

Resolve to take personal inventory this New Years, psychologist says

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The end of the year is a time when many of us will make resolutions to lose weight or quit smoking. But instead of making resolutions which are often times quickly forgotten, New Years is a good time to take personal inventory of our lives, says Temple University psychologist Frank Farley.

“In so many fields we take stock, we take inventory, we take a pulse at the end of Audiocast

the year,” says Farley, a professor at Temple. “Sports commentators are going to be reviewing the year in sports and pundits will be doing the same for politics. Even businesses do an end of the year inventory and balancing of the books.

“But we are not so good at doing that about ourselves, reflecting and assessing how we’ve done this past year,” he says.

Historically, says Farley, the end of the calendar year has enormous impact on us as we construct our lives to a very large extent around the calendar, with December 31 being a very important date.

“I don’t think it is trivial this time of year to take psychological stock or personal stock of ourselves, and try to decide, ‘Ok, I’m going to work on this, I’m going to do that,’” he says. “The taking stock, whether you make resolutions or not, is very helpful at the end of the year.

“And we might need to know where we stand this particular January 1, because we are in the midst of a veritable ‘perfect storm’ of stress and challenges in this country, with an economic environment unparalleled in several decades, two ongoing wars, and a new administration about to take office in Washington,” Farley adds. “These developments have a common thread — uncertainty.

“What will 2009 bring; how shall we proceed as a nation, and individually, in the face of all this?” he says. “Planning and knowledge are important antidotes to uncertainty and the fear that uncertainty can bring. Setting goals and personal strategies for your entry into the New Year can help reduce the uncertainty and thus the fear.”

Farley, a past president of the American Psychological Association, suggests making a list of things that are absolutely essential that you have to deal with in the coming year. “We do that in a sense everyday; lots of people keep ‘to do’ lists in one way or another, but this one should be more reflective and it often isn’t.”

In addition, making a list will give you more focus and direction in how you can concentrate on those items that you wish to deal with, he says.

Once you have made your list of things “to do” or resolutions, Farley recommends sharing them with family or friends as a sort of support system for seeing your resolutions through.

“There is often a flip, glib or impulsive quality to some of the resolutions we come up with at New Years and they are often going nowhere,” he points out. “But having family, friends or professionals help with your resolutions is going to have more impact than just a personal resolution that you keep to yourself or mention in passing.”

Farley says that New Years also offers a good opportunity to forgive —

whether it is forgiving a grudge or an argument — and start a fresh relationship with that person.

“Doing it at New Years reinforces it with the other person,” he says. “At some other time of the year, the other person might think, ‘Why are they doing this now, what is their real reason for forgiving?’ But at New Years, in a sense, you have a license to do things like this; you have a license to rearrange or reestablish a relationship or just to forgive.”

Farley points out that one of the unique things about forgiveness is that it often helps the person who is forgiving more than the person who is being forgiven.

“There are some studies that show that things like one’s anxiety and stress almost melt away when you forgive someone for something,” he says. “Getting rid of some stress and anxiety for 2009 is a healthy plan.

“To me, New Years can be turned into something profound,” adds Farley. “It represents a benchmark in the history of the world and it should be a benchmark in an individual’s personal history.

“It is a time to reflect on where we’ve been and where we’re going next,” he says. “Our journey is not random. You can influence that journey and this is a good time to do it.”

Provided by Temple University

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