



Conscious Goal-Setting for the New Year

By Michael Mongno Ph.D

Most of us have a love/hate relationship with goals, especially those requisite, all important New Year's resolutions. We do love the "idea" of a new year, a new start, and an opportunity to have a re-do on what we failed to do or complete this past year. But how often do we take the time to analyze why we weren't able accomplish our goals for this year before moving into the next. Unless we know what interfered, most likely it will occur again. After all, the only real difference between this year and next is simply a matter of seconds ticking down on the clock. And although we can "imagine" that we'll be different next year (by being more committed, motivated, conscientious) what is it that is going to cause that change to happen? We will have to change more than just our minds to create change in ourselves and in our lives, as we are much more than just our thoughts. We need to fully engage all the parts of us in order to create the crucible of transformation powerful enough to break old, habitual patterns and manifest real, tangible change.

In my therapy practice I work primarily psychologically, but I'm always attuned to how whatever my clients are working on will create direct change in their immediate behaviors as well as provide an effective track for the long term. As I get to know what they are capable of emotionally, I'm able help them foster the kind of tangible change in their lives that I can continue to support and root for. We all know that when we're excited about something it's far easier to start doing something about it, no matter how difficult. So that is where I start. As part therapist and part coach, I work with the emotional

leverage necessary to create the motivation and momentum to overcome the inertia of the status quo and move forward with concrete, tangible goals in mind.

We are all comprised of four components of the Self: the emotional, intellectual, physical, and spiritual. And in order to create lasting change, we must engage as many components as possible in order to achieve a critical mass of energy to move beyond our current default patterns that continue to encumber us. If we think we can just imagine (intellectual) what it would be like to have a healthier body without the motivation (emotional) to really put some new behaviors into practice (physical) we'll never feel the transcendent reward (spiritual) of making different choices to produce new, positive results.

When setting good goals, such as desiring better health, exercising more, studying something new, or accomplishing a project for work, it's important that they be tangible/quantitative, measurable, time limited, and doable (with a bit of a stretch). For instance, if we decide we'd like to read or exercise more, we would then need to specify the following: how many pages/workouts/lbs. lost, how much time spent per day/week, by when, and for what purpose. The purpose is important because it utilizes emotional leverage to keep the motivation going when we're tired and really don't feel like it. Then we can recruit the other parts of ourselves to help when one part is flagging. We can use our minds (intellectual) to make our bodies get up and just do it, to go to the gym when our emotions don't feel like it and then

along the way our bodies get in gear and create their own forward momentum and pretty soon we're on the treadmill feeling (both physical and emotional) the reward of accomplishing what we're seeking to create.

This kind of positive feedback loop needs to happen to replace any negative, unproductive, or destructive kind of behavior. There has to be a clear new goal, the motivation to change, the tangible means to create it, and the support along the way to stay consistent. It's said that twenty one days are necessary to substitute one pattern of behavior for another. So why not design for yourself a 21 Day Plan for several of the changes you'd like for the New Year? Choose the most important one first, the one that if you accomplished it would have you feeling really great and confident about yourself and your abilities. Once again, we come back to using the emotional juice to keep you going through thick and thin (like running a marathon), to keep the new pattern alive and beginning to take root.

With a new year just ahead, think about coming up with only four goals representing each of the components

of ourselves. The physical could be health, nutrition, or exercise related; the emotional could be how to become more connected to yourself, less reactive and more self-differentiated; the intellectual could be to stimulate yourself so as to learn, discover, or become curious about more things or become better at your work; and the spiritual could have you meditate/pray more regularly or become more patient, kind, or heart-centered.

Take some time to sit with yourself at some point before the end of this year. Go within, focusing more deeply and ask, "What things would be important for me to accomplish by the end of 2012 and what would I need to make the necessary changes so as to bring forth my best self?" Then from what your inner/authentic Self tells you, begin writing up a concrete action plan. Make it a set of tangible, attainable goals and then fully commit to putting it into practice; it may also be helpful to inform a couple of trusted people so that they may support you in the process. And remember, how well you do is up to you, because the improvements are really for you and ultimately have potential to expand and transform whatever life you choose to create.



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