

Professional makeover

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The concept of making new year resolutions is well-engrained in our culture. But how many of us look back each new year and congratulate ourselves on achieving them!

If we really want to make a difference to our business and personal success, however, we need to focus on the things that will have the biggest impact. So, here are some ideas to ensure that this time next year your business really is on track for long-term success!

Increasing business

Developing a business which will stay the course means not just increasing business volume but also business quality. In other words, either sell more or sell higher value products or services.

Ask yourself:

- What should our target revenue / profit be this year?
- How is our market changing?
- What are our competitors doing?
- What are our suppliers doing?
- How do our prices compare – is it time to change?
- What products / services do we sell most of – and to whom?
- What products / services are not selling well – and why?
- How much of our revenue / profit targets comes from existing clients – and how much from new clients?
- What new markets / ranges can we expand into?

Involve others:

- Ask customers for feedback and ideas
- Ask former customers or prospects why you failed to win or keep their business
- Generate ideas within your sales team or supply chain

Image

We're bombarded with 'makeover' programmes on television today – but when did you last give your company image a makeover? Think about:

- How would you like your customers to describe your business?
- What does your company's image (logo, office, stationery, shop etc) say about your business? Ask customers, friends and staff for honest feedback
- How professional are your emails and written correspondence? Do you have standard fonts and formats, a formal signature at the end of your emails etc?
- What does your website say about you? How can you encourage more visitors, bring business to your site and portray the image you want? How can you make it easier to regularly update its content – and its 'look and feel'?
- How can you update and improve your printed literature, proposals, brochures etc?



Getting the job done!

Most of us have been on time management courses at some time but how well do we put it into practice? Being a small business means being jack of all trades – and master of all too! It's easy to simply spend all our time jumping to our clients' demands.

Achieving your personal and business goals means prioritising time to focus on what's important to meet these goals. Stephen Covey in his book 'Seven Habits of Highly Effective People' offers a framework for an effective approach to life. Assess your work and consider:

- Covey promotes the principle of 'Start with the end in mind'. What is the end I want to achieve?
- What can I do that will really help me to get where I want to?
- How can I differentiate between the tasks which are urgent and those which are of strategic importance – and how can I reduce the firefighting to free time to work more strategically?
- How can I promote good time management practice to my staff?

Motivation

Of course, knowing what we want to achieve and how we are going to achieve it from a practical perspective is all fine – but why are we doing it?

Every manager wishes they understood the secret of motivation – but unfortunately it's a complex subject and most of us never fully understand the vagaries of our motivational triggers, let alone those of anyone else!

Start with yourself. Consider:

- Where do I want to be in 6 / 12 months, 5 years?
- What am I truly passionate about – and why?
- How do I behave at the start of new projects or activities?
- How do I behave once a project is underway and in 'operation'?
- What are my strengths – and my weaknesses - when it comes to motivation?

Getting support

It's one thing to make plans to change but it's quite another to make these happen – particularly when we're in the thick of running a business. Increasing numbers of business people employ the services of coaches or mentors to help them to be as effective and successful as they want to be.

A coach works with you to facilitate you in your development. Ally, supporter, challenger and devil's advocate, a coach offers an objective sounding-board to think through plans, challenges and opportunities. Unlike friends and colleagues they are not directly involved in either your business or personal life and so bring fresh non-judgemental challenges to help you decide what will work best for you – and help you stick to it, even when the going gets tough. As many coaching clients have found, it can be a lot more motivating to stick at difficult behavioural change or activities when you know that your coach is going to be asking for a progress report next week!