As routine and predictable as Santa's yearly appearance at the mall, setting goals for the New Year is almost a holiday tradition in its own right. If you're like most managers, you've already been working on some objectives for the future. And if you're really like most managers (and every other person in the world), most of your goals will be forgotten by March.

Like a well-intentioned dieter who snacks on too many holiday treats, it's easy to forget, neglect, or simply fail to meet goals. Taking stock of the old year and mapping out plans for a new one is an important step, but it's only the first one. Treat your goal-setting sessions as more than a task to mark off a to-do list, and you'll get a lot more out of them.

"At the end of the year, we set goals and regard them as our business plan for the next year," says Stanley Rothenberg, cmca, ams, pcam, executive vice president of C&R Realty & Management Company, in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey. "We go over special projects and pay attention to details that normally get put aside, like the things you never have time to get to when you're out doing a walk-through. We put them in a plan and consider everything--funds, insurance, time, manpower--and evaluate what we can accomplish."

Most leaders have an idea of what they hope their organization will look like in the future. Successful leadership requires a commitment to basic goal-setting principles.

**Mission Statement**

The heart of any organization lies in its mission statement. What is the mission of your organization--why do you exist? The statement should be simple and to the point. Lengthy, complex statements are confusing and uninspiring. Consider Disney's mission: "To make people happy."

A mission statement should be easy to understand, easy to explain, and reflect the company's philosophy. In essence, it captures the purpose behind everything managers and employees do--from the routine (like staff meetings), to the details (like on-site inspections), to the big-picture projects (like roofing replacements).

**Setting Goals**

Employees look to leaders to help define a vision for an organization, but reaching goals is always a team effort. Setting goals should be a team effort as well. Input from diverse areas helps uncover problems at all levels. Often employees have the best perspective on things that need changing. If everyone is involved in the process of setting goals, they'll have more of a stake in reaching them.
Kathryn C. Danella, cmca, pcam, general manager of Boca Pointe Community Association, in Boca Raton, Florida, finds that involving board members becomes a tool to keep focused. "A lot of times," Danella says, "I'll hear myself saying, 'Let me remind you about x, y, z--this was a plan we made together,' or, 'Don't lose sight of what we said three months ago.' My job is to provide that focus, to let them go forward with some things but not let them lose sight of their basic responsibilities."

Reaching Goals

Goals must be measurable; they must answer the questions of how much, by when, and with how many? Define your goals clearly. Often such goals as "improve the newsletter," or "offer more education opportunities," are too vague. Be specific.

Put your goals in writing, and set a timeline for achievement. "We put together a 12-month calendar based on the goals we set," Rothenberg says. "The idea is to keep the board focused. We don't want to write goals and put them away, we want to write them and keep bringing them up. The project calendar helps keep goals in their face."

Stick to your goals with conviction, but be flexible. Re-evaluate your goals periodically. "We do have a certain skeleton that senior management has worked on to direct us in a certain way," says Janice Barber, CMCA, PCAM, vice president of Executive Property Management, in North Brunswick, New Jersey, "but often it will go in a totally different way. Sept. 11 is perfect example. We've had board members who were killed in this tragedy, a number of residents had children involved, people who are now unemployed. Unforeseen things will happen, and when they do, you've got to readjust."

Goals are only as good as your commitment. It's important to shoot for the moon--selectively. "We try to keep it simple," Barber says. "We don't get involved in impossible projects. We brainstorm ideas, but we whittle the list down to five main goals. If we accomplish those, we can always go back and tackle others. But to start, we keep it to a manageable number to stay in a positive mode."

Jill McCrory is "ringleader" and Steve Swafford is "balance warrior" of Leadership Outfitters Inc., in Arlington, Virginia. They will be presenters at CAI's 51st National Conference & Exposition, in Palm Springs, California, in May.

STAYING ON COURSE

- Engage others at all levels in goal-setting efforts. Ask for ideas about how things should look in the future.
- Identify what has to happen or be changed in order to make goals a reality.
- Be clear and specific when writing goals. Objectives should be measurable and based on a shared understanding of what success means.
- Incorporate individual goals into the organizational goal-setting process.
- Continually review and celebrate successes on the way to achieving your vision.