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### How Are You Doing With Those New Year's Resolutions?

Each month when I turn my calendar over to the next month I am amazed at how the time goes. We are already at the midpoint of another year. I consider myself lucky to have a June birthday. In January, the start of a new year, almost everyone takes stock of their lives and sets new goals for themselves. Because I start a “New Year” of my life in June, I get to review my progress at the halfway point of the year, when most people have long forgotten January’s goals and resolutions. According to a study conducted by the University of Scranton, less than 8% of people achieve the goals they set for the New Year. This is why it is much easier to find a parking spot at the gym in February than in the first weeks of January. It is also why so many people fail to achieve their sales or business goals. The middle of summer is a good time to make what airline pilots call a “mid course correction” and rededicate yourself to achieving your objectives in the second half of the year. To help you realize your goals, below are some ideas to help you stay on track toward your objectives.

#### **Think about what you want**

At my company, our sales managers assign a sales goal to each of the people that report to them. Achieving this assigned target has a big impact on the sales person’s earnings. One of our reps completely ignores her sales target, it’s not that she doesn’t respect her manager or isn’t interested in her paycheck; in fact she is one of our top earners. She ignores her assigned goal because she sets her own, much more aggressive goals. This is a good example of the importance of setting meaningful goals.

Psychologists who study human motivations describe two basic types of incentives, extrinsic or intrinsic. An extrinsic goal comes from the outside world. You will earn a bonus if you complete a task or you will be more attractive to others if you lose weight. Research has shown that extrinsic motivators are effective in the short term, but do not produce lasting results. For example, people who work hard to get a raise in their salary, tend to slack off after they have received their raise. The larger check ceases to be an incentive and is soon seen as an entitlement. It is human nature that soon after we get the big boat we have been dreaming of owning, we begin dreaming about a bigger boat. Intrinsic motivations come from within; they are goals that are not based on external rewards, but on delivering personal satisfaction. An intrinsic goal would be, “I want to prove to myself that I can be the top rep in the company” or “I want

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to lose weight so that I will feel more alive and healthy.” Developing intrinsic goals can be hard work. You have to set aside time to really think about your life and what you want to accomplish. Your goals have to be measured against this standard—“Will accomplishing this help me get what I want out of life?” Once you have established intrinsic goals, maintaining your focus is simply reminding yourself of the personally important reasons for setting them. “I will stay in the field and make 5 more calls today, because that’s what the top rep in the company would do and I will be the top rep!”

### **The power of intention**

A group of British researchers conducted a study that found a simple technique for achieving one’s goals. They found that writing down one’s commitments to performing a specific task, greatly increases the chances that you will complete them. A group of people who wanted to start exercising regularly were recruited for the British study. The participants were divided into three groups. The first group was the control group. They were only instructed to record when they exercised in a journal. The second group was given materials to read and given a motivational lecture on the benefits of exercising regularly and on the consequences of not working out. This group was also asked to keep an exercise diary. The third group received the same information and instructions as the second group, but they were also asked to create an exercise plan for the next week. Group three was asked to clearly state their intention to exercise by writing out a statement that read, “During the next week, I will exercise vigorously for at least 20 minutes on Wednesday morning at the YMCA.” The participant’s intention statements had to be specific regarding the time, places and duration of the workout. The exercise diaries of all three groups were collected at the conclusion of the study. An analysis of the diary data produced some very interesting results. The control group and the “motivation” group had almost identical results. In fact, the group who had received the motivational materials actually performed slightly worse than the control group, 38% of the control group exercised on a weekly basis versus just 35% of the second group. An amazing 91% of the third group followed up on their intentions and exercised weekly. At the beginning of the study, all participants said they wanted to exercise regularly so “desire” was not a factor. People were assigned randomly to the three groups, so it is illogical to assume that members of the third group had greater “will power” than their peers. The research, which has been duplicated in similar studies done elsewhere, indicated that writing out our intentions in specific detail has an immense impact on our ability to change our habits and achieve our goals. Dr. Heidi Grant Halvorson, Professor of

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Psychology at Columbia University, has said, “Deciding in advance when and where you will take specific actions to reach your goal can double or triple your chances for success.”

### **Putting this technique to work**

General Norman Schwarzkopf said, “The truth of the matter is that you always know the right thing to do...the hard part is doing it!” This is certainly true in our industry. We know what it takes to be successful, we need to talk to new people, we need to sell larger programs to our existing accounts, we need to come up with new promotions to help our customers, etc. Like the General said, the “hard part is doing it!” This is where invoking the power of intention can help us in achieving our goals. The first step is to establish personal activity goals. An activity goal is completely within our control, we cannot say with certainty, “I will sell three new customers this week,” as we will need the customer’s cooperation to accomplish this. We can say, “I will make three new business calls every day this week.” You can start by making a list of the things “you should do,” prioritize them and then write out your intentions to do so. Make these goals reasonable, don’t plan to make 100 new calls this week, but make them stretch beyond what you are currently doing. Don’t forget to include a time and a location when you write these out. For example, if your ultimate goal is to expand your customer base, look at what you need to do to realize this objective—make more prospecting calls. Think about your schedule and then write out your “intention statement.” In this scenario, your intention statement would read something like this, “I will make prospecting calls in the southern end of my territory from 1 to 6 p.m. on Wednesday.” Don’t just say this to yourself, write it out. The research is very clear on this point; writing out your intentions gives them more weight and increases your likelihood to follow through on them. You can post these at your desk or put it in your calendar. You may wish to share your goal with your co-workers, your supervisor, your partner or anyone else you choose, but this is not important. The key is making and keeping a commitment to yourself. You can attack several goals at once using this technique, but don’t try to lump them together. Keep them focused and very specific. This method can be used to break bad habits and establish new ones. If you want to become a better sales person, you could write something like this, “On Tuesdays and Wednesdays, I will arrive at the office one hour early and I will spend that hour reading sales books and blogs to improve my professional skills.” If you do this for a few weeks, it will become a habit and in a year’s time you will have spent over a hundred hours improving your selling skills.

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### One step at a time

Clearly defining our goals and setting them to paper is the first step to making our lives true masterpieces. Few works of man are as impressive as a Michelangelo sculpture. When you look at these masterworks it is hard to imagine that they are the result of thousands of individual hammer blows, each touch of the chisel removing a tiny piece of stone. This is how masterpieces are created, one small action at a time. To achieve our goals we need to imagine where we want to be, know what we need to do to get there and then commit to doing them.

*This article was written by Jim Busch of the Pittsburgh Pennysaver.*

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