

This Simple Trick Can Boost Your Team's Effectiveness by 400%

Boost your team's effectiveness by 400 percent by using the power of the pause.



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In my 20 years of working in businesses, I have witnessed many distinct ways to run an annual goal setting and planning process. Personally, I have wavered wildly with my approach—from massively over-engineering the process to completely letting go, setting no boundaries.

While there's little doubt about how critical [effective goal setting](#) and planning is, there are many differing opinions about the most effective way to manage this process.

In the last year, we've finally unearthed the right balance to ensure [strong goal setting](#) and self-assessment strategies. We did this by using a very simple—but powerful—model for planning that is already wildly popular as a [personal productivity technique](#), boasting an impressive productivity increase of 400 percent.

In society, in general, people are overstimulated and desperately craving the ability to turn off the constant noise. In the same way that executives are now finding ways to meditate or unplug during their day, you need to find a way to build that into your quarterly planning process.

So, how, precisely, do you build in this time to pause, assess, and reboot? I want to share our process and why it works so well for us, so that it may help your team's planning process.

First, break the year into four 13-week periods.

We split the year into four periods and have 12-week sprints of goal achievement, with a one-week break in between each sprint to allow for reflection, cleanup, and goal setting for the following quarter. (Our process may sound familiar because it's modeled after [The 12 Week Year](#).)

After a big achievement and focused time at work, people need time to reflect before they can keep going. Each 13th week is probably the most important week of the year.

Why? Because that's when the thinking is done. It's a built-in break.

Use the 13th week of each quarter to rest and reboot.

The 13th week itself is where our process differs—it's the most critical time of the year:

- On the Friday before the 13th week, everyone reviews their standard operating procedures to ensure they are up to date—creating a structure and accountability for starting each planning process afresh.
- On the Monday of the 13th week, each person does their self-assessment, taking the previous quarter's goals and mapping out both successes and targets that weren't achieved. There's also a section to reflect on performance relative to company values.
- On Wednesday, everyone completes their goal-setting document using SMART goals methodology: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound.
- Each manager has two performance conversations with their direct report: one about the self-assessment document and one talking through goals. Establishing a set time to have a discussion creates clarity on overall themes in employee performance, ambitions, and career goals, which often doesn't happen unless it's calendarized.

Why does this approach work so well for us?

- It guarantees time for reflection, not overlapping with action and completion of goals. The best type of reflection often happens away from a computer. My personal technique: I write my business goal on a notecard, put it in my pocket, and take a walk. It works wonders in helping me to clear my mind.
- It creates clear expectations regarding who should achieve what and by when, preventing micromanaging.
- For teams that operate cross-functionally, it enables upfront collaboration and syncing of priorities.

There are some drawbacks to our process: It forces decision making and makes it hard to shift within that 12-week time period (hell hath no fury like a team member who's just finished goal setting and is then asked to "pivot" to a new project...). It's also confusing for new starters (this isn't your usual goal setting process!). But, on balance, it's been transformative for us.

As a business leader of a remote team, sometimes I feel like I'm a squirrel trying desperately to crack a nut that I can't get open. But when I do, it's sheer joy!

That's how this planning process has been for our team. After years of struggling with the balance between reflection and action, between rigidity and flexibility, between bureaucracy and free-form thinking, we finally have a process that sets up the team—and the business—for success.

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