

NEW YEAR = NEW OPPORTUNITY FOR IMPROVEMENTS JANUARY 2022

"Happy New Year!" is a phrase that we love to say. Some see it as an opportunity to throw out the old and try something new. Others see it as a time to reflect and resolve to make changes. This is a time for personal resolutions, but what about for your veterinary hospital? A new year is an excellent time to make resolutions for the business too.

For many, January is the start of a new business/fiscal year – and it signals a time to review business performance. The review may be in the form of a formal SWOT analysis, in which you assess a practice's competitive position by evaluating its Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. If you prefer to keep it a little less formal, you may simply decide what to keep doing, stop doing, and start doing.

Regardless of the approach, strategic planning for the New Year is crucial for business health (just as personal resolutions are for one's personal health and well-being). Items on this year's business strategic plan may include:

- Update the compensation and benefits package
- Implement Fear Free protocols
- Specialty certifications for some team members
- Meet with the accountant to prevent "X" from happening again this year
- Start offering virtual care services
- Embrace more technology
- Explore the company's level of diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Implement procedures to support the team's mental health

Each of these goals sounds like a New Year's Resolution - a big, audacious goal that will transform the practice for the better!

The exclamation "Happy New Year!" may be light-hearted and cheerful, but making resolutions can be frustrating - close to 80% of New Year's resolutions fail. Other statistics state that only 8% of people successfully achieve their resolutions. And just like New Year's resolutions, business strategies are at risk of low success rates. Why is this?

Look at any article or blog about New Year's resolutions. A common theme seems to emerge about why many fail to achieve their goals.

- Goals are not clear
- Overwhelmed (quit before even starting)
- Not ready to change
- Lack of commitment
- No plan
- No accountability

Sounds somewhat familiar, doesn't it? For any practice manager or team leader, these are the same reasons given when assessing the failure of a change initiative at the practice - whether for a performance improvement plan for an employee facing termination or for a change of operations across the entire practice. With this knowledge about human nature and resolutions, you can develop an implementation plan that addresses these issues for a better chance of success.

We aren't here to offer good versus bad practice resolutions. Instead, we want to provide steps to take so that you are successful no matter what your goals are. Taking a cue from achieving New Year's resolutions, create a clear goal, a plan, a willingness to change, and a way to hold yourself and others accountable. Translated to a goal or resolution, it will look like the following:

Know Your Why

Have you ever held a team meeting to announce a project or a change in an SOP? Of course, you have. A month later, did you need to schedule another meeting to discuss the lack of compliance among the team? Probably more often than you want to admit! Getting buy-in can be challenging. Simon Sinek wrote a book called "Start With Why" to emphasize that people won't buy in until they understand the WHY behind any idea, product, or service.

Consider how you will explain to the team why this change is necessary. The WHY is the objective or goal – what happens once your project is successful. Having a clear goal goes a long way in getting the team on the project's bus and heading in the same direction. Next, the team needs to know how to implement and achieve success.

Make a Plan/Strategy

It does no good to issue a proclamation from the owners - "do this because I said so." The team needs to know HOW this change will be implemented and what role each of them will play. The plan is the blueprint or key steps the team needs to take to achieve the objectives.

This is a good time to bring in team members to brainstorm. Ask them to provide insights into potential obstacles and constraints. The best way to prevent that "I told you so" moment from a skeptic is to listen to their concerns and work together to find ways to deal with potential obstacles. It's also a good time to clarify expectations. If your team is stressed by the current workload, launching a new project may need to wait until the schedule is not as hectic.

Establish Accountability

Establishing clear expectations requires identifying WHO will be responsible for specific steps. When it comes to a personal resolution, you might ask a friend or family member to participate with you, or at the very least, hold your feet to the fire. Designating key individuals is equally important for the business - who is responsible for each task, who sits in each seat on the project's bus, etc.

Identify the best combination of skills and talents for key positions - such as a project coordinator or a subject matter expert to handle training and act as the go-to person for the team. Accountability for all members of the team is equally important - what will be their responsibilities, and what are the associated rewards and consequences. Also identify when team members will have time to devote to the project. Will they have uninterrupted time to work toward the goal?

Know the Numbers

Plans and accountability do not come free of charge. Although you don't necessarily need a budget for every project, it is essential to have a sense of the numbers that matter. Consider:

- Personnel costs associated with paid time spent on the project, training, and monitoring milestones
- Expenses related to technology, supplies, and marketing
- Patient and client numbers related to the project (such as bonding rate, services, products, etc.)

Refer to the plan to determine what numbers to monitor.

Speak with your CPA about the project and identify the KPIs affected. Don't focus just on expenses. You need success metrics as well. No one wants to be surprised when the practice information management system (PIMS) or QuickBooks report shows numbers in the red. Nor should you reach the end of the project and not know if it positively or negatively impacted the business. Speaking of the end, set one.

Set a Time Frame

To ensure a serious commitment to achieving your goals, make sure to set target dates - dates for milestones, completion, feedback, project status reports, etc. This is another way to hold people accountable (remember those people you identified just two steps earlier?). Prevent that "slipped my mind because I was so busy" excuse and get a firm commitment to complete the assignment within the deadline. Furthermore, dates are a signal to pay attention to the numbers that have been identified as important.

Measure/Assess Progress

Since some resolutions are measurable, SMART goals should be considered. Other resolutions are a little more challenging to quantify. The key is to monitor progress. Notice when things have "gone off the rails" and when success is on the horizon. Recognizing the right time to pivot or celebrate is essential.

There you have it, the key steps to successfully implementing the practice's New Year's resolution... or any project begun at any point in the year. Do not simply wish for change. Instead, make a commitment and stick to a structured plan.