New Years Resolutions

The basis for self-leadership is learning, and principally learning from experience. Reflection is a major way in which we learn. Consider some of the ways of reflecting: looking back, thinking back, dreaming, journaling, talking it out, watching last week’s game, asking for critiques, going on retreats.... Reflection is a way of making learning conscious.

-Adapted from Warren Bennis, On Becoming A Leader

Greg Giesen
# New Years Resolutions that Stick!

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**A note about time required and setting:**

It is critical to spend quality time on Steps 1 – 3. So critical, in fact, that you’ll need some “alone time” to do so. If possible, schedule a personal retreat (4 to 8 hours, away from any and all distractions) just for yourself where you have uninterrupted time to think, to reflect, to laugh, to cry, to write, to journal, or simply to get back in touch with yourself.

Take whatever time you need for Step 1, Step 2, and Step 3. Do not rush through this process. This is not a race. This is not a “HAVE TO.” It’s a “GET TO.” This is about your life. Aren’t you worth a few hours?

Step 4 is equally important as Steps 1 – 3 but it is not as time-bound.
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Introduction

Why is it we don’t take New Year’s resolutions very seriously? Is it because the word “resolution” has become associated with superficial, lofty goals that fade almost as quickly as our hangover from the New Year’s Eve celebration? Or could it be that there is simply no time between Thanksgiving and New Years to do any serious goal-setting, given all the holiday parties, family obligations, and end-of-the-year work deadlines that must be met?

The answer is “yes” to both. The fact is, New Year’s resolutions get a bad rap because we don’t take the time to do a thorough process of reflecting, assessing, transitioning, and goal setting. Instead, we latch on to any central theme that has been bothering us of late and turn that into some sort of half-hearted resolution. Is it no wonder that 80 percent of people who make resolutions on Jan. 1 fall off the wagon by Valentine’s Day, according to Marti Hope Gonzales, an associate professor of psychology at the University of Minnesota.

So, how do you make New Years resolutions that stick, you ask?

Let me answer this in two ways.

First, let’s talk about the difference between being interested and being committed. When you are interested, you do it (whatever that may be) when it’s convenient. When you are committed, you accept no excuses, only results! What I need from you is a commitment to this process. That means finding the time to complete the four-steps outlined in this workbook. It means enrolling others in your efforts, whether by sharing your insights and results with them or by doing the four-step process together. And it means creating accountability around your commitments to ensure long-lasting success.

Is this something you are willing to do?

Next is the four-step process itself. In Steps 1 & 2, you will use the New Year’s Questions provided after each section. By answering as many of these questions as you can, you’ll get the opportunity to reflect upon this past year and apply what you learned to the upcoming year. This dual-phased reflection process is a great way to both honor the past and embrace the future. Step 3 involves taking your initial resolutions and goals and turning them into measurable commitments. And finally, Step 4 is all about creating accountability around your commitments by following the Best Practices suggestions outlined in this workbook.

Most importantly, you’ve already taken a first step by downloading this packet. Now let’s get to work and create New Years resolutions that stick!

-Greg Giesen
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Step 1 – Reflecting on 2016

The end of the year is a perfect time for some personal reflection. It is an opportune time to look over the past year with gratitude and appreciation, noting the high points, the low points, and all the learning in-between.

At the end of this section are thirty questions that focus on this past year.

Your task:

1) Review the 30 questions that focus on this past year and select at least ten that you’d like to spend some time reflecting on, thinking about, or simply answering.

2) Using a note pad or a journal, write down any thoughts and/or feelings that come up as you go through each question.

3) Once you’ve completed your assessment of this past year, review your notes and look for any patterns, reoccurring themes, or insights that particularly stand out. The additional questions that follow should help.

4) Take a break before going on to Step 2.

Why Step 1 is so important: Every year of your life is like a chapter in your own autobiography. Make your life a bestseller by capturing as much as you can from each and every year. It will not only give you a greater sense of self, but it will undoubtedly make each successive year that much better.

Additional questions:

1. Did any emotions or feelings surface for you during this process? If so, what insight might that have for you?

2. A defining moment is a moment in time that had a life-changing impact on you. Did you have a defining moment this past year? If so, what impact did it have on you?
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3. There is as much to learn from the good things that happen to us as well as the bad things. What did you learn the most about yourself from this past year?

4. If someone asked you to share the three most important things that happened this past year, what would you tell them?

5. As you look over your notes, do you see any behavioral patterns or reoccurring themes that stand out from this past year?

_Self-examination is always the first step to change._
- Thomas Mann, Nobel Prize Winner
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Questions for this past year...

1. If you had to summarize this past year in three words, what would they be and why?

2. What “personal” accomplishments were you most proud of and why this past year?

3. What did you learn most about yourself this past year?

4. What surprised you the most this past year?

5. What was the biggest change you made this past year and why?

6. What were the biggest challenges you faced this past year and how did you handle them?
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7. Who were the people who had the greatest impact on you this past year and how did they impact you?

8. What “professional” accomplishments were you most proud of this past year and why?

9. What didn’t you do that you wish you had done this past year?

10. What friendships meant the most to you this past year and why?

11. What was one of the best decisions you made this past year?

12. If you could relive one day from this past year, what day would it be and why?
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13. What made you laugh this past year? Give some examples.

14. What did you do this past year to grow and develop yourself as a person?

15. What was one of the biggest risks you took this past year and how did it turn out?

16. If you could change one thing from this past year, what would you change and why?

17. What was your biggest disappointment this past year?

18. What unexpected obstacles came up this past year and how did you deal with them?
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19. What was one of the most meaningful things this past year that someone did for you?

20. What was one of the most meaningful things this past year that you did for someone else?

21. What was one of your favorite romantic highlights from this past year?

22. How are you different now than you were a year ago?

23. What was one of the most meaningful compliments you received this past year?

24. What’s still incomplete for you from this past year?
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25. What are you most thankful for this past year?

26. What created stress for you this past year and how did you manage it?

27. What did you do to stay healthy this past year and was it effective?

28. What did you do to play and have fun this past year?

29. What are you most proud of from this past year?

30. On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being high), how would you rate yourself on the amount of love you gave and received from this past year?

Congratulations! You’ve graduated to Step 2.
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Step 2 – Transitioning to 2017

The end of the year is also a time for regrouping, recommitting and transitioning into the New Year. At the end of this section are thirty questions that focus on this upcoming year.

Your task:

1) Review the 30 questions that focus on this upcoming year and select at least ten that you’d like to spend some time reflecting on, thinking about, or simply answering.

2) Using a note pad or a journal, write down any thoughts, ideas, or goals that come up as you go through each question.

3) Once you’ve completed your questions for the upcoming year, review your notes and look for anything that could potentially become a New Year’s resolution. The additional questions that follow should help.

4) Take a break before going on to Step 3.

Additional Questions:

1. Based on your work in Step 2 thus far, what do you think will be the biggest change you need to make for 2017?

2. When you think about resolutions and goal setting for the upcoming year, are you feeling confident, hopeful, and motivated, or do you lean more towards being unsure, anxious, and apprehensive? Please explain.

3. Complete the balance wheel (on the following page) by filling in each section (10 being a high score):
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How Balanced Are You?

QUESTIONS:

1. From a satisfaction / fulfillment perspective, where are you now in each area?
2. Where would you like to be in each area?
3. What do you need to focus on most and why?
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Questions for this upcoming year. . .

1. What would you like to be different in your life a year from now?

2. What’s the most obvious personal goal and/or commitment you need to make this upcoming year?

3. What, if any, bad habits would you like to rid yourself of this upcoming year?

4. What unfinished business do you need to complete this upcoming year?

5. What would you like to have more of in your life this upcoming year?

6. What would you like to have less of in your life this upcoming year?
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7. What relationships would you like to improve upon this upcoming year? What would that look like?

8. What’s the best advice you could give yourself for this upcoming year?

9. What personal challenges do you anticipate this upcoming year? What’s your strategy for handling these?

10. What professional and/or career-related challenges do you anticipate this upcoming year? What’s your strategy for handling these?

11. What would you like to be more disciplined about this upcoming year?

12. What do you plan to do just for you this upcoming year?
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13. What do you plan to do to create a healthy balance between family, friends, work and play this upcoming year?

14. What personal growth opportunities are you going to create for yourself this upcoming year?

15. What compliments would you most want to hear about yourself this upcoming year?

16. What could possibly prevent you from creating the year ahead that you truly desire? Is there anything you can begin to do now in order to avoid that from happening?

17. What are you looking forward to most this upcoming year?

18. What are you apprehensive about this upcoming year and why?
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19. What do you plan to do to grow and develop yourself professionally this upcoming year? How will it benefit you?

20. What do you plan to do to enhance the amount of love and romance in your life this upcoming year?

21. What physical health commitments are you willing to make to yourself this upcoming year?

22. What needs to be your first priority this upcoming year?

23. What support are you going to especially need this upcoming year and from whom?

24. What support will you need to be able to provide this upcoming year and for whom?
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25. It’s January 1st, 2018 and you are starring at yourself in the mirror. Aside from some possible bloodshot eyes from too much celebrating the night before, describe the essence of the person you see in the mirror.

26. What is your biggest wish for this upcoming year and what would it look like if it comes true?

27. What are you going to do to have fun this upcoming year?

28. What risks do you plan on taking this upcoming year?

29. From a spiritual perspective, what, if anything, needs to be different for you in this upcoming year and why?

30. What three words would you like to represent how this upcoming year turns out?

Congratulations! You’ve graduated to Step 3.

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Step 3 – Resolutions to Commitments

You’ve now done the required pre-work to move into the resolution stage; only we are going to make a slight adjustment before continuing. From this point forward, we are going to replace the word resolution with the word commitment. Commitment represents an undying dedication, a vow, a pledge, and a promise to keeping your word. When you make a commitment, it is no longer about “if” but about “when.”

Additional advice:

• It is important that the commitments you make are your commitments and not someone else’s. Trying to become a better listener because your significant other wants you to be won’t be as effective as you wanting to be a better listener in order to enhance your personal and professional relationships.

• Too many commitments will muddy the water. Try to keep your commitments to around five, give or take.

• Since balance in our lives is so important, make sure your commitments reflect balance as well (use the Balance Wheel on page 12 as a guideline).

• All commitments must include a daily or weekly action plan.

Your task:

1) Identify five commitments that you are willing to make for the upcoming year.

2) Using the SMART commitment formula (at the end of this section), write out your five individual commitments.

3) Once you’ve completed your commitments, you must also break each commitment down into daily and/or weekly action items, using the SMART formula for these as well. The worksheet that follows should help.
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Worksheet

1. My first commitment for the upcoming year is:

   Specific action items that I will do on a daily/weekly basis to demonstrate and support this commitment include:
   
   •
   •
   •
   •
   •

   Possible obstacles that could prevent me from achieving this commitment:
   
   •
   •

   What I’ll do to counter these obstacles and stay the course toward my commitment:
   
   •
   •

2. My second commitment for the upcoming year is:

   Specific action items that I will do on a daily/weekly basis to demonstrate and support this commitment include:
   
   •
   •
   •
   •
   •

   Possible obstacles that could prevent me from achieving this commitment:
   
   •
   •
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What I’ll do to counter these obstacles and stay the course toward my commitment:

• 
• 

3. My third commitment for the upcoming year is:

Specific action items that I will do on a daily/weekly basis to demonstrate and support this commitment include:

• 
• 
• 
• 

Possible obstacles that could prevent me from achieving this commitment:

• 
• 

What I’ll do to counter these obstacles and stay the course toward my commitment:

• 
• 

4. My fourth commitment for the upcoming year is:

Specific action items that I will do on a daily/weekly basis to demonstrate and support this commitment include:

• 
• 
• 
•
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Possible obstacles that could prevent me from achieving this commitment:

•

•

What I’ll do to counter these obstacles and stay the course toward my commitment:

•

•

5. My fifth commitment for the upcoming year is:

Specific action items that I will do on a daily/weekly basis to demonstrate and support this commitment include:

•

•

•

•

Possible obstacles that could prevent me from achieving this commitment:

•

•

What I’ll do to counter these obstacles and stay the course toward my commitment:

•

•
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Creating S.M.A.R.T. Commitments

S - Specific
M - Measurable
A - Attainable
R - Realistic
T - Timely

Specific - A specific commitment is well defined, clear, and unambiguous.

EXAMPLE: A general commitment would be, "Get in shape." But a specific commitment would say, "Join the health club and workout 4 days a week."

Measurable – What good is a commitment that you can't measure? If your commitments are not measurable, you never know whether you are making progress. Hence, it is important that your commitments include concrete criteria for measuring progress.

To determine if your commitment is measurable, ask questions such as......How much? How many? How will I know when it is accomplished?

Attainable – For a commitment to be attainable, it needs to be realistic and achievable. Commitments that are set too high or too low eventually lose appeal and become ignored.

Relevant - To be relevant, a commitment must be both meaningful and beneficial. The more meaningful a commitment is, the more dedicated you’ll be to achieving it. The more beneficial a commitment is, the more motivated you’ll be to see it through.

Time-based - A commitment should be grounded within a time frame. With no time frame tied to it, there’s no sense of urgency. If you want to lose 10 lbs, when do you want to lose it by? "Someday" won’t work. But if you anchor it within a timeframe, "by May 1st", then you’ve set your unconscious mind into motion to begin working on the commitment.

Congratulations! You’ve graduated to Step 4.

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Step 4 – Creating Accountability

Congratulations on creating your New Year’s commitments. This last step, Creating Accountability, is what will ultimately determine if you are successful or not.

For any goal or commitment to be successful, it is critical that each of you create a surrounding environment that not only supports what you are doing but that also holds you accountable. This can be done in many ways and is why I’m including a Best Practices list to help you identify accountability measures that will work for you.

Your task:

1) Select a minimum of 3 separate accountability practices from the list of Best Practices below that you would be willing to commit to for the upcoming year.

2) Add an additional New Years commitment to your list that includes your accountability practices. Be sure to use the SMART formula for this commitment and action items as well.

Best Practices
(The following list of Best Practices was derived from successful authors, life coaches, motivational speakers and management trainers across the U.S.):

• Accountability Team. Create your own accountability team (3 to 5 members) and get together once a month to share progress, updates, and challenges on each member’s commitments. The key is to provide both support and accountability for each other.

• Life Coaching. If an accountability team is not doable or if you prefer more one-on-one coaching around your commitments, sign up with a Life Coach.

• Share Commitments with Those Most Impacted. Imagine how powerful it would be if you shared your commitments with the people who were most impacted by those commitments. And imagine if these people agreed to not only support you, but to give you ongoing feedback along the way. This is a no-brainer!

• Bi-Annual Personal Retreat. Take a day all to yourself every six months (quarterly would be even better) and get away from all distractions for the purpose of assessing, reviewing, critiquing, and tweaking your New Years commitments. The truth is, our lives are always changing and so to would our commitments and priorities.

• Journaling. Journaling on a regular basis is a great way to stay focused on your commitments while increasing self-awareness. Journaling also provides you with a record of the year and greatly enhances this 4-Step process, year after year.
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• **Visualization.** Visualizing your commitments in action is only second best to actually acting upon your commitments. Visualization is a form of mental rehearsal that builds self-confidence and keeps us in alignment with our desires and commitments.

• **Reward Yourself.** Create a reward system for yourself that acknowledges incremental progress towards your commitments.

• **Become an Expert.** Those of us in the management training field know that we teach what we most need to learn. Become an expert in the area that you need to excel the most in by reading books, articles and attending workshops. Then, when you are ready, begin instructing others. You’ll be amazed at what this can do for you.

• **Daily Affirmations.** Okay, maybe not for everyone but they do work. Why? Because affirmations are a form of visualization and we already know that works. Think about it.

• **Weekly Rituals.** Every Sunday morning I sit in my outdoor Jacuzzi and reflect upon the past week and the upcoming week. It has actually become a spiritual adventure over the years for me and I wouldn’t trade that weekly ritual for anything. Why not create one for yourself?

• **Daily Questions.** Create your own thought-provoking daily question to reflect upon each night or each morning. Let’s say your commitment is to lose 25 pounds by April 1st. An example of a daily question(s) might be: “What went well today regarding my exercise program and what didn’t go as well? What can I learn from today that will help me even more for tomorrow?

Something as simple as answering a daily question or two can help maintain the focus on your commitments and provide continuous motivation to stay on course.

Congratulations! You’re done!
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About Greg Giesen

Bio: Greg Giesen is the manager of people development at the University of Denver where he provides professional development and consulting services for faculty and staff. With a Master’s degree in Personnel Services and Counseling from Miami University, Greg brings over twenty-five years of experience in corporate consulting, training, facilitation and conflict mediation. In addition, Greg is a 14-year graduate school professor at UCOL and is the author of three books on Creating Authenticity, including his latest, Mondays At 3: A Story for Managers Learning to Lead. Greg also speaks around the country on authentic leadership and his award-winning program, Leading From Within. Additional information about Greg can be found on www.leadingfromwithin.net or on LinkedIn http://www.linkedin.com/in/greggiesen.

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