The Problem with New Year's Resolutions

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Why don't most people's New Year's resolutions lead to lasting change? The underlying message in most of our New Year's resolutions is that there is something wrong and we better fix it or else… We are bombarded with the message that we **should** be better – not just that we could be happier or more effective if we chose to make a change – but that we must be better or else we are inferior, inadequate, and bad. How much time and energy do you spend fighting yourself and/or the universe? I **shouldn't** be feeling this way. I **should** have gotten that contract. My spouse **should** do what I ask of him. Most of us are so steeped in our own rigid perceptions of what is acceptable that we refuse to see the world as it really is. And then we wonder why it is so hard to make a change.

Can you imagine how much easier and more pleasant life would be if you could accept that you are completely fine exactly the way you are? Nothing needs to be altered. Nothing needs to be fixed. Really. This is hard for most of us to believe since we are usually so focused on trying to improve in some way. What most of us "*need*" more than anything is to practice acceptance of our own humanity, to recognize that nothing we do is ever going to reach our definition of perfection, and acknowledge that the universe is a wacky, unpredictable place. Yes, this definitely takes it practice.

You may be thinking, "*but I want to make more money*" or "*but I want to lose five pounds*" or "*but my sister really is an intolerable witch.*" Sometimes we think we have to reject our current situation or else we will be sentencing ourselves to a life of resignation and misery. Consider that the opposite may be true. It is only by accepting a situation as it is that we have any real possibility of changing it. We don't have to reject the past (or the present) to embrace the future. It is possible to be okay with the current situation AND look for ways to move forward.

Consider the classic New Year's resolution, how can you both accept yourself the way you are now AND proactively try to get into better shape? Look for aspects of your body that you can appreciate. Do you have nice hair, or attractive feet, or strong arms that allow you to pick up your child? Focusing on the positive helps us to feel accepting about where we are, and when we are feeling okay about ourselves it is much easier to make a change.

Or look at a scenario where you want more clients. Say you made 50% of your sales goal for last year. On one hand you could see that as a failure, and on the other hand you could interpret it to mean that a lot of your actions and policies ARE working AND there is room for expansion and improvement. When our energy is focused on the negative it is impossible for us to get a clear and realistic view of the situation. Without a clear understanding

of both what is working and what is not working, any changes could actually be counterproductive.

Like so many things in life, this is simple but not easy. That is why people hire coaches to support them through the process of transformation.

How to Design a Powerful Project

Whether you are trying to lose weight, write that novel, or increase revenue, one simple way to help yourself achieve the intention quickly is to write out a project plan. The following are ten steps to create an effective plan.

1. **Set a specific and measurable goal, with a clear time frame. –** Many of us aspire to "*lose weight*" which is vague and, therefore, less powerful than a specific target like "*lose 10 pounds by February 28th*". Even an abstract objective like "*improve my relationship with staff*" can be translated into a measurable goal. For example, "*have three staff members share personal information with me by January 30th,*" or "*have three staff members voluntarily stay late to complete their work by February 15th.*"

2. **Set a goal that inspires you. –** Ask yourself if you are excited and energized. Have you "*dumbed down*" the objective to make it seem more realistic or acceptable? If running a marathon inspires you, but running a ten mile race does not, you should aim for the marathon. Is the goal about you and what you want in life? Or is it about what someone else thinks you should achieve?

3. **Set a realistic time frame for implementation. –** If you have never written a screenplay and don't know anyone in the business, selling a screenplay may be perfectly achievable. However, aiming to do so within one month, may be setting yourself up for failure.

4. **Create a clear vision to keep yourself motivated and inspired. –** What will your life be like when you have achieved this objective? How will you be relating to yourself and others? Write at least one paragraph in the present tense describing your experience after having achieved this goal. You can also create a collage or other visual representation. The visioning process makes the end result seem more real and, therefore, more achievable. Look at it regularly to remind yourself what you have at stake and why you are bothering to do all this work.

5. **Make lists of the skills and resources you already have.** You probably already have much of what you will need to be successful with

the project. Making these lists will create positive forward momentum by reminding you of what you already have going for you. If you get frustrated later on, you can refer to these lists to help you decide how to move forward.

6. **Figure out what skills or resources, if any, you are missing. –** If you see something missing, consider what skills or resources (including people) you have which you can use to address the gap.

7. **Get the support of your community. –** You have friends, family and colleagues who are on your side and would love to support you in achieving your goals. Tell them what you are doing, get their support, and ask for their help. Having ten people ask you periodically about that book you are writing will help keep you on track and may lead to unforeseen resources or connections.

8. **Set clear and achievable milestones for implementation. –** Setting intermediate deadlines will help you maintain course and stay focused on your objective.

9. **Create rewards which motivate you. –** Some people are hesitant to reward themselves, believing that they shouldn't need extra motivation or that achieving their goal would be reward enough. In any endeavor there are times when it will be difficult, you won't want to persevere, or obligations will get in the way. These are the times when it is most valuable to have a little extra motivation. Try designating a reward for each significant milestone. Rewards don't have to be expensive, but they should be something that you actually want which will help when the going gets tough.

10. **Revise the project. –** Over time the project plan will become outdated. Results will be achieved faster or slower or simply move in a different direction than you anticipated. Change is natural, but an outdated project plan loses its power. So refer to the plan regularly and revise as needed.

A Surprisingly Useful New Years Activity

Two years ago on New Year's I sat down with a few friends, a stack of magazines, glue sticks and a big piece of cardboard and created a vision of what I wanted in my life for 2010. The interesting thing about vision boards is that they provide access to beliefs, ideas, or desires that you may not otherwise be

aware of. At that time, I was completely focused on my coaching practice in the U.S. It had not occurred to me to me that I might soon be living abroad. Yet this was the vision board I created:

As you can see, it has lots of fantastical images, dancers in wild costumes, machu picchu, a tree made of people, elephants, etc. I remember looking at the completed vision board and thinking, "*Oh dear, if this is what inspires me, I don't think I am on the right path. How in the world am I going to create this kind of life?*" But I loved the images, so I put it up on my wall and decided not to worry about it. Then, in April, I decided on a whim to move to Istanbul. In retrospect, I can see that the visioning process helped me realize what I wanted, and posting it helped keep that insight present for myself. Images are extremely powerful, and they can influence our attitudes and behaviors without us even being aware of it.   My experience of living abroad really has been magical. All sorts of wild, interesting things have been happening, and I have found coaching clients with remarkable ease. The overall feel of the vision board, the magic and adventure, really does reflect my current experience of life.

Some people use vision boards to help them stay focused on and inspired by a specific goal.   For example Michael Phelps had a vision board of himself winning gold metals. Others use it as a tool related to the law of attraction (as popularized by The Secret). One of my clients used a vision board to help clarify her own beliefs about wealth, business and gender. She discovered that subconsciously she thought only white men could become wealthy business owners. Once this belief was identified, we were able to address the issues, and ultimately her company went from a local D.C. business to a national franchise. Regardless of whether you use a vision board to gain insight or to achieve goals (or both), this activity is both fun and useful. If you make one, send me a picture. I'd love see it.

May you have continued success and joy in the new year!