

When goals are not enough

As I look around everyone seems to have such busy lives. Even schoolchildren have an endless round of after-school clubs, 'playdates' and parties. Business people race from one meeting to the next, with no time in between to think, plan or delegate tasks.

Small wonder that everyone seems to be reading email on the go (or in meetings). What did we do before we had smartphones?

Today's problem is not about how to connect. Today's problem is when to disconnect. We're all overwhelmed with information, opportunities and requests. And many of us don't have a reliable way of managing all this input. Marketeers tell us that in today's world, most people scan an email, news item or reports initially to see if there's a reason they can legitimately ignore and delete it:

"I'm on holiday that week." "I've passed that project on to my colleague." "I don't use an iPad." "I'm not a frequent flyer." "I have to go to the dentist." "I looked at this three years ago and decided not to pursue it." "I'm self-employed." "I'm a manager." I'm too busy to think clearly?

While this kind of thinking can be helpful in scanning the 'spam' in your in-box, it can lead to overlooking or disregarding valuable opportunities.

That's why goals are important. If you're not clear about what you want to achieve, it's very hard to decide what's relevant and what isn't. It's hard to decide what to spend time on and what to avoid. It's even harder to decide whether or not you've had a good day!

So, if you've got clear goals for 2012 that's good. But is it enough to keep you focused and productive?

There is something else as well.

Maybe one of the greatest skills required in any job is being able to focus on what matters and not get distracted by everything else. But a relentless focus on your goals can make you blinkered to other relevant opportunities as well as to the irrelevant distractions.

The latest neurological research shows that people feel most alive and are most motivated when they are learning something new. So closing down our field of vision in relation to our goals is counter-productive to that. It's good to have focus, and it's even better to balance that focus with times when you step back, look around and ask yourself, 'what else?'

So as well as your goals for 2012, how about allocating some time, space and energy to pursue something new, to take up one of those unexpected opportunities and to stop retreating into 'I'm too busy' when you can't immediately see the benefit of doing something. You might be pleasantly surprised.

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