

**A FRESH START FOR THE NEW YEAR**

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**The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result each time. - Albert Einstein**

So...what will you do differently this year? What results/outcomes/dreams/goals do you want to create in the year ahead? How are you planning to support these visions?

Welcome to the New Year! Lofty questions...But before you march into the New Year with those shiny new ideas, goals and -- dare I say -- resolutions, let's peek at the year past and acknowledge your accomplishments.

New Year's reflections so often look through lenses of 'what's wrong and what do I need to fix?' It's equally important to acknowledge 'what's right and what's worth celebrating.

Let's start with that.

**Step #1: Create an Acknowledgement List for the Year 2007**

Take 10 minutes (or longer if you like) and write down (free-flow) all that you feel good about from the past year. Make the focus specifically about you -- what you did that you are proud of and consider who you were being (your character strengths). Nothing is too small for this list so don't limit yourself to just the 'big ones'. Go as micro and macro as you can, stretch the memory and notice that good stuff comes in all sizes.

Did you learn a new skill? Help someone out? Challenge yourself in a new role? Take new risks? Create something special? Follow through on a dream? Become more charitable? Establish new relationships or improve the ones you already have?

How does it feel to look at your list? Notice the stuff that you may not have been present to before doing this exercise. Bring this good stuff forward into 2008!

**Step #2: Create an Acknowledgement List for the Year-end 2008**

Yup - you read this right. I'm asking you to stand in your shoes a year from now. We'll call this the 'future-self list'. Close your eyes (Not yet -- read the instructions first!). Choose a moment in time either in December 2008 or early January (2009). Visualize the details of where you are (e.g. on holiday? At home? The office?), your surroundings, who you are with, etc. -- and picture yourself reflecting on all your achievements of the year past (2008). What does that list look like?

Another one of my favorite quotes from Einstein frames this exercise well:

**“The gift of fantasy has meant more to me than my talent for absorbing knowledge”.**

In this exercise, you want to get out of your head and into your heart as you step into that imaginative space for yourself.

**Step #3: Pick the hotspots that resonate at a gut level**

Look at your future-self list. How will you feel when you achieve those goals/wants? Which ones from the list energize you when you think about them? Leave behind the ones that leave you flat – they are probably ‘shoulds’ and hold little meaning for you. Focus on areas that give you energy. There’s something in those that are important to you.

**Step #4: Get clear on why each goal is important to you.**

Clarity on why you are pursuing your goal is critical. Will it make you happier? Will it balance your life? Will it honour your values? If you don’t truly know why you are taking on this challenge – then don’t bother. Pick another.

**Step #6: Rate Your Commitment**

How committed are you to the dream or goal? Don’t worry if you don’t yet know how you are going to achieve it. Rate your commitment on a 1-10 scale (10 the highest –e.g. “*I’m going to find a way to achieve this no matter what...*”). This is about clarifying your level of *intention*. One of the reasons resolutions often don’t work is because we are not fully enrolled in our own goals – yet we don’t even realize that fact.

So before declaring a goal make sure you are authentically committed.

**Step #5: Now Make a Plan (“a goal without a plan is simply wishful thinking”)**

I borrow that quote from a CFP professional (Certified Financial Planner) that I know. She shares this with all her clients. Well said!

Likewise, the American Society of Training and Development estimates the probability of reaching a goal is only 10 per cent if you simply have an idea -- but 50 per cent if you have a plan. If you don’t intend on planning for successful completion of your goal – then go back to Step #5 and ask yourself again: how committed are you?

Dreams, goals, visions don’t simply happen just because you have them. You gotta do the work.

Like any other planning process, your plan will be a roadmap to success. Here are a few thought-starters to get you going on this plan.

**1. What will success look like?**

- Make your achievements tangible, measurable and time-sensitive. If your goal is to be more active or to eat healthier – how and when will you measure your

success. Be as specific as you can.

**2. What will success *feel* like?**

- Worth repeating: get clear on the meaning behind this goal. The more emotionally attached you are to the ‘why’ behind the goal – the better chance you have of sticking to it.

**3. What structures can you create to remind yourself of the ‘why’ behind the goal?**

- Create something visible or easily accessible to you to stay mindful of the reasons and meaning behind the goal. This will help you stick to your plan. Perhaps something visual like a photo, expression, or written description (vision) of your success? Or a daily action to stay present to your intention. Some people meditate. One of my coaching clients writes out his intention daily. He says this helps him enormously. The key is to find one that works for you.

**4. What do you need to learn to make this happen for yourself?**

- Every new challenge – be it a task or new habit – requires some new learning. Maybe you need to learn a new way of being (more disciplined, open to help, more patient?) – or maybe simply acquire new information. Get clear on what it is so you can create a meaningful learning agenda to support yourself in pursuit of your goal.

**5. What of your strengths and values can you count on in yourself?**

- You are your greatest asset when it comes to making change. Research shows that success comes best when we work from our strengths – rather than focusing only on our gaps. Get to know yourself from a place of strengths and core values.

**6. What might get in the way? What can you plan in advance to deal with potential obstacles, challenges and ‘stuck’ points?**

- Good intentions or not, stuff happens or our limiting habits or inner conversations get in the way. The more conscious you are of those potential pitfalls, the better you can plan for them before they trap you.

**7. What can you do to stay hearty and recover from occasional set-backs and momentary failures?**

- Ever hear of the dieter who eats an entire bag of cookies, carton of ice cream (and more) – just because she/he slipped and had one treat that was not part of the plan? Hey – we all have our moments and set-backs. Don’t use any as an excuse to throw away the whole effort. Learn to forgive yourself and get back on track.

**8. What support do you need?**

- No matter how determined you are to do accomplish your goals – you don't have to go it alone. Ask for help! Enroll friends, colleagues, professionals who can provide the right support (emotional, professional, etc.). You may even consider enlisting support to work through this planning piece – and not just the execution. In fact, it's the quality of this work (planning from place of authenticity) that will set the stage for meaningful results.

## 9. To whom will you hold yourself accountable?

- The American Society of training and Development estimates a 95 per cent level of success in reaching goals when there is someone to be accountable to. So don't keep your goal a secret! Share it with someone and make an appointment with them to check back on your progress.

## 10. What milestones will you mark along the way? And how will you celebrate ongoing success?

- December 2008 is a long time away so break down your goal into smaller chunks so you can celebrate, acknowledging your progress along the way.
- Feel free to start now – and acknowledge yourself for getting started.

### A final thought:

I'll leave you with one of my favorite quotes: *“Luck happens when preparation meets opportunity” (anonymous).*

May you prepare well for your dreams and have much luck in creating your success this New Year.

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