

MY NEW YEAR' RESOLUTION

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I have never a big fan of New Year's resolutions. My thought has been that if you want to change your behavior, then don't wait for the New Year. Everyone I've known who made resolutions like losing weight, quitting smoking, going to the Gym, saving money, and in the end those resolutions would be broken within weeks, if not days. So, why bother lying to yourself, right?

This year I've started to rethink my New Year's resolution prejudice. To be honest, I usually make them even though I'm skeptical. So, this year when I started thinking about the changes that I wanted to make for the New Year, I asked myself why I was bothering to make a resolution(s) when I don't really believe that they have any merit or weight in changing behavior. The answer that came to me was simple: the end of the calendar year is a natural time to reflect on our lives. Finishing up the holiday season, spending time with family, watching "It's a Wonderful Life", and planning next year's budget – these activities all seem to lead naturally to a time of reflection. This led me to think about how many of us run businesses. If we're doing our job, then we're constantly taking time to reflect, assess, plan and take action. This year, I'm making some resolutions, to be a better dad, which I'll share with you.

Before I begin, let me just make one more point. When most of us set goals every year for our work, those goals are usually substantiated by a plan of action to achieve them. One of the problems I think comes into play when making a New Year's resolution is that there is often no reflection on how to achieve the resolution. It's just a statement of what I **want** to do. So, I'm going to share with you some of my plans on how to achieve these resolutions, as obviously, that will be the key to success. I'm also going to keep 'em short and sweet (only three) and attainable. Here we go:

1. **Be there when I'm there.** Everyone told me when we started having children that time would fly by. Well, they weren't kidding. My oldest child is 11, and it seems like minutes ago that we were toting him out of the hospital in his infant car seat for his first visit home. We only have him for another 7 years before he's off to college – almost 2/3 of our time with him is gone.

I get home most nights for dinner (although sometimes later than I planned), and am blessed to live only 5 miles from where I work. I also am the Head of School at my children's school. So, I get plenty of face time with my children. However, I also am distracted more than I like and more than my children deserve. I check my email more than I need to, take phone calls that can wait until later, and bring work home that could have been done at work if I had managed my time better. So, my first New Year's resolution is to really be present when I'm with my children. Here are some things that I will be trying to do to achieve this goal:

- a) Eliminate phone calls in the car when I'm with the kids. The kids and I have an agreement around this, and I usually live up to it, but need to be consistent.
- b) Stay in the room during family movie nights. Some of the movies they want to watch are awful, but they love sharing the experience with my wife and me, and it's important to them.
- c) Turn off my cell phone when I get home and save emails until after the kid's bed-time. I've gotten addicted to checking my email and text messaging on my smart phone. But the truth is that it's really rude and unnecessary to the most important people in my life.

Desired result: a deeper connection and sense of trust with my children.

2. **Teach more, blame less.** I've realized lately that I've gotten into a bad habit of assuming that my

children should know how to do things around the house because they watch my wife and me (or that they just should have been born with these basic skills). I don't always take time to teach them the steps of how to do a job and then what completion should look like so that they can self-evaluate. Then, when they don't do what I thought they should, or didn't do it how I thought they should I get upset. Here's what I'll be working on to help facilitate more teaching and less blaming:

- a) Schedule weekly chore time for larger chores into our routine, where my wife and I can work **with** the kids so that we can be present and available to show them **how**. We currently do larger cleaning, etc. as it's needed, and this isn't conducive for my wife and I to be truly present for helping and teaching when it's needed.
- b) Include our youngest children in the daily chores and teach them how to do some of the chores that they can do. Currently the oldest two do most of the chores (ages 6 and 11), but as a Montessori teacher, I know that my youngest child (age 14 months) can start to do things like help put the silverware away (yes, give it a try, it's amazing).

Desired result: children who are confident and capable, and feel comfortable making mistakes.

- 3. Involve the children more in family problem-solving, planning and decision making.** While my wife and I try to involve the kids in as much problem-solving and planning as possible, we too often take the easiest solution for the moment and make decisions for the family that could be shared. As a result, the kids buy-in and cooperation is not as high as we'd like. When this happens we find it easy to get into the cycle of demanding obedience rather than fostering cooperation. And while blind obedience sounds like a terrific virtue to have instilled in our children (momentarily anyway), I think what most of us really seek is cooperation and mutual respect. With that in mind, how we are going to do to attain our goal is:

- a) Reschedule our weekly family meeting to a time that will allow for more consistency. Family meetings are a time where we solve problems, plan for future events and family time, and make decisions together that involve the whole family.
- b) Before tackling a problem in the moment, take time to "S.T.O.P." together. S – Stop, T – Think, O – Organize and Plan, P – Proceed
- c) Teach our younger children the concept of STOP.

Desired result: Increased cooperation, communication, mutual-respect and sense of community and belonging in our family.

I hope that by sharing these resolutions and plans that you too may be inspired to reflect, and plan for being an improved mom or dad this year. There really is no more important job on the planet. I hope you have a Happy New Year, and that you make lots of mistakes – they're a wonderful opportunity to learn and grow.