

# To move up, you need to fix the step you are in!

The energy and the excitement of welcoming the New Year are still with us. The celebrations were not only about stepping in to a New Year, but also about the end of another year as well. End of a year has many meanings for all of us. For employees it is the bonus time. It is also the appraisal and the promotion time. It is the holiday time for school children - making it a busy time for mothers and fathers. It is also the time you go shopping for gifts for family and friends and look forward to receiving gifts from them. More importantly, an end of a year and the beginning of another is a time of reflection - many people look back at their lives (do the adjustments if needed) and re-focus on the future with new hopes, strategies and energy.

As a Personal Development and a Motivational Trainer, I get many requests to organize goal setting programs for company staff at the beginning of the year. Company owners and directors have realized the importance of supporting their staff to set and achieve goals - both personal and professional goals. Going beyond merely setting goals, it is imperative for employee to link their long term personal and professional goals with company goals. This is the only way to create loyalty, motivation and energy within individuals to contribute to company goals.

"What are your plans and goals for the new year?" people often ask from their friends. Having goals and resolutions for the New Year is good. Adjusting and refocusing your existing goals is also acceptable.

Just setting goals will not do any good for you. You have to learn how to emo-



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tionally get linked with your goals. More emotionally linked you are to your goal/s - the better the chances you have to achieve them. But that is not the first step. The first step is "fixing where you are right now!"

You may have heard the phrase - "Life is like a ladder". I am a firm believer of this phrase. To move up, we need to fix and stand firmly on the step we are in - whether it is work, relationships, money, education, business or health. Only when the step we are in is fixed, we get to move to the next step.

1. "I hate this step- I want to be in a different one" People deal with the current situation and circumstances of their life - their current step of the ladder - in different ways. Some say "I hate this step- I want to be in a different one". You cannot hate your current situa-

tion because more you hate more attached you get with that situation. Unless and until you realize your problem and fix it, you will not get to move up. Even if you 'step-up' temporarily, without fixing your current step, you are bound to face similar challenges very soon. That is why some people complain saying "Why it is always happening to me?" The answer is because you haven't fixed your current step!

I will share a story with you. Nadun is a young professional working in the corporate sector. One day he was called into his boss's office. The boss told him that he likes Nadun's work and he sees Nadun having a bright future in the company. He further said although Nadun has enough experience, he

has to improve his language skills (English) and computer literacy to meet the requirements of a job with more responsibilities and rewards. Nadun felt a little offended. He was adamant to go ahead without addressing what his boss show as his shortcomings. After few weeks, Nadun asked his boss to transfer him to a different department (mail department) where English language and computer literacy was not required for survival. Next year, the company merged with an international company. The new boss had a chat with Nadun. He said he cannot afford to keep the whole team of mail department but prefers to keep Nadun because of his experience. He wanted Nadun to lead a new team which has both local and international staff. This was great career opportunity for Nadun but he felt hesitant to take the offer because of gaps in his language and computer skills. So Nadun decided to

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company to start his own business, yet again he didn't want to fix the problem. When I met Nadun last year, he was struggling to develop his own business, mainly due to lack of language and computer skills, and he was feeling depressed. This is what happens when you don't fix your

'step' and try to bypass it.

2. "I want someone else's ladder"

The second group of people says "I want someone else's ladder". This group thinks everyone else's life is better and easy than their own. They look at other people's houses, cars, relationships and success, and feel sorry for their own circumstances. Also, they often feel angry and jealous as to how easily success comes to other people. However, they rarely analyze what has gone wrong in their own lives and act to fix their own 'step'. This group gets so distracted with other people's 'steps' they lose their focus and often end up depressed and demotivated.

So the point is, before you come up with new goals and resolutions for the New Year - take a minute to "fix your current step". Whenever we are stuck or repeating challenges and issues have the courage to ask - "what haven't I fixed?"

Be critical and honest when you are reflecting on your situation and circumstances. Once you know what need to be "fixed" - concentrate on those areas before setting new goals.

There is no limit that number of goals you can achieve in your life. But make sure you go up, not side-ways, when faced with a challenge. Have courage to "fix and step-up". Eventually you will reach extraordinary heights that seemed impossible to reach when you first started.

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## Motivating top talent

Two recent reports offer guidance on motivating and developing talented employees in the current global economic downturn.

**Motivating And Retaining Top Talent**  
A report from OnPoint Consulting identifies strategies for motivating and retaining top talent in the current economic climate when the emphasis on bonus payments is no longer possible or appropriate. Previous research has found that earnings and benefits have a 2 per cent impact on job satisfaction and engagement compared to 70 per cent provided by job quality and workplace support.

**The report suggests the following survival strategies:**

- Create a sense of purpose - Engagement and retention improves when people understand how they connect to the "Big Picture" and how they make a difference.
- Provide meaningful work - Allowing people to do what they do best and make a significant contribution is key to engagement and retention.
- Solicit ideas - Involvement in decisions gives people a sense of control in uncertain times, shows them their opinions matter, and improves decision acceptance.
- Let people know where they stand - Setting tough but realistic goals is motivating even in a tough environment.
- Enhance trust and communication - Trust is built when leaders improve credibility by being candid, demonstrate reliability by ensuring their actions are consistent with business objectives and values, and are accessible.

**Rick Lepsinger, president of OnPoint Consulting commented:**

"Feeling connected to the people you work with also helps create a sense of purpose.... Providing opportunities to learn and grow is icing on the cake.... Clear goals are only part of the equation. People need regular feedback so they know when they are on track and recognition when they achieve key milestones....The more people feel you are focused on them, rather than on yourself, the more they trust you."

**Employee Goals and Talent Development**

A report from SumTotal® Systems Inc., a global provider of talent development solutions, argues that implementing effective, universally-accepted goal setting for employees, coupled with a system for managing and tracking these processes can enable HR managers to make a significant contribution to improved organizational performance.

Richard Oyen, director of HR and talent development said:

"With the current economic forecast, it is now more important than ever to make sure employees' goals reflect the



organization's overall goals to ensure everyone is working toward the same mission. By helping to set organizational alignment, HR departments have the ability to impact their company like never before and create significant productivity improvements."

**The report offers the following guidelines for the involvement of HR in employee goal setting:**

- Know the goals - HR should be involved when senior managers plan annual goals to be aware of underlying issues and challenges.
- Get buy-in - The executive team should support HR's efforts to align goals and help communicate the importance of the program.
- Cascade goals - Once goals are set at the top of the organization, they should work their way down to all employees.
- Ensure consistency - As goals are established further down the organization, HR can assist by creating standards and monitoring consistency.
- Hold everyone accountable - Managers should ensure goals are measurable with specific deadlines and then hold employees accountable.
- Reinforce through development - Ensure that employees have skills and tools to achieve established goals using development plans monitored by HR.
- Work the gaps - Managers can work with employees individually. HR should identify gaps in organizational provision and address issues proactively with the Learning team.
- Encourage year-long communication - Initial goals may be agreed but paid no further attention. Sending reminders to update goals is one way for HR to encourage a culture of frequent manager/employee communication.
- Monitor compliance - Managers should monitor progress and completion of employee goals HR should review overall process and report to executives and department heads.
- Measure twice, cut once - Goals should be a major component of a company's annual performance appraisal where employees are measured and held accountable.

## Positive attitude ...

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Multi National Companies that operate locally have an advantage in this case, any HR or business models they follow are monitored and approved by their parent companies overseas and conformance to such models is done with ease by the local wing. There is uniformity across the board and recruitment models can be adopted and applied systematically.

**Q : Is our Education system structured in a favourable manner that makes attractive interviewees out of students?**

A: One finds that generally schools at city level, creates a majority of students who are unafraid to communicate and express themselves more confidently comparatively to those coming from rural schools. But the school one attends is definitely not the only attribute that makes them communicable. The exposure one could gain by nature is quite significant that their lifestyle gives them access to experience as to how most of the organizations would operate and what level of expectations they may have from their employees. This in itself works in their favour to begin with. Further; the family background, level of upbringing, the exposure to different levels of social networks together with extra-curricular activities add an immense amount of confidence to how they carry themselves and contributes enormously when being interviewed so their personality shines out.

I remember growing up seeing

my senior school mates who were quite clear about what career path they wanted to choose and selected their Advanced Level subjects to compliment that career goal. This kind of role model culture is also important to ensure that children who remain clueless about why they study; through primary and early secondary education, to have someone accessible and relatable figures; to use as examples or rather role models when selecting their own career path. Schools could facilitate this aspect at less cost but with conscious effort which could lead to a positive outcome in the long run.

Also I believe a slightly wider combination of subjects for Advanced Level examinations; will also create broadly knowledgeable students in schools and thereby multi skilled individuals to the workforce. I am not proposing that any combination of subject is allowed but a rationale mix recommended by authorities will certainly be favourable.

**Q : What do you think has deterred unemployed graduates from potential job positions?**

A : Lack of communication skills and lapses in professional attitude are at the pike of graduate unemployment. Some of them are extremely qualified and blatantly intelligent but weak in Business Communication and we are compelled to give more emphasis on the same as it is an accepted norm and a definite requirement in the current context of the corporate world. This is one aspect we find as a main obstacle among the unem-



ployed graduates. They are confident in conversing in the local languages but when English becomes the language they are asked to communicate in, things gradually fall apart. Perhaps, the first point of solution to this will be to give them a sound English education but the lack of resources makes it very tough to offer them this facility. From a company perspective, we will attempt to match their skills as much as we can to our requirements and in some cases make the exception of recruiting them because all other requirements are met except communication skills, but this causes a skills gap like I mentioned before and we consequently have made great effort to bridge such gaps identified within feasible limits of the organisation where the individual develops personally whilst enabling productive contribution, leading to a positive outcome in the long term.

Unemployment can generally

arise through the lack of job opportunities. In the case of unemployed graduates, it happens also because many are not attracted to the job being offered. Professional attitude is imperative in any recruitment process but if we see it being a shortfall at graduate level, we are compelled not to offer positions as it causes many more complications within an HR framework. Attitude formation does not begin at adulthood, it is important that we all are exposed to positive attitude from a very young age so we end up being approachable and congenial cogs of the labour market.

However this drawback is common to third world countries so Sri Lanka is no exception. It is essential for me to reiterate on the fact that we do have some great skillful workforce who can compete at the highest level in the local as well as in the global context. Hence as HR professionals, the real challenge and the responsibility we are required to be obliged to is to facilitate the process of identification of the hidden skill sets of individuals throughout their service and to adopt the right type of HR systems and arrangements in the organisation to explore them through a continuous monitoring system to the robust recruitment process we practice. This is where the modern HR practices together with professional approach play a crucial role by arguably being the deciding factors behind the success of organisations today.

**Q: Employees are unaware of their rights and responsibilities**

**within an HRM structure. What do you think are the most effective methods of educating them?**

A: A right of an employee can be simply explained as a blessing from the employer to them and their responsibilities can be explained as their blessing towards the employer. Both takes equal importance in business and it is essential that receiving sees no compromise when delivering and vice versa.

Personally, leading by example does the trick for me. It is important that HR professionals practise what HRM preaches. Beginning from the most basic act of respecting your staff and listening to their concerns, they must set an example. This goes a long way and the positive effects of such practice cannot be quantified.

Inductions and Refresher training programmes are a very formal and popular method of this education as well. All staff should be given a comprehensive view of what is expected of them and how their rights will be honoured by the organizations. Refreshers programmes will ensure that staff members are reminded of the importance of their role and how much the company values them. Just a mere example is that a switchboard operator generally does not feel that they actually operate the hub of verbal communication for the organization. Their punctual transfer of calls is what ensures that all messages to and from the organization are relayed efficiently so business runs smooth-

ly, failure to remind them this; will cause monotony in their job and in turn issues around motivation etc.

**Q : Does failing main examinations mean that one has failed in life?**

A : Certainly not, but seldom will you find individuals who make it big in the corporate world based only on work experience because, academic or professional qualification and work experience must go hand in hand in this modern era. This is the only way to ensure that one remains a sought after candidate in the national work force or even within the global context if needed.

I strongly believe and adopt the principle that "Nothing is impossible in this world and if there is a will there is also a way". I feel that it could be applied to the above mentioned category of candidates too and also to all HR professionals in the fraternity. It is an individual's responsibility to reach for his/her highest potential with the positive and the right approach and as HR Professionals we are obliged and responsible to attract, recruit, induct, groom, motivate, develop and retain the talents in the market not only restricting ourselves to high potentials but also in transforming the average level employee to an exceptional level. It is important that HR practice of an organisation caters to all categories of employees. This is where the actual value addition comes from the HR professionals in organisations hence it will contribute at large both in the national and global context.