



A NEW PERSPECTIVE FOR A NEW YEAR

Setting Meaningful (but
Achievable) Goals for 2021

CLARITY^{VP}

Understanding the context of 2020

Most of us start each new year with a well-intentioned, but often 'movable', set of resolutions for the 12 months ahead. Some of us blend personal and professional ambitions, while others keep them strictly separate. Whatever your approach, the practice of setting goals for the coming year is still highly relevant for 2021, but we do need to take account of the collective and individual experiences that the last year has presented us with.

2020 had a significant impact on everyone – whether you run a large or small team in a corporate or SME, whether you are an employer or a sole trader, or even as a consumer. The unprecedented events that unfolded, and continue to unfold, have given us all a new perspective. No matter what our circumstances, we shared a common set of experiences in 2020:

- We all had to go through it
- It forced us to stop
- It made us face our own mortality
- It compelled us to grow and to look at things differently
- It made us reflect and ask questions of ourselves: 'How well am I coping?', 'What am I learning through all this change?' and 'Where am I going to next?'

It's important that we acknowledge how these experiences have changed our perspective, and we need to factor this into our goal setting for 2021 in a conscious and tangible way.

The Latin root of *perspective* means to look through or to perceive, and all definitions of the word incorporate some sense of this 'looking'. As we begin to plan for the year ahead, I think the interpretation of perspective that is most useful to us is the one that focuses on a true understanding of the relative importance of things.

New perspectives allow us to learn a lot about ourselves. In the last year, we have seen more clearly the impact of our choices, we've understood how we go about making them, and we've been surprised by our innate capacity for resilience. Looking to 2021, we need to ensure that we put these learnings into action and prioritise the areas that are most important to us – it's an opportunity not to be missed. But how do we do this in practice?

Establishing goals that really count

Committing our goals to paper is one thing, but the real hurdle lies in following through on them. The process we engage in to determine meaningful goals is what's key here:

1. Take a step back

To get started, it's best to take a step back and reflect. Assess what happened in 2020, both professionally and personally. From there, pick out three key successes and three things that did not work out so well for you.

Write these down.

I recommend investing in a Moleskine notebook to record your goals and to document other thoughts and ideas that will encourage you to reach your targets throughout the year. Hemingway and Picasso used Moleskines to capture what inspired them to be at their best, so you'll be in good company!

2. Find the 'why'

We can sometimes be too casual in how we determine the goals we want to achieve. Instead, we need to look at the motivation behind the goal and question what is driving it. Taking this deeper dive into the intention helps us to understand why it is so important to us.

3. Focus on the outcomes

Keep the end in mind. What does good look like for you in 12 months' time? Identify the outcomes that you want to see and devise your goals around delivering these. Then put a realistic time frame on them.

4. Aim high

Building on your new perspective, go big for yourself in 2021. Use some of your goals to test the boundaries of your comfort zone. Think about how you can be more curious about your role or your profession in the year ahead. By exploring the 'why' (as above), you can potentially unlock negative feelings or frustrations that have been holding you back in the past.

Once you identify and acknowledge these barriers, you can begin to break them down with a new sense of confidence.

5. Incorporate learning

Try to include an aspect of knowledge development or learning in some of your goals – it can be so powerful. You might want to hone your skills or sharpen your abilities in your role. Or you might want to deliver more for your clients through your own professional development by adding value or helping them to tackle their business challenges more effectively. Whatever area you choose, learning and professional development are fundamental to intrinsic motivation.

6. Identify your top three

Filter your objectives down to three key goals for 2021. You can subdivide each one into distinct stages or sets of actions later, but creating a small number of core goals helps you to stay focused.

7. Be specific

Remember, vague goals lead to vague results!

Implementing your goals in 2021 and enjoying the benefits

Take one step at a time.

Once you've established your top three goals, divide them into smaller tasks that can be addressed on a month-by-month or quarter-by-quarter basis. Reducing big ambitions into bite-sized chunks keeps you from feeling overwhelmed and helps you stay on track.

The SMART approach to goal setting can be very useful here:

Specific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant, **T**ime-bound

Monitor your progress

Stay disciplined. Being accountable to yourself is critical to achieving your goals. That said, being accountable to someone else can be even more motivating. Consider working with a coach or mentor during this process, but most of all be consistent.

Reward yourself

While it's important to stay disciplined, we also need to acknowledge our achievements along the way. Be kind to yourself! Treat yourself to something special when you reach your interim goals.

Maintain balance

We can all get trapped in the 'always-on' cycle of working life, but it is really important to nurture our whole selves to ensure we don't deplete our resources. Make time to read, research and develop yourself away from the noise of the day. In *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey talks about the principle of balance and self-renewal. His seventh habit, 'Sharpening the Saw', sets out four areas of our lives that must be aligned for us to stay truly effective:

Physical - exercise, nutrition, stress management

Mental - reading, visualising, planning, writing

Social/Emotional - service, empathy, synergy, intrinsic, security

Spiritual - value clarification & commitment, study & meditation

If we can strike a balance between all these areas, then the magic really happens!

A few nuggets to take away

- Use your new perspective to genuinely consider how you can be more focused, more relevant and more productive in 2021.

- Move outside your comfort zone. Enjoy putting new learnings into practice and seeing the impact it has on your clients or your team.

- Build discipline and consistency into your daily routine. Start the day early, own your own destiny and really make things happen for you in 2021.

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