



Making 2009 the Best Year Ever

A series of articles written by Barbara McCauley for Auto-Insights[®]

Setting Goals: The Critical First Step to Achieving Success

Part One of a Twelve Part Series, "Making 2009 the Best Year Ever"

*"Last year I made a list of things that I resolved to do;
I'll use that list again this year, it's still as good as new!"*

At midnight, December 31st, we said goodbye to 2008. We wished our family and friends a Happy New Year—a healthier, happier, more prosperous 2009. We told ourselves this next year will be better. We're motivated, ready to hit the ground running. We tell ourselves we will exercise more, lose weight, keep up with friendships, take the kids on that vacation we promised. We make mental lists, resolutions. That's what we're supposed to do in January, isn't it? Make resolutions?

But resolutions, however well meaning, are rarely taken seriously – with little commitment, and even less determination—two crucial elements of success.

So let's substitute the word resolutions with "goals." A goal is indeed more powerful, more motivating, more compelling. I think of my goals as a game plan—a life plan. A road map for the upcoming year. If you know exactly where you want to go, this list will not only get you there, it will get you there faster, with fewer roadblocks and dead ends along the way. "I am a great believer in luck," said Stephen Leacock, "and I find the harder I work, the more I have of it." Success is not just about luck, it's knowing what you want and taking action.

I've heard some people say, "I don't need to set any goals. I already know what I want and what I have to do. I don't need a list to remind me." I've even heard, "I've tried setting goals before, it didn't work. It was a waste of time." With this mind-set, these people are probably right. Setting goals probably won't work paired with that kind of negativity and self-defeating attitude. Fear is what drives negativity. Fear that you won't succeed, and all you will have at the end of the year is a list to remind you of your "failure."

But goals are simply goals. Your own personal road map—rarely life or death. There's no rule you have to meet every one. (I certainly never have!) If you met only half, even two or three, just let yourself celebrate the success you do attain, no matter how small. Let each accomplishment motivate you to move on to the next.

Give it a try. Take that first step to making 2009 the best year you've ever had. Even if you have doubt, even if it hasn't worked in the past, you have nothing to lose to try it again. You do, however, have everything to gain. The time it will take you—probably the length of a TV show—will be just the beginning of the incredible success you can achieve. The beginning of changing your life for the better, improving what you already do well and realizing opportunities you've only dreamed about.

Even better, opportunities you hadn't considered.

Here's how to get started:

1. WRITE THEM DOWN

Get a notebook, (I use a simple, spiral bound) pull out your favorite pen and find a quiet, comfortable place to think without distraction. Don't think too hard, however, or overanalyze. Even if you feel awkward, or a little silly, do it anyway. You must write your goals down, using pen and paper (there's a chemical in the brain stimulated from doing this) My goal list usually runs between two-three pages. I list EVERYTHING I can think of I want to achieve that year, from big (remodel the kitchen) to small, (organize my book shelf) from reasonable (write two books and read ten non-fiction books) to outrageous (buy a vacation home) I leave nothing out. As the year progresses, I add new goals, sometimes delete old ones, and often redefine the existing goals. These are *my* goals. *I* make the decisions. *I* am the only one who keeps score. It's your choice if you decide to share your list with someone else, but I don't recommend it for two reasons. One, you might hold back on writing down a more personal goal, (like writing a book or learning to play the piano) and two, the world

is full of critics, cynics and negative people who, like a speeding bullet, can shoot down your goals without saying a word. You know that lift of an eyebrow, or shake of the head. Or worse, a laugh. Often, they are the people we love most, and we love back. Maybe friends or colleagues we respect and admire. They might be well-intentioned, or “realists” as they like to call themselves, but they suck our motivation, our energy and our joy with a simple look. Unless you have the skin of a rhino, keep your list to yourself, or share two or three goals in generic terms, such as: lose weight, stop smoking, make doctor’s appointment, make more money. Remember: You Keep Score.

2. BE SPECIFIC

Think in DETAILS. Don’t write, “make more money.” Write the exact amount. \$100,000, \$164,000,” etc. Don’t write, “lose weight.” Write, “25 pounds, or forty.” Whatever your goal is, give your mind a precise figure or number or amount. What color? What size? Model number? Every tiny detail associated with that goal, write it down.

3. THINK IN THE POSITIVE

Write each goal with optimism. Rather than writing, “I want to stop eating bad food,” write, “Eat more vegetables, whole grains and fruit.” In the first example, your mind only sees “bad food,” while with the latter, your mind sees “vegetables, grains, fruit.” Learn to phrase all your thoughts and words in a positive manner – they lead to positive actions.

4. VISUALIZE

SEEING what you want helps you move closer to achieving it. As you write your goals, establish a clear picture in your mind, right down to how achieving this goal *WILL MAKE YOU FEEL*. You *see* the money in your account when you write your checks and that makes you feel safe. You *see* yourself sitting on a beach in Hawaii with your spouse, *feel* the sun, the breeze, *hear* the ocean waves. This makes you smile. You see yourself wearing that little black number, size 8. See the label, feel the fabric on your skin. Maybe you just want to clean out that overstuffed, messy closet. *See* – in your mind – your closet neat. Doesn’t it *feel good* to be organized? When you concentrate on your goal and imagine you’ve already achieved it, the brain releases those feel-good chemicals. It’s not magic, it’s no “secret.” The “Law of Attraction” as the popular phrase is right now, is science and energy—good energy. It is real, and it does exist.

5. BALANCE

When setting your goals, keep in mind ALL areas of your life: Family/Relationships, Health, Career/Finances, Personal, Spiritual. Make sure you include goals that cover the entire spectrum of your life. Balance makes us happier, healthier and a lot more sane. (Most of the time anyway!)

6. LOOK AT THEM EVERYDAY

Put your goals in a place where you can see them every day. (I keep mine next to my computer) It is imperative you look at them often. Makes notes on what you have accomplished, cross off the goal if it’s completed. Once again, feel-good chemicals are released when we finish a task or goal and cross it off a list. Daily lists and goals are a great supplement to your 2009 goals, too. I was once called “the ultimate list maker.” I’m not sure it was meant as a compliment, but I accept it as one!

7. SET GOALS FOR YOUR GOALS

Let’s say you’ve written that you want to make an additional \$100,000 dollars this year. That’s great, but

it's really just the start. Now set the goals that will help you increase your income. You probably know what most of those goals should be. Classes. Seminars. Change jobs. Hire better staff. Start an at-home business. The point here is to make you think, which will create action. I write books for a living. Each book I write is a goal. I then break that down into smaller goals: Plot story idea; write synopsis; structure; chapter one;

Goal Setting Tips:

- Write Them Down
- Be Specific
- Think in the Positive
- Visualize
- Balance
- Look at Them Everyday
- Set Goals for Goals

chapter two, and so on. If I didn't break this goal into "steps," the thought of writing 300 pages would be daunting. I would be much more tempted to give up before I even began, or give up ten pages into the project. This way, I celebrate each smaller goal, then move on to the next. Even for some of my "easier" goals, like the messy closets I mentioned earlier, I like to break down into rooms or sections. Every goal crossed off my list, big or small, leaves me with a sense of accomplishment. Don't minimize your achievements, no matter how unimportant it might seem to someone else. Celebrate each and every success, from tiny to huge, from easy to hard.

Setting goals can be work, or it can be fun. Maybe even both. Either way, the choice is yours.

Accept the challenge: Make 2009 the best year ever.

*Next month we'll talk about the one thing we all need more of:
Time!*

This article was submitted by Barbara McCauley, an award winning author whose novels have appeared on USA Today and Borders Bestseller Lists.

Making 2009 the Best Year Ever: A Twelve Part Series

Part Two: How to Create More Time

If you're like most people, your life is filled with endless tasks and commitments. Between jobs, family, the house and all those other people who want "just a minute,"—we can't help but feel overwhelmed. The obligations pile up next to the mountain of paperwork, and the "hurrier you go, the behinder you get."

Do you wish you could get organized? Have a neat desk? Clean out those files, closets and garage? Spend weekends with the family or bicycling in the mountains? If your life feels out of control, then whatever you've been doing isn't working. Will Rogers said, "If you find yourself in a hole, stop digging." Change requires awareness and commitment. Success requires action and perseverance.



We're all born with the same twenty-four hours in every day. It's how we choose to use those minutes and hours that sets us apart. Make your choice to create the life you want.

1. KNOW WHAT YOU WANT

Last month we talked about the importance of making and writing down your goals. Time management works hand in hand with a clear vision of what you want to achieve. If you haven't set your goals yet, do so now. Know the steps that will help you accomplish each goal, and every day, make a list with the most important at the top. Evaluate at the end of the day, cross off the completed tasks, and enjoy the sense of success.

2. ORGANIZE

This may be the most daunting undertaking of all. But clearing clutter, cleaning closets, filing and straightening your home and office creates a more efficient and pleasant environment. Order improves clarity, focus and relaxation—all which translate to increased productivity. If you aren't ready for a complete overhaul, start with the ten minute rule and work on one dreaded task each day. Don't get discouraged and don't give up! Within just a few days you'll begin to see the improvement and feel a better sense of control.

3. SET PRIORITIES

Determine what's urgent, what's important and what's a *want*, as opposed to a *need*. Consider the consequences of an unfinished task and assign a number to the level of importance. Ask yourself, "If I only accomplished one thing at the end of this day, what would it be?" Analyze how you spend your time and eliminate the things that do not give you a sense of satisfaction. Be ruthless. Learn to say no. (All you people pleasers out there, you must learn to value and guard your time!)

4. DELEGATE

Your time has a value! If money allows, hire part-time help. House cleaners, gardeners, repair men or even a part-time assistant. If money doesn't allow those luxuries, ask for help from your spouse, your children, a friend or co-worker. No doubt you've been there for others, there's no guilt in asking for help in return. Believe it or not, you really don't have to do it all!

5. HEALTH

Developing healthy habits is the most crucial time management practice of all, and yet it also tends to be the first area of our lives we neglect. Exercise, sleep, the right foods and reducing stress all contribute to a more productive, satisfying life. A few minutes on a tread mill, some simple changes in your diet and a little education on stress reduction can not only add time and productivity to your day, but years to your life.

Next month we'll talk about fear.

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Fear Factor: It's No Reality Show

Part Three of a Twelve Part Series, "Making 2009 the Best Year Ever"

Several months ago, when I first decided to write an article about fear-- how it affects us, how to overcome it-- I thought it would be fairly easy. I'd read a couple of books in the past, scores of articles, listened to tapes and even attended a lecture or two. I was confident I had enough knowledge and insight on the subject. How hard could it be to pass along a few tips to others?

When it finally came time to start writing, I pulled out my books and articles and read them again, but this time, *really* read them—slowly, attentively, thoughtfully. The more I read, the more I began to understand what Fear truly is--how deeply it affects who we are and what we do. Or what we *don't* do.

Then, suddenly, and unexpectedly, I had a revelation which I must now confess: *I am afraid to write this article.*

I will explain later. For now, I will stay on topic and continue.

"Fear has different levels," says Susan Jeffers, Ph.D., and author of *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*. She explains that Level One consists of those things that "happen," such as aging, dying, illness and accidents. Level One also consists of the things that require an "action," which include making decisions, driving, losing weight or asserting yourself. These Level One fears are "situation-based," says Jeffers. *continued from Fear, page 3...*

Again, they are fears of things that *happen*, (ex: losing a loved one) and fears that require an action, (ex: public speaking.)

Jeffers goes on to explain Level Two fears, the fears that are not situation-based, but an "inner state of mind." They are the fears that "reflect your sense of self and your ability to handle this world," Jeffers explains. These fears include rejection, success, failure and helplessness, just to name a few, and they greatly affect the decisions, which in turn, affect your entire life.

Some heavy stuff here. And it's sometimes a "Catch 22." We're afraid to look inward, because then we'd have to acknowledge our fears. If we admit fear, we might appear weak. The risk is too great. It's much easier to deny fear, to justify it, or simply ignore it.

Which leads us to Level Three—the biggest fear of all. The **one** true fear that holds us back and prevents us from achieving our goals. THAT FEAR IS:

I CAN'T HANDLE IT

"That's it," says Jeffers. At the heart of every fear lies the one, overwhelming dread that you won't be able to handle what life throws at you. When you understand this Fear, stare it in the face and let yourself feel it, you are ready to take the next step—the most important step, which is to believe in yourself and know, without doubt, that:

I CAN HANDLE IT

Every day, write these words down. Ten times, twenty times. Keep writing until you *feel* the truth. Say them in your mind, say them out loud. Over and over and over. Whatever challenge you might face, know that you have the ability, the strength and the courage to get through it.

So why was I afraid to write this article, you ask? Because I was afraid that I would not have the ability to express the importance of Fear, how it permeates every aspect of our lives and prevents us from achieving our dreams.

I faced my fear and did it anyway, as Jeffers suggested. I now challenge you to do the same.



RECOMMENDED READS: *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*, by Susan Jeffers Ph.D., *Risking*, by David Viscott, M.D.

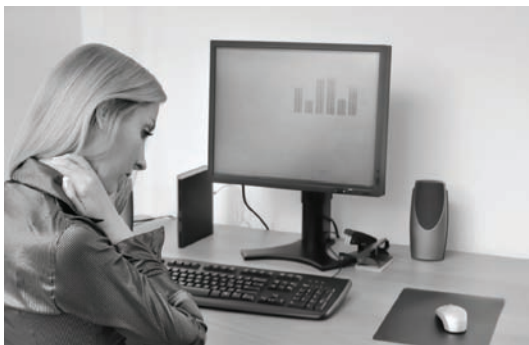
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STRESS: Can't Live With It, Can't Live Without It

Part Four of a Twelve Part Series: Making 2009 Your Best Year Ever!

We all know the feeling. That searing pain in your shoulders, the tight knot in your gut or chest, an explosion of temper out of proportion. Nearly half of all Americans believe their stress has gone up in the past five years, reports the American Psychological Association. Money, work, family, more demands, less time, health—all these daily worries take a toll on our emotional, mental, physical and even our spiritual state. We often feel out of control and overwhelmed—feelings which only exacerbate our stress.



While stress itself is necessary to give us an extra burst of energy and stay focused, too much stress for too long can have harmful affects on every aspect of our lives. Insomnia, forgetfulness, exhaustion, inability to focus, headaches, irritability, back pain, high blood pressure, depression, weakened immune system—these are just a few of the more common side affects. (Not to mention excess stress accelerates the aging process!)

Stress may be a fact, but it doesn't have to be a way of life. With awareness and a little education, we can not only train ourselves to reduce most of our stress, we can also learn to cope better with the

stress that we have little or no control over. While it is always best to consult your doctor for advise on how best to handle excess stress, here are just a few stress-busting techniques.

BREATHE

When we're anxious, our breathing becomes shallow. Remind yourself to breathe deeply, slowly. Inhale through your nose, then exhale slowly through your mouth. This not only relaxes you, but brings more oxygen to your brain.

MUSIC-BATH-AROMATHERAPY

When you're tense, a hot bath with some lavender or Epsom salts, and a few minutes of quiet, calming music can do wonders. You'll not only loosen those tight shoulders, you'll draw toxins from your body.

REDUCE STIMULANTS

Stress can create exhaustion, and we tend to reach for that extra cup of coffee, soda, energy drinks and sugar. But that *Continued from page 3, Stress*

extra spike in our blood sugar and energy is followed by a crash. Keep your energy up by eating smaller meals more often. Don't skip meals and make sure you eat the right balance of protein and carbohydrates.

CALL A FRIEND

Share your feelings with a trusted friend—someone who will listen and be supportive, rather than critical or negative. Also, listening to a friend talk about their problems may also help reduce your own worries.

WHEN A PROBLEM ARISES, DON'T PUT IT OFF

If something, or someone, is bothering you, holding your feelings in and ignoring them will not only make the problem worse, but affect your emotions and health. Whenever you can, address a problem immediately. If the problem is a situation, find a solution. If the problem is with a person, discuss the problem in a non-confrontational, non-accusing manner.

TAKE A WALK

Okay, you knew this one was coming. But it's a fact. Exercise reduces stress, makes you feel better, look better and clears your mind. Walk, swim, lift weights, yoga—whatever gets you moving and your blood pumping.

There are dozens of helpful ways to help you to de-stress, but since this is an article, not a book, I will quickly name just a few more: Slow down. Cut back on multitasking. That rude clerk or jerk who cut you off on the road—let it go. Those people are unimportant and insignificant and not worth your time. Meditate. Take a vacation. If you don't have one, take up a hobby. Pray. Journal. Let go of expectations—learn to ask for what you want.

LAUGH

I left this one for last because I feel that it is important enough to warrant its own space. See **page 9** and read more about this powerful stress buster.

Take back control of your life. It's not selfish to put yourself first—it's responsible. It's the same as being on an airplane with your child and the oxygen masks come down—you need to put your mask on first. Life is no different. Every day, even if it's only a few minutes, schedule in time just for you. You'll be healthier, happier and more relaxed.

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Facing the Dragon of Self-Doubt: A Guide to Survival

Part Five of a Twelve-Part Series, Making 2009 Your Best Year Ever!

A young warrior sits upon an aging, shaky steed. Our hero, ordinary in stature, holds a shield in one hand, a burned spear in the other. He stares upward, his gaze steady. Towering twenty feet above is a dragon; smoke curls from its flared nostrils. Its claws are long and sharp, its eyes yellow and narrowed. Still, our warrior holds his ground.

The painting is titled, “It Takes Courage.” The artist is Don Maitz. The first time I saw this amazing work of art, it resonated deeply with me. I felt myself sitting on that nervous steed, staring up at that dragon who represented my daily challenges and self-doubt. I bought the poster and keep it in my office. Every day, it reminds, and inspires me, whatever the odds may be, to face my dragons.

We all have dragons of self-doubt. Some are bigger than others, or more frightening, but they exist. We can deny them, run from them, or, like our young warrior, face them. I won’t tell you it’s easy, but I will impart a few thoughts to help.

KNOW THAT EVERYONE HAS SELF-DOUBT

You are definitely not alone. Everyone has varying degrees of self-doubt. Accept this as a natural part of being a thoughtful human being.

FEEL THE FEAR

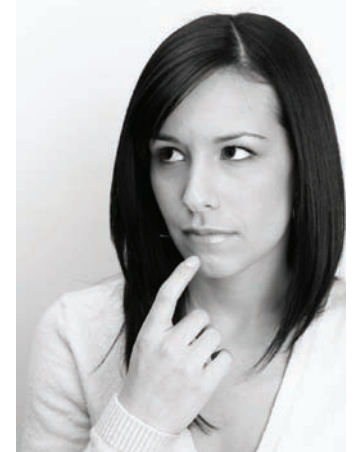
The bottom line of self-doubt is really about fear. (I talked about fear in a previous article) Ask yourself what’s worrying you? Is it failure? Rejection? Appearing foolish? Picture yourself on the starting line of a hurdle race, each hurdle is labeled with a self-doubt. BANG! Run—no thinking, just run. See yourself leaping smoothly over each hurdle. Feel the victory course through your veins.

TURN OFF THE CRITIC

When you hear that voice whispering in your ear—you know the one I mean—the voice that says, “You aren’t smart enough, young enough, experienced enough.” It’s the dragon’s voice. The dragon knows you so well, your doubts, your worries, your insecurities. It delights in spewing negative thoughts. When you listen, when you begin to believe the lies, the dragon grows stronger. This is the time to focus on your strengths. Focus on what you have accomplished, what you do well. Know in your heart that this is the truth.

BE KIND TO YOURSELF

Treat yourself as you would a friend. When you experience a disappointment, resist the urge to beat yourself up. Instead, ask yourself if you could have done anything different. You can’t change the past, but you can learn from it. Take responsibility, learn from every experience, the good and the bad, then move on. Regret, resentment, anger and guilt are useless, non-productive emotions. You can not change the past, so learn to be present in the moment. Yes, it does take courage to face the dragon. You may not always beat the beast, but to know you held steady, to know you stared into the yellow eyes of adversity and did not back down, that, my friend, is true victory.



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Change: Can We, or Can't We?

Part Six of a Twelve-Part Series: Making 2009 Your Best Year Ever!

*Men marry women with the hope they will never change.
Women marry men with the hope they will change.
Invariably they are both disappointed.*

That was Einstein's opinion on the subject of change. And we all know, of course, that Einstein was a genius, so he must be right. Right?

Wrong.

Sorry, Albert, but even genius's don't always get it right. In fact, too much intelligence could actually be a hindrance to change. Why? Because change--true, lasting change--deals more with emotions than smarts.

I'm sure you understand the kind of change I'm talking about here. Not the physical changes of body or health, suddenly needing glasses or those annoying gray hairs. I'm talking about our basic belief system, our habits, our behavior. Our brain has carved a pathway (synapses) of lifetime beliefs. We rely on what we already know and accept as true. Scientists refer to this as "framing." George Lakoff, a professor in cognitive science and linguistics, defines frames as the "mental structures that shape the way we see the world." According to Lakoff, the challenge in trying to change how people think is that they rely on these frames, not facts.

In Alan Deutschman's book, "Change or Die," the author poses the question, "What if a well-informed, trusted authority figure said you had to make difficult and enduring changes in the way you think and act? If you didn't, your time would end a lot sooner than it had to. Could you make those changes when it mattered the most?"

According to Deutschman, people overwhelmingly responded yes. But in fact, the scientific odds studied are nine to one against you. Old habits—smoking, drinking, eating poorly, stress and exercise patterns—die hard.

And I mean that literally. Even the fear of death isn't enough to motivate change. Two years after coronary-artery by-pass surgery, 90% of the patients returned to their old lifestyle.

So what *does* motivate change?

John Kotter, a Harvard Business School professor and authority on the subject says, "Behavior change happens mostly by speaking to people's feelings." The short version of these studies is that change is not motivated by facts or fear, but by making an emotional appeal. As human beings, we might think with our brains, but we respond with our hearts. Inspirational stories and movies, support groups, or sometimes even a "Hey, you did a great job," is enough to remind us of the pleasures of life, boost our self-confidence and motivate us to keep trying, even after we've gotten off track. (maybe you ate that extra doughnut, lost your temper, forgot an appointment, gossiped, broke a promise, negative thoughts, etc.) Like I said, we're mere mortals. We are all a "work in progress." Tomorrow is another day, you can choose to start with a clean slate and focus on the possibilities, or you can dwell on the so-called "failures" and mentally beat yourself up.

There is no question that the brain is a complex organ. But recently, neuroscience, by leaps and bounds, is beginning to discover the secrets of this mysterious gray matter. The findings are optimistic. Where scientists once believed the brain was "hardwired" at an early age and couldn't change, they are now realizing that the "plasticity" of the brain—its ability to change—is lifelong.

Feel better now?

Good. That's where you start. With feelings. Constantly remind yourself of all the joys in life that surrounds you—all the daily pleasures, people and things that make you feel good. Focus on these feelings, clearly imagine



how you will look and feel when you make that change. You are a unique individual. Believe in yourself. You must be your own best friend. With every success, no matter how small, don't hesitate to give yourself a pat on the back. Know in your heart that you can change. Change won't occur because you need to, or even because you want to. Change occurs when you find the inspiration. Trust in those feelings, let them guide you.

One day, when someone says to you, "You seem happier lately, more relaxed. What's changed?"

You just smile and think, me.

Recommended read: "Change or Die," by Alan Deutschman

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Joy to The World:

Part 7 of a 12 part series: Make 2009 Your Best Year Ever!

“Joy is not in things; it is in us.” – Richard Wagner

The feeling of joy can be as simple as a baby’s smile, or as profound as watching your son or daughter exchange wedding vows. It might be a call from an old friend, watching the sun rise, heartfelt laughter, or the satisfaction of helping others. As opposed to pleasure, which is external, joy is internal. It is what we believe, about ourselves and about others. Simply put, it is an attitude—or if you don’t like that word, then think of joy as a state of being.

There is a fine line between joy and happiness, and it is difficult to separate the two. I chose to focus on joy only because “the search for happiness” almost seems cliché. It’s a given that we all want to be happy. We spend our lives looking for it, or many of us, waiting for it to come to us.

But how many of us say, “I just want to be joyful.”

Imagine a box wrapped in bright paper, topped with a big yellow bow surrounded by colorful curling ribbons. Inside is something no amount of money can buy. It’s not a big house or new car or big screen TV. It’s JOY. This is a gift you give yourself, and even better, you can share with others.



I am not suggesting you can just think “I am joyful,” and like magic, you are instantly floating on a cloud of bliss and happiness. What I do believe is that each of us has the ability to make choices that can influence how we feel. Our thoughts, our actions, the words we speak, all have an effect on our spirits. Whatever situation you struggle with, be it your income, your health, your past or current problems, there are some basic things you can do to increase your joy.

Exercise. A regular schedule of physical activity has been proven to increase one's level of

Joy - continued from page 3

well being. You’ll not only feel better, you’ll look better. And when you look better, you feel better...

Stay Connected with Friends and Family. Keep in touch with the people you care most about, and who care about you. Avoid the “toxic” people in your life, the friends who exhaust your energy or bring you down. (I’ll discuss this more in another article.)

Journal. Studies have shown that keeping a daily journal can help improve one’s mood.

Take a few minutes each day to jot down what’s going on in your life. Write whatever comes to mind--your ideas, your feelings. This journal is for your eyes only, so don’t edit your thoughts, just let them flow.

Give Back. Volunteering or helping someone in need not only lets us step out of ourselves and our own problems, the act of giving instills us with a sense of purpose and personal satisfaction.

Finally, ask yourself if you enjoy your work. If you’re spending enough time with your family. Taking vacations. Pursing hobbies or interests. Maybe it’s time to re-evaluate what you’re doing—or not doing—to bring more joy into your life.

So in the immortal words of Three Dog Night’s popular song, *Joy to the World...*

“Joy to the world
All the boys and girls, now
Joy to the fishes in the deep blue sea
Joy to you and me.”

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The Five Stages of Learning: From Clueless to Clarity

Part Eight of a Twelve Part Series: Making 2009 Your Best Year Ever

“Life is a learning experience, only if you learn.” – Yogi Berra

I've learned a lot about learning, the most important thing is realizing I have a lot to learn. I also learned that true knowledge is not just finding the answer to a question; true knowledge is the journey itself. Ultimately, what we learn is not nearly as important as how we learn. As we go through life, it is our own personal process of gathering information which shapes who we are. We are all capable of greatness. In order to reach our full potential and achieve the goals we set, it helps to have a conscious understanding of The Five Stages of Learning:



1. You don't know you don't know.
2. You realize you don't know.
3. You work hard to learn.
4. You now know, at a practical and automatic level.
5. You've mastered your knowledge and retained awareness.

Stage One: This stage is a bit of a head-scratcher. How can we learn something if we don't know we don't know it? This is the state of “unconscious incompetence.” This stage requires no discipline or skill, no effort. Many people live their life in this stage of ignorance. Often, they are the ones who think they already know. They cannot allow themselves to even consider they might not know, either because it questions a core belief they've based their life on, or for fear of appearing stupid. It is comfortable and easy to remain in stage one.

Stage Two: This is where we suddenly become aware that we don't know (Conscious incompetence) This stage is the most critical, and the most difficult. It is where the majority of people give up because (1) they realize they will have to work hard, or (2) are afraid they do not have the ability. Only with determination, a positive attitude, patience and discipline can one accept the challenge, set goals, then read, study, take classes—whatever it takes to achieve success.

Stage Three: You've worked hard and developed your skill. This stage brings understanding. (Conscious competence) You know that you know, and you have confidence in your ability to perform.

Stage Four: You have mastered your skill and you “own” it. You know what you know without thinking about it. (Unconscious competence) Riding a bike, driving, playing the piano are all examples. At this level, the skills you have learned you will never lose or forget.

Stage Five: This is the highest level of knowledge. (Conscious competence of unconscious competence) Your skill has not only become instinct, you now have the ability to train and teach others.

These five stages might seem like a lot to learn in this short article. But the fact is, no matter what your goal might be, your success is dependent on Stage One: All you really need to learn is that you have a lot to learn.

This article was submitted by Barbara McCauley, an award-winning author whose novels have appeared on USA Today and Borders Best Seller Lists.

How to Deal with Toxic People

Part Nine of a Twelve Part Series: Make 2009 Your Best Year Ever!

Unless you live on a deserted island--odds are that you encounter “toxic” people on a regular basis. You know the people I’m talking about, those individuals who drain you mentally, emotionally and physically. Also called “energy vampires” and “crazymakers,” these individuals are adept at clearing a room, breaking up a party and bashing good moods into smithereens. They may operate in different ways, maybe by constant complaining, or through intimidation or sometimes a condescending attitude. They are the ones who gossip, criticize, blame you or others for their problems, manipulate through guilt, discourage your opportunities and minimize your success. They seek out the negative, feed on bad news and can’t wait to share that bad news with anyone who will listen.

Anyone come to mind?

No doubt, more than one person popped into your head. For the most part, you probably have already managed to avoid most of these walking land mines. The checker at the grocery store or a teller at your bank, a neighbor, a member of an association you belong to, someone from your church. These people you can duck and evade without too much trouble. But what about the people you can’t easily ignore or walk away from, be it a family member, a close friend, a business associate or co-worker? How do we deal with these people, and still protect our health and sanity?



1. Evaluate

Consider the individual and the situation. Ask yourself if you might have somehow encouraged that person’s negative behavior. Did you unintentionally initiate the tone of the conversation? Maybe a passing remark or complaint about a fellow employee, or that horrific crime you heard about on the news? If the answer is yes (be honest!) then strive to be more conscious of your own attitude. Encourage positive conversations and uplifting stories, try to discourage the negative by changing the subject and sharing a happy event. If the other person persists on the path of doom and gloom, just smile and politely excuse yourself.

2. Compassion

When you encounter rude or toxic behavior, either from a stranger or someone you know, it’s normal to feel angry or hurt. Whenever possible, pause for a moment and do your best to give that person the benefit of the doubt. There’s a story of a man sitting on a crowded subway, surrounded by elderly and handicapped people, leaving a very pregnant woman to stand. When one of the elderly women chastises the man sitting, he stares at her for a moment, as if in a daze, apologizes and then stands. What no one is aware of, is that the man’s wife died that morning and he is on his way to make funeral arrangements. I would like to believe that most people are not mean-spirited or intentionally rude, and sometimes problems so overwhelm them, they behave badly. You do not have to condone that bad behavior, but simply do your best to give that person the benefit of the doubt.

3. Be Confident

Learn to speak up for yourself. Treat others with respect and have the confidence to know that in return, you deserve that same respect. Do not allow toxic people to have power over you. Assert yourself in a calm manner, but avoid confrontation when you can. No matter how much you want the other person to understand your view, truly negative, toxic people rarely listen to reason or logic. Rarely will they accept that they might be wrong, or that their behavior is irrational or inappropriate. You’ve heard the expression about trying to teach a pig to sing—you only frustrate yourself and anger the pig. Don’t waste your time, your breath, or your energy.

4. Learn to Let Go

Accept that some people cannot--or will not--change. The more we care about someone, the more difficult it is to

let them go. But there are times and situations when no matter how much we love someone, we must protect our health and well-being and take a step back. How big a step depends on the person and the situation. There is no simple answer, no one-size-fits-all solution.

5. Promote the Positive

There are lots of happy, positive people. Cultivate friendships with people you admire, seek out kind, motivating people, people who inspire and energize you. People who make you laugh and feel good about yourself and life. A good friend is a precious gift. Appreciate these special people, and be grateful they are part of your life.

This article was submitted by Barbara McCauley, an award-winning author whose novels have appeared on USA Today and Borders Best Seller Lists.

Banishing the Green-Eyed Monster

Part Ten of a Twelve Part Series: Make 2009 Your Best Year Ever!

You know the feeling. That pang of resentment when a co-worker gets the promotion you deserve. That knot in your gut when your neighbor drives home in his/her new car, and your car is held together with gum and duct tape. The tightness in your jaw when your best friend's child gets straight A's, while your child is bordering on C's. We always smile for those people, of course, and say, "That's wonderful!" We want to be happy for them, we truly do, but that little green devil sits on our shoulder and pricks us with his pitchfork, and somehow, we can't help ourselves: We feel jealous.

A few years ago, I was leading a writer's retreat for ten women. We'd been sharing information about writing and the business, laughing and in general, having a great time. When the topic turned to "How to Avoid Jealousy," the room turned quiet. Several of the attendees squirmed in their seats, a few others shuffled papers, gazes wandered.

Clearly, we'd entered into forbidden territory.

We all know that "nice" people, "polite" people, are not supposed to feel jealousy. We are raised to be happy for another's good fortune. To admit jealousy is to admit we are not so "nice," not as kind as we'd like everyone to believe. And to admit jealousy is also an admission that we feel inferior in some way, that the other person is somehow "better." Often, we tell ourselves that those fortunate people are just more "lucky" than we are. Or maybe we believe they don't deserve such good fortune, that they manipulated, lied, or cheated their way to success. Or maybe we believe the opposite; that they are more deserving, that they are better people.

The fact is, we are all human; we all experience a wide range of emotions. Emotions are what make us human. Admit it or not, like it or not, no matter how nice we are, jealousy will occasionally rear its ugly head. The taste is always bitter, and like acid, it burns in our blood and gut. Jealousy is always counterproductive, and always destructive.

So what can we do to help negate and move past this unpleasant emotion?

Awareness

Admitting to yourself that you feel jealous is the first and hardest step. Recognize the emotion for what it is, avoid self-condemnation or criticism of the other person. Ask yourself why you are feeling envy, and think of ways to deal with them, such as reminding yourself of all the things you are grateful for.

Motivation

Use your feelings of jealousy to motivate you in a positive direction. Maybe you missed out on the promotion because the other person truly was more qualified. If you need to take some classes or develop better people skills, start there. Don't be afraid to ask questions how you might improve and don't take offense or be angry if you get answers that you don't agree with. Take a hard long look at how you might improve. If, however, that

person did get the promotion for "brown nosing" or other less than respectable means, be proud of yourself that you are an honest, hard worker with integrity.

Do Not Compare

We are all unique individuals. DO NOT COMPARE YOURSELF with anyone else. Do not judge yourself, or anyone else, by the clothes they wear, the car they drive, or even the success they may have achieved. Instead, keep your focus on yourself and be the best YOU can be. "To thine own self be true," said Shakespeare. Live by those words.

In the end, you might be surprised at how many people are actually jealous of you! Maybe because you ARE nicer, or you have a better singing voice, or you have stronger computer skills, or maybe people always come to you for advice. Be who you are, the best you can be, and the next time you're passed up for a promotion, or not invited to a special party, or angry that someone else is getting more attention than you, accept those things as challenges and look for solutions. Read and take classes to improve your work skills, your people skills and don't waste your time and energy on other people who seem to have the "perfect" life. Believe it or not, everyone has their own self-doubts and problems.

One last thing to remember about jealousy. It not only stems from self-doubt, but from the fear that someone



"I should have won"

else is getting what we want and there won't be enough left for us. THIS IS A LIE. There is great abundance in this world and endless opportunities. With an open mind, and an open heart, what you truly want will come to you. Julia Cameron, author of *Artist's Way*, says, "Green may be the color of jealousy, but it is also the color of hope." Like spring leaves and lush grass, green is growth. Without growth, there is no life. And like the old saying goes, "Be careful what you wish for—you might get it."

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The Gratitude Attitude

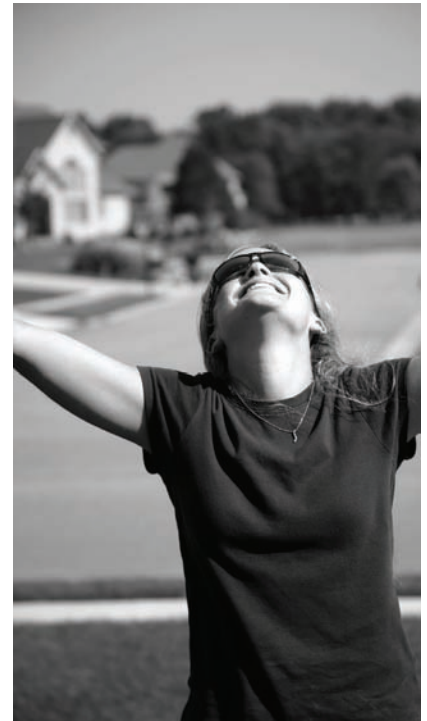
Part Eleven of a Twelve Part Series: Making 2009 Your Best Year Ever!

“As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.” — John Fitzgerald Kennedy

When you hear the word “Thanksgiving,” be honest now, what is your first thought? Turkey? Time off work? Extra shopping, cooking and cleaning? Football? Travel?

Now let’s skip to what we know our first thought should have been. Family? Traditions? Sharing? Gratitude?

From the time we were little, we’ve all been told to “be grateful for what you have.” (and of course, when we were little, how many times were we told just how “ungrateful” we were?) Somehow, the meaning of grateful started to blur along the edges. We knew we should be grateful if we had a job, a car, clothes, food, health, etc. But this little voice in our head sometimes whispers, “You should have a better job, a newer car, more clothes.” And as far as food and health, we don’t even think about those things until something bad happens. We are human beings, after all, and as human beings, it’s natural to think about what we don’t want, or what we don’t have, instead of what we do have.



Which leads us back to Thanksgiving—the day of giving thanks. A day of gratitude. If you haven’t already incorporated the gratitude attitude into your life, let Thanksgiving be the day to start. Whatever your situation is in life, take a few moments and write down what you are thankful for. Family, friends, material possessions, an ability you possess, everything you can think of--just keep writing. When you’re done, read what you’ve written and let yourself really feel the gratitude. Keep the list, add to it as often as possible. Let it inspire you.

“Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life,” says Melody Beattie. “It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.”

On Thanksgiving, let your family and friends know how grateful you are for the opportunity to all be together. And of course, for the turkey...

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Oh What a Year: Part 12, the Final Installment of Make 2009 Your Best Year Ever!

This journey started last January. One article a month, each designed to inspire, inform and motivate you to stretch your mind, your body and your spirit. I now ask you, in this last article, to find a quiet place, by yourself, and press the pause button.

First, I'd like to briefly review the past year's topics:

- January—Setting Goals. Know what you want, write it down, go after it.
- February—How to Create More Time. Focus, organize and set priorities.
- March—Facing Fear. Acknowledge your fears, face them and know that you can handle them.
- April—Stress. Remember to breathe, call a friend, Laugh
- May—Self-Doubt. Know that everyone has self-doubt. Learn to turn off your inner critic and be kind to yourself.
- June—Change. You must first recognize what you need, or would like to change, and remind yourself daily the benefits that change will bring and how much better you will feel. Change is a true test of commitment, determination and perseverance.
- July—Joy. What makes you feel good? Do more of that! Nurture friendships, give what you can to others in need and exercise. Just one kind act a day, no matter how big or small, brings more purpose and happiness to yourself, and to others.
- August—Five stages of learning. 1. You don't know you don't know. 2. You realize you don't know. 3. You work hard to learn. 4. You now know. 5. You teach.
- September—Toxic People. Avoid negative people who drain your energy. Keep your own thoughts and actions positive.
- October—Jealousy. Know that there is abundance in the world; use your feelings as fuel to motivate yourself and focus on being the best you can be.
- November—The Gratitude Attitude. Remind yourself what's really important in life. Let your family and friends know how much you appreciate them. Be generous with smiles, hugs and kisses. Even a simple thank can show others that you care.



And now it's December. Think back one year, ask yourself if your life is (1) better (2) worse (3) the same. Whatever your answer, now ask yourself, "Why?"

If you answered (1) fantastic! You've taken an active part in improving and you can see the results of your hard work.

If you answered (2) then the "why" is critical. If you think your life sucks and you have a list of reasons or excuses why it sucks and why it always will, then you're probably right. Until you accept responsibility for your life and your actions, there can be no change. Bad things happen, it's a fact of life. It's how we face those challenges and what we learn from them that defines who we are.

If you answered (3) then you're either stuck and can't quite get traction, or you're complacent. If you're the former, don't give up. Persistence will pay off. If you're the latter, which is satisfied with your life and yourself and

you see no need to change a thing, that's fine. We each have our own definition of happiness and success.

In the end, the only opinion that truly matters is our own.

I'd like to thank everyone for all your kind words and thoughtful comments on this past year's articles. If my words have raised awareness or given support to even one person, I can think of no greater honor.

(By the way, the answer to my own question is a resounding #1!)

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