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Thinking ahead

Questions to ask yourself as you prepare your business for 2014.

Scary as it may be, Christmas trees are already in the shops, end-of-year parties are being planned, major sales catalogues are being printed and Christmas puddings are steeping. Is 2103 almost over already?

Before we get too carried away with the festive cheer, it's a good time to stop and think ahead about the coming year. You might think of this in terms of your business, your career, your professional development, or all of the above.

Here are seven questions to help you prepare for the year ahead, by considering what you have already achieved this year and what you'd like to achieve in 2014.

1. What have you achieved this year?

Write it down. Make a long list. I like index cards, but sticky notes are good, a notebook, your diary, or any other way you'd like. Congratulate yourself. Include all those little things that are sometimes overlooked, but nevertheless important. We can't all win a Nobel Prize, or an Olympic gold medal, but we can record and celebrate the things that are important to us.

It might be a milestone in your business. Next month I'll pass the milestone of 10 years in business and I think that's worth celebrating.

Key Learning objectives:

- Identifying your goals for 2014.
- Plan to achieve your goals.

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”

I'll be holding a special dinner for a small group of important clients. During next year, I'll hold a series of events to honour those people who've contributed to my success.

Even small wins are worth celebrating: exceeding your monthly sales targets, receiving excellent feedback from a customer, undertaking some useful training. Celebrating small wins is a proven method to encourage change and is one of the steps in John Kotter's well-known eight-step change management methodology¹.

However, John Kotter also warns against declaring victory too early. This may lead to resting on your laurels and not achieving all that was really possible. Celebrate both your professional and your personal achievements. They feed into each other and they all contribute to who you are and who you want to be.

2. What did you miss this year? It's time to review those goals from last year. Yes, I'm assuming you had them. Some of them will have been checked off in the first question. Some of them may have been missed altogether. Have another look. Maybe the reason these goals weren't achieved is because they weren't really important to you. Maybe there were too many to start with.

As Kenny Rogers sang in *The Gambler*: 'You've got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em'.

Reconsider which of these goals you want to refocus on for next year and which you're happy to leave off your list altogether. Sometimes, what we thought we wanted, isn't what we want at all. It's OK to move on.

Sometimes the reason we haven't achieved what we set out to do is that the circumstances of life got in the way. Did you try to do too much? Did better opportunities come along and you decided to pursue those instead?



Or, did you get distracted by all the day-to-day busy work that chews up time and energy and prevents you from being where you really want to be? If this is the case, it's important to refocus on your priorities. This is why having a clear vision to drive your decision-making is so important.

3. What do you really want in the coming year? Start with a clean slate. If money, time and other resources were no issue, what would you really want to achieve over the next 12 months? This is the time to think big. Maybe a Nobel Prize or Olympic gold medal will still be out of the question, but feel free to use your imagination.

Maybe it's the major refurbishment that you've been meaning to do but just haven't quite found time for yet. Maybe it's putting into practice new service initiatives that you learned about at the last conference you went to, but haven't done anything about just yet. If you could do anything at all, what would it be, and how would it change the face of your business?

4. What can you achieve in 12 months? Go back to your answers for question 2. After answering question 3, which of these goals from question 2 do you still want to include?

When opening your mind to whatever may be possible, perhaps you came up with a few things that could just be done. Maybe they're more achievable than you think, and maybe they're more important than the smaller ideas you had at question 2. Set some priorities. Put them in order from the top priority to the lowest one (this is where the sticky notes come in handy).

Make a physical list of no more than seven things that you want to set as achievable goals for the coming year. 'Miller's law', an observation by Princeton psychologist George Miller in the 1950s, tells us that seven (plus or minus two) is the maximum number of ideas a human being can hold in their conscious mind at one time². So, if you're going to stay focused on those goals, limit them to seven.

5. How do your goals fit with your vision and your strategy? If you look at your list for 2014 and see no alignment with your overall vision and strategy, then it's time to review your list. If the list seems to make more sense, it might be time to review your vision. If you're reading this and wondering 'What is my vision, anyway?' then this is something you'll need to work on. Perhaps this should be your first goal for 2014?

6. How will you do this, really? If you're clear about your vision and your strategy,



then putting a plan in place is much easier, but a plan needs to be real. It needs to have real outcomes, real actions and real dates.

What good is a plan if you don't know when to pop the champagne? Put the framework of your next year in place well before you start singing *Auld Lang Syne* and you'll have a much more relaxed and enjoyable celebration.

7. How will you stay sane? We can easily drive ourselves crazy trying to do too much, too soon, with too little. The world doesn't end on December 31. Some of our dreams

will still be a few years away, but what we do now helps us to work towards them.

Progress itself is a great achievement. Measure your progress and celebrate each success, no matter how small. Don't let others determine what success should look like for you. It's what's important to you that matters. ^{Rp}

References

- ¹ Kotter, J, 1996. *Leading Change*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston.
- ² Miller, GA, 1956. The magical number seven, plus or minus two: Some limits on our capacity for processing information. *Psychological Review*. Vol. 63. No. 2. pp. 81-97.

Submitting answers

This activity has been accredited for 0.5 hours of Group One CPD (0.5 CPD credits) that may be converted to one Group Two CPD credit upon successful completion of the corresponding assessment for inclusion on an individual pharmacist's CPD record.
Pharmacist competencies: 2.6.



Accreditation number:
A1311RP2

Q & A:

1. One of John Kotter's eight steps for change management is:

- A) Celebrate small wins.
- B) Celebrate early.
- C) Celebrate on New Year's Eve.
- D) Celebrate big victories.

2. According to 'Miller's law', what is the maximum number of ideas humans can keep in their conscious mind at one time?

- A) 7 (+3).
- B) 17 (+/-10).
- C) 7 (+/- 2).
- D) 9 (+/-2).

3. For a plan to be effective, it needs to include:

- A) Days, hours, minutes.
- B) Outcomes, actions, dates.
- C) Seven different ways to achieve the goal.
- D) A long list of tasks.

4. Having a clear vision helps you to:

- A) Focus on your priorities.
- B) Make important decisions more easily.
- C) Recognise when you are successful.
- D) All of the above.

5. Reasons why goals might not be achieved include:

- A) Taking on too much.
- B) Being distracted by low-priority tasks.
- C) Being superseded by a more significant goal.
- D) All of the above.

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Answers for October 2013 article:

1. D 2. D 3. B 4. D 5. D