

Five steps to a fast start in 2012

In his coaching series for CAM practitioners dedicated to “The difference that makes the difference”, NLP Coach **Mark Shields**, Director of the Life Practice Group, explains his eleventh Practitioner Proficiency: how to get over that “Here we go again” feeling of doom as a New Year arrives.

Well here we are again, standing on the threshold of a new year. Just weeks to go before the beginning of 2012.

For a lot of small businesses the New Year represents the end of one business year and the beginning of another.

This can often be quite daunting for the practitioner who feels all the clocks have gone back to zero (metaphorically speaking, of course) and here they go again as the start of the year looms in front of them.

This thinking can breed insecurity, worries and concerns for the practitioner who often faces this challenge alone.

It doesn't have to be this way, so read on and learn some valuable tips to help yourself embrace the first few months of the New Year with structure, focus and confidence

The key is to act NOW and ensure you are thoroughly prepared for that 1st day of January – a day that represents the beginning of all of the wonderful opportunities, challenges and successes you will experience throughout the next 12 months.

Step 1: review 2011 goals and performance

Yes, do this now. Your first step is to review your 2011 goals and business performance using the GROW model. GROW stands for Goals, Reality, Options, Way Forward.

Review the goals you set – or hoped for – in 2011. Do an honest reality check: note the successes and also list the areas of your performance that didn't go so well. You can then build on your successes and learn from your failures and implement “Do differently” plans for 2012.

Be flexible, and don't be too harsh on yourself. The important thing is you are prepared to review your actions from the previous year, take what you have learned forward and implement your “do new” strategies in the year ahead.

Step 2: Implementing change for 2012

Achieving business success is one thing; sustaining business success is something



entirely different and more challenging.

To do this you need to be constantly piloting and implementing new ideas and strategies to ensure your practice not only continues to achieve the results you require, but also allows you to change to meet the ever-evolving needs of your clients and the market in which we operate as alternative practitioners.

Be prepared to take the knocks and rise to the challenges. Never give up on your vision and mission for your practice.

Step 3: The short-term business plan

In every successful business it is common to see Short, Medium and Long term business plans. The Short term plan is normally for the following 12 months, while the Medium term plan is for two years and the long term plan for five years. This can change from practice to practice.

In reality it's uncommon in our business to find practitioners with all three in place, but evidence suggests that all successful practitioners at least have a rolling 12-month reviewable action plan, running between the January and December of each year – and often reviewed monthly.

It is also best practice to track your business performance year on year so you can identify trends and areas of focus.

Step 4: Set Your New Year business goals and actions

When setting your New Year goals and actions you should always set no more than five goals at a time and adopt the KISS principle: “Keep It Simple, Stupid”. The last thing you want is a set of new goals that you have no chance of achieving because they are over-complicated

and include strategies outside your direct control.

I often find that working to more than five business goals at a time dilutes the energy and focus needed to deliver on the actions and can lead to a lack of focus and, often, failure.

Ensure your goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable and Realistic, and that they have Timescales. It almost goes without saying that you need to check in with yourself that you are fully committed to implementing the actions it will take to achieve these goals.

Step 5: Ensure a Fast Start to 2012

An experienced practitioner normally recognises and understands the buoyant times coming in the year ahead. I call this business seasonalisation.

We know a crucial time for us all is January, as 76% of people start the year with good intentions – aka New Year Resolutions – which effectively means that throughout January 76% of the UK population is susceptible to personal change. Let's make sure we are ready for them.

We also know that during school holiday periods such as Easter and the summer holidays business can be very quiet, so it is of vital importance we don't miss the opportunities seasonal times can present. Many successful practices achieve 40% of their client and income target during the first quarter of any year, getting ahead so that the potential Easter school holiday slump, looming just weeks away, doesn't hit so hard.

In my experience, the first three months of any year can be the most lucrative, so it has to be a time when our activity is at its highest. This is the time we need to be proactive and working to attract as many clients as possible during this period. ☞



About the author

Mark Shields, life coach, author, Media expert and motivational speaker, is managing director of Life Practice UK, specialists in Personal and Business Coaching.

Contact: 01462 451473, info@lifepractice.co.uk, www.lifepractice.co.uk