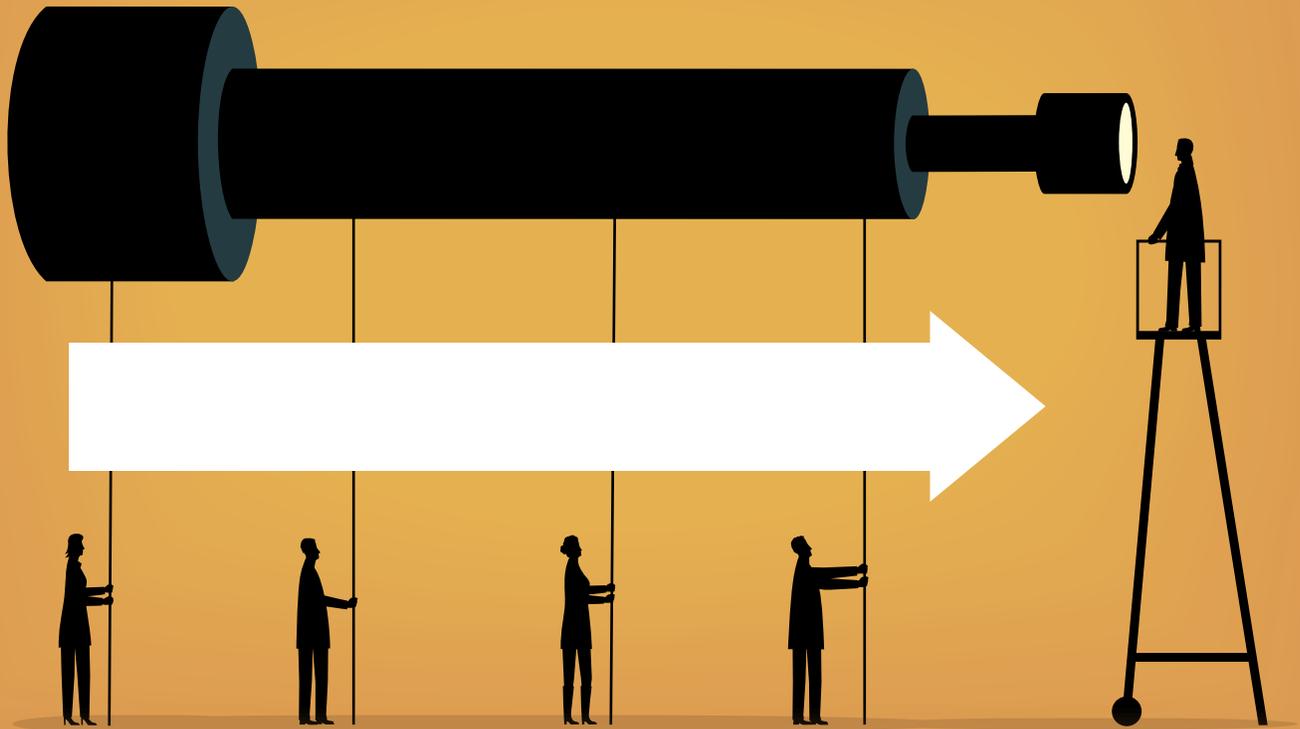


Self Informed

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STARTING OFF YOUR NEW YEAR RIGHT:

Using a
Retrospective
to Set
Actionable
Goals

As 2016 draws to a close and the New Year stretches out ahead with so much promise, many small business owners and self-employed people wonder, *how can I make next year more successful than the last?* Many of us have checklists and calendars we go through, there are past-year audits that are recommended, some even advocate a good old fashioned scrubbing and cleaning to promote clarity and a fresh start! While each of those methods have their merits, creating an actionable plan for success in the upcoming year can be a daunting task. As such, many people make it too large of an endeavor and don't know where to begin. This year, I suggest you condense your end-of-year audit and future planning into one activity, borrowed from the [Agile software development](#) world, called a *retrospective*.

WHAT IS A RETROSPECTIVE?

No matter how well you feel you, or your team, is working, there are always opportunities for improvement. You are most likely always looking for ways to improve your business, whether it's your bottom line, customer satisfaction, or employee retention. However, setting aside time to purposefully reflect on what you are doing and ways you could improve, enables you to take more of a holistic view when making decisions regarding your path forward. That's the essence of the *retrospective*.

HOW TO DO A RETROSPECTIVE?

If you're lucky enough to have a team, include them and you don't need to make important decisions in isolation. Schedule up to an hour for this activity, which is usually more than enough time. That being said, sometimes a topic will escalate into a discussion and you may have to make further time to flesh it out and come to a decision. There are many formats that a retrospective can take, but the simplest and most effective is to go around the room and ask each team member the following three questions:

1. What's going well?
2. What's not going well?
3. What could we do differently to improve?

Initially, as you're leading the meeting, just go around the room and compile a list of people's comments and suggestions. It's essential that the reflective and holistic spirit of the retrospective be maintained in order for creative suggestions and necessarily critical feedback to come forward. If participants get the sense that their comments will have grand consequences, they are less likely to be candid. As such, there are many options for creatively formatting the retrospective itself (*see below*).

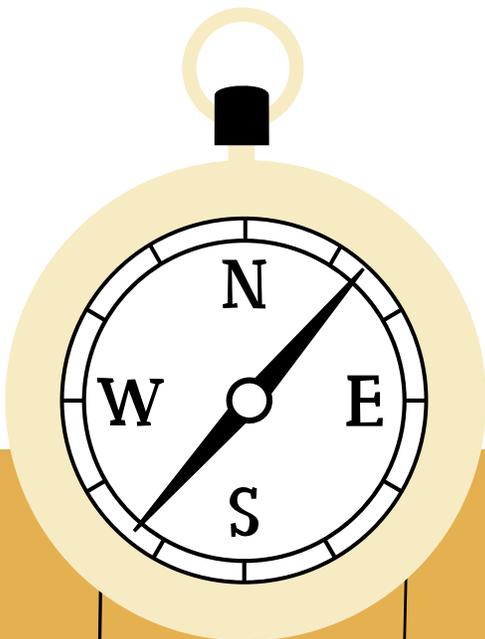
WHY DO A RETROSPECTIVE?

As the saying goes, *insanity is doing the same things over and over and expecting different results*. If problem-solving is your goal, then changing the way you work is a must. By giving power to

your team, not only are you helping them develop their own problem-solving skills, but since the ideas that come out of retrospectives are from the team, there will be little resistance to changes as they are implemented. As a business owner, this helps you in multiple ways. First, it helps you to be able to step back from your business because you know that your staff is fully bought-in to the plans for the upcoming year. Second, it provides a platform for creative ideas to be examined and addressed. Third, it's short, taking about an hour. And last, the retrospective is future-focused, unlike an audit or a brainstorming session, its format encourages timelines and teammates taking ownership of their suggestions.

HOW TO APPLY FEEDBACK?

Once the list from the meeting participants has been compiled and everyone has described what they thought went well, and what they thought went poorly in the past year, as well as what they think could be improved in the coming year, it's time to put that feedback to good use. Much like any other meeting, the outcomes need someone who takes ownership, a timeline for follow-up, and measurements for success. The beauty of the retrospective is in the simplicity of its action and its laser focus on improvements. However, failing to implement those improvements is never a path to success. Turning retrospective feedback into SMART goals is necessary.



SPECIFIC

What will I accomplish?



MEASURABLE

How will I know I have achieved it?



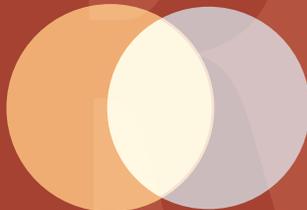
ATTAINABLE

How will I achieve it?



RELEVANT

How does it relate to the business problem?



TIME-DELIMITED

When will I achieve it?



WHAT ARE SMART GOALS?

As a business owner interested in improving your business and generally getting things done, you've probably heard of SMART goals before.

There's never a bad time to review, though, so here's what the SMART acronym stands for:

- **SPECIFIC:** Define the goal in as clear terms as possible. Define the *who, what, where, when, and why* you think this goal is important, as well as requirements for defining success.
- **MEASURABLE:** How will the progress be tracked and the outcome be measured? It's also important to define how you'll know when a goal has been achieved.
- **ATTAINABLE:** Ensuring that a goal isn't below regular performance standards, or out of reasonable reach provides a 'reality check' and helps support a plan's success.
- **RELEVANT:** A goal should be consistent with both short and long-term plans, as well as the overall needs of the business.
- **TIME-BOUND:** An objective without a time constraint never develops a sense of urgency and therefore almost inevitably will be pushed aside for more pressing priorities.

It's never advisable to set a goal, whether in business, or in life, that doesn't fit the SMART parameters, since a goal that lacks one of these constraints (measurability, for instance) will almost inevitably result in a failure. Why would you set your business, your team, and yourself up for failure at the beginning of a brand new year?

How to apply SMART goals to retrospective feedback?

This doesn't have to be where your retrospective meeting becomes ho-hum. Planning for the future should be exciting for both you and your team! Doing it well makes the activity even more enjoyable because you know you're laying the groundwork for success. Once you've got your plans to improve, simply apply the SMART goal format to them. An easy, fun, and visual way to do that is to try a *futuropective* approach by putting a timeline for the year up on the wall. As you and the team define each goal and how it will be measured, put it up on the timeline near the date when the goal should be accomplished. Doing this provides a visual reminder to space out goals, as well as the motivation for each team member to have a goal up on the timeline, thus everyone takes ownership of something throughout the year.

You can and should conduct retrospectives on a regular basis – don't feel restricted to the busy year-end time, when inventory, high discount sales, and family commitments often pull our focus away. Quarterly, or even monthly check-ins may lead to significant improvements for you and your business. Once you get comfortable with the format, try to have a little fun with it. Check out the links below for some suggestions for turning your retrospectives into team-building events.

TIPS FOR GENERATING INTERESTING INSIGHTS

- **LEGO Serious Play**
- **Company Map**
- **Futuropective – Path to Nirvana**



NASE Guest Expert Ken Rhie

Ken is the CEO of Trumpia, a complete SMS software company with mass SMS messaging, smart targeting and automation.

3 WAYS

Text Messages Help Improve HR Communications

Strong employee communications are the oil that makes a successful business machine run.

If you're able to effectively communicate with your employees, you'll be able to provide them important information when it's necessary and you'll have the opportunity to build a strong relationship with them.

Failing to communicate properly with your employees places your company at a significant disadvantage. Consider the **following** problems organizations that lack strong communication processes encounter:

- *People leave more often.* Companies who cannot communicate effectively are 50% more likely to encounter high turnover rates.
- *People show up to work less.* Almost 20% of all workplace absences are directly attributed to poor communication.
- *Customers are less happy.* When you don't provide your employees key information, they cannot pass it onto your customers. In fact, businesses with good communication tend to have improved customer satisfaction and revenue.
- *Projects fail more often.* A recent survey of IT professionals found that 28% of all project failures are attributed to a lack of communication.

It is clearly important to find a way to drive effective **communication with employees**. That's why mass text messaging is one of the best ways you can improve your existing HR management software and processes.

Below, we'll take a look at exactly why SMS text messaging is such a powerful communications tool, especially for HR departments:

1. HIGH OPEN RATE

Text messaging simply cannot be beaten when it comes to open rate. An incredible 99% of all text messages are opened. Compare that to about 30% for emails and it's easy to see that SMS is the best way for delivering information that cannot be missed.

Additionally, text messages are kept brief by their nature, which makes the message you provide easy to understand and retain.

2. IMMEDIACY

It's also difficult to beat text messages when you need to ensure your message is received immediately. If you send a company-wide email, people who are out of the office might not see it until they're back in. If

somebody is on vacation, there's a chance it gets lost in the mountain of emails piled up in their Inbox and they never even take a look.

Text messages, on the other hand, are almost always opened immediately. Most people keep their cell phone within reaching distance at all times. For this **reason**, 98% of all text messages are opened within only 3 minutes. If a message is time sensitive, SMS is your only option.

3. FLEXIBILITY

If you're using a strong SMS text messaging platform, crafting and sending a message is easy. Best of all, you can segment your audience to ensure that you're only sending messages to the appropriate people. You can even leverage shortcodes to allow employees to opt into specific lists themselves.

Improving your employee communications as an HR department is tricky, but it's clear that SMS text messaging can be an important part of your strategy to do so.

If you have any success stories or questions of your own, make sure to let us know by tweeting us at @Trumpia & @NASEtweets!



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Member Spotlight



Picture Yourself in the Spotlight

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Fill out the information in our [Publicity form](#) so an NASE representative can reach out to discuss featuring you and your business next!

What's the best thing about being self-employed?

To me, the best part about being self-employed is the freedom to work outside established norms and take risks to facilitate change in an industry that has a status quo of exploiting workers and the environment.

Christian Birky, Founder, Lazlo, Detroit, MI
July, 2016 Spotlight

What's the most important piece of advice you would give to someone starting their own business?

I would advise anyone starting a business to identify colleagues and professionals who can act as mentors during this process. I would also advise to be financially prepared to reinvest early profits back into your business in order to further grow your business.

Wendy Miller, Owner and Principal,
Annapolis Senior Care Solutions, Annapolis, MD,
May 2016 Spotlight,

What challenges have you faced in your business?

The challenges that I've faced have been getting Mainely Cupcakes name out in front of people. Getting people to trust my brand and to know that they are getting a quality, delicious product is always a challenge. Perseverance has been key for me. I am not a quitter and I've never stopped marketing my business or building my brand. I do holiday specials and advertise those on social media and my website. In the past, I've joined networking groups to have an opportunity to meet different people and introduce myself as well as my product. Now that I have built up my business, I can let my name speak for itself.

Cassandra Tindell, Owner, Mainely Cupcakes, Indian Trail, NC
June, 2016 Spotlight

What's your schedule like, what's a typical day for you?

One of the great parts of being self-employed is that every day has the potential to be different. A typical day may start in our warehouse space or machine shop building a new apparatus or repairing current performance machines. We may have long brainstorming conference calls with our creative team to discuss new project ideas or might have to load a truck with our equipment to head out to an event. Time is spent every day on the computers designing sets, developing budgets, negotiating contracts and casting performers for upcoming events.

Chris Lashua, Founder and Director, Wheelwork Arts, LLC, Las Vegas, NV
November, 2016 Spotlight



What's the best compliment you've ever received from a client?

I had a customer tell me that the person they were dating asked them "How much do you love me?" and their response was, "I love you a lot, but I love my accountant more".

Teewa Akers, Owner, The Bookkeepers Accounting Service MD,
Upper Marlboro, MD
August, 2016 Spotlight



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VICTORY!

President Obama Signs Into Law Legislation that Allows for HRAs

On Tuesday, December 12, 2016, President Obama signed into law bipartisan legislation allowing small businesses with less than 50 employees to offer Health Reimbursement Accounts (HRAs) without penalty.

The language which was identical to previous legislation approved by the House of Representatives was inserted into the 21st Century Cures Act, a sweeping piece of legislation that funded important health programs and includes significant resources to the Beau Biden “moonshot” project- with a goal of curing cancer. The tack on of our legislation is a testament to the hard work done by the NASE, congressional champions and staff, and our coalition partners to emphasize how important HRAs are to the small business community.

NASE has been part of a coalition of small business groups leading the

effort to change this unintended consequence of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which negatively impacted small employers with 49 or less employees that are under no legal obligation to provide a qualified healthcare plan under the employer mandate of the ACA. HRAs are a key health care tool that has long-been used to help small business owners provide some level of financial support for their employees.

In 2015, the Treasury Department announced that it was delaying the enforcement of the technical guidance issued in September 2013 regarding Health Reimbursement

Accounts (HRAs). When the technical guidance was issued, NASE submitted a draft response illustrating its effect on the small business community.

Tuesday marks the conclusion of NASE’s nearly three years of aggressive advocacy with key coalition partners to reverse the damaging Treasury guidance. These efforts have been supported by the House and Senate and championed by numerous lawmakers on both sides of the aisle. We are pleased to end 2016 with a significant legislative success, however, there is much work to be done and we look forward to 2017 and representing our members and the 23 million self-employed on key issues, including health care, tax reform, and regulatory review.

Happy New Year!

Katie Vlietstra is NASE’s Vice President for Government Relations and Public Affairs; You can contact her at kvlietstra@nase.org.