



SOME TIPS ON FULFILLING NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

Well, another year has passed...much too quickly for some of us and not quick enough for others. For many people, there are two main issues that need to be addressed at this time of year and not necessarily in this order. One is to try and figure out how we're going to pay for all of the bills incurred buying gifts for Christmas. The other is to focus in on making some New Year's resolutions. I'm not qualified to address the former but I would like to spend some time exploring the latter. Yes, New Year resolutions have become almost a ritual for many people. They talk about them, tout them and some make them but do nothing to accomplish them. The hoopla surrounding this festive day probably transcends any other celebration on our yearly list. The revelry that accompanies New Year's Eve parties is the most resounding practice but then, there's the day after getting over our having drank and ate too much. And there is also the dreaded thought of making some New Year's Resolutions. In this article I want to explore some of the social, psychological and emotional importance of New Year's resolutions.

I say "dreaded" because resolutions have to do with some of the practices that people have engaged in previously that weren't good for them or have become a problem and need changing. And so, we use this New Year to get a fresh start and resolve to fix them in order to get back onto the right path in our lives. Some are sincere in making resolutions while others are rather "half hearted" because they really don't want to change but feel the need to conform to what others or society might expect. And so resolutions have become a traditional or, for some, an essential practice. A clear fact is that, though, is that the longer we practice a pattern that may be harmful, the more difficult it is to change. For instance, if someone has a "smoking habit" that is quite different from having an addiction to smoking. The latter will no doubt take a great deal of time and effort to change whereas the former might not.

So what's the difference between success and failure in succeeding to resolve your issues? What insures that you will be successful in keeping your resolutions? It seems that the only way a resolution can be effective is when certain conditions prevail. One of them is to have a *proper motivation*. By that I mean having very strong motivation and incentive to change a routine or pattern vs. just giving lip service to doing so. The motivation must require *doing something* in order to change. In fact, my mentor who suffered from polio would indicate that someone

with a handicap needs to develop an almost obsessive attitude and thought process suggesting “I’m going to do this or die”. And please remember that making too many resolutions usually overwhelms people who may then have a tendency to give up.

Another element is developing a *proper perspective*. Perspective is important because we need to view the pattern in a manner so that the process of change can be accomplished. For instance, if we’re going to change a complex pattern, viewing it as a “whole” rather than a number of parts becomes quite overwhelming and tends to defeat us even before we start. Patterns or behaviors need to be broken down into their essential components or steps in order to achieve success. In this way, each successful step we take toward changing a pattern becomes an incentive to go onto the next and so on until the changes have been accomplished. I view this point as a “built in” success factor that helps us to continue in our efforts as well as to succeed in accomplishing our goal.

A third element is to make sure that we have *reasonable expectations* for ourselves. If our expectations are unreasonable or unrealistic, no matter how hard we try making desired changes, they are bound to fail. Expectations are the *key element* that will usually determine the final outcome. If our expectations are beyond our abilities, despite an intense desire, a sense of discouragement will set in resulting in abandoning our efforts and considering our efforts a failure. I should also say that the expectations of others need to be realistic and reasonable as well. I know of many people whose New Year’s resolutions are wrapped in a bet as to whether they will be accomplished or not. I’m not sure that betting serves a useful or positive purpose in creating an incentive since there is a good deal of pressure that might result from it. However, by the same token, for some it works.

Now let’s take a look at why *resolutions don’t work*. I have found the most common reason for failure is a person’s *feeling guilty* as the motivation for change. In other words, because the pattern may have existed for a lengthy period of time or because of others bringing the need to change it to our attention we may develop a guilt pattern as a result. In and of itself, there may be nothing wrong with a little guilt because it may serve as an incentive to make some necessary changes. However, too much of a good thing is never good for us. Guilt often suggests a sense of negativity rather than a positive outlook to the future. It also signifies that past failures are the basic reason for change resulting in a defeatist sense from the outset.

Another reason is that people expect immediate gratification from their efforts. Starting a change plan requires patience because if a pattern has existed for some period of time, it is probably going to take a period of time in order for that pattern to be changed. For instance, quitting smoking after years of practicing that habit may not be able to be accomplished within the first week and may take several tries before success is experienced. Keep in mind that we are all human and that humans tend to be “creatures of habit” so don’t be too hard on yourself or become discouraged to the point of quitting your efforts. In other words, be good to yourself

instead of being demeaning and don't let others determine what is right and good for you. That's your prerogative and it should remain only yours.

In summary, here are some points that you can consider to insure success with your New Year's resolutions. 1) Develop a positive motivation to change; 2) Don't make too many resolutions all at once; 3) Develop a clear perspective of both the pattern and changing it; 4) Create steps for changing that provide a positive incentive to move toward success; 5) Make sure your expectations are reasonable and realistic; 6) Change feelings of guilt from past failures into a healthy outlook to the future; 7) Develop patience vs. expecting immediate gratification. In these ways, your attempts at making necessary changes will become a labor of success instead of a sense of futility that might result in failure. n that kind of thinking.

A Brief Biographical Sketch

After an over 40 year career as a professional psychotherapist and Director of The Sports Stress Clinic in Amherst, NY, Charles Bonasera came to Florida and decided to use the benefits of his previous professional experiences in his new roles of Consultant in Life Management and Business Coaching as well as his expertise as a Motivational Speaker. He once again became involved with athletes in different sports training them with his techniques to help them develop and maintain focus as well as staying in their zone. Much of his training methods are derived from the CD collection he developed under the heading of WIN-WIN SECRETS as the President of Personal Identity Controls. This collection consists of thirty-six programs dealing with vital issues in the management of stress.

Another role that he adopted to add to his professional career was that of Author. Early in the 1980's he wrote Guide to a Life Management Process which he has re-written as a workbook to successfully help people manage their stress which includes his own Working Model. As a result in his interest in golf and realizing that it was essentially a "mind game", he wrote The Mental Side of Golf which can benefit the beginner as well as professionals playing the game of golf. He then compiled over five-hundred sayings that he had developed in the course of his professional career as stimuli to help people change patterns in their lives entitled How to Stay Well and Live Life to the Fullest. This was followed by a book documenting case studies around disruptive life patterns including ways to change them under the name of How in the Hell Did This Happen to Me? Both his personal involvement in sports as a participant, coach, manager and in his role in officiating, inspired him to write a primer for parents and coaches entitled The Legend of Little League.

Charles invites you to view his website at www.charlesmbonasera.com as well as to write with your comments and questions to his e-mail address (charles@charlesmbonasera.com). He would also be very happy to communicate with his readers by telephone should they desire. His professional motto is "seeking alternative methods to happiness" and wishes those touched by his

words to practice the three secrets to a happy life: “enjoy life and enjoy it thoroughly ... develop and maintain a sense of humor ... bring as much love into your life as possible.