

The 12 Week Year Summary

By Brian Moran

What if you could achieve your annual goals in just 12 weeks? The fact is that yearly planning is so "last year."

The 12 Week Year will revolutionize your productivity. This is the ultimate how-to manual, for individuals and organizations seeking to improve their execution effectiveness.

For most of us, when it comes to planning, it's all about the annual cycle. However, as we know, a lot can happen in a year, which is why so many goals and plans fall off the table. Having an accurate schedule and staying motivated for 365 days is nearly impossible. This book offers an alternative approach where we divide the year up into three months, or 12 weeks. In so doing, we'll increase productivity and produce tangible and meaningful results.

Brian Moran and Michael Lennington have a background in entrepreneurship and consulting. As popular coaches, both are passionate about growing businesses and individuals. They walk us through the proven step-by-step system for achieving more in 12 weeks than others do in 12 months.

How effective do you think traditional annual goal setting is? The truth is that for eight out of ten people, it's ineffective. On the other hand, *The 12 Week Year* creates focus and clarity on what matters most, alongside the need to cultivate a sense of urgency. So, if you feel you could be doing more in less time, or you're struggling to put your great ideas into

practice, or as a business leader you want to boost productivity, then get ready to turn your idea of a year on its head, and speed up your journey to success.

This Briefer summary looks at why 12-week cycles of goal setting, along with work sprints, trump traditional annual goal-setting methods. We'll then look at how to jumpstart our 12 week year.

It's Not What You Know; It's What You Implement That Counts

'You can't build a reputation on what you're going to do.' Henry Ford.

You've probably heard people say that "knowledge is power," but that's not entirely accurate. Knowledge without action is just a bunch of ideas. And change doesn't come from ideation alone.

Do you know how many Americans are either overweight or obese? It might surprise you; it's a whopping 65%. Why is this? Is it because they don't have the knowledge needed to live a healthy lifestyle?

On the contrary, there certainly isn't a lack of information. There are about 46,000 books on healthy eating and diet. Most people know how to eat better and exercise more. The problem isn't lack of knowledge; it's lack of action.

Power comes from what one does with knowledge, and ideas are only powerful if acted upon. The key to reaching our goals and creative potential lies in *consistent* execution. And, the secret to solid execution is

to shift our thinking from annualization to periodization.

From Complacency to Consistency

We set ourselves up for complacency when we set annual goals, whereas applying the 12-week year method helps us to be more consistent.

"Periodization" is the core concept where we change our time frame, so that every week counts. The first step is to throw out the annual plan and break each year into four 12-week periods.

How are your New Year's resolutions going right now?

In our personal and professional lives, we tend to set goals based on an annual attack plan. We set New Year's resolutions in January to reach some desired change by the end of the year. We do the same in business. Organizations set annual goals and do yearly progress reviews. But annual thinking hinders progress.

Annual thinking creates a perspective on our workflow that we have all the time in the world to meet our yearly goals. This breeds complacency because we believe that we have plenty of time, so we never really get started. Annual goals can feel big and overwhelming, so we get caught up in putting off the work because it feels daunting. This feeling is often coupled with the delusion that we think we've got plenty of time.

Research shows that most businesses experience 40% of total productivity in the last two months of the year. The end-of-year push is a significant incentive because we develop a sense of urgency around performance results. But why wait?

Anyone at the top of their game knows that chunking up goals and dividing planning into manageable parts allows for greater focus and urgency. Athletes have been doing this for a long time where they identify specific skills that need improvement. They then allot a 12-week cycle to improve and hone these skills. We need to think like athletes, and instead of focusing on productivity and skills at the end of each year, we need to reassess these things constantly.

With a 12-week pattern, we can get that motivation to sprint to the finish four times a year. We set ourselves up to work harder in the intermediate points within the 12-week cycle. As with most things in life, the concept is simple, but implementation can be tricky. To help us redefine our year into 12-week cycles, our authors suggest five disciplines that we need. And to solidify these disciplines, we need to be accountable and act with integrity.

Discipline One: Vision

Nothing motivates us more than having a vision that inspires us. A compelling vision is where we see ourselves in the future, and it's a massive driving force. When it comes to vision, we need to consider the long term and the short term, and make sure our ambitions are realistic.

Developing a compelling vision means that we need to focus on our long-term dreams. It's essential to zoom out on life and focus on personal and professional ambitions. Think about where you see yourself in ten years. We need to look at spiritual, personal, and professional goals, and build them into our long-term vision. This process is crucial because it forms an emotional connection to our goals, which motivates us to work hard to realize them.

Once we've created a relatively long-term future, we should pair it down to where we see ourselves in three years. Three-year goals are important because they help us focus on the short-term objectives that we need to achieve to realize our long-term goals.

This leads us to the planning phase.

Discipline Two: Plan Your Execution

According to our authors, 'A vision without a plan is a pipe dream.'

A 12 Week plan allows us to structure our lives, and as we know, structure helps us to navigate unknown territory. Making our lives more manageable is absolutely essential, because when we have a sense of security and stability, we're less likely to become overwhelmed. Short-term plans also help to improve focus because we can see exactly what we need to achieve in the coming weeks. Finally, because 12 weeks isn't a lot of time, it forces us to make the most of each day, and when we get into this habit, we are so much more productive and energized.

Begin by writing down what you hope to achieve. Once you've done this,

set deadlines for specific tasks and actions. This will help with time management and with overall motivation.

Discipline Three: Control the Process

Being in control comes down to setting up the proper controls.

How do you cope when things get tough? According to our authors, routine and structure are how we regain control when things fall apart. We need plans to guide us through our actions and keep us moving on a positive trajectory.

There are three aspects of process control that help us to move forward on our journey towards excellence. The first is a weekly plan, the second is peer support, and finally, progress measures.

Once we've determined what steps are required to achieve our 12-week goal, we need to break them down into weekly goals. Our weekly plan should clearly tell us which daily tasks are necessary in order to generate the necessary results, and lay the foundation for further progress. At the beginning of each week, sit down and schedule the plan for the week. Then, at the end of the week, take the time to review your progress. A strategic weekly plan means that we focus our energy on a clear strategy and don't waste time focusing on unnecessary tasks. It also means that we meet our deadlines.

If you still battle to focus and maintain discipline, look to your peers for support. Peer support helps motivate us and keeps us accountable. When we know others will evaluate our work; we're more likely to work harder and produce higher-quality results.

Discipline Four: Keep Score

'In God we trust; all others must bring data.' W. Edwards Deming.

The only way to stay on track is to measure our performance.

Whether it's counting steps, or measuring KPIs and other metrics, we need to keep a record of our progress. Understanding progress allows us to predict how long it will take to reach a goal. And, when it comes to operating at our optimum level, we need to measure the tasks we've accomplished, and rate how we've done.

Mapping out our goals allows us to have a tactical plan, and planning is essential because it saves us valuable time and energy.

Whether it's to run a marathon, lose weight, or increase product sales, we need to do some research before we begin. Find blueprint plans of what works, what actions have helped others achieve similar goals, and write down those critical actions. Critical actions are those that, if not performed, will make it impossible to reach our goal. These are known as keystone actions.

After you create weekly keystone action plans, it's best to focus on "weekly execution score" as opposed to results. Good execution leads to

good results. This metric matters because far too many people abandon a good plan because they don't see immediate results.

Keep focused on execution and not results, and keep score of execution. For some of us, a list of critical keystone actions might look like the following. 1. Create a sales landing page. 2. Upload a marketing video on social media. 3. Message five prospective clients. 4. Follow up on actions from the previous week. At the end of each week, you can score yourself on how many things you crossed off the list. Over 12 weeks, if you score 85% or more, you'll achieve your goal. However, if you are consistently underperforming and only achieving scores of 65%, it's unlikely you'll reach your 12-week goal. Hence, it's best to delegate or work on ways to improve procrastination habits.

The benefit of 12-week plans is we don't need to wait until the end of the year to check in on our progress. In just three months, we'll be able to see how far along in the process we are and make the necessary adjustments. We then improve and build on what we're doing well over the next 12-month period.

Discipline Five: Time Management

Time is everything, and managing it effectively is key to being effective.

Our world is full of distractions that pull our focus away from high-priority tasks. Studies show that most workers lose 11 hours of productivity a week because of the time it takes to refocus after bouncing back and forth between work, and distractions.

So how can you structure your time better and stay focused? The lesson

is to time block. We should schedule three blocks of time into our weekly plan to help us stay focused: strategic blocks, buffer blocks, and breakout blocks.

Strategic blocks are three-hour chunks of time per week dedicated to your 12-week plan. During this block, commit to only working on priority tasks.

Buffer blocks are the time to work on miscellaneous activities that disrupt workflow. When you group these activities into one chunk of time, you address the frustration of constant interruptions and wasted time. This is time to check emails, answer phone calls, meet with employees, etc.

Breakout blocks are three-hour periods to rest and let the mind and spirit rejuvenate. If you don't recuperate, you're likely to give up on the plan, so allow time to go for a hike, watch TV, read a book, or spend time with friends.

In Conclusion

Just like there's no reason you should have an 8-hour workday: something Tim Ferris tells us about in *The 4-Hour Workweek*, there's absolutely no reason we should adhere to an annual plan. Redefining our year as 12 weeks can help us speed up our execution cycle, and help us get more done than others do in 12 months.

However, it's also up to us to be accountable, take ownership, and focus on the time for continuous improvement.

Accountability is the recognition that we can control our future by making

the right choices. But too often, we make excuses or blame circumstances for our failure to accomplish goals. All of us need to take ownership of our fate. We need to focus on what we can control and put energy into those activities. Don't complain; change your behavior if you're not getting the results you want, and engage with positive people. Seek out people who can hold you accountable on your journey of self-discovery. The most crucial aspect of exceptional execution is a commitment to follow through and execute. Accountability is ownership of our actions, and commitment is our promise to perform those actions. Commitment and follow-through on tasks develop discipline, confidence, and self-respect. We can keep a strong sense of commitment if we create the following aspects: A strong desire, keystone actions, knowledge of costs, and off switch for emotions.

Are you ready to commit? Make your word count. When making explicit commitments, integrity is on the line. We can't do it all. We need to learn to be intentional. We become great the moment we prioritize what's essential to create the life we want and then take small steps toward our goal.

The plan works because we need a pick-me-up every three months, and three months are more manageable than 365 days. Begin by starting small. Think about those things you've always wanted to do. Then analyze your plans based on the next three months. But, as with anything in life, it will only work if we put in the work. Moran reminds us, 'The number-one thing that you will have to sacrifice to be great, to achieve what you are capable of, and to execute your plans, is your comfort.'

So what do you plan to do in the next 90 days?