

SPIRIT, MIND & BODY

Setting the Tone for the Year to Come

By: Pamela Bell

As I write this, Christmas hasn't even arrived yet. The houses are still decorated with glistening lights, wreaths and inflatable snowman and parts of Petaluma look like a storybook dream. But soon this will all change. Santa will have come and gone by the time you read this. Our new toys will be well employed or broken, and the storybook will be closed until this time next year.

Our streets will take on a different feel then. The houses will return to their normal facade and the trees will sit barren exposing the sky. An emptiness might linger. A solemnness both in the air and in our hearts as we catch our breath from the holiday festivities and slowly move into the shelter of a brand new year. What lies before us? What are we hoping for? What dreams might be realized this year that were passed over in 2003?

During this transition from one year to the next, I always find myself challenged by letting go of the past and embracing fully what lies before me. There is a grieving period of sorts as I reflect upon my existence and the quick pace with which it passes. There is sweetness too, as I acknowledge my accomplishments and the teachings they have brought me. And finally there is a letting go.

A purging that is required to make room for what is yet to come. It is a bittersweet transition as I say goodbye to an old friend that has stood solidly by me for twelve long months. But say goodbye I must, so that new dreams can take shape and my creativity can soar to yet unimagined heights.

This is where excitement enters the stage, and even the air around me feels pure and weightless as if it is simply waiting for form; an idea to take hold or a promise to be made. And right here in this place is where you can set the tone for the entire coming year.

Resolutions are made and broken as we regress into our old selves. We decide the whole idea is silly in the first place, rather than set up structures that ensure our success. So first I request that you change the word "resolution" to "promise." If you make a promise to a friend or loved one, do you generally keep it? I personally never make a promise I can't keep. Why not show the same honor and loyalty to our selves? Think about this word for a moment: Promise. It is powerful and full of commitment. I ask that you make a promise to yourself.

Secondly, follow the steps below to help you reflect on your past, reevaluate your goals and redirect your efforts toward the future.

Reviewing the past is essential if we are to learn from our mistakes and identify what contributed to our successes. The following questions help you to do just that.

1) What accomplishments did I make over the past year that I am most proud of?

2) What steps did I take that contributed to this success?

3) What did I not accomplish that I wanted to? Is it important enough to me to carry over to this year?

4) What did I learn about myself over the past year? Did I discover that I am really good at something? Did I discover that I spend most of my day doing something I don't enjoy? Did I discover that I really love doing something that I never thought I would? What did I learn from these discoveries and how might I use this new perspective in the future?

5) What kind of support was required for me to achieve what I did and where did it come from? Who stood by my side? Who believed in me? How did I manage to create my own support system? Was I able to ask for what I needed?

Reevaluating your goals will help you to focus your efforts and intentions. First however, it is important to prioritize them.

1) What do I most want to achieve this year? Do I want

to focus most of my energy on one goal or do I have several that are of equal importance?

2) What are my secondary goals? Where do they fit into my overall "big picture".

3) How important are these goals to me? Why are they important?

4) How do I hope to feel when I have accomplished what I have set out to do?

Planning a direction is essential. Without this step you might as well be asleep at the wheel and driving in circles.

1) What steps must I take in order to meet my primary goals? (Example: If you seek a new job you will need an updated resume and perhaps a good career counselor. If you wish to travel the world you will need to plan an itinerary. etc.)

2) Set some benchmarks for yourself. By March I will be here! By June I will be here! If you meet your deadlines, in what ways will you reward yourself?

3) What kind of support will I need and where will I

get it?

4) What am I willing to give up so that I can be fully committed to my goals?

5) How will I celebrate when I have kept my promise to myself and honored the creative and ever changing person that I am?

One final suggestion: at the onset of this work go to higher ground (Mt. Tamalpais, Pt. Reyes, Bodega Bay, Tahoe and Helen Putnam State Park, are some of my favorites.) Sit and be quiet. Look far and wide and take in the view. Notice the bigger picture and your place in it. How will you make your mark? What impression will you leave? When will you begin?

"Let old dreams fade into the night, so new ones can rise with the dawn."...Beth Mende Conny

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