

“I’m Going to Do It!” vs. Honoring Intention: How to Set Goals and Really Keep Them!

By Craig E. Bentley

Is it just me, or is a year shorter than it used to be? Before you know it, another year has come and gone on the calendar. And, of course, with every new calendar year comes another round of resolutions focused on self-improvement. On formal spreadsheets, backs of envelopes, or just via mental note, most of us started off the early days of 2012 with lists of promises to ourselves to change our behaviors, modify our life styles, expand our minds, flatten our stomachs, spend more time with our loved ones, while at the same time transforming ourselves into absolute business powerhouses. I know I do it every year— make that long list of all those things I am going to do to make this next year a real winner. But “going to do” is an interesting phrase.

I’m reminded of the old FedEx ad of the late 1970s that trumpeted their delivery services for packages that “absolutely,

positively have to be there overnight.” It was a bold claim — it was their “we’re going to do it” resolution. And it was a great success—but not without a lot of work. They created a delivery network, an integrated technology platform, and a multi-national workforce that was committed to the cause. They backed it up with action and built a \$40 billion company with nearly 260,000 employees world-wide by doing what they said they would do.

However, “going to do” can also have a very different meaning. It can be a mechanism for delay, for putting off those things that really need to be done. I’m “going to do it” is a promise of future action—I’m “going to do it” after I finish what I am doing now, or tomorrow, or next week, or if and when I remember it at some point in the future. And the longer our intended actions remain *future* intentions, the less likely it is that we will actually do anything at



Craig Bentley is an executive coach, speaker and senior communications consultant with Bates Communications who has lived in Europe and Asia. Craig works with senior leaders and rising talent across the country and overseas to make more dynamic and effective leaders.

Contact him at cbentley@bates-communications.com or by visiting www.bates-communications.com

all. If we are really honest with ourselves, isn’t that what often happens with our resolutions—our “going to do’s”?

As I am regularly reminding my kids (now young adults), “Yeah Dad, I’m going to do it” isn’t the same as “Dad, I’ve done it!” At Bates Communications, we express this concept a bit differently. We encourage our clients to adhere to the following simple mantra: “Plan the Intention

– Schedule the Intention – Honor the Intention.”

Success is often about prioritization and focus. This requires discipline, but not in the way one often thinks of discipline. It isn't about getting up at dawn seven days a week, or making every minute count, or constantly multi-tasking. It is rather about putting your energy into what matters, about working with laser focus on the most important things and not being distracted by all of the less important peripheral issues that constantly pop up in our lives. And it's about tackling those most important challenges and tasks with a sense of urgency.

One of my former clients, a rising star at a Fortune 500 company, had built a solid reputation in sales and marketing and he was great with customers, quickly gaining their confidence. He rose steadily within the company and eventually was rewarded with a significant leadership role. Now, in addition to continuing to be personally involved in a few of the company's most important relationships, he also had an increased administrative burden. And, as a leader, he was also expected to be thinking and acting strategically — looking ahead and charting and executing a progressive growth strategy for the next three to five years.

This was new territory and he struggled with meeting his boss' expectations. Not because he wasn't capable of doing

strategic work, but because he repeatedly failed to prioritize—he failed to concentrate his energy and attention on the most critical strategic initiatives and opportunities before him. Instead, he first did all the other things that cluttered his desk and life. He “cleaned up” all the little things, all the routine tasks that accumulate in any leadership role, telling himself that, by clearing the decks, he was freeing himself up to really concentrate on the big, important challenges.

As a result, of course, there was just never enough time to give is full attention to the most critical issues. But by working with him over several months to first identify and then articulate the importance of the key strategies, projects, and decisions that would have the greatest effect on his business, and thus on his business leadership, he was able to break his old pattern of “cleaning up” the little things and instead use his experience and expertise to deliver decisive leadership and vision. His stock rose as he was increasingly seen as someone who could look to the future and drive change.

Sometimes, however, it is doing the little things to help us get out of a performance rut, to break the paralysis of non-action. For some of us, our burning desire of wanting to be perfect and do everything “just right” means we do nothing at all. Another executive I worked with was at

a fast paced company known for its innovation. This executive was a great fit—she was creative, quick to grasp complexity and potential value, and quick come up with creative ideas to go after them. But she had so many ideas, engaged in so much over thinking, and so wanted it all to be perfect that she did nothing. Even the smallest tasks became obstacles because there could always be one more review of the problem, and the solution.

So together we started just “doing”—tackling one simple task after another. The whole idea was just to get something done, unblock the work flow, get things moving, make decisions, and delegate promptly. We broke down her task list to those things that had to be done in the next hour, done that day, or done that week. The inertia quickly shifted from stagnation to action. Soon all those “little” obstacles were being handled quickly and effortlessly, or were being delegated to others who were fully capable of addressing them.

We all come across hundreds if not thousands of opportunities in our lives, each with its own task list, timeline, and risk/reward profile—it can be overwhelming. This is especially true when we overlay our daily lives with a little guilt and self-reproach about what we “should” be doing—how we “should” be working—how we “should” be parenting—how we “should” be exercising—etc., etc.,

etc. Frank Freed, the California-based psychologist has said that we would all be living much happier lives if we would just “stop should-ing on ourselves.”

So let’s pause and take a good, hard look at our newest self-renewal plans for the year ahead. Let’s think about what intentions we will truly honor, what we really are prepared to DO—and not bog ourselves down with everything we convince ourselves we should be doing. Let’s throw out the long lists that require a spreadsheet to categorize and track. How about making just four resolutions, set just four goals for the year, and focus our energies and efforts on tackling these four:

- For your biggest projects, challenges or business goals, break them down into manageable bites—micro-goals—and then set out clear steps that you can achieve and record and track your progress as you march through the list.
- Control your calendar and control your life. Make sure that you see every time slot

on your calendar as a valuable asset—don’t allow yourself (or your assistant) fill your dance card. Schedule and protect that “free space”—to think, to reflect, to strategize—to breathe!

- Resist the allure of your inbox—electronic or snail mail. And make sure that the top of your To Do list is filled with the most important items. Ask yourself the question—“Of the 50 things I am being asked to do today, which 2 or 3 will have most significant long-term impact on my business, my people, my career?”
- Have some fun! Set one somewhat “crazy” goal for the year—a real stretch, but one that if accomplished would create a new, different and exciting future state; the kind of goal that if you can only can get halfway there, you will still feel good about the progress you have made and will be better for the effort. Richard Branson is

a pretty wild and crazy guy, and he has accomplished a number of incredible things in his life both personally and professionally. What drives his success? In large part, it comes from his own personal credo:

“My interest in life comes from setting myself huge, apparently unachievable challenges and trying to rise above them...”

A funny thing often happens when we set big, soaring, tough goals for ourselves—the seemingly impossible begins to become doable.

If we can succeed at just these four goals, my guess is that we will feel we have actually accomplished something, actually made a difference that looks and feels real to us. And we will be ready when 2013 rolls around to face the challenges and opportunities of that next New Year with greater confidence and enthusiasm.