

Rethinking Those New Year's Resolutions

By Maurice Carter in The Covington News – January 6, 2013

As I write, the new year is already four days spent, and it'll be nearly a week behind us by the time you read this. If you made any resolutions, I hope they're still unbroken.

Over the years, I've become less inclined to making such annual commitments. Maybe it's just the realization that passing time and advancing age make another 365 days a lot to ask for all at once. I'm a good deal more grateful for each new day that does come my way, and I've tried to make my resolutions accordingly. I figure if I rise again tomorrow with the sun, I'll resolve to make the most I possibly can of that day. Then I'll tackle the next one if it comes.

It's not that I don't think about something larger or more lasting. But, "a day at a time" is more than a cliché, it's the reality of how life is given to us. The only day I can affect is this one.

Still, the lessons learned in one year can guide us as we move forward to the next.

Looking back, as I consider the moments and events that made the most memorable or lasting impact on me in 2012, they were largely unforeseen at end of the previous year. They were not the result of some preplanned agenda, but rather a simple "yes" to opportunities that presented themselves or a decision to act on an impulse. My bike trip from Pittsburgh to DC, the journey to Macon to experience the Muscogee (Creek) Nation ceremony at Ocmulgee, an anniversary trip to the Smokies, picking up the guitar again, writing this weekly column -- these were all experiences that shaped my year and affected my life, not through careful planning, but simply by being open to the adventure.

Other experiences were about just being there. Death played a large part in my past year, but in ways that also enriched my life. I watched my father die, but I was there -- really there. I spoke at his memorial service and also attended moving celebrations for people like Charles King and Pierce Cline. I attended the funeral for the wife of my high school football coach and reconnected with people who impacted my life almost 40 years ago. I used to think of funerals, weddings, and other celebrations as obligations to be fulfilled. But, I've come to learn there's something precious to be found when I make the effort to truly be there.

It's not about planning where you're going to be, it's about being where you're supposed to be when the time comes. And, I don't mean supposed to be by someone else's criteria. Every day we make decisions on where to be or not be. I'm learning to trust my instincts for where I need to be.

Something else about resolutions... We're obsessed with eliminating the imperfections we see in ourselves (or that other point out for us). We strive with mixed success to give up our vices and eliminate our bad habits. But, how often do we seek to perfect the strengths and capabilities we already possess that make us special?

During a two-part, six-day executive leadership workshop this past year, I experienced that reality first hand. After bonding with our classmates through difficult challenges and tough assignments, we were given a task on the final day. Before the start of class, our facilitators placed envelopes on the wall of our classroom, one labeled for each member of the class. They gave us 4x6 note cards and told us to fill out one for each person, describing what you appreciate about them, a capability you acknowledge in them, and something you envision them accomplishing in the future.

Reading those cards made me feel good. But, it also gave me new insights into the best qualities I possessed that I wasn't applying near often enough to my work or my personal life. Rather than prodding us to become what we were not, this exercise taught us to perfect and leverage the people we already were. And, that seems like an outstanding place to start when making resolutions for growth in the coming year.

Say "yes" to opportunities that come my way. Strive to be fully present each moment, wherever I feel I'm meant to be. Know myself and put my talents and abilities to the best possible use.

That's the plan for tomorrow. Then we'll take it from there.

May you find your happy New Year in each waking day.

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