



2014 – This Isn't a Dress Rehearsal!

by JUDY BERANGER

So it's that time of year again...the gift of another 365 days, a fresh start to further discover and transform our lives with the conviction that the more we are, the more we consciously affect not only our own lives but the lives of those we touch. We are already cast as the lead role in our own lives and it helps to become more intentional as to what that means. We sometimes remind our students that life is not a dress rehearsal and the early months of 2014 are a great time to reflect on what that really means. There is something about the arrival of a new calendar year that makes many of us want to be better in some way. Teachers can choose not to be included in the statistics that cite high numbers of people abandoning resolutions in the first three months of the year.

Shakespeare once said, "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." If you want to squeeze even more out of 2014, think about the value of life, health, relationships and success. We all know that we only showcase a small speck of our potential and most of us want to be more of what we are capable of becoming. So let's beat the stats and set a few realistic, achievable goals that will heighten personal power and excitement, adding to our quality of living – both at home and at school.

What might work for you?

Reflect on what went well last year. What didn't go well? Why? What did I take for granted? Is there anything in hindsight I might have done differently? Are there any habits I want to transform? Mark Twain reminds us that "habit is habit, and not to be flung out the window easily, but coaxed downstairs a step at a time". Where would you like to be a year from today? Are your current goals in sync with this? Things happen in life that can distract us from our goals, bringing along its share of discouragement and setbacks. It is then we most need to refocus, revise and recommit.

Tips for keeping on track of goals

- 1. Give other people more slack** – There will always be disloyal, defensive people who say or do unkind things, and it has nothing to do with you. They may have had disappointments or setbacks adding to their unpleasant stance. Resist the temptation to retaliate when people are less than they should be. A helpful mantra is repair if you can, detach if you can't.
- 2. Make two or three resolutions** – write them down and review and/or revise them weekly to strengthen commitment. Social psychologist Chris Berdik, author of *Mind over Mind: The Surprising Power of Expectations* makes a short list of resolutions every year and suggests that the reason we often do not follow through with resolutions is that we make too many of them. "We only have so much willpower to go around."
- 3. Write down what might get in the way of accomplishing goals** – Sports psychologist Michael Gervais advocates this is where you begin to identify the thoughts that are causing you to "not go for it." Writing can help you identify reasons that may keep you distracted from moving toward success. Making lists of small steps can also help.
- 4. Work with your best time of the day** – Energy is usually highest in the morning so it is the best time to create the routines necessary to accomplish your goals. Some research suggests that willpower steadily declines throughout the day as people fatigue. Nighthawks be aware!
- 5. Be specific** – Instead of saying I will be more active in my loving to that special someone this year, say that at least once a day I will tell/show that special someone how I feel by (*state an action here*). Saying I will show appreciation by sending four thank-you notes a month to those deserving is a realistic and measurable goal and builds energy and willpower for the tougher goals. Instead of general health statements, add detail. "I will drink six to eight glasses of water each day; have at least one veggie at each meal,

walk an extra ten minutes a day and be snuggled for the night by 10:30 p.m.”

6. **Consider sharing your goals** with a special someone and assist in coaching each other.

7. **Be creative and unique** – Some write a yearly family Christmas letter. Others capture a family story. Write a story to pass on to other family members or tell it to someone who will write it for you. One story – even a little one for each year is an achievable family goal as we keep people present in our lives even when they have passed. Here is a handed-down story once shared with me by a teacher about her great-grandparents:

My great-grandparents ran a farm. One spring their hens starting disappearing at the rate of two or three per night. Each night the men in the family would sit up to watch for the thief but would eventually fall asleep. Finally, out of frustration, Great Grandma said she could do it and decided to go on watch herself. Late in the night, when she eyed a shadow moving across the yard, she thought to herself, “I have the thief!” She turned on all the lights and bravely ran out into the yard to confront the intruder. She was shocked to see a startled, huge black bear looking back at her. Quicker than lightning her braveness passed and she rushed back into the house.

This cute story has been embellished with lessons learned and retold for years. Story telling can touch immeasurable lives as family members learn more about their heritage.

8. **Grow your willpower** – In her book, *The Willpower Instinct: How Self-Control Works, Why It Matters, and What You Can Do to Get More of It*, psychologist Kelly McGonigal says that willpower is like a muscle. The more you work on developing it, the more you can incorporate it into your life. McGonigal suggests starting with small feats of willpower before trying to tackle more difficult feats. Willpower is contagious and she encourages the importance of finding a willpower role model – someone who has accomplished what you want to do.

9. **The importance of sleep** – In her research, McGonigal reported on why proper sleep is a healthy goal. With less than six hours of sleep per night, the prefrontal cortex loses control over the regions of the brain that create cravings. Science shows that getting seven to eight hours each night helps people recovering from addictions to avoid a relapse. The prefrontal cortex regains control and it can certainly help you resist a food temptation, a cigarette and keep one focused on particular goals.

Setting resolutions gives us active opportunities to deepen our commitment to growth, increase our generosity and responsibility to life. A University of

Michigan study showed that people who are generous live longer, are generally healthier and less stressed, and have a greater sense of purpose and meaning.

Susan Breathnach in *Simple Abundance* offers principles to use as guides to further develop well-being. They include gratitude – making a daily habit to note one or two things for which we are grateful. Hardly a day goes by without my Dad (paralysed on his entire right side) reminding me of how fortunate he is that he still has his mind and his left hand. What a model for gratitude! Simplicity flows from gratitude – naming the essentials of what we need to live well; order is next – both internally and externally followed by harmony which allows us the inner peace to appreciate and value each day. Harmony flows out of our sense of order and of changing unwanted ways of thinking and behaving. Considering these principles can guide and inspire goals.

“It is only when we truly know and understand that we have a limited time on earth that we begin to live each day to the fullest, as if it was the only one we had.” (Elizabeth Kubler Ross) Set a few commitments – if you mess up, start again – don’t give up. Have a glass of water and toast the good that you have accomplished – indeed this is not a dress rehearsal. I wish you a year to be savored – a transformative year of discovery and joy.

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Smartphone apps that may help with your resolutions



- **My Fitness Pal:** Turns your smartphone into a personal trainer, allowing for calorie counting, exercise monitoring and weight management
- **Sleepbot:** For those resolving to get more rest, this app logs sleep, tracks movement and sound, and wakes you up at the ideal time each day (see also: Sleep Cycle)
- **Expensify:** Record-keeping of your purchases, document receipts using your phone’s camera, and auto-generate expense reports for tax season
- **Commit:** Catch-all app for goal reminders and progress-tracking
- **Livestrong MyQuit Coach:** Smoking cessation app