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“Planuary” – The First Month of Your Best Year Ever

“We will open the book. Its pages are blank. We are going to put words on them ourselves. The book is called Opportunity and its first chapter is New Years Day.” – Edith Lovejoy Pierce

Most people see New Years Eve with its paper hats, champagne toasts and noisemakers as the big event. Personally I’m a big fan of New Years Day. New Years Eve celebrates the end of the holiday season and the passing of the old year. New Years Day is about beginnings. On New Years Day the slate is wiped clean and the scoreboards are reset. I know that I can do nothing to change the old year. I also know that on January 1st, I have the power to change everything in the year to come. New Years Eve is about celebration and introspection. Hamilton Mabie wrote that, “New Years Eve is like every other night; there is no pause in the march of the universe, no breathless moment of silence among created things that the passage of another twelve months may be noted; and yet no one has the same thoughts this evening that come with the darkness on other nights.” New Years Day is about action, taking proactive steps to make the future better. While it is natural to ponder what has passed, it is much more useful to look forward. Someone once said that, “An optimist stays up to midnight to see the new year in, a pessimist stays up to make sure the old year leaves.” As a confirmed optimist, I am convinced that the New Year holds wonderful gifts for me, as a realist, I know I will have to work hard to earn them. January is the time to set a course for a productive and profitable new year. Here are a few ideas to make your new year the best one of your life.

Looking back to move forward

January is named for Janus, the Roman god of doorways. In art, Janus is represented as having two faces, one looking back and one looking forward. The Romans were an organized pragmatic people. They understood that the best way to move forward is to take a look backward. We can not change what has already happened, but we can learn from it. The key here is to take an objective look at what we’ve done in the past. Regrets have no place in this process, it is important to separate what happened from how we feel about what happened. Our goal is to learn from the past, not regret it.

Whenever possible use hard data, look at your sales results, call reports etc. to establish a base line for your plans for the New Year. Look at your account list to see who dropped out, who started to advertise and who increased or decreased their investment. Look for patterns, what types of businesses have

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been most productive for you, are there specific products that you sell more than others, are there products or categories that you have not sold well, etc. Try to get a “big picture” understanding of your year. If this exercise teaches you nothing else, you should learn the importance of keeping good records. Most people will have a record of their sales results (It’s called a paycheck), very few keep accurate records of the activities that produced their sales. The more you can focus on the sales process, the more control you will have on the end result. Keeping accurate records of your sales activities lets you connect the dots and see the relationships between what you do and your sales results.

Deciding where you want to go

Once you have a solid understanding of where you’ve been; it’s time to decide where you want to go. Much has been written on the importance of having clearly defined goals. Most sales reps acknowledge the importance of having written goals yet how many people actually follow this practice. Most sales people I have worked with lack written goals or write them out in January and then file them away to be forgotten. This is because they don’t believe that they are in control of their destinies. They tell themselves that they want to increase their income or to be the top rep in their company, but they can’t control what their customers buy, or what is happening in the economy. Goal setting is serious business and deserves serious thinking. Poor goal setting can actually hurt your efforts. Goals should be a stretch but attainable. Setting unrealistic goals is setting yourself up for demoralizing failure. Some people set goals to impress their peers or recycle old goals that they never achieved in the past. It is easy to lose focus when you know you are destined to fail.

I like to set two classes of goals, “product” goals and “process” goals. Product goals project the end result of your efforts, “I will increase my sales by 15% next year,” “I will be the office leader in selling ads on our web site.” The challenge with achieving “product” goals is that they can only be accomplished through others. You need more people to buy advertising to add 15% to your sales and you need to find accounts who will buy ads on your site to achieve “top rep” status. To a certain degree, the power to realize these goals lies outside of your control. “Product” goals must be backed by a plan to make them bear fruit. “Process” goals put teeth into your “product” goals. They give you the right to reasonably expect to achieve the results you desire.

“Process” goals lie completely within your control. You do not need the cooperation of others to achieve them. You control all the variables, all that is required is that you make and keep commitments to your self. “Process” goals

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are clearly defined action plans. They describe what activities you will do to achieve your “product” goals. For instance, “process” goals like “I will make a minimum of 15 calls per day, every day” or “I will spend two hours per week developing my sales skills” are crucial to “increasing sales by 15%.” Since you are the only one who can make the calls or spend the time to enhance your skills there is no reason not to accomplish these goals. Making and keeping these types of commitments will give you a sense of being in control of your destiny. This will have a very positive effect on your self-esteem and confidence. When you have committed to a certain level of activity, you will not give in to temptation and slack off when things are not going your way.

I believe that if you work hard on perfecting the “process”, you guarantee a favorable end “product”. Action always precedes outcomes. For this reason I always set just a few large “product” goals and many small “process” goals. Details matter in sales, everything we do has an impact on our success. By paying attention to the details, we turn our goals into accomplishments.

Are you ready for the New Year?

Several years ago, I bought a beat up old book for a quarter at a garage sale. It was a WWII U.S. Army document entitled “Lessons learned in the Tunisian campaign.” I learned that this book was an AAR (After Action Report) that analyzed the army’s performance in North Africa. This book looked at everything from the types of boots issued to the troops and the organization of the command structure, to coordination of efforts with air and sea forces. In my research I learned that this is common practice in the U.S. military and is one of the reasons our forces are so effective. They constantly are looking for ways to improve their organizations. Doing your own AAR is a great way to start off the New Year and put the lessons of the old year to good use.

Here are some areas to look at:

- **Your tools** – are your sales materials neat and organized? Is your briefcase worn out? Do you have everything you need to present your products and address customer’s concerns?
- **Your record keeping systems** – do you capture all of the information you need to analyze your activities? Do you have a way to track calls, presentations, sales and revenue? Do you have an efficient method to follow up with customers and prospects?
- **Your level of productivity** – are you consistently working to your full potential? Do you make the most of the time available? Do you leverage technology to stay in touch with prospects and clients?

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- **Your attitude** – do you maintain a positive mental attitude? Do you read motivational materials and interact with positive people to “recharge your batteries”? Do you find yourself prejudging accounts or making negative assumptions? Do you make a positive contribution to your team?
- **Your professional skills** – do you devote time each week to expand your knowledge and enhance your selling skills? How many books, recordings etc. have you made use of in the past year? When your company provides training opportunities do you take advantage of them and attend with an open mind?

It is far easier to make 100 things 1% better than to make 1 thing 100% better. By taking an honest look at everything you do, you can break bad habits and make every year better than the one that preceded it.

Conclusion

I am sure you have heard insanity defined as “doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results”! We are living through difficult times that leave little margin for error. We need to consistently perform at the highest level; we need to make the best possible use of our time and of every opportunity. To achieve this level of productivity, we need to develop and implement a well thought-out plan. “Planuary” is the time to begin. Lots of people make New Years resolutions, real winners plan. Others can wish you a “Happy New Year”, only you can make it happen!

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

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