

The careerist

'Distinguish between what is urgent and what is important'

Set yourself goals for the year ahead

With the festive period behind us, business minds are focused on the year ahead and what they hope to achieve. So, how do you set career goals and how do you stick to them?

How do I plan my goals?

Richard Brown, managing partner at Cognosis, a London-based strategy consultancy, says: "You should have three goals or less. Any more and you won't be able to focus on them."

When considering your goals for 2010, think about how they fit into where you are heading over the next five years. "It may help to see them in the light of your longer term vision for your career," says Mr Brown.

How do I make sure my goals are right for me?

"The two main factors are your personality and the nature of the goal," says Jane Clarke, a director at business psychologists Nicholson McBride. "Where we go wrong is that we assume that what works for one successful person will work for you. But you will often find on some level that you don't want it enough. So you need to think about your motivation – for instance, is it status or work-life balance? Look back over your career – what has worked?"

Ms Clarke also suggests using the technique of "reframing", which involves trying to view goals that may not initially feel very "you" in terms of the benefits they can bring you. You could also visualise how you will feel when you have achieved your goals.

My goals look like mountains. Where do I start?

"Break them down," says Standolyn Robertson, a personal organisation expert. "If any part seems overwhelming, then you

have not broken it down enough. Individual tasks have to be within reach." For instance, if your goal is to change career, step one is rewriting your CV.

Ms Robertson also advises getting organised, by which she does not mean tidying your desk (although that may help); rather, you need to deal with the problems that are preventing you focusing on career goals.

How do I make sure I stay on track?

If you are serious about attaining goals, you should prioritise them over everything else, says Ms Clarke. Just as important, you should make sure that those around you understand your priorities. This goes for everything from "I'm going to raise my profile" to "I'm going to pick my kids up from school twice a week".

This does not mean you should not do ordinary, day-to-day work; but it does mean that working towards the goal should not constantly take a back seat to ordinary work. Learn to distinguish between what is urgent and what is important. So, block off time in your diary to achieve your goal and treat it as you would any other business engagement.

You should also keep track of your progress. Give yourself deadlines and appraise yourself monthly or quarterly.

"You should keep your goals close to hand," says Mr Brown. "Have them on cards on your desk or on a screen saver."

It is a good idea to share the goal with someone else at work. Two people are far more likely to stick with something than one. Alternatively, you could turn to a coach. "Anything that gives you accountability will help you achieve your goals" says Ms Robertson.

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