

a new beginning
the precious present of another new year



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Leadership Solutions

P U B L I S H I N G

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by debbe kennedy

Life is a series of new beginnings. It is always inviting us to create the lives we want to live—to become more ourselves. When I was young and forging my own unique path, I saw life more in big, giant chunks of time, where, unconsciously, I seemed to move from one unexpected new beginning to another. My eyes were tightly closed most of the time, often “hanging on for dear life,” hoping wherever I landed would be the life I dreamed about.

During those years, I recall being guided by two influences. First, my mom had told me, “Good things come to those who wait.” Although this statement of hope reflected my mom’s somewhat passive approach to life, the goodness in it stayed with me. In times of trouble it was a great comfort. Eventually, it became a kind of mantra that I often repeated to others and said over and over to myself. The other powerful influence on my thinking came from my big brother. He is eleven years older than I am, one of my heroes and the pride of our family. He seemed to have come into this life goal-directed with a will to achieve and he planted a seed in my mind at an early age, “You can do or have whatever you want, if you want it badly enough to work for it.” I didn’t instantly make the connection that what he meant was that my destiny would be shaped by my decisions and my own actions. However, my deep respect for his guidance soon translated his message into a strong belief that life had many wonderful possibilities waiting for me to find them.

Over the years, I have grown more and more appreciative of the blessing of these early influences. My observation looking back is that these simple thoughts did shape my direction. They worked as catalysts to ignite my courage to look for, and embrace, many new beginnings, some that were full of joy and some surrounded by much sadness and scary stuff that came about unexpectedly and seemed very much out of my control.

A few years back, I started to more consciously approach this idea of a new beginning. Instead of big, giant chunks of time, I now recognize that every minute, every day, every month, every year that we are alive, we have an open invitation to clean out, build up and make our lives better than they were before. I’ve realized that the most gratifying renewals don’t come from material things we gather in, but from the sense of well-being and peace

“...if you make up your mind that “I have got to do it, and I must do it, and I will do it,” success will surely materialize.”

—Paramahansa Yogananda

that we each carve out for ourselves that comes first, by believing we can make positive change in our lives. Then courageously doing what is necessary to enrich our lives, step-by-step, unfolding the dreams that we hold inside.

For these reasons, the advent of a new year has become one of my favorite times. For years, I made hopeful New Years' resolutions. Some were realized and some forgotten along the way. There were also months spent renewing myself from *top* to *bottom* for big birthday milestones (like 30, 40, 50) arriving thinner, toned and styled for each new life decade. In recent years, I've worked to apply what I learned from the process of those more worldly renewals to getting real serious and specific about my goals and plans for the year, searching for the most meaningful contributions I could make. My life-long best friend and I work on our plan together. As we have experienced some amazing results that come from consciously developing a plan and working it all year long, we are hooked on the process. We look forward to it. We are getting better at the planning and achieving every year, and along the way we help each other stay focused—or sometimes, we even help each other recognize when we are off our paths.

Here is the thoughtful, but simple process we use. You might want to read through the whole process first.

new beginning planning process:

STEP 1: Give Yourself the Gift of Time

We are all busy, but we find time for what is important to us. Your life should be right up on the top of the list. What you need is at least a few dedicated hours to think. You can do this alone, but it is also great to work with someone special in your life or a few close friends. Find a date. Mark your calendar and show up. Come willing to fully invest yourself. As an example, we have spent from 4-6 hours to even a whole day dreaming, talking, refining and formalizing the New Year's plans.

STEP 2: Ask Yourself Questions and Think

Thinking about one of the questions below isn't difficult in itself, but it takes determination to stay with it long enough to pinpoint what your true answers are. It gets easier as you move through the process and as you practice the process. It is best to just start by brainstorming with yourself. You might even start pondering the questions below a few weeks ahead to give

“I'm not looking
for perfection.
I'm looking for
the best in
me...”

—Martina
Navratilova

yourself a running start by thinking through your responses. Don't worry about being perfect. You can refine preliminary thoughts later. Most important, write down your thoughts and stay with each question until you are satisfied with the response. This is where a friend or partner can be helpful. If you share the process, you can help each other move along more quickly by discussing your ideas with one another. Here are the questions:

VISION:

What is my long-term vision for my life? What do I want my life to be? Project yourself into that wonderful place and define what you see. Be specific.

GOALS:

In order to fulfill what you want your life to be, what specific interim goals will you have to achieve to lead you in that direction? (e.g., if your vision includes being debt-free, one goal might be to start paying off specific bills.)

SUPPORTING PRACTICES & DISCIPLINES:

What will you need to do every day, every week, every month as a practice to fulfill the vision and goals you have set for yourself? List specific practices, thinking through the behaviors and actions that will influence change in your life. Consider key aspects of your life—work, family, health, spirituality, recreation, money, and personal growth. Think about behavior changes that may be needed (e.g., if your mind is regularly full of self-defeating negative talk, then one of your new disciplines might be to practice the power of positive thinking.)

GOAL-DIRECTED ACTIONS:

What specific actions and behaviors will be necessary for you to develop the practices and discipline in your life that will support your vision and goals? Consider all the ways you may be sabotaging your vision and goals through your behavior and action, or maybe inaction. (e.g., if losing weight and eating healthy are supporting practices, then a goal-directed action might be to join Weight Watchers® or some other program that meets your needs; if having a better relationship with your partner or spouse is one of your goals, then planning time to really be together and talk with each other might be one of your important goals.)

“Stay with
friends that
support you...
Talk with
them...
How you're
doing...
How they're
doing and keep
your practices
together.”

—Rumi

MEASURES OF SUCCESS:

As you are working to fulfill your vision and achieve your goals, what will be the symbols of your success? How will you know if you are heading in the right direction? (e.g., if your goal is to find more meaningful work, then a few short-term measures of success might be that you will have rewritten your resume, identified leads for a new job and applied for the job.)

STEP 3: Refine and Review Your Plan Regularly

After a healthy brainstorm with yourself (or with a friend or two), refine your responses into a list that will have meaning to you, but will be brief enough for you to easily review it regularly. Be specific, but use phrases that you will recognize and understand, instead of long, cumbersome detail. A practice we have added is typing our refined list into a card that we carry with us. Give it a title. A couple that have worked are: “Life Success Plan” or “Living My (Our) Dream.” Then put it somewhere that you can bump into it often as you go about your day. Even seeing the title will be a reminder, silently questioning, “How are you doing? What progress have you made?” Seeing mine in my calendar pocket has corrected my actions many times. It is also great to review the card regularly. Read it. Talk about it now and then. Have a good laugh about your human failings. Ask yourself, what’s going well? What isn’t? What am I going to do about it? Then start up again, heading toward the life you have envisioned.

At the end of the year, if you have remained faithful in your belief that you can achieve your goals and you have done the action steps you planned, you will be amazed at what you have learned and achieved. It may be far beyond what you imagined!

INSPIRATION FOR YOUR NEW BEGINNING

Recently, I found a box of my dad’s belongings that I’ve never had the courage to open since he died some years back. In the box was a folder of quotes and stories and clippings he had saved. When I opened the folder, I found a short poem that he used to say often from memory. I have always wished that I had written it down when he was alive. When I saw it there, tattered and torn, it was as if he came back to make sure my wish came true. I am grateful that it came to me in time to bolster my belief in the promise of the new year ahead. May this poem also give you a new sense of determination and courage to set your direction for the year and believe you can achieve the goals you set for your new beginning.

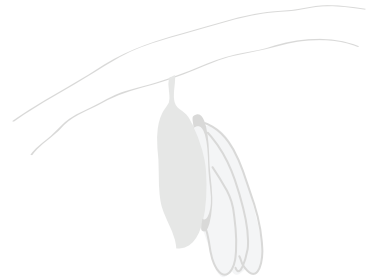
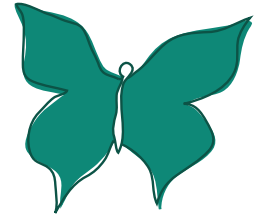
“You have to have confidence in your ability and then be tough enough to follow through.”

—Rosalynn Carter
Former First Lady

BEGIN WITH A VISION

Begin with a vision
 And hold it fast;
Reality passes
 But great dreams last.
In time, wit and work
 Will open the doors
To give form and body
 To that dream of yours.
Begin with a vision
 And follow it through—
For that is the way
 Great Tomorrows come true.

by Helen Lowrie Marshall
from her book *Quiet Power*
(one of my dad's news clippings, dated 1970)



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