

Setting Goals in Times of Business Uncertainty



By Paula Santonocito

A new year brings an opportunity – and in many instances, a requirement – that HR and other members of the organization’s management team set goals. But how do you set goals when you’re not sure what the future holds?

Assessing the Situation

To some extent, business and life are always uncertain. Now, ongoing global and national economic concerns have organizations proceeding with caution. While the approach makes good business sense, an unwanted consequence is trepidation, which has the potential to negatively impact the innovation and creativity that should emerge from an effective goal-setting process.

So, how do you move forward with department and personal goals, while encouraging others to do the same?

An understanding of the business environment is essential, and reflecting this in your goals 1) makes your goals more realistic and achievable, which are key components of goal setting, and 2) allows you to come across as a knowledgeable professional tuned in to reality, which you are.

Here are two examples of how this might translate to the goal-setting process.

Now is probably not the time to list purchasing and implementing new HR technology as a goal. However, it is the perfect time to look at integrating existing systems with the goal of achieving greater efficiencies. See the difference?

Similarly, in a cautious economic environment, where salary increases are limited and promotions are few, employee morale and retention issues have a tendency to become problematic. However, now is probably not the time to push for budget increases in order to reward and retain staff members. Instead, a goal might be to explore creative solutions to improve employee morale and address issues of employee retention. With this as an objective, you can then look at workplace flexibility, telecommuting, and other low or no cost benefits that will resonate with employees and determine if these are viable options for your organization.

Looking Ahead

As these examples show, innovation and creativity can flourish during challenging times. But a change in mindset is required.

Granted, it's easy to get swept up in the negative aspects of an economic downturn and it can be difficult to enthusiastically set goals. Nevertheless, it is necessary to maintain a positive outlook – for the health and wellbeing of the organization, and your personal job satisfaction.

It helps to remember that business is cyclical and these challenges too shall pass. In the interim, as a leader, you should focus on ways you can contribute to moving the organization forward.

Understanding the Basics

At the same time, it's important to understand the purpose of goal setting and how it relates to your career.

PeopleTek, a coaching and leadership development firm, ties goal setting to an individual's vision and mission. Note the difference: This is about your vision and mission.

Vision is defined as the aspiration you have for yourself and your organization. It provides direction.

Mission represents what you are going to do and how you're going to do it to carry out the vision; it begins to bring clarity to your vision.

But goals, ah goals, are the road map.

Goals bring 100 percent personal clarity to your vision and mission. Why? Because goals require action. PeopleTek encourages participants in its Leadership Journey program to think in terms of what, when, and how as they set goals.

Additionally, goals should be specific, measurable, actionable/achievable, realistic/relevant, and time-bound.

Making a Commitment

In case you haven't figured it out, goal setting requires accepting that the process works and making a commitment to the goals you set.

The biggest mistake people make is they don't think they need goals; and, if they get to the point of needing them, they don't write their goals down, says Michael Kublin, founder and president of PeopleTek.

And then there are those who procrastinate for other reasons.

"It's also a big problem where people think their goals need to be perfect, and that stops them from writing them down or having goals at all," Kublin tells *HR Insider*.

Which category do you fit into? No matter, no more excuses. It's a new year. Get to work and write down your goals.