

Making Effective New Years Resolutions

By Tom Northup, January 2008

Most of us have just finished the New Years resolution season. It seems that on January 1 we make a whole series of resolutions such as eating better, exercising more, or losing weight. And what happens? We try for about a month and by February 1 we return to our old habits.

Why does this happen every year? Are we are comfortable with the status quo? Are these changes really that trivial to us?

This year, even though it is past New Years, think about making a new set of meaningful resolutions that will have a profound impact on your life. Don't limit them to personal resolutions, which are good. Equally important should be to focus on your professional life.

You are one of the leaders in your organization. You are a role model and as such every action you take counts. Your employees and co-workers observe you and your behavioral traits every day. John Maxwell put it this way, "People do what people see."

Your personal leadership reflects your expectations for yourself and for your organization. Making and achieving meaningful resolutions is one way to demonstrate effective behavior.

When you make your resolutions, ask yourself, "Am I positioning myself this year to be truly successful?" The following questions will guide you.

- What new life and career skills can I quickly and effectively learn?
- What performance issues did my employees or I have last year that I can prevent in the New Year?
- How can I inspire all of those around me to become more effective? Whom do I need to focus on?
- How can I become a solution to the company's work environment challenges? What can I change?

Life is 10% of what happens to us (events) and 90% of how we react to it (our attitudes). You are where you are and what you are because of the thoughts that dominate your mind. William James said, "We can alter our lives by altering our attitudes of mind."

Status quo is comfortable and easy. . However, the rewards of successfully making and completing meaningful resolutions are life-changing for you and your employees.

How do we develop new attitudes that will allow us to make meaningful resolutions?

Attitudes are habits of thought. We often think of habits as action oriented. But new attitudes and new ways of thinking are habits too. The good news is that we can change habits. The bad news is that it will take time and effort.

Here's an apt analogy from sports

Great athletes spend most of their time practicing and far less time performing. Tiger Woods and Anika Sorenstram, both tops in their field, may hit a thousand practice shots for every tournament shot.

In contrast, most of us the business world spend none of our time practicing and all of our time performing. We get in a rut, defined as, "A coffin with the ends knocked out," and never develop our potential or the potential of our organization. We fall into the insanity trap when we do the same things over and over and expect different results.

The key to developing new habits lies in practice to the point of mastery. This idea is not new. Over two thousand years ago, Aristotle said, "We are what we repeatedly do; excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."

Studies show that people who set goals, and resolutions are goals, achieve more in life than those who don't. Those same studies confirm that when people write down their goals and refer to them regularly they achieve great success.

Here are the five steps to effective goal achievement:

1. For best results, write your goals down. Writing crystallizes your thoughts forcing you to be logical and realistic.
2. Develop an action plan. A plan describes how you will achieve a goal. Develop the steps in the sequence required to accomplish your goal. Identify who is responsible, what is required and when the step will be accomplished.
3. The hardest part is to actually DO the steps. Remember nothing happens until you start - until you take action.

We all are good at making appointments to meet someone for lunch or to attend a meeting but we often have difficulty making appointments with ourselves to accomplish the tasks that are important to our success. Make an appointment with yourself and write the action steps into whatever scheduling system you use.

4. Determine metrics to measure your goals and track and measure your results.
5. We all know how to procrastinate. If you have trouble holding yourself accountable, work with a mentor or confidant. The best mentors are non-judgmental and assist you with encouragement and support. They help you monitor progress and hold you accountable.

Summary

Not all of the goals you set for yourself need be major. Even working on minor ones will help you maintain more control over your life. Accomplishing any of your goals will give you great satisfaction. As you generate success you will find it easier to work on the rest of your goals. Success breeds more success.

You are a leader and a role model. People will observe you achieving success. As a leader you challenge and assist others to achieve their success. Lead yourself and others to improve attitudes and skills. The result can be astounding.

The five steps to successful goal achievement are simple to understand but difficult to execute. Use a mentor to assist in holding you accountable. The steps will become easier and easier as you make them habits over time.

The personal and professional benefit of setting and accomplishing resolutions year after year is cumulative. You will improve your effectiveness several times over your career, finally reaching the level of success you have determined for yourself.