

Mindful Goal Setting

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I have long had mixed feelings about celebrating the new year.

For starters, late nights are not my thing as I am a perpetual morning person (I know...*gag*...so annoying).

Additionally, for me, and for many, the beginning of a new year is associated with pressure. Pressure to change. Pressure to improve. Pressure to look a certain way, eat a certain way, pressure to be different. We are often told that this is the time to set goals for the year – the whole year – and we do so, often without a great deal of planning or support on creating a roadmap to success. Therefore, our goals are often dismissed before they've even really gotten legs. So, not only have we “failed”, but now we have the potential to layer additional guilt about our inability to succeed on top of that

I can feel it coming already – “New year, New You.” Headlines in LinkedIn asking “How do you become more efficient? More productive? Work harder? Be more successful?”



Before we set goals, personal or professional, I believe the need for reflection, mindfulness, and intentionality is essential. Before we think about where we want to be, we first need to understand where we are. We can then set meaningful and mindful goals, understand how to best measure our progress, and celebrate our growth.

The need for mindful goal setting applies to our companies' goals as well. Inward reflection is an important first step before looking forward. And while goal setting around traditional metrics of success are valid, don't forget the human-centric ones too. Employee engagement – employee wellness, connection, satisfaction. Because employees are reporting higher stress levels than the last two years (1) we have an opportunity and an obligation to reflect on the best way to support well-being in a holistic way.

Take Stock of Where we are

To set an attainable goal, we must first understand where we stand today. This requires honest reflection without judgment. This candid and inward reflection, however, can be difficult (to quote Taylor Swift's timely hit Anti-hero "I'll stare directly in the sun but never in the mirror"). Taking inventory of our own personal state has challenges. It can be difficult to match our inner dialog with the reality of our current state, as many of us are hardest on ourselves. Enlisting the help of honest and caring friends and/or professionals can be helpful in these exercises. Have you been too critical, too optimistic, missed something entirely?

"This year, I'm trying something new. I'm planning to think of January as a time to pause, to reflect, and to be mindful and intentional."

Taking stock of current state can be difficult for corporate programmatic goals as well. These goals often span functional groups and have many components, not all of which are fully visible to those involved in goal setting. As such, the use of a conversation tool may help to organize thoughts and highlight gaps in awareness. To this end, I am developing a conversation tool to help employers fully reflect on their well-being programs, which may feel unruly and disparate to many. This tool is intended to guide employers as they work to understand current state, holistic nature, measuring techniques, and best next steps for well-being considerations. My goal is that this tool, or some version of it, is shared with all parties in well-being to request input and reflection. Do employees understand the offerings available to them? Are the considerations meaningful and convenient? Are there gaps in well-being initiatives that may prove to be highly impactful for employee health, workplace satisfaction, and overall engagement?

Mindful measurements

As Peter Drucker has said, “What gets measured gets managed.” It is imperative that we track our progress towards our goals for accountability, learning, and encouragement. However, be careful of surrogate measures for the results you are seeking. For example, (despite the barrage of weight-loss advertisements that I know are coming) body weight may not be an appropriate surrogate measure for overall health. All our body weight tells us is how much we weigh, and it should not be a reflection of total health.

If a corporate goal is to increase productivity, it is important to be mindful about measurements, as surrogates can be especially tempting. If you evaluate keystrokes as a measure of productivity, for example – the number of keystrokes is likely to increase, but not necessarily productivity outcomes. The same may hold true for measurements related to time in the office, VPN logins, or meetings attended.

Be honest about any tracking used, assumptions made and be candid about what you can really learn from those outcomes. Additionally, don't rule out including subjective measures in addition to objective ones. It is well understood that subjective measures have limitations, but without asking people their opinion, experience, and perspective, we miss out on understanding the human perspective all together.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

This year, as I reflect internally, I am also taking stock of my privileges and biases. As we are looking to improve, it's important that we reflect on our influence of the lives and success of others in our realm.



Can we use this time to assess unconscious biases against differences both visible and invisible? Can we work to create goals that are focused on improving the equity and inclusion of our workforce?

We may also need to reflect on how we are providing equitable experiences for various working styles and preferences. How can we provide opportunities for collaboration or ideation for remote workers that are comparable to those in the office? Do we allow for different modes of participation that feel approachable for individuals who have different abilities or tendencies? How can we create spaces and experiences where we all have an opportunity to thrive and be our authentic selves? And how do we measure progress in this area?

Communication

I recently learned the acronym NIMSU (no information, make stuff up). It is human nature to connect dots and assign reason – correctly or otherwise. When we do not have knowledge of the ways the dots actually connect, we tell ourselves a story about how we get from A to B.



Adam Grant has said “Leaders are 9x more likely to be criticized for under communicating than overcommunicating. Those who say too little come across as unclear and uncaring. When you’re tired of your message, it’s just starting to land.”

When new goals result in different requirements of employees AND when they offer new opportunities to employees, communication is imperative. Employees need to know and understand the direction, the reason, and how they contribute and participate. We need to know the ‘why’ and ‘how’ – not just the ‘what.’

Our Mindful Goals

At Allsteel, we are using this time to pause, reflect and be mindful as well. We are looking inward and taking stock of where we stand and where we have opportunities to improve. We are being intentional about how we measure progress, and we will be mindful on how we create equitable and inclusive experiences. We are looking forward to sharing our journey with you.

I hope you join us as we continue to explore these topics. We’d love to hear from you.

Wishing you and yours health, well-being, and happy days ahead,

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