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Calculated risks help in reaching goals

The new year is already upon us. One year ago, I started the Paradigm Shift column with a look at new year's resolutions and by inviting readers to examine and assess how they are doing with respect to their goals throughout the year, both professionally and personally. It is through examining our successes and shortcomings that we can more effectively formulate plans for the future and maximize our chances of accomplishing our short- and long-term goals.

So, how did you do this year? Did you stay committed to your goals throughout the year, or did they quickly fade from your consciousness? Whatever happened, do not be discouraged. We all know that resolutions are often no more than pie-in-the-sky wishes and hopes, akin to declaring your desire to win the lottery. This lack of realism and, maybe because of this, a poor track record has led many to refuse to make resolutions of any kind. It is fascinating how we seem to have a love-hate relationship with new year's resolutions. But I believe that if we all take a closer look at why resolutions fail, there are important lessons to be learned.

Resolutions require us to constantly strike a delicate balance among many competing factors and that balance is an ever-moving target. The new year is a time of fresh beginnings and wiping away regrets of the past; it is in this context that we generally make our resolutions. However, at a time when our natural inclination is to focus on the good in all things, including ourselves, there is a tendency to forget that we are also human and have inherent limitations in what we can realistically accomplish.

Promises to ourselves, partic-

ularly when made as resolutions, are often unrealistic. Furthermore, we often underestimate the damage to our psyche and motivation resulting from having regularly unmet expectations of ourselves. Indeed, if we consistently fail to reach our goals, we often experience feelings of failure, inadequacy and low self-esteem which can then make it more difficult for us to effectively perform.

Therefore, we owe it to ourselves to take a step back and make sure that we both consistently aim high while, at the same time, keep at least some of what we declare both realistic and achievable. Success begets success and accomplishing even just one or two of the goals we set for ourselves creates the necessary traction for attacking other challenges and creating the "flow" in our lives where the real magic happens.

As we are setting our goals, we must be brutally honest and bold about the possibilities of what we can and should strive to achieve. Seizing greatness in our professional and personal lives is never easy and it is only by holding ourselves accountable and aggressively pushing to learn and grow as much as we can that we are truly successful.

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PARADIGM SHIFT



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Rather than being distracted by what others are or are not doing, having the resolve to focus on our goals not only makes them more attainable but also frees up more time to take on additional interests and challenges. We should embrace each of the new opportunities we encounter along the way and see them as ways to learn about and improve ourselves.

While it is a challenge to be realistic in our goal-setting and, at the same time, to push ourselves to the limit, it is in striking this balance that we are at our best and can then most effectively help others in their journeys to also be better professionals and people.

We all know that life is full of successes and failures — those which life deals us on its own and those which we bring upon ourselves. However, we often forget this reality when we get down to developing that list of

goals we wish to accomplish. We often end up playing in the minor leagues in the game of life, rather than setting our sights on the majors.

If we all take a moment to reflect on what our dreams and aspirations were when we were small, we would realize that we all dreamed a little bigger when we were young. Some attribute this to the naiveté of youth, but I believe that it is because we have all become a bit disconnected from ourselves along the way. The new year is as good a time as any to reconnect with ourselves, to think about what excites, motivates and inspires us and whether we have people and opportunities in our lives which will open up possibilities for happiness. Achieving happiness is a sure sign that you are doing something right — and that success is likely around the corner.

Whether you ultimately succeed or fail in what you set out to do this year, there will undoubtedly be tremendous wisdom and knowledge you will gain in your journey. Indeed, many of the world's most successful leaders say that their greatest learning experiences have been in those moments when they have failed in what they have set out to do, rather than when they have succeeded.

Knowing this to be true, we should all feel more confident in pushing our boundaries in making whatever new year's resolutions we choose, while at the same time maintaining a sense of realism in the process. Taking calculated risks is what life is all about. It enables us to push toward our most challenging and meaningful goals, while at the same time to follow our passions and maintain our zest for life.