

Building new bridges?

Try acknowledging the unfinished ones first

There's something about the cold blast of January air that motivates us to start something new. With each new year comes a fresh, clean slate and a chance to embrace the countless opportunities that seem to be hovering on the horizon. But before you call everyone into the boardroom to share your inspired resolutions, you might want to take a few moments to strategize on how you're going to address the residue of the unfinished ones. Because to keep everyone focused on getting the results you desire, you first need to acknowledge what might be holding the team back.

Which reminds me of a story.

Years ago, I was talking to a public relations colleague about some of the issues she was managing. She quickly launched into the latest crisis. It involved an overpass that had been started years before. Through a combination of poor budgeting and poor planning, the project had come to a halt. Now her client was stuck with a big slab of concrete, suspended in mid-air with no clear end in site. Unfortunately, the company hadn't been proactive in communicating their plans for the half-built structure. People couldn't help but notice and eventually, they started to ask why.

Most organizations have at least one bridge to nowhere. We make goals, we get busy. We make new goals. We get busy. We see the shadow of one of those old goals as we pass a colleague in the hallway. *Is that still a goal?* Too busy to bring that up. Too much work to do already. We try to ignore them, but those half-built bridges are distracting and productivity invariably starts to suffer.

Progress takes focus. And focus means acknowledging what's getting in the way of success. Successful organizations are responsive – sometimes that means revisiting strategies, abandoning the ones that no longer fit and forging ahead with new ones. If you don't address them, unfinished goals can cast shadows on new strategies, and muddle your attempts to motivate your team.

Employees are much more productive when they can see how their daily tasks fit into a bigger plan and when they understand how they will be supported to get the job done. If you're crystal clear on the core goals and objec-

tives of your organization, then you empower yourself and your team members to prioritize daily tasks so that the ones that no longer fit into the greater plan can be delegated, modified or relinquished.

Try starting with the end in mind. If you can paint a picture of the destination (preferably through a compelling vision statement) then creating a roadmap with clear goals, objectives and milestones will give your employees something to hold on to. Establishing guiding

principles against which to measure your goals also helps when it comes time to determine what no longer fits. One popular method is creating SMART goals. For those of you who like acronyms, you can play with whatever version works for you. Here are some examples:

S - specific, significant, stretching

M - measurable, meaningful, motivational

A - agreed upon, attainable, action-oriented


R - relevant, rewarding, results-oriented

T - timely, tangible, trackable

Whatever method you choose, it helps to make it a habit to step back and ask yourself if the projects or initiatives that you are working on fit into a greater plan. Essentially, are they worth the effort? If you're not clear on why you are doing something in the first place and

how it fits into the big picture, then you're wasting your time, resources and focus - and it's time to start working on another bridge.

Questions for Reflection

1. What are the top three goals you're working toward this year? Why?
2. What's your intention in achieving these goals?
3. What's your role in making it happen?
4. How will you instil the clarity necessary for every member of your team to be able to identify their role in making it happen?
5. What's getting in the way? What needs to be delegated, modified or let go?
6. How can you make addressing 'energy drains' part of your regular way of doing business?
7. What's one goal that if achieved, would make your year? 



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