

GET it

December 2019

ON THE GOLD COAST

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Why goal setting doesn't work anymore

Gihan Perera, business futurist, speaker, and author, explains to us why goal setting doesn't work anymore and what we can do about it

Have you ever set a 'SMART' goal? That's been the gold standard for goal setting, but it doesn't even come close to helping you achieve a goal. Even a drunken New Year's Resolution — say, that you'll finally lose that 10 kilograms of excess weight this year — could be a SMART goal: it's specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-based. But as we all know with New Year's Resolutions, most of them don't survive to the end of January!

Goal setting is easy — ridiculously easy. The real problem is with goal *getting*. In our fast-changing world, the future is unclear, the changing environment constantly throws out new obstacles, and the goalposts keep changing along the way. That's why we need new rules now for achieving our goals.

Make it a project, not a goal

A project is a small, clearly-defined job. Like a goal, it has an outcome, but it also has a clear plan attached to it. Sending a man to the moon was a goal; each space flight during that time was a project. Even if you're not taking moon-shots, work on 90-day projects rather than 12-month goals. That's long enough to do something significant, but short enough to know the world won't change too much around you.

Test it fast

Don't spend the first three weeks planning, strategising, and optimising your goal. As soon as possible, test it! Approach a few customers, build a prototype, try out a 'beta' version of the idea, publish a few pages of your book

as a blog post, start the new eating plan immediately, and so on. Your project only runs for 12 weeks, and you can't afford to wait until Week 10 to discover you're on the wrong track. Test it, assess the results, tweak your approach, and try again.

Take a leaf from Google's book. Gmail was in 'beta release' (that is, not officially a product) for five years before Google officially ended its beta status in 2009. By that time, it already had hundreds of millions of active users, who had the benefit of using Gmail, but also provided invaluable feedback to Google.

Make a plan

With only 12 weeks, you don't need complex project planning software to plan and run the project. Map out the entire project — week by week — on a big sheet of paper, a simple Excel spreadsheet, or a whiteboard. It's easy to visualise and easy to track. Share it with your team, and make it visible and prominent throughout the 90 days.

Set rules and build habits

Hard work, discipline, and motivation can help, but another factor trumps all of them: habits. Habit trumps discipline because you're not relying on motivation and inspiration. You don't need discipline to brush your teeth or wear a seatbelt, do you?

Apply the same principle to your project. Build habits by setting rules for when and where you will work on it, for example:

- "When I wake up each day, I will write another 500 words."

- "At the start of the weekly team meeting, we'll spend 10 minutes sharing interesting ideas we have seen that week."
- "When I pull out my phone to check social media, I will first read an article from my saved bookmarks."
- "Every Tuesday morning from 9-10am, I will have meetings with the people I mentor."

Imagine how you could fail

Traditional goal setting urges you to imagine success in all its glory. But that's too optimistic for a fast-changing world. Instead, imagine what might go *wrong*, so you can plan for it.

In *Harvard Business Review* in 2007, Gary Klein described a process he and colleagues devised: a "pre-mortem". In a medical post-mortem, the surgical team analyses what went wrong so they can prevent future deaths. In a pre-mortem, before the project starts, *imagine* your project has failed after 90 days, identify what went wrong, and then add these obstacles, mistakes, and missteps to your project plan.

How will YOU set — and get — your next goal?

Boxer Mike Tyson said, "Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the face." In our fast-changing world, there are so many things that could punch us in the face! But these principles will help you stay on track, so you can set — and, more importantly, *get* — your goals!

Gihan Perera works with business leaders to help them lead and succeed in an uncertain but exciting future. He is the author of *Disruption 87*. Design: Leading the change in a fast-changing world (RPP \$33). For more about how Gihan can work with your leaders and teams, visit GihanPerera.com

