

Q&A Column

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Email Subject Line: Succeeding At Work In The New Year

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Headline : Planning for Success in the Coming Year

Summary:

Question: I'd really like the new year to be a good one for me at work. I'm not very adept at planning though and I think this has held me back in the past. Any thoughts on how to be a little more strategic?

Landing Page copy

Headline : Planning for Success in the Coming Year

Dear Mark,

Question: Last year wasn't so great for me. It seemed like I was always "reacting" instead of being forward thinking. I'd really like the new year to be a good one for me at work, especially since things are pretty stressed around here. The problem is I'm not very good at planning and I think maybe this has held me back in the past. Any thoughts on how to be a little more strategic?

Francois V., Quebec City, Quebec

Dear Francois,

In January it's natural to turn our thoughts away from celebrations, back toward getting down to work. And there's no better way to start the year than by planning ahead.

I generally encourage my clients to start the process not by looking forward, but actually by reviewing the previous 12 months first.

Some standard questions to consider:

- What did you do well at?

Maybe you helped launch a new product. Could be you typed reports more accurately or increased sales by more than quota. Try describing each accomplishment in some detail. What was the background situation? What actions did you take to solve the problem or create a new opportunity? Then quantify the results you generated where possible.

2. Where did things fall through the cracks?

Nobody's perfect. Choose events or projects from last year where you know you could have done better. Did you give it all you had? If not, why? If so, why do you think things didn't work out better? What would you do next time to increase the odds for success?

3. Did you do anything you're not too keen on boasting about?

Workplace pressures are enormous these days. Most people I speak to have been asked to go against their values at least once. It's good to start evaluating where your line in the sand is. How far are you willing to go to get what you think you want? What price are you willing to pay for it?

Now, back to the future. Questions to ask for the coming year include :

- What direction is your employer heading, and how can you help them achieve their goals?
- How can you make your boss—and the people who report to you, if any—look like winners?
- In what areas do you need to improve your own performance? (and what type of training or upgrading might you need to reach the standard expected of you?)
- Is there anything special you want to achieve this year, such as getting that promotion you've been hoping for, or achieving more life balance, or networking internally to boost your profile? If so, what series of steps do you need to take to get there?

The idea is to direct your efforts so you get the biggest bang for your buck. It's part of personal strategic planning—a concept outlined in “Creating Your Future: Personal Strategic Planning for Professionals,” by George Morrisey (Berrett-Koehler Publishers).

It's pretty straightforward. Ask yourself some penetrating questions, be willing to learn from your experiences, and set clear goals that can be measured over time. By taking a bit of time to reflect and plan, you really do improve your chances of performing at your peak.



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