

Make this your best work year yet with new habits and a new perspective



If there is one invaluable lesson the past year taught us personally and professionally, it's that the willingness to adapt is key to surviving and thriving. While that sounds great, in theory, it can be challenging to identify what that really means. Fortunately, we just have to look to experts on how a new perspective and new habits can make all the difference.

A new perspective may be all you need

As you and your team form your action plans for the new year, use these expert tips from best-selling author, speaker, and organizational consultant Simon Sinek. Embrace the fact that you can and will come out of the hard times last year presented.

1. Remember that uncertainty and change aren't bad

In his book *The Infinite Game* Sinek says finite-minded leaders like control and rules and want to avoid surprises at all costs. They view their business with a sense of an "end." That could include achieving specific quarterly goals or winning a specific client.

Infinite-minded leaders, on the other hand, welcome uncertainty and believe that it opens up new opportunities. They view their business as a constant evolution, not a means to an end.

The fact is, business may never return to the “normal” most of us remember before the pandemic. Yet, the world has gone through plenty of past changes leaving companies that refused to adapt out of business. From the advent of the Internet to mobile phones to streaming media services, there have been occasions in history where some industries died entirely and new ones were born. The businesses that were willing to pivot did just fine. Those who refused to adapt went out of business.

In the same vein, people must be equally flexible in their roles and responsibilities, just like a company. New skill sets that were not once part of an employee’s role may become necessary. New roles may become in demand in your organization, where there was once little opportunity.

Work with your team members to take stock of the skills employees need to develop or learn for the first time in order to remain valuable contributors. Then, discuss where employees may need to shift their focus to accommodate changing company priorities.

2. Examine how different your team or company might look if you could start from scratch

As you and your employees determine where to invest your energy and focus in 2021, look to other companies and leaders you admire for inspiration.

Assess what you are currently doing individually and as a team. What’s working? What should be stopped? What could be improved upon? Encourage employees to apply questions like “if we could solve ‘problem X’ knowing nothing, what would we do?” to every project.

When you and your team reimagine what kind of value you offer to the people who ultimately buy your product — irrespective of what you used to do or do now — you can identify ways to improve and do meaningful work.

3. Be of service to others

Sinek says the best leaders always believe that they’re in service to something bigger than themselves. This includes the company’s larger mission and the contribution you make to your employee’s career development, workplace engagement, and satisfaction.

Commit to consistently communicating with your employees to explore how you can help them continue to develop and learn each day. Eagerly welcome their ideas for how to become stronger contributors.

4. Stop seeing competitors

Stop seeing competitors as a threat and start seeing worthy rivals, both in and outside of your company. Sinek says you’ll see unexpected ways you can up your game.

The rival should be a person or company that you respect, want to learn from, and know is good at what they do. Don’t see rivals as people or businesses to beat, or with corresponding feelings of anger, frustration, or defeat. Instead, see them as a revelation of opportunities for growth.

Build better habits

Whether you’ve kicked off the new year with a set of small resolutions, are taking it easy, or trying to reach one big goal by year-end, focusing on your habits can transform how you make decisions and spend your time, energy, and attention.

Use these simple tips to take note of which habits you want to form and break for a more successful professional and personal year.



1. Notice what you currently do out of habit

Wendy Wood, psychologist and author of *Good Habits, Bad Habits: The Science of Making Positive Changes that Stick*, explains that a habit is a behavior that we learn from doing many times, experience some sense of reward for, and in turn, do over and over.

In fact, her research indicates that 43% of what people do every day is repeated in the same context, automatically and mindlessly, and usually while they are thinking about something else.

To know how much of your life is dictated by habit, commit to tracking what you do in a day, for at least five days. From the time you wake to the moment you go to bed, write down what you do, how much time it takes, and where you do the behavior. In all likelihood, you'll see that more of your life is on autopilot than you realize and that you lose a lot of your day to unproductive habits.

When you reclaim all the lost minutes (which behavioral researchers call "time confetti") you spend checking social media and email, snacking, and being otherwise distracted, you can start to break habits that stand in the way of how you want to spend your time. You can reclaim control of your day.

2. Give yourself space to form good habits

Wood's research revealed that people whose days are spent surrounded by others (especially kids) have fewer habits overall, because their day involves more interruption.

To counteract this, carve out spaces of time you know you can consistently control to form a new habit. Perhaps you have time in the early morning hours before co-workers start emailing and calling. Alternatively, consider taking time during the lunch hour to block your calendar, log off your email, and devote your full attention to a task.

3. Use a different environment as an advantage

When you work in the same shared space as co-workers or live in the same house with a partner, spouse, or

children for many months or years, you fall into habitual roles (often without realizing it).

While the changes to work, personal, and family routines most people experienced in 2020 disrupted and stressed daily routines, the new context and environment actually make it easier to ditch habits that no longer serve you. This frees you up to form the new ones you want to make stick.

Wood explains this is because habits tend to be triggered by “habit cues,” like checking your email on your phone as soon as you sit down at a conference room table, or munching on a cookie each afternoon when you walk past the office breakroom, that trigger automatic behavior.

When that cue is gone, the programmed pattern that is your habit is much less stable.

4. Be persistent

Habits are formed based on the repetition of immediate internal or external rewards following a behavior.

If you’ve set a goal to read one new management book a month this year, for example, read from 6 a.m. to 6:45 a.m. every workday. Follow it up with a reward (like a morning cup of coffee or breakfast) immediately after.

Want to reclaim the time you lose checking notifications on your phone in the middle of the workday? Delete the notifications, and mark your daily progress on a calendar for two to three months — the amount of time Wood says it takes to form even simple habits.

Additional Resource: Want more guidance on setting the right goals for success? Check out [our guide to 2021 goal setting](#).