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New Year's Resolutions

Making New Year's resolutions should not be limited to just those for our personal life; we should include our professional life as well – after all our professional life does take a great deal of our time.

The end of the year is a good time to stop and take a look at the events of the current year and evaluate what went on and plan for the upcoming year. This is true whether you are a business owner or an employee.

Below are just some questions to ask yourself and they may trigger others.

- What happened this year that you felt took you off guard or left you feeling overwhelmed and unprepared?
- What tasks are the most time consuming?
- Do you find yourself crabby and frustrated?
- Are you presenting a professional image?
- Do you feel that you were spending more time than usual putting out fires?
- Did you feel that you were getting/providing good job costing reports?
- Are you getting the information you need in a timely fashion?
- Are you happy with the people you work with?

From a business owner's perspective now would be a good time to take a look at overall business operations and look for ways to improve them in the upcoming year. You will need to involve every key employee in this process in order to gather their input and put together a plan that will work.

As an employee of a company this task is perhaps a little harder because you do not ultimately make the decisions on a day-to-day basis and you may feel that your opinion is not important. However, remember this – as an employee you do represent the company to others that you deal with.

The answers may be simple. You may need new software and computers; hire additional employees; provide training to existing employees, or simply improve communication and office procedures.

What Can Be Done?

Well, this really isn't so simple to determine, but here are a few suggestions to get you started.

If you are an Employer

- Schedule a staff meeting, making it mandatory that all key employees attend.
- Insist that all key employees present you with a list of things that they feel need improving – this list must be presented to you 1 week before the meeting.
- You will review the individual lists and compile them into one big list which you will break down into categories and priorities - without disclosing who said what.

- Distribute this list a day or two before the staff meeting, giving everyone an opportunity to review it.
- Be open to criticism, because some of these issues may involve staff's dealings with you.

If you are an employee

- Be honest when you make your list.
- Prioritize your issues.
- Be specific – a vague “I’m not getting the information” will not be helpful, whereas a specific “I’m not getting X when I need it”. X could be timecards, new hire information, gas receipts, materials receipts, bill approval or whatever.
- Be open to criticism, because when the staff meeting happens some of these issues may involve you.

Don't be discouraged if your first staff meeting is difficult – if this is something “new” to your employees everyone may be feeling a little uncomfortable.

Try to create a relaxed environment and get everyone involved. Ask questions and encourage everyone to answer.

Hopefully, your staff meeting will be productive and everyone concerned will walk away with something positive and a feeling of accomplishment – as well as a list of things that they need to do.

Let's assume that your staff meeting was productive – what next? We've provided a basic list of resources that you may find helpful in solving some of the standard problems that could be causing problems in your business:

New Computers:

If everyone agrees that you need new computers look to your local computer store and not a big box store to have one custom built for you. Often times if you already own your software, this is a good way to go. Local computer stores may also allow you to pick and choose what version of Windows you would like installed – XP vs Vista. Before buying new Vista computers make sure that existing software you own will run on Vista.

New Software:

Maybe it's time to bite the bullet and do that upgrade to the newest version of QuickBooks (usually once every 3 years is sufficient).

QuickBooks Integrated Applications:

QuickBooks Add-On or Integrated Applications can be found on the QuickBooks Solutions Marketplace - <http://marketplace.intuit.com/>

Research the Solutions Marketplace for solutions to automate your company's most time consuming tasks – estimating, scheduling, document management, etc. Check out products and request trials so that you can make a complete evaluation.

Training:

Whether it's you or your staff that needs training, make the investment of *both* time and/or money – it will pay off in the end. The internet is full of wonderful free training resources and below is a list of our favorites:

- Small Business Administration
<http://www.sba.gov/services/training/onlinecourses/index.html> - offers free on-line

courses for Starting a Business, Business Planning, Business Management, Financing & Accounting, Marketing & Advertising, Government Contracting, Risk Management & Cyber Security, E-Commerce, International Trade, Federal Tax Training, and Small Business Retirement.

- JumpUp <http://jumpup.intuit.com/> - started by Intuit, helps the new business get up and running quickly.
- Accounting Coach <http://www.accountingcoach.com/> covers everything from Accounting Basics to Stockholders' Equity.
- QuickBooks On-line Community <http://www.quickbooksgroup.com/webx/?14> lots of great info on QuickBooks including user forums that are monitored by Intuit employees.
- Construction Magazines <http://www.freeconstructionmagazines.com/index.aspx>
- Our Own QuickBooks for Contractors Resources, available in our Technical Support Area <http://www.sunburstsoftwaresolutions.com/support/> here you can find information on Certified Payroll, AIA Billing, Advanced QuickBooks training, Contractor specific articles, and a free Construction Bookkeepers Test.
- Certified QuickBooks User Program http://quickbooks.intuit.com/product/training/certified_user_program.jhtml?img=239&kbid=4271&sub=&priorityCode=3969702399 while this program does not offer construction specific training it does provide training on the overall use of QuickBooks.

File Sharing/Document Management

- FolderShare <https://www.foldershare.com/> although still in beta this is a great tool for document management/file sharing that does not require emailing documents back and forth.

Plan regular staff meetings, discuss results and findings and make group decisions. Work together and make a commitment to yourself and each other!

Happy New Year from Sunburst Software Solutions, Inc.



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