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DESIGN YOUR BEST YEAR EVER

Lessons especially important for highly sensitive people

LINDA WHITE

It's common to make career resolutions at the start of a new year but what if you decided instead to design your best year ever?

"I'm calling it a 'reflection rendezvous,'" says executive coach and speaker Clare Kumar of Toronto. "We need the patience to explore what's important to us on a recurring basis because life is always changing, and our capacity and capabilities are always changing."

Many people are familiar with the analogy of big rocks, pebbles and sand when setting priorities. Place the big rocks – which symbolize the things that are most important to you – in the jar first, then the pebbles, which represent things of medium importance, followed by the sand, which represents less important things.

The lesson: If you don't put the big rocks in first, they won't fit in later. Need help identifying your big rocks? Kumar recommends using a lifetime management model that looks at six important areas of life:

- **Purpose:** Contributions through work or volunteering
- **Health:** Physical, mental and spiritual wellness
- **Lifestyle:** The manner and environment in which you live
- **Relationships:** Your engagement with others
- **Development:** Personal growth and learning
- **Play:** Activities for amusement and delight

"Have we even thought about how each of these things is showing up in our lives? Do we have intention statements of what success looks like for each of those things?" Kumar asks. "When we know what we're aiming for to feel satisfied with our life, we can set intentions or 'punctuation points' for the next 12 months."

Clare Kumar is a highly sensitive executive coach.

'HAPPY PEOPLE ARE PRODUCTIVE'

She recommends assigning a colour to each of the six areas. As you mark activities in your calendar, make sure you have a good balance of colours.

"Happy people are productive and productive people are happy so if we want to invite this reciprocity of effort and fulfillment, we need to invite the ideal conditions and we have to support the integration of life into work," Kumar says.

Consider, for example, professionals who've lost the transition time between work and home since they began working remotely. "A lot of people don't know how to end their workday, so it extends into the evening," she says. "They're receiving and responding to emails and end up pushing back their ideal sleep time to do some 'revenge bedtime rolling' and then start again the next day depleted."

Getting really clear about what you want in your personal life will make it much easier to define an end to your workday and to then prioritize things that might include a new or neglected hobby, family time and a recommitment to movement and exercise.

If you're among the professionals who has already or will soon be returning to the office at least part of the time, you might be anxious about how you'll balance those six areas of your life. Even if your boss reminds you that you managed prior to the pandemic, you may not be the same person and may better appreciate that there's more to a fulfilling life than to work the way you once did.

Kumar invites leaders to honour their employees' new realities. While she believes in setting core work hours and deciding when and where you want employees to be available and to collaborate, she also encourages leaders to ask their employees what they need to succeed.

HIGHLY SENSITIVE PEOPLE

Of course, that may look different from one employee to the next, especially among highly sensitive persons (HSPs). The HSP trait, known clinically as 'sensory processing sensitivity,' is present in about 20 per cent of the population. It's distinct from sensory processing disorder, which includes difficulties organizing and responding to information that arrives through the senses.

If you're an HSP, you must understand how the trait impacts you. Do you tune out when someone speaks too fast, for instance? You must learn how to control what you can control and to advocate for yourself. If you're instructed to return to an open-concept office, for instance, advocate for the flexibility you need to be successful in what you're being asked to contribute.

While HSPs make exceptionally good employees who earn high performance reviews, they'll be among the first to burn out if conditions aren't kind, Kumar reports. The flexibility to take quiet time and be in a space where to centre, rest and recover can be helpful.

"Flexibility is inclusivity," she says. "If we're in a leadership position, we need to create an environment that meets the needs of a broader diversity of people and provide options."

Are you a highly sensitive person?

Qualities of a highly sensitive person (HSP) include the following:

- **Depth of processing. You spend more time dealing with new information and thinking about it more deeply, which can be exhausting. You tend to overthink.**
- **Overstimulation. You can be extremely sensitive to high-stimulation environments, such as crowds, busy roads and noisy restaurants, as well as rough fabrics.**
- **Empathy and emotional reactivity. You have greater reactions to both positive and negative experiences. Your brain is noticeably more responsive to positive stimuli.**
- **Sensitivity to subtle stimuli. You pay attention to everything. Couple that with your empathy and you'll often look out for others.**

Source: clarekumar.com

HIRING TRENDS

LINDA WHITE

Remote work is here to stay, according to the Hiring and Workplace Trends Report for 2023, produced jointly by Indeed and Glassdoor.

In September, 11.2 per cent of Canadian job postings on Indeed mentioned remote work – almost four times higher than the pre-pandemic share. Meanwhile, 4.6 per cent of Canadian job searches explicitly included remote-related terms. That's up from 0.6 per cent three years earlier.

Canada's population is growing faster than most of its peers thanks to elevated immigration rates, but because the share of population over age 65 is projected to rise similarly to others, the tight labour market will continue.

Higher pay is the most common reason already-employed jobseekers are looking for new work, but an Indeed Job Search Survey found 20 per cent also cite better benefits as a motivation for searching. Glassdoor research found job seekers satisfied with their current positions are less likely to apply for a new job elsewhere.

Finally, Canadian employers are offering more diversity, equity and inclusion program (DEI) benefits, such as diversity training and mentoring programs. Through the first three quarters of 2022, 48 per cent of employer benefit reviews on Glassdoor mentioned DEI benefits, up from 32 per cent in 2018.

Women of Steel

The Canadian Welding Bureau Welding Foundation (cwbweldingfoundation.org) is launching the Women of Steel: Forging Forward Program in a bid to increase the number of women in welding and joining, fabrication and other skilled trades.

The program will offer such wraparound supports as childcare, transportation, cultural competencies, employment preparation and counselling sessions. The project is funded by the federal government and will be offered at many locations through August.