

Make THANKS a part of this Thanksgiving, and you'll find greater success in your career

POPCORN IS MY CULINARY SPECIALTY. Give me a popcorn bag, a microwave, some salt, a little Tabasco, and three minutes, and I'll produce a low-fat, low-calorie snack that I chomp down for lunch right at my desk.

Given my remedial cooking skills, it's no surprise that come Thanksgiving my wife Tess banishes me from the kitchen while she fires up our double oven to prepare two turkeys with all the trimmings for our extended family.

Exiled to the living room, I find time between watching football games and babysitting my grandchildren to reflect on the past year.

Perhaps it's the haze induced by too many calories, but to me Thanksgiving is an ideal moment to consider where I've been, where I am, and where I'm going in my business career.

Taking stock of how your dreams correspond to reality isn't self-indulgent. On the contrary, a study in the *Harvard Business Review* found that the best indicator of professional success was when a job's demands matched a person's desires and aptitudes.

Bob Dylan grasped this concept long ago when he sang "a man is a success if he gets up in the morning and gets to bed at night, and in between he does what he wants to do."

This holiday, let me encourage you to apply my acronym THANKS and take a few moments for self-evaluation. As Benjamin Franklin (who suggested the turkey for our national bird) declared, we should "observe all men; thy self most."

T: Turn inward.

Turning inward is the first step. In this column, you are the specimen under the microscope. External change is hard enough; internal transformation is even more difficult.

Start with a compass reading: What is your personal/business mission? What are your fundamental values? Does your current direction keep you on course with these two essentials? Synchronicity is essential if you want to move beyond success to significance.

Then gauge the speedometer: What are your professional goals? Have you achieved any this past year? If not, what attitude and behavioral changes are necessary to ensure future success?

Goals are dreams with deadlines. As



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leadership experts Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus discovered, what distinguishes successful people is the capacity to develop and improve themselves by setting and meeting goals.

H: Honesty is essential.

My Aunt Mae may claim you look darling in rose-colored glasses, but this is the worst time to don them. Why? Honesty is essential to self-appraisal.

John Wooden, former UCLA basketball coach and one of my all-time sports heroes, turned 93 last month. In his biography, Wooden emphasized two rules. The first was "Never lie. Never cheat. Never steal."

If you wouldn't be dishonest with others, then don't fudge the truth to yourself. Admit it if you're unhappy with your professional position, direction, and/or performance. Ignoring an elephant-sized problem won't shrink it magically to a manageable size.

A: Accept the present, but prepare for the future.

Accepting the present brings me to Wooden's second rule: "Don't whine. Don't complain. Don't make excuses."

If your boss is crazy, your hours insane, and your job description impossible, so be it. Perform the best you can, and simultaneously prepare for the future.

Envision your ideal position five years down the road. Then create a career map to arrive at that destination, whether by improving your skills, taking classes or widening your network.

As mid-1800s British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli said, "The secret of success in life is for a man to be ready for his time when it comes." To lead tomorrow, learn today.

N: "No" is unacceptable.

By this point, you have clarified your

dreams, outlined your goals, and identified your ideal destination. What remains is setting your mind on victory. You must believe that "no" is unacceptable, that failure is not an option.

This mindset calls for a dose of Winston Churchill's table-thumping encouragement. Consider Churchill's first speech after becoming prime minister in 1940: "What is our aim? I answer in one word: victory — victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival."

Hopefully none of us face annihilation, but the lesson is clear: To realize your dreams and attain your goals, you must figure out what success entails, then go after that with passion and every resource at your disposal.

K: Know your pitfalls.

Know your pitfalls before you embark on your journey. Be they impatience, a quick temper, or micromanagement, you must confront your weaknesses in order to rise to the next professional level.

Gilbert Arland illustrates this concept through archery. He writes, "When an archer misses the mark, he turns and looks for the fault within himself. Failure to hit the bull's eye is never the fault of the target. To improve your aim, improve yourself."

S: Set your plan in motion.

Inertia is your greatest enemy. Sitting still, complaining about your life is the easy way out, while shoving off on the voyage to success demands energy and perseverance.

I encourage you to abandon procrastination and cast off for success. This Thanksgiving when you say thanks, know that you are that much closer to reaching your dreams, goals, and destination.

In the meantime, I've got to decide what fruit to add to my popcorn-based lunch if I want to meet my new 5 a Day consumption objectives for the coming year.

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