

Strive for Better—Make a Single New Year’s Resolution for Your Business

By Kenneth A. Shaw

Soon a new year will begin and the inevitable personal and business resolutions will be made. We all make them with modest success, probably because we often make too many. For this year, try just one personal resolution and one in the business part of your life.

And let me suggest a business resolution for you: guiding your team to become more creative, productive and more capable of good decision making. Tall order—but let’s break it down.

First, creativity. Too often we stifle our team’s creative juices by judging ideas too early. Try suspending judgment until everyone’s thoughts are on the table and encourage them to think outside the box. This is called brainstorming. I have seen work teams come up with 40 or 50 ideas in 20 minutes under this approach. Of course, many of the ideas won’t work, but if, out of the 40 or 50, a few “gems” spring up, you are way ahead. Later you can drill down and develop a realistic plan of action.

Second, productivity. Clear goals, effective performance reviews and your inspiration help. Most members of your team are competent and motivated to get “their job” done. “Their job” is often the problem. What about those initiatives that require team cooperation—those that require your team being more than the sum of its parts? You, as the team’s leader, need to ensure that everyone understands the overall mission and goals. You also need to nip jurisdictional conflicts and silo building in the bud. And you need to ensure the reward system includes attention to the achievement of essential organizational goals and that individual team members are evaluated on their collaboration skills. Without these actions, your nice words will have little effect.

Third, decision making. Here are some principles that work for me.

1. Ensure that everyone knows who is responsible for various decisions to be made. If the decision is yours to make, say it. If it belongs to someone else, say it.
2. Hold team members accountable for their decisions, but be forgiving when the occasional bad one is made. Otherwise, your people will not want to make them, and if you can't forgive yourself, you won't either.
3. See that decisions are made. No decision is a decision. Colin Powell believes that too often we wait for more information when either it won't be forthcoming, or if it is, won't make things clearer. Allow your intuition to fill in the blanks and move ahead.
4. Don't sweat the small stuff. Don't allow yourself or others to focus on the less important. It is said that one U.S. president insisted on scheduling the White House tennis court, not a good use of the leader of the Free World's time.
5. Involve others. Getting lots of views gives you information you otherwise might not get. It also promotes buy-in.
6. Once you are 98 percent committed to a given course of action, take 20 minutes to discuss what could go wrong and what would need to be done to get things back on course. Usually, the decision won't change, but if it occasionally does, this is good. You have avoided making a really bad decision.

Soon it will be a new year. Your team will consist of the same people, a year older. However, it can be more creative, productive

and able to make better decisions with your leadership. Make it a good year.

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