A New Kind of New Year’s Resolution: Saying No

If you’re anything like me, your list of New Year’s resolutions reads like a sort of global to-do list. We resolve to change our diets, exercise more, travel to new places, finish a big creative project. We resolve to be better by doing more.

Yet, focusing our energies – and goals – on what we should NOT be doing in the coming year can have just as positive an effect on our productivity, not to mention well-being. As bestselling author Curtis Sittenfeld has noted, “Politely saying no can free up astonishing amounts of time.”

If you are feeling overwhelmed, information overloaded, or just plain off-track, I would implore you to be more disciplined about what you are taking on, and why. Increased efficiency is not the only solution to feeling overwhelmed. Saying no – and closely guarding your focus – must also be part of the productivity equation. Acclaimed business writer Jim Collins (Built to Last, Good to Great) writes eloquently about his discovery of what he calls the “Stop-Doing” list in his 20s when a professor gave him the “20-10 assignment”:

“Suppose you woke up tomorrow and received two phone calls. The first phone call tells you that you have inherited $20 million, no strings attached. The second tells you that you have an incurable and terminal disease, and you have no more than 10 years to live. What would you do differently, and, in particular, what would you stop doing?

That assignment became a turning point in my life, and the “stop doing” list became an enduring cornerstone of my annual New Year resolutions — a mechanism for disciplined thought about how to allocate the most precious of all resources: time.”

It wasn’t that Collins was not working hard, or toward clearly defined objectives. As he says, “I was the type of person who carefully laid out my BHAGs (big hairy audacious goals), top three objectives, and priority activities at the start of each New Year.” But without understanding the importance of saying no, Collins was – as his professor put it – leading a busy life rather than a disciplined life.

Here are a few best practices for deciding when to SAY NO, so that you can keep your energy focused on the objectives that really push your creative endeavors forward:

1. Distill the key objectives for your creative project or business down to just a few items.
You can’t very well decide what NOT to do if you aren’t crystal clear on what you want to achieve. These goals shouldn’t be a laundry list of 10 or 20 things. Instead, they should be limited and achievable – perhaps just 2-3 items.

2. Kill ideas with gusto.
Though they charm us with their novelty, new ideas are actually the arch-enemy of project completion. Consider filing away that new idea in a “backburner” document – a running list of ideas you want to come back to – until you have some energy freed up. If it still seems earth-shatteringly brilliant when you revisit it, then it’s probably worth doing. If it doesn’t, good thing you didn’t waste your time.

More than just discipline, saying no requires faith in the value of your goals. If you remain focused and cultivate your chosen expertise, you will eventually become a magnet for the right projects and people. Then, all those missed “opportunities” – which would have distracted you and depleted your energy – won’t really seem to matter anymore.

Source: Jocelyn K. Glei, 99u.com
January is Cervical Health Awareness month, a time to get out the word about steps women can take to prevent and detect cervical cancer.

The good news? Cervical cancer is largely preventable and, if detected early, curable. The key to prevention is vaccination, and the key to early detection comes down to two tests.

Cervical cancer forms in the cervix, the lower, narrow part of the uterus that connects with the vagina. It is caused by the human papillomavirus virus (HPV). For 2016, the National Cancer Institute estimated that 12,990 women in the United States would be diagnosed with cervical cancer, with 4,120 women dying from the disease.

Pap and HPV Testing
The two tests to detect cervical cancer are the Pap test (or Pap smear) and the HPV test. According to Shyam Kalavar, a cytologist (an expert in the microscopic examination of cells) at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the Pap smear looks at cells from the cervix for abnormalities that may become cervical cancer if not treated appropriately.

When a Pap smear shows abnormalities, further testing or follow-up is needed. Follow-up testing may include another Pap smear, an HPV test to check for the presence of the types of HPV most likely to cause cancer, and/or a biopsy of the cervix. There are more than 100 different kinds of HPV, and not all of them cause health problems.

“If cervical cancer is found early, it’s easier to treat,” Kalavar says. Because this form of cancer often causes no pain, a woman can have cervical cancer and not know it, making the importance of testing that much greater.

The Pap smear is not 100 percent accurate, and cervical cancer may be missed in a small number of cases. But it usually takes years, if not decades, for abnormal cells to develop into cervical cancer. Regular Pap smears — as recommended in the 2012 guidelines from the American Cancer Society, the American Society for Colposcopy and Cervical Pathology, and the American Society for Clinical Pathology — should identify changes in time for treatment.

Women can also be tested for the presence of high-risk types of HPV, a process known as “Pap and HPV co-testing.” Co-testing is less likely to miss an abnormality than Pap testing alone. Additionally, HPV testing is now approved as a first-line primary screening test for cervical cancer. Women may want to talk to their health care professionals about this option.

Source: FDA.gov

Healthy Cooking: Spaghetti Squash Pizza

**Ingredients:**
(makes one large crust)
1 spaghetti squash
1 egg
1/2 tsp. dried oregano
1/4 tsp. cayenne
1/2 tsp. salt
Tomato sauce
Cheese of your choice

**Directions:**
1. First, carefully cut the squash in half and scoop out the seeds and innards.
2. Lightly coat the inside of the squash in a couple teaspoons of olive oil. Bake at 375°F for about 45 minutes, until the inside is easy to shred with a fork. Allow to cool. Scoop out the insides. Place on a plate or baking dish with paper towels. We want to try and soak up any excess moisture from the squash.
3. In a bowl mix together the squash, egg, and spices. Set aside.
4. Preheat the oven, with the baking sheet inside, at 400°F. Once the oven is hot enough, remove the pan, cover with parchment paper, and spread the spaghetti squash mixture over the baking sheet in a thin layer. Bake until the edges begin to brown, around 20-25 minutes.
5. Cover in a little sauce (use homemade or store-bought), cheese, and your favorite toppings. Bake for another 4 - 6 minutes, until the cheese is nice and melted.
The Norwegian Secret to Enjoying a Long Winter

As the days get darker and colder in much of the northern hemisphere, it’s easy to indulge in gloom. For the next few months, you’ll be shivering. You’ll be battling foul weather. Thanks to daylight saving time there will be no chance to see the sun after work.

The gloom leads to a common question: What can I do to cope with the dark and cold? If you truly want to be happy during winter, though, this is the wrong approach to the season. Changing your mindset can do more than distracting yourself from the weather.

That’s the takeaway from research done by Kari Leibowitz, currently a PhD student at Stanford University, who spent August 2014 to June 2015 on a Fulbright scholarship in Tromsø in northern Norway. Tromsø is so far north that from late November to late January, the sun never climbs above the horizon. Leibowitz went to study the residents’ overall mental health, because rates of seasonal depression were lower than one might expect.

At first, she was asking “Why aren’t people here more depressed?” and if there were lessons that could be taken elsewhere. But once she was there, “I sort of realized that that was the wrong question to be asking,” she says. When she asked people “Why don’t you have seasonal depression?” the answer was “Why would we?” It turns out that in northern Norway, “people view winter as something to be enjoyed, not something to be endured,” says Leibowitz, and that makes all the difference.

Lessons from the Far North

To be sure, there are some aspects of the near-polar culture that might be hard to emulate elsewhere. Small Norwegian communities are tightly knit, and strong social ties increase well-being everywhere. That said, there are lessons that can help anyone think differently about cold weather.

First, Norwegians celebrate the things one can only do in winter. “People couldn’t wait for the ski season to start,” says Leibowitz. Getting outside is a known mood booster, and so Norwegians keep going outside, whatever is happening out there. Notes Leibowitz: “There’s a saying that there’s no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing.”

Norwegians also have a word, koselig, that means a sense of coziness. It’s like the best parts of Christmas, without all the stress. People light candles, light fires, drink warm beverages, and sit under fuzzy blankets. There’s a community aspect to it too; it’s not just an excuse to sit on the couch watching Netflix. Leibowitz reports that Tromsø had plenty of festivals and community activities creating the sense that everyone was in it together.

And finally, people are enamored with the sheer beauty of the season. Leibowitz grew up near the Jersey shore, and “I just took it as a fact that everyone likes summer the best.” But deep in the winter in Norway, when the sun doesn’t rise above the horizon, multiple hours a day can still look like sunrise and sunset, and against the snow, “the colors are incredibly beautiful,” she says. “The light is very soft and indirect.”

A Mindset Shift

Most likely you can’t cross-country ski straight out of your house, and while Norwegian sweaters may be catching on, restaurants and coffee shops in more temperate climates don’t all feature the fireplaces and candles common to the far north. Still, there are little things non-Norwegians can do. “One of the things we do a lot of in the States is we bond by complaining about the winter,” says Leibowitz. “It’s hard to have a positive wintertime mindset when we make small talk by being negative about the winter.”

This is easy enough to change; simply refuse to participate in the Misery Olympics. Talk about how the cold gives you a chance to drink tea or hot chocolate all day. Talk about ice skating, or building snowmen. Bundle up and go for a walk outside, knowing that you’ll likely feel warmer and happier after a few minutes. Better yet, go with a friend. Social plans are a great reason to haul yourself out from under the covers.

But overall, mindset research is increasingly finding that it doesn’t take much to shift one’s thinking. “It doesn’t have to be this huge complicated thing,” says Leibowitz. “You can just consciously try to have a positive wintertime mindset and that might be enough to induce it.”

Source: Laura Vanderkam, Fast Company
Karen’s Korner, Karen Hensley, UR Dietician: Healthier Eating in the New Year

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Is healthier eating one of your New Year’s resolutions? Following a fad diet or being overly restrictive will not help you meet your health goals long term. Therefore, try to make small changes and eat healthier which will make a lasting impact on your health.

Try these simple and sensible steps to lead you to a healthier diet, without feeling deprived...

1. Fill your plate with colorful vegetables. Incorporate brightly colored vegetables, which are especially loaded with vitamins and antioxidants.

2. Snack on fruit and vegetables. Go for the fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables first before canned. Add hummus or a yogurt dip to make it more exciting.

3. Look for alternatives to processed meat. Processed meat is packed with sodium. Try using leftover protein from the night before. If you had a rotisserie chicken, then make a BBQ chicken sandwich or add chicken to a salad.

4. Choose whole grains. Whole grains are high in fiber and contain a variety of antioxidants. Make small changes such as using whole grain bread instead of white bread. Make brown rice instead of white rice. If you don’t like the taste of brown rice, then mix brown and white rice together to make it a little healthier.

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