

Session 4.22 | The Importance of Your Annual Review

In this Module, we've been looking at how you can Measure, Track, and Celebrate progress to consistently maximize your influence and impact. And we've looked at the Weekly and Quarterly reviews up to this point and these things need to be a part of your calendar, if you're going to maximize your influence and impact.

Again, the number one problem for leaders with growth and planning is that they stop reviewing their plans. And those things that were once identified as most important fade into the noise of life and work.

Your life and your work are not something that you can plan once and then just put away. You've realized that already. They are far too important for that! To have maximum impact, your action plans and the tools that we've looked at together in this Fast Track must be reviewed regularly.

In this session we are going to look at The Importance of The Annual Review.

Now, if you haven't already, go ahead and download the worksheet for this session so that you can follow along as we move forward.

It seems like the years get shorter and shorter with each passing year. And if you're like me you've already identified several goals for the year; several things to be accomplished before the year ends.

I've learned that, if I am going to live out the things that are most important for me, if I'm going to achieve these things that are most important for me, then I must plan regular and purposeful time away to reflect on the past and look forward into the future.

We've looked at how we do that on a weekly basis, and how we can do that on a quarterly basis. Now we're going to look at how we can do that each year as we look ahead and get a big picture for what the year ahead could look like.

Years ago, I remember sitting in a cafe in East Texas. Across the table from me, sat our daughter who was 8 at that time. I asked her this question that probably is too big for an 8 year-old. But I just asked her, I said, "What do you want your life to mean?"

She thought for a few moments as she poked around her food on her plate there. And then she spent the next 45 minutes telling me about her dreams – for her life, for her friends, for her school, for her work, for her future family.

I remember one thing in particular that she said - She talked a lot about what she is doing at that point in her life - about today. As I listened to her, I was reminded that the way to have a great tomorrow is to have a lot of great todays.

If you're going to have a lot of great todays you'll have to be very intentional about how you live and how you work.

It won't work if you're accidental. If you just go along with the flow. If you just allow your schedule and your plans to be determined by other people and other things.

What are you going to do today to get one step closer to what you want your life to mean? What is the one step that you can take in your work, with your spouse, with your kids, in your church, in your community? What are the goals you have for this year?

Every year between Christmas and the New Year I spend a couple of days away conducting my Annual Review.

If you're like me, you've already discovered the value of scheduling time away to reconnect with the things that are most important to you. You've probably figured out that just getting away won't cut it! Maybe you've tried this before. And it hasn't gone exactly the way that you've planned.

What you do during the time away is equally important.

So I want to share a few things with you in this session that helped me make the most out of my annual review.

1. Purpose

Why am I doing this? Why take time during this holiday season to get away and to think about what the incoming year was going to look like.

My primary goal for my Annual Review is to reflect on the previous year and then look ahead 1-3 years to set aside substantial time for my top priorities. Those things that I have identified in my simple personal plan and in my simple vision that we've talked about before. Those things that I have identified as most important in my life and in my work.

To help me be more productive when I get away for planning and reflection, I developed a template – this Annual Review Tool.

Again, you can download the tool and the worksheet and follow along as we go through it.

I schedule Annual Review during the week between Christmas and New Year's. This is typically a good time for me to pull away for a couple of days without the "distractions" of

work, family usually doing other things, spending time with other family. They have plenty to do and I can get just enough time to get away and look ahead to the year ahead. This time may not be ideal for you. You may want to do it earlier in the fourth quarter so you could get a little bit more of the runway, and that's perfect. Decide what might work for you and test it.

It's really helpful for me to understand first of all my purpose.

2. Prepare effectively for my Time Away

As with my Quarterly Review, my Annual Review is far more productive when I have a plan before I go. Without a plan, I would fumble around for the first half-day trying to figure out what I need to get done to make me feel like I accomplished something of value during my time away.

Just as yours is – my time is valuable. So I want to be just as productive as possible with my time away. So I did 2 things.

First of all, I developed a tool that we've already mentioned – the Annual Review Template. We will take a look at that in detail in just a moment.

The second thing I did just like with my quarterly review, I identified the things that I need to do before leaving...

1. I review my template and I pull the things together that I need to take with me. So that I'm ready to go and I'm ready to hit the ground running when I get to the location where I'm going to do my review.
2. I write down one or two top priority goals or projects for the time away. If I don't get anything else done, these are the things that I want to accomplish. Then I review those goals with my wife, with my business manager (occasionally other team members) before I leave.

You may also want to review them with your boss – or with your team. What you want to do is you want to ensure that you're working on those things that are most important to you, most important to your family, and most important to your team.

Let's look at the Annual Review Template...

The first thing I did was to make notes about my ...

1. Travel. Now what I've learned about me to be most effective with my time away, it's good for me to choose a location that's 1-3 hours away from home. And I go alone. I use the drive time to clear my head and prepare mentally for the work that I'm going to do over the next 2 days.

I found that this 1-3 hours is enough time for me to clear my head even make a few phone calls, do a last minute check in on any feedback that I want about the things that I should be doing with my time away.

I also use the time to listen to podcasts or make phone calls to catch up with close friends or close family. Part of my simple personal plan is staying in touch with a handful of friends that I have connected over the years. Before I leave, I plan the podcasts or the sessions that I am going to listen to and the friends and family members that I am going to contact on the way.

2. Planning the Evening of Arrival. My typical annual review is 2 full days. I generally leave home in the late afternoon and arrive at my destination in the early evening. My goal for the first evening is to prepare to start early the next day - Day One. So I do 2 things:
 - a) Prepare. I set out the documents and tools. I lay them out on the table there in the hotel room or in the room where I'm staying. I set out the documents and the tools to prepare for the next day.
 - b) Read. I will often select one book to read or to process while I am away. I spend most of the evening reading or thinking about the content of that book or that material.

Part of the tool that we've looked at is Travel and then the Evening of Arrival. Now let's look at...

Day One

The first full day is all about personal life planning and scheduling.

1. I review my Quarterly Review Tool. This is the tool that we went over in the previous session and usually that takes up to 5-6 hours. This serves as my fourth quarter review.
2. I review my Simple Personal Plan in great detail.

Now we walked you through how to create your own simple personal plan which really becomes the foundation for this entire course that we've been talking about. And we show you how to do that in this Simple Leadership Masterclass.

You can get more information about this simple leadership masterclass using the link on this page.

My review of the simple personal plan during the annual review is different than the review during the weekly review, and the quarterly review. During the annual review, I go much deeper. I really go through every line, every word and I think about the changes that I need to make to do better or to make more progress towards the goal that I want and each relationship in each area of my life and work.

I do a lot more detailed review of my simple personal plan and I'd make significant changes. If there's any to be made, I will make those at the time of my annual review.

3. I review my Life 86 List (my bucket list) and generally, each year, I'll select 2-4 items to complete in the coming year.

This list is really interesting and over the years, of the 86 items that I've placed on this list, I've completed over 40 of them. And so if you'll take those items and you'll select 2-4 a year, you'll be surprised about how many of those things you're able to check off and experience.

4. I review my *Annual Plan*. I look at the annual plan spreadsheet and I'll fill in my yearly calendars with those big block items. Those that really need to be put in first for the next 3 years. My current year will have more detail than year 2 or 3 for obvious reasons. I plan all of the leave time (vacation, personal, professional development, etc.) for the coming year. I plan all of the major family events or major work events. So those things are blocked annual plan at the end of day one.

Day Two.

The second day is about projects and planning.

1. I plan my one-on-one Meetings for the early part of the year. This is the first thing I'll do in day two. And this usually takes me an hour or 2.
So I want to think through, who are the people that I need to be meeting on a regular basis. Is that list the same as what I've been currently doing? Does it need to change? Do we need to change the scheduling, do we need to change how we've been doing that? Do I need to approach those meetings differently or with a different mindset depending on the individuals that I'm working with?
2. I work on high impact projects or planning. And this usually takes the rest of the second day. These are the projects I've reviewed previously with my wife, or with my team, or with my business manager and during this time away, I develop an implementation strategy to complete these things.

Travel Home.

I use the drive home to clear my head and to prepare to reconnect with my family. I will usually stop on the way home and just pick up a small gift for my wife or for our children - because I'm just a cool dad and husband! You may want to plan something like that into your drive home as well.

This annual review tool will help you get started with a framework for your Annual Review.

I want to mention something here – if you take this template and this tool and use it as it is, it may not be as effective for you – because you’re different than I am. Your thought processes are different. Your work flow is different. You will want to customize it to fit your needs.

I have tested and tweaked my Annual Review template for years. In fact, it was several years before I was comfortable with it. As with many things of value, you’ll need to exercise some patience with it.

Everything’s not going to work exactly right the first time. And that’s okay Make changes where they are needed, then test it again.

Whatever you do – don’t do nothing! Decide right now that you are going to take one step today toward being more purposeful in your life and work by planning you next annual review.

Remember - everything we do works because of applied learning. And everything that we do involve applied learning. If we don’t apply it, it doesn’t have the ability to work for us in our life, work, and leadership.

I want to share one more tip with you...

You don’t want to attempt to do all of these review exercises and start all of these tools at once. You want to start with one. I recommend starting with the weekly review or the quarterly review first. Start with one. Create it. Use it. Revise it. Once you get going with it, move on to the next.

When it comes to creating an Annual Review process that works for you, remember, you don’t have to get it perfect, you just need to take the next step.

After working through these tools with thousands of leaders all over the world, we’ve seen dramatic improvements in their life, and in their work, and their leadership – particularly in areas that are top priority for them.

Next Session

In the next session, I’m going to show you what to do about problems which can’t be fixed.

So I’ll see you in the next session.