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Six Steps: Make This YOUR Year

By Jackie Billhymer

Welcome to the New Year! There is a passage in T.S. Eliot's "Little Gidding" that reads:

*"What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from."*

The New Year brings a sense of renewal with new beginnings and anticipation for all of the wonderful possibilities the next 365 days may offer. It can also be a time of reflection over the last year, recounting the good and the bad and putting the year 'to rest', so to speak. Whether your focus is the beginning of the year or the end, there are several things to consider as you ponder the New Year.

A resolution by Merriam-Webster's definition is 'a position arrived at after consideration' or a 'firm or unwavering adherence to one's purpose'. And maybe you don't like to call them resolutions. You can decide to set a goal, have a renewed sense of purpose, right a wrong or decide to say goodbye to old habits and ways of thinking. Whatever your feelings are - each new day is an opportunity to make positive changes. THIS is the year!

Whether you call it a resolution, a goal, a purpose or a priority, the intent is that you are willing to change something in order to accomplish another. Studies of human behavior tell us there is often a gap between intention and behavior. We intend to exercise more, give up smoking or soda, eat better or save more money. It is our behavior that dictates whether we take action towards accomplishing the goal.

Here are steps you can take to make this YOUR year:

1. In the words of Zig Ziglar, **start** with a checkup from the neck up. Get real with yourself! Think about the things you want to do, improve upon, or change. What do you want to accomplish? Why is it important to you? Take time to **envision** what effect this change will have on your life.
2. **Write down** what you would like to accomplish the most. It is important to write your goals down to see them, not just think of them. Be specific! If your goal is to become more active in your community, narrow it down to the specific area(s) you want to get involved in.
3. How are you going to make it happen? **Create** an action plan. For each goal, think of one to three **actions** that will support your goal. Using the example from above, you have decided you want to become more involved in the community by volunteering at a local hospital. An action would be to contact the organization and ask about how to become a volunteer and take the required steps.
4. You have your goal(s) and you have a few actions set towards the goal. Now, **set a time frame** for accomplishing your goal(s). Be realistic! If your goal is to run a marathon and you consider yourself a couch potato, then give yourself time to train. Look at your action plan and break it down by what you want to accomplish in a week, a month, 90 days, whatever a realistic length of time is for YOU.
5. **Commit** to following your action plan. Keep it fresh in your mind by posting your list somewhere that can serve as a daily reminder - the fridge, the bathroom mirror, your office, the dashboard of your car. Seeing your goal(s) every day will help remind you of WHY it is important.
6. Lastly, be prepared to **adjust**. You may have setbacks or obstacles pop up that catch you unprepared. When this happens, go back to your action plan and make changes if you need to. Maybe a goal is going to take longer than you hoped, and that is okay. Keep at it!

Setting goals requires consistency and patience. Take it one day at a time and celebrate or reward yourself when you do accomplish a goal. Have a mindset that anything is possible! This IS the year you achieve your goal(s). May the New Year bring you happiness, peace and prosperity! ■