

Looking Back to Get Ahead...

“We do not learn from only experience, we also learn from reflecting on experience.”

As we come close to the end of 2018, we all have many familiar emotions to manage – feeling of an ending and excitement for a new beginning. The rush of getting everything done for Q4, the hectic schedules of family and work get together, planning for next year and naturally, a look at our performance from the past 12 months, both professionally and personally.



When I am designing an immersive learning experience, facilitating a challenging leadership case scenario discussion, or conducting an executive coaching session, one of my favourite aspects is the debrief. Taking a moment to look back and review with a closer look at what happened, what did we notice, and what would we differently next time.

Unlike in life, this is the time when the participants, audience or coachee get to stop the live action and go back to the instant replay. We all love it when we are watching sports and the commentators review a previous play frame by frame, second by second. We get to appreciate the art of athleticism. When it comes to real life, being able to rewind and broaden our perspective only deepens our learning and life experience. So, before we look into the future and what we want to accomplish in the new year, a vital step that we all should take is looking back. It is self-reflection and review in our non-stop world that can go a long way towards creating a fabulous year.

Taking focused, uninterrupted time to look back allows us to consider the journey of our past year. What has been achieved or what has been lost? What have we gained, but also what have we given? What have you earned, but more importantly, what have you learned?

To help you make the most of your reflection time, on your own, with a partner, or with your team, here are key questions to help learn from your experiences this year:

1. How would you describe your past year in 3 words? Why?

What were the main themes of your year? This about patience, innovation, risk, stress-management, and altruism. Regardless of the words you selected, they will give you insight into who you are. Were these the same themes as the year before? Or are they completely new to you? Whatever words you selected, they symbolize the tools you used to work through 2018 and can now confidently be added to your life “tool box”.

2. When did you feel inspired, alive or excited this past year and why?

What achievements stand out for you this year? What were your wins? Make sure you are enjoying the journey today. It's important to enjoy yourself each and every day. Celebrating even the small wins is important. Remember the times you were on top of your game.

3. When did you feel at your lowest this year and why?

Looking at our own failures can be tough, but it is necessary. To move forward, we must be honest about where we were not successful. Maybe it was something that we didn't give our all, or perhaps something we said we were going to do but didn't. These questions can be painful to answer, but they can help us remedy them in the future.

4. What lessons have you learned?

We should always be learning. What lessons did life teach you in 2018? What will you do differently in the coming year? Identifying and understanding your lessons learned, which can only happen in reflection, will help all of us grow and be ready for similar situations in the future.

5. What will your focus / goals be for the next 12 months?

What do you need to spend more time doing? What activities and goals are not getting enough of your time? Maybe it's spending time with family or simply being more organized. What do you need to stop doing in the new year? Maybe you have a bad habit (or two). Try replacing negative behaviors with new positive ones.

Reviewing and revising goals is an important exercise. The goals may be entirely new, or they may be updates and tweaks of existing ones. As long as we are not letting ourselves off the hook with a goal, there should always be some course-correcting to stay on target for success.



This time of year can be incredibly stressful and hectic from a personal and business perspective. As you go through these last moments of 2018, be sure to book some time in your calendar for yourself. The holiday season is about family as much as it is about rejuvenation, and as we all get a break from our usual daily routines, it is the ideal time to reflect and look back on everything you have experienced, discovered and achieved during the last 12 months.

As adults we learn best when we reflect and question what we do and then take action. As you embrace this holiday season, make sure you spend some time looking back to simply get ahead in 2019.

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