardy and that is another issue), and give them feedback to make them accountable for their performance. It does take some courage to make yourself vulnerable as a manager, however, if you are not willing to be accountable for your performance as a leader is it fair to expect that of others? [Click](#) for sample appraisal.

Step 7. On being positive

A lot is being written and discussed at the moment about focusing on the positives. This is not glib talk in an attempt to have us all read more tomes of self help; there is a large body of research that now shows the clear links between the way we view events in our lives and the negative impacts on our health, for example, stress, more instances of illness, headaches, and of course, depression. Difficulties and challenges happen – it's part of life and business.

Negative thoughts are par for the course but it's what we do with them and whether we let them limit us or empower us that makes the difference.

Research shows that higher levels of optimism in the workplace leads to better problem-solving, more creative thinking, better accuracy and speed on complex analyses, and better health (Seligman, 1998). This is not to say, of course, that a critical view of things isn't useful or appropriate. It is useful and appropriate some of the time and only to the extent that it empowers future action.

While thoughts are important, it's also important to be aware of your behaviour, the example you set, and what kind of environment you create through that. Positive behavior is as much a trait of leadership as is strategic thinking. What are some behaviors that can indicate positivity? I suggest trust, transparency, acknowledgment, integrity (I do what I say), openness to ideas and involvement. What can you do in 2008 to create a more positive work environment in your business?

There is nothing more powerful than making conscious choices about the environment you create. Life will 'just happen', but not necessarily how you really want it to, unless you are continually making conscious choices.

Regardless of what you believe or celebrate at this time of year, the best gift that you can give yourself is the time and space to think, reflect, discuss and create your own future.

"For myself I am an optimist - its does not seem to much use being anything else" **Winston Churchill**

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