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Turning the Page: Making the Most of New Year's Resolutions

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It is said that the first day of the year represents a blank page in a new book waiting to be brought to life with new experiences and opportunities. Few regard the year's beginning with indifference; it is a time for a new script filled with rebirth and redecision as one looks ahead to what could be. Regardless of the joys, challenges and regrets of the year before, it offers a future replete with potential, promise and infinite possibilities.

Conducting post-game analysis of the past year in order to make a new plan is a healthy exercise important to redirecting our life course and creating a better future. So why are our best New Year's resolutions so often elusive? For many, the very term "New Year's resolution" engenders anticipation of failure and unfulfilled promises.

Understanding why resolutions are so difficult to keep helps us firmly commit to new, more productive behaviors while discarding unworkable ones. Here are some helpful tips for overcoming the most common resolution roadblocks:

- **Base your resolutions on real needs and personal priorities, not "shoulds".** Honestly examine your motivation for change. Is there an enduring, legitimate personal reason for your resolution or is it based on what someone else expects from you?
- **Have a dream or goal that looks to the future.** Decide what you want to do with your new blank pages and create a vivid mental snapshot or image representing how your life will look by year's end. If you prefer a more tangible reminder, use pictures or clippings from magazines or other media to symbolize the desired outcome. Develop realistic, achievable goals given your priorities and personal circumstances.
- **Make resolutions based on true priorities.** Our lives can easily become focused on making a living, not a life. In today's busy world, family, relationships and faith can place second to other interests; it is easy for things and appearances to become an empty, false priority and inaccurate measuring stick of self-worth.
- **Avoid a long list.** Choose only one or two important goals rather than an overwhelming litany of resolutions that distract you from your real focus.
- **Make a specific, viable action plan.** Commit to your goals by developing a detailed plan of action and putting it on paper. Consider dividing the plan into achievable daily or hourly goals.

Keep track of your progress and adjust the course if necessary. Reward your progress along the way.

- ***Deal with fears of change and failure.*** Look for future potential rather than ruminating over past mistakes and missed opportunities. Examine the roots of fears that thwart your ability to make lasting change. If your past is standing in the way, work to understand and break these bonds by educating yourself and practicing new behaviors, giving yourself permission to be imperfect in the process. Remember that change typically does not happen quickly; it requires patience and sustained effort.
- ***Honor and acknowledge your strengths and inner resources.*** Take time to discover who you really are and what you are made of. Identify what has enabled you to survive the tough times in the past and use these strengths to sustain and maintain your new resolutions.

The course of 2009 will be determined by what we do to fill the empty pages of our own autobiography. We are the ones who will write the words. And in the process, we must have the courage to “dance like nobody’s watching.”