

Achieving True Change

By Jeff Cowart

The beginning of a new year, the launch of a new practice, a significant change in direction – all of these are opportunities for reflection on where we've been and where we're going. Usually this reflection is accompanied with resolutions, declarations of new resolve, and new energy. Too often, this devolves into disruption by the mundane, the heavy tug of the status quo, and the loss of traction toward our new goals. Then the malaise and disappointment of failure starts to hover and nag.

Why is this cycle so familiar? The truth is the cycle has nothing to do with our good intentions nor our self-worth. More often it relates to the artificiality of the catalyst that prompted us to make the resolutions or the declarations in the first place.

True change is not driven by something framed as resolution made because the calendar happens to be about to roll over to a new year. To be successful, change must be rooted in pragmatic deliberation, intent driven by longer-term strategic vision, and commitment that can be sustained beyond the constructs of cultural moments of engagement.

There is nothing inherently wrong with using year-end or other circumstances to spark reflection on the need for true change.

As John Kotter, one of leaders in achieving positive change, writes “the problem is complacency. With complacency, no matter what people say, if you look at what they do it is clear that they are mostly content with the status quo.” He also faults false urgency where there is “lots of energy around activity that is less focused on winning and more driven by pressure that creates anxiety and even anger.” Kotter concludes that “true urgency is driven by a deep determination to win, not anxiety about losing.”

So, the strong leader who wants to create true change – personally or organizationally – must set goals that are grounded by a deep determination to win. Moments in time, reflection, a crisis, or anything else can all be a catalyst for true change as long as the goal moves beyond the catalyst itself and into the realm of sustained achievement driven by a desire to win rather than by an anxiety of losing.

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