NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTIONS....LEADERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, LIFE BALANCE, & MORE!

BUSINESS NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTIONS
FORBES.com 1/2/2015 by Chuck Cohn, CEO of Varsity Tutors

The act of setting new goals and resolutions permeates everyday culture. Television and radio commercials, not to mention social media posts, are reminders to make personal resolutions as 2015 begins – but what about professional ones?

The New Year can offer you a powerful catalyst for business growth. The only question is which goals to set. For owners who are unsure, here are three New Year’s resolutions that have been selected:

1. **Work with key company data throughout the year.** It may be tempting to only review all of your startup’s key operating metrics a few times per year, but this can make it difficult to foresee what changes might be needed before it is too late. Try to implement systems that will help you detect issues as they arise so that you can take action before a small spark becomes a wildfire. Consider:

   - **Investing in data analytics and IT.** This way, you can review daily, weekly, and monthly reports on those metrics that affect your business most. Ask yourself, “Is there a way I can tell how my company is performing – at this very moment—with just the click of a button?” What programs and strategies come to mind? How can you begin using them?

   - **Developing your analytical and quantitative skills.** You may not comprehend every mathematical formula involved in the creation of your business projections – but you should. Aim to understand the projections themselves and what action items can be taken, as well as the mathematical formulas behind them that led you to those projections. For example, how could you increase your client conversion rate? What are typical conversion rates for companies in your industry? Challenge yourself with exercises such as taking your product/service and determining the total costs that go into producing that item. Then, look line item by line item and ask yourself if there are any inputs that you can acquire at a lower cost, thereby increasing your margins.

   - **Identifying milestones for the year ahead.** For example, if your goal in 2015 is to double your 2014 revenue, what milestones does your startup need to reach each month or each week? Once you have identified the milestones, put systems in place to help you track progress toward those goals. Breaking down a big lofty goal into smaller milestones will also help your team members achieve a sense of progress along the way as each milestone is reached. These are often called “departmental goals” and they allow each team member to take ownership of a particular area of the business. If you hit most of your departmental goals, the annual high-level company goals are almost always achieved.
2. **Get to better know your customers.** Understanding your clients is one of the best ways to improve your product or service. Personal touches, like remembering subtle nuances of an individual’s preferences, can be an effective way to set yourself apart from others in your industry. But there are also more general client aspects to pinpoint, including:

- **Pain points.** A customer’s pain point is the problem that he or she hopes to solve. Once you identify your client’s pain point, you can build a product or service that effectively addresses it. Think about additional pain points that your customers may be facing, beyond what your current services/products address. Consider, for example, the increase in usage of mobile check deposits. This feature lets you take a picture of a check using your smartphone and then directly deposit into your bank account. For customers, this saves them the time and hassle of having to drive to a bank location – and for banks, this lets them have the deposit into their accounts much quicker. Features like these increase the “stickiness” of your product and make it less likely that a customer will leave you for a competitor.

- **Needs.** What are your customer’s specific needs? For instance, does your client consider cost the most important pain point? Or is it speed? If it is speed, it may be advantageous for your company to offer on-demand services. Some businesses can deliver online tutoring faster that doing in-home tutoring, and an online tutoring platform helps to better meet the clients; urgent/last-minute needs. Every business likely has some consumers that will highly value the time to receiving service and make it a key aspect of their purchase decision (see Uber, TaskRabbit, Porch, etc. as examples of companies that have benefited from addressing this need for their clients). If you understand the extent to which your customers value different product attributes, you can enhance and change your product to better address their particular needs. Surveys and focus groups (even informal ones) can greatly enhance your understanding of your customers and what they want.

- **Objectives.** You can think of your customer’s objectives as his or her goals. A client’s objectives may extend beyond solving a pain point – for example, a customer’s pain point might be that his or her car’s transmission is broken. The objective is therefore to have a reliable car for daily commuting and travel. Helping your customer achieve that objective can differentiate you from your competitors. For instance, you could help to identify a rental vehicle while the car is undergoing repairs, or you could decide that the car is not worth repairing and recommend that your customer purchase another vehicle as soon as possible and then assist in that transaction.

3. **Focus on what truly matters to the growth and sustainability of your company.** If you often find yourself mired in paperwork or other tasks that are not directly related to leading your company, consider delegating some of those tasks more frequently. As the CEO, how can you maximize the return on each hour you invest in your business? In other words, how can you best spend your limited time? You might periodically ask yourself, “Is my company ready for someone other than me to do X?”

With that question in mind, try to keep an eye out for those candidates who can assume the responsibility of key tasks, both externally and internally. One possible idea is to create an internal system that allows your team members to take on additional responsibilities as they develop. As your staff grows in experience and skill level, your business will grow as well. Engage your team members’ abilities and align their efforts, and they will likely help you achieve a level of success well beyond what you could have reached by yourself or without leveraging their full skill sets.

*The New Year is the perfect opportunity to recommit to those factors that matter most to your business success.* Whether you choose to emphasize data-driven analysis, knowledge of your customer, a focus on growth or sustainability, or all three, good luck with your 2015 resolutions!

**SMALL BUSINESS TIPS: Six New Year Resolutions to Improve Leadership**
By: Kevin Eikenberry, author of *From Bud to Boss-Secrets to a Successful Transition to Remarkable Leadership*

The New Year brings promise, excitement and New Year’s Resolutions. But this article isn’t about losing weight, starting your exercise plan or one of the other common personal resolutions people make. Rather, this is a practical and timeless list of resolutions you can make as a small business owner to create more confidence for yourself, more
engaged and happier employees and a more successful business. While these small business tips don’t impact profitability, sales gross margin or other key factors, they will positively impact these important financial measures for as long as you are in business. These resolutions are about your behaviors and habits and how they affect your employees and their productivity. Taken individually, they can make a difference in your results; collectively, they will change your level of business success forever.

Six Resolutions for Small Business Management

**Involve others in goal setting and planning.** Yes, it is your business. Yes, it is your financial stake and you are the one taking the risk. And yet...your team members are invested in the business too. They spend their time, effort, and energy. Wouldn’t you like them to be more personally invested in the success of the business? Let’s put it this way: would you like your employees to think more like owners?

If so, you have to involve them in them in the goals and planning for the business – i.e., you have to drive **EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT.** You may set the overall direction, but let them be involved in the creation of the outcomes. Slowing down enough to involve them in this important work is a big key to greater involvement, commitment and success.

**Keep goals in front of yourself and everyone else.** Have you ever set a goal only to later not remember exactly what it was? This resolution will keep that from ever happening again! Once goals are created, everyone needs to be reminded of them regularly. This isn’t an exercise in micro-management or nagging. Rather, as a leader you must help people keep their goal in mind and remind them of what success looks like – which means **employee motivation** is key. There are dozens of ways to do this – from using bulletin boards to regular conversations in team meetings. Find several that work for you and your team and implement them.

**Communicate more and in more ways.** Evaluate effectiveness of e-mail messages. As a leader you must communicate key messages frequently. Which means you must complete the communication loop—you must ensure that the message sent is received. Doing so, especially as your team grows, requires communicating more frequently and in different modes, so your message is heard and drives action.

**Talk less, talk later and listen more.** At first this may seem contradictory to the last resolution. As with most complex things in life, balance is the key. In trying to make sure their point is made, or to stimulate a discussion, leaders will often share all of their ideas and then ask the rest of the team for input. At that point it is often too late.

If your boss just spent ten minutes sharing ideas, then asked for your input, how likely would you be to chime in? When you want the team’s input and ideas, you must ask questions and shut up! Let the group share their ideas as a means of team building. Be patient and give them time. If they don’t think of a key idea or piece of information, you can share it later in the conversation with greater effect. This approach also helps you listen better and **be a better boss** – because it is hard to listen while you are talking.

**Focus feedback on the future.** You want people to improve. In almost every case, people want to improve and do great work. Yet most workplace feedback is focused on something that can’t be changed – the past. If you want to be a more effective coach to your team and help them make improvements in their skills and results, give them feedback, advice and wise counsel about what they can do next time. And be sure you regularly conduct **employee performance reviews.**

**Be a ...role model.** Your team is watching and emulating you. Are your behaviors the ones you want them exhibiting? Are your attitude, work habits, and customer focus what you want them to exhibit? Looking at the attitudes and behaviors of your team is in part like looking in the mirror. If you like what you see, great! If not, look in the mirror more carefully and recognize that the source of your frustration with other’s behavior likely starts with you.

These resolutions remind you that you are not just a business owner thinking about a new customer, profit margin or monthly P & L – you are also a leader. All of these small business tips, when put into practice, will make you a more effective leader and a more successful business owner too. Like many New Year’s resolutions, this list may seem a bit
daunting. Remember that they don’t necessarily require any special skills. They may require a change in mindset and most likely a change in habits. The effort involved is worth it – for you, your team and ultimately your results.

Taken in part from hiring.mnster.com/hr/hr-best-practices/workforce-management/improving-employee...

**IMPROVE YOUR WORK-LIFE BALANCE WITH THESE NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTIONS FOR BUSINESS SUCCESS**

By Susan Ward; Small Business: Canada Expert for www.about.com

The end of the year is a good time to reflect on your business’s progress over the past year and plan how you want your business to develop. The following top 10 New Year’s resolutions are designed to help you strike a better work-life balance, so you can achieve a truly satisfying success in the New Year.

1) **Learn how to delegate and do more of it.** Delegation is the key to a healthy work-life balance.

2) **Promote your business regularly and consistently.** If you want to attract new customers, you have to make promotion a priority. Make a New Year’s resolution to hire a marketing expert, or take the time to create a marketing plan on your own and follow through.

3) **Make business planning a weekly event.** Planning is vital if you want a healthy, growing business. Set aside time each week to review, adjust, and look forward – make business planning a part of each day.

4) **Learn something new.** Learning something new will add to your skills and add a new dimension of interest to your life – another important part of achieving a healthy work-life balance. Meet new and interesting people who may become customers, colleagues or friends.

5) **Join a new business organization or networking group.** There’s nothing like talking to other business people for sparking new ideas, refining old ones and making contacts. Whether it’s a group specifically designed for networking or an organization dedicated to a particular type of business, in person or over the ‘Net, making the effort to be a part of a group will revitalize you and your business.

6) **Give something back to your community.** There are all kinds of worthy organizations that make a difference in your community. Make it a priority to find a cause that matters to you, and give what you can. Serve on a committee, be a mentor, volunteer, or make regular donations to the groups in your community that try to make the place you live a better place. (*Top 10 Ways to Get Known*)

7) **Put time for you on your calendar.** It is important to take the time to recharge and refresh yourself; a healthy work-life balance demands time out. If you have trouble freeing up time to do the things you enjoy, write time regularly into your schedule to “meet with yourself” and stick to that commitment. If you don’t invest in yourself, who will?

8) **Set realistic goals.** Goal setting is a valuable habit – if the goals lead to success rather than distress. Make a New Year’s resolution that the goals you set will be goals that are achievable, rather than unrealistic pipe dreams that are so far out of reach they only lead to frustration.

9) **Don’t make do; get a new one.** Is there a piece of equipment in your office that’s interfering with your success or something that you lack that’s making your working life harder? Whether it’s an old fax machine that’s a pain to use, or the need for a new employee to lighten your work load, make a New Year’s resolution to stop putting off getting what you need. The irritation of making do just isn’t worth it.

10) **Drop what’s not working for you and move on.** All products aren’t going to be super sellers, all sales methods aren’t going to work for everyone, and all suppliers and contractors aren’t going to be ideally suited to your business. If a technique or product or a business relationship isn’t working for you, stop using it. Don’t invest a
lot of energy into trying to make the unworkable workable. Achieving a healthy work-life balance is like maintaining a good relationship; you have to keep working on it.

**Determine Your Personal Return on Investment:** Many entrepreneurs start their own business because they want to be their own bosses. But many sole proprietors aren’t just their own bosses; they are also their own sales staff, secretaries, accountants, publicists, customer service departments, financial planners…you name it. All the myriad tasks with running a business don’t have equal value, especially if we look at them in terms of our personal Return On Investment (R.O.I.). Think of all the different business-related tasks required by operating your business; look at your records to determine how much time you are spending on different tasks your business requires of you. Complete a time study and rate each task regarding the portion of each day you spend on specific tasks.

**Look at Your Bottom Line:** One way to determine your personal Return on Investment is to simply look at the bottom line. Tally the number of hours you spent in a week on bookkeeping tasks. Now think about how you make your profit. What do you charge to deliver the service you provide, or how much product would you sell in that time frame? If you spend ten hours on bookkeeping tasks, and charge your clients $40 an hour to use your services, the ten hours on bookkeeping have “cost” you a potential $400. Now extrapolate: how much does doing that particular task yourself cost you over the course of a month and a year? In this example, completing bookkeeping tasks costs $1200 a month. The bottom line may say that you can’t afford to keep doing this.

**Non-Core Activities Take Up Valuable Business and Personal Time:** Another way of determining personal Return On Investment is to look at the “human” cost. How are those hours spent on the particular task affecting the things that are important to you, such as family life, lifestyle, or even health? Are the hours spent a month on bookkeeping chores cutting into the precious hours that could be spent with family? When you consider this, do you think that bookkeeping was as “important” as any of the people or things that are truly the most important?

Some small business owners state that they do their own income taxes every year, or that they’ve designed their own letterhead, or created their own website. The question to these tasks could be “Why?” Any small business person can do these things, but should they? The answer depends upon how relevant the particular task is to his or her business and what he or she gets out of the task at hand. If you’re a web designer, then it’s important to create and maintain a website; if you’re a landscaper, it’s not.

* Small business owners don’t need to do it all. If they do, some aspect of a business can suffer. Every small business owner will have a different comfort level and a different set of skills. It’s not good enough to …”copycat” …others may have certain talents that you don’t have. To succeed, stay focused on, and spend time doing, what you do best.

**Are You Managing Your Business or is it Managing You?** You can, for instance, design and run your own marketing campaign, but do you enjoy it and are you good at it? How much time does it take you? Is this time that you resent spending on that task because it takes time away from things you would rather be doing?

* Many small business owners make the mistake of confusing running the show with performing the entire show. Are you managing your business or are you feeling frazzled and harassed because your business is managing you?

**AND ONE MORE INTERESTING ARTICLE TO SHARE...**

**FIVE HOT TRENDS FOR 2015: WHICH WILL BENEFIT YOUR BUSINESS?**

Predicting trends is always risky business. However, the following list of five trends will definitely command a share in the headlines over the next 12 months and beyond.

Any value lies in determining which trends are most suitable for advancing a business throughout the year, so it’s from that perspective that the following five are listed with #1 being the biggest and most important.
#1. 2015 will offer major small business growth.

- Will be there for those who are well positioned and ready to work hard. Small business owners need to be sure that everything is in place to participate in 2015’s opportunity for growth.
- If growth requires funding, put it in place. Do you need to hire? Need more space?
- Have you deferred funding for retirement? Go into 2015 with a positive attitude, ready to grow, and aggressively build your retirement accounts.

#2. Savvy marketers stop chasing trends (with exception of #5).

- Past tactics included Facebook ads, content marketing, SEO, automated CRM, etc.
- During 2015, businesses will bring a holistic approach to their marketing programs.
- All current sales and marketing strategies have a place, but in 2015 small business owners will look at the big picture and design their own “marketing blend” that includes several of those mentioned, plus they will bring in more traditional marketing devices such as direct mail.

#3. The color of money will be in flux.

- Major wars will be fought over payment systems and even currencies.
- Mobile acceptance systems, smart cards, smart phone-based payments, and cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin will be battling it out for this huge market.
- Small business owners can sit out this war until some clear victors begin to emerge; others need to get involved. Consider which option is going to work for the customers you have today and the ones you hope to have tomorrow.

#4. The “home office” is officially listed as an endangered species.

- Virtual workers, co-working spaces and cloud computing will continue to change the complexion of the small business workforce. You need to seriously consider all of these major trends.

#5. Mobile and local marketing are promoted from kings to emperors.

- Marketing professionals will continue to develop new systems and strategies for engaging customers on their mobile devices when they are out and about; set aside time to study the topic and find the best ways for your business to take advantage of mobile and local marketing initiatives.

**BEST WISHES FOR A SUCCESSFUL YEAR IN 2015!**

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