**Management Psychology Thought-Leadership Series**

Using *‘FORWARD RELEVANCE’* TO HELP YOU FULFILL YOUR NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTIONS



Have you been thinking about your New Year’s resolutions, but still not sure what to focus on in 2018? Finding it hard to come up with more *meaningful* resolutions to break away from the conventional ones like living a healthier lifestyle or planning to visit a far-away friend? Apparently, you are not the only one facing this challenge. Recently, I have received many requests from people to help support them with creating resolutions that they feel they want and can to stick to. A difficult challenge at first, I thought, but later it dawned on me that many of the goals that people focus on are either too far away from the meaningful stuff they do day-to-day or are goals generally associated with the New Year resolution tradition.

**Forward Relevance**

About 50% of people make New Year resolutions, but a mere 10% of the people who make them is able to fulfill their goals by year-end. There are many reasons why people don’t stick to their resolutions e.g. lack of commitment, dip in motivation, lack of resources, or loss of interest. Though this is difficult to solve on an individual basis, there are some great strategies you can use to help you achieve your objectives. One specific strategy I want to highlight in this article to help fulfill your New Year resolutions, is something I call ‘*forward relevance’*. Forward relevance is a personal strategy of designing meaningful (actionable) goals that help you create your future-self, instead of looking at your past-self to overcome deficits or break habits.

The first step in this process is to create relevance. A great way to do this, is to (1) find something you are actively engaged in on a daily basis, (2) identify the latest trends within this activity and (3) connect these trends to the goals you would like to achieve. This way forward relevance prescribes goals which are meaningful for you to achieve and relevant to the year you are doing it in, which creates a deeper connection between you and your environment, the people involved in helping you achieve your goals and the timeframe to do it in.



**Applying Forward Relevance to Trending Events.**

For most of us work is something we are deeply involved in on a daily basis, so connecting New Year resolutions to the work environment is a great way to make your goals transcend beyond self. I want to share with you some key workplace trends for 2018 and provide some suggestions for actionable goals to achieve in the new year (be sure to identify other goals which find meaningful).

**Continuous Education.** As the rate of change is surpassing the rate of learning, people need to keep up with continuous development and education. Global mobility and technology are radically changing what we learn and how we learn. And as past results are no longer an indicator of future success, continuous education is your gateway to ‘*lifetime employability’* in 21st century.

Forward Relevance: **Create a mindset for continuous education.**

* + Actionable goals:
    - *Identify* an area or subject you feel passionate about, but have not learnt anything about ***yet***.
    - *Commit* yourself to continuous learning through taking a couple of online courses via a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course), attending a masterclass, learning on the job, or enrolling in a professional degree program.

**Digital Skills Gap.** Digital skills are becoming one of the most demanded skillsets by employers today. Every business today is a digital business and with the rise of Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) and the Internet of Things (I.O.T.) digital skill requirements are on the rise. However, less people are focusing on or able to fulfill technical skill requirements leading to a global digital skill gap. However, it is becoming easier to build digital competencies thanks to new online platforms and apps which require less programming and coding knowledge.

Forward Relevance: **Enhance your Digital Skills in 2018.**

* + Actionable goals:
    - Taking courses in Digital Marketing, Programming, Machine Learning and Coding will be paramount to remain relevant in 2018 and beyond.
    - Build an online presence, products and services, or even algorithms using easy-to-use online platforms and apps.

**Workplace Wellbeing.** Employee well-being and health is high on the agenda in 2018 for most organizational leaders. Studies show that happy and healthy employees are more engaged at work, more committed to their jobs and organizations, feel more resilient, and are more productive. In today’s business world, talent is contingent with organizational survival and ensuring that companies create a company culture in which employees can thrive is critical to organizational success. Initiatives to integrate physical and mental well-being into organizational performance management will be on the rise in the workplace in 2018 and beyond.

Forward Relevance: **Focus on your Physical and Psychological Well-Being.**

* + Actionable goals:
    - Actively take part in (or organize) group mindfulness, yoga, or running classes to give your health, mind and physical performance a boost.
    - Create a social media support group to engage others in your well-being efforts, provide support and strategies to your social networks, and make new friends who have similar interests. Combined offline and online strategies are a great way to work on your well-being and provide to others.

**Precarious Work.** Flexible working conditions, otherwise known asprecarious work, has been on the rise for the past 10 years and according to statistics will only continue to grow. Changes in labor regulation, globalization, technology and pressures on labor costs, have given way to various flexible work arrangements (e.g. part-time work contracts, telework set-ups, contingency and free-lance based work) lowering the number of full-time employees. Studies show that precarious work arrangements have both benefits and disadvantages to organizations and employees.

Forward Relevance: **Boost your ‘lifetime employability’**

* + Actionable goals:
    - Identify and enhance (your) transferable skills. Work on developing skills that you can use in different organizations or for your own business.
    - Working part time or on contract basis can allow you to be more flexible when and where you work. Work progressively towards finding the perfect work arrangements to facilitate a good work-life balance.

**One Last Note…**

Finding a meaningful resolution to focus on is just 25% of achieving your goals. Here are ***5 effective strategies*** to help you achieve your goals, besides applying forward relevance.

1. **Make you goals SMART**:
   * *Specific*: Specify your goal and be specific about what you want to achieve, when, how, why and with who. The more specific you are the more likely you will be to achieve your goal. Also identifying limitations is a way to be specific about what is and is not possible.
   * *Measurable*: Making your goals measurable is a way to identify what you want to see when achieving your goals. Feeling good is not specifically measurable, but living a healthy lifestyle, by taking a 15 min stroll during every lunch break, is. Make sure that you can measure the outcome of your goal.
   * *Attainable*: Make sure your goals are attainable. First, try to define goals that you believe are reachable within your capacity (time, effort, resources, other commitments). If your goals are too big or personal limitations don’t allow you to achieve your goals, then you will surely fail. Also watch out for goals you cannot fulfill yourself. Try redefine goals which are attainable with your power and capacity.
   * Realistic: Make sure your goals are relevant and realistic for you to achieve. Identify the source of motivation for you to achieve your goals and ensure you are committing to your goals because you really want to. This sometimes requires some deeper reflection, so feel free to revisit your goals to make sure of its relevance. The Future Relevance approach is a great way to focus on this point.
   * Timely: Time management is key in helping you achieve your goals. Make sure to set deadlines for yourself and don’t be too stringent about them. Allow for some flexibility, but not too much.
2. **Change Big Goals into Bite-Size Learning Goals**. Break bigger goals down into smaller (manageable goals) and also try to frame them as learning goals. So, if you don’t achieve all of them within the time specified, at least you still worked towards achieving some of them. Don’t kill yourself if you don’t achieve all your goals. Framing them as learnings goals is also a great way to learn what you did well, what you liked about working on them and what you can do better or differently next time.
3. **Planning**: Planning is a key strategy in achieving your goals. Setting some guidelines and achievable goal posts at the onset can help you plan in achieving difficult attainable goals. Successive achievements of goals throughout the year promotes motivation and helps you stay on track without losing focus of the main goals you want to achieve by year-end. Goal planning does not only have to be long-term, but can also be short-term as well.
   * Behavioral science shows that there is a big difference between intentions and actual behavior. Using Intention implementation as part of a short-term planning strategy can help you effectively transform intentions into actual behaviors. This is done by specifying your goals very precisely as an ‘if-then’ approach, indicating that when time X occurs (time and/or place), a specific doable activity Y should be initiated and completed to attain goal Z. For example *If/when I pass the supermarket on Sunday, I will buy groceries for the week so that I can cook food at home improve my eating habits.*
4. **Have OTHERS help you achieve your goals:** The science shows that we achieve more together. Try to find other people that share the same goals as you and find ways on how to work on those goals together. Working on goals together is more fun and can help a lot when one feels slightly discouraged and demotivated. Having someone work with you or support in achieving your goals is proven to be highly effective. Don’t forget to celebrate your achievements.
5. **Make your goals PUBLIC**: Behavioral Commitment Research shows that if you make your goals public to others, you are more likely to stick to them. Write them down, share them with others and have others remind you of your verbal commitments you made to achieve them. You will need this when your motivation is low or your interest is dropped. Expect this to happen, so tackle this before it does!

