

## **Starting Right**

It's human nature. The new year has arrived, the economy appears to be strengthening, so action seems both right and fitting. Besides, after the slower pace of the Holidays, most of us are rested and ready to go. So, what do we do? We pick up right where we left off. We go back to what we have always been doing in order to go forward. And, that's not starting right; it's starting wrong.

The most important first step in any new year is to stop. Call a halt to all recruiting, even if it's just for a day. Warn the hiring managers so they don't go into withdrawal. Then, assemble the team, turn off the computers, put the cell phones on mute and sit still. Spend the next eight hours thinking about what the team is doing and how it's doing it.

This period of reflection should be carefully defined and structured. Its purpose is not to take a break from the daily grind, but instead, to use the absence of those requirements and pressures to accomplish very specific goals. While those objectives are idiosyncratic to each recruiting team, they should, as a minimum, include:

- an honest assessment of the team's performance over the past year – what has it done well and where has it fallen short;
- a candid analysis of the team's strengths and weaknesses – where do individual members excel and what additional development do they need;
- a no-holds-barred exploration of potential initiatives for improving the team's performance – what specific steps can the team take to upgrade its yield and which of those are most important for 2011; and
- a reinvigoration of the lines of communication among the team – what can be learned from its collective wisdom and how can that knowledge be applied to the team's benefit.

## **Why at the Start of the Year?**

Now, some will say that the time for such analysis and discussion is before the year ends. Budgets for the upcoming year are often set during the fall, so this period of reflection will do the most good if it occurs then. That way, the resulting insights can be used to shape decisions about investments and staffing.

That view, however, while logical is often unrealistic. The fall is typically a period of hectic

recruiting activity. Tapping the views of the team to set budgetary and staffing priorities may make great sense, but doing so has a lower priority than the needs of hiring managers. Their impatience all but guarantees that reflection, like the leaves, will fall by the wayside.

Moreover, doing a team's reflection at the start of the year does have real advantages:

- First, the unknowns have been removed. Budgetary and staffing decisions have been made, so there's no guesswork about the resources available to implement plans.
- Second, the entire team is available. Brainstorming sessions that occur in the summer, for example, are often degraded by the absence of at least some of the recruiters on staff.
- And third, there's an energy in the room. A new calendar year represents a blank slate, a new beginning and a fresh start on even the most intractable of challenges.

Will starting the new year by first stopping solve a recruiting team's every problem? Of course not. Will it preclude crises from erupting or strains from emerging during the year? Absolutely not. What the period of reflection will do, however, is reenergize the group's sense of teamwork.

During the year, as individual team members meet their individual assignments, the definition of teamwork often devolves into teamWORK. The focus is on getting the job done. Stopping to reflect, in contrast, provides a forum in which that definition can be reset for each and every member of the team. They can be reminded that the best way to realize their full power and promise is through TEAMwork. It is to integrate their individual capabilities and efforts into a unified vision that everyone can – and likely will – call their own.

Thanks for reading,

Peter

Visit me at [Weddles.com](http://Weddles.com)

Peter Weddle is the author of over two dozen employment-related books, including the recently released blockbuster *The Career Activist Republic* and *Work Strong, Your Personal Career Fitness System*, one of the most innovative career success books in print. Both are available at [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com).

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