

Making a Resolution that Matters

To make resolutions that matter, don't look forward. Look back.

by **Marshall Goldsmith**

It is February - half of all New Year's resolutions have already been broken. It is probably a good time to revisit your goals and think about what you really want to change.

Take a deep breath. Take a deeper breath.

I want you to imagine that you're 95 years old - and on your death bed. Before taking your last breath - you're given a great gift: the ability to travel back in time - the ability to talk to the person who is reading this column - the ability to help this person be a better professional and, more importantly, lead a better life.

The 95-year-old you understands what was really important and what wasn't, what mattered and what didn't, what counted and what didn't really count. What advice would this wise "old you" have for the "you" who is reading this page?

Take a few seconds to answer this question - personally and professionally. Jot down words that capture what the old you would be saying to the younger you that is here now. My next suggestion is simple - just do whatever you wrote down! Make that your resolution for this year and next.

A friend of mine actually had the chance to interview people who were dying and ask them what advice they would have had for themselves. The answers he got provide wonderful advice for all of us.

One recurring theme was to "find happiness and meaning - now," not next month or next year. The great Western disease lies in the phrase, "I will be happy when . . ." The wise old you has finally realized that the next promotion, the next achievement, or the corner office really won't change your world that much. Many older people said they were so wrapped up in looking for what they didn't have that they seldom appreciated what they did have. They often wished they would just enjoyed life as they were living it.

Another common response revolved around friends and family. You may work for a wonderful company, and you may think that your contribution to that organization is very important. When you are 95 years old and you look at the people around your deathbed, very few of your fellow employees will be waving good-bye. Your friends and family will probably be the only people who care. Appreciate them now and share a large part of your life with them.

Older people offer other valuable advice: "Follow your dreams." Figure out your true purpose in life, and go for it! This doesn't apply just to big dreams; it is also true for little dreams. Buy the sports car you always wanted, go to that exotic locale you always

imagined yourself visiting, learn to play the guitar or the piano. If some think your vision of a well-lived life is a bit offbeat or even goofy, who cares? It isn't their life. It's yours. Old people who pursued their dreams are always happier with their lives. Few of us will achieve all of our dreams. Some will always be elusive. So the key question is not, "Did I make all of my dreams come true?" The key question is, "Did I try?"

I just finished a major research project involving more than 200 high-potential leaders from 120 companies around the world. Each company could nominate only two future leaders, the very brightest of its young stars. These are the kinds of people who could jump at a moment's notice to better-paying positions elsewhere. We asked each of them a simple question: "If you stay in this company, why are you going to stay?"

The following are the top three answers.

"I am finding meaning and happiness now. The work is exciting and I love what I am doing."

"I like the people. They are my friends. This feels like a team. It feels like a family. I could make more money working with other people, but I don't want to leave the people here."

"I can follow my dreams. This organization is giving me a chance to do what I really want to do in life."

The answers were never about the money. They were always about the satisfaction. When my friend asked people on their deathbeds what was important - and I asked young, global leaders what was important - we got exactly the same answers!

So do the reverse New Year's resolution. Don't look ahead. Look behind. Be happy now - enjoy your friends and family - and follow your dreams. This is great advice for everyone who wants a fulfilling career. It's also great advice for everyone who wants to live a meaningful life.