

Forget the Resolutions...Raise Your Standards

by Charles Wendel

YouTube offers a Tony Robbins video message aimed at New Years' resolutions and the lies we tell ourselves. In [this video](#) Robbins says that for 95% of the people the resolutions that we made on December 31st have already been broken or dropped by January 15th. We quickly realize that the goals we set are unrealistic (10 pounds less) or just too hard to pursue (gym attendance always goes down after January).

Robbins describes resolutions as wishes, that is, hopes and not plans with any stickiness or strength attached to them. Instead, he says that we need to set a compelling vision for ourselves, something that pulls us to pursue and create, something that makes us excited and keeps us up at night with energy and anticipation...in short, emotional intensity. Vision also needs to be backed up by strong reasons to push the vision into reality and avoid giving up the steps toward your goals (e.g., not saying "I will go to the gym tomorrow.") Robbins emphasizes the need for intensity to succeed and the discipline required to review your progress.

In his view we all fall into patterns and limit our sense of whom we can be. He stresses the need to raise our standards and redefine ourselves. He says do not focus on losing ten pounds but changing your identify (your inner game) more fundamentally. For example, versus the illusive goal of weight loss Robbins suggests pursuing the more challenging but significant goal of being healthier than you have ever been.

OK, so you move from transitory resolutions to meaningful goals and raising standards. That's not enough for success. We also need "rituals" to condition ourselves to achieve and maintain the higher standards, to reach what he terms a "peak state" or stepping up to a higher level. Being healthier than ever before requires the ritual of exercise, diet, meditation, etc. Little rituals add up over time. (Here is a somewhat banal example. Maria Carey recently had a disastrous New Year's Eve performance because she and her team did not go through the critical "rituals" of checking equipment and rehearsals, basics for success.) Rituals equal execution; without rituals higher standards will come to naught.

Robbins' comments and suggested approach translate perfectly to the banks and corporate business. Consider the following steps for raising business performance and standards, adapted from Robbins' personal focus.

1. In a business context what do you want to improve? In some cases banks wish to improve the "customer experience". While difficult to pull off, this does set a higher standard versus a more frequently stated goal of increasing profits per customer or overall returns. However, in many cases banks fail to articulate any visionary goal, seemingly mired in day-to-day activities and a focus on short-term

earnings. While understandable, it is also probably self-defeating, resulting in an uninspired personnel base and unexceptional performance.

Step one involves developing a consensus within the bank on where to focus, where the standards need to be raised.

2. Be truthful about what needs to happen to improve the situation. We often deceive ourselves about the current situation. Bankers need to be brutally honest about current performance and how the bank got there. What “rituals” have occurred over time to create the present business situation?

As a consultant I may have to plead guilty to not spending enough time in this area. In my zeal not to point fingers or spend too much time on the past in favor of providing solutions, I may have overlooked an important issue. Unless a bank understands and combats the negative rituals that have resulted in problems, it is likely that moving to a higher standard will never occur. The bank will simply revert to its old ways.

3. What is your vision for the business? For example, if your RMs were operating at their peak, what would their day/week/month be like? If you were truly a small business bank, what would the customer experience be like both on and off line? How would their view of the bank differ from today?

4. What are the consistent rituals that will get you there? Developing a list of required rituals equates to creating an implementation plan. Again, too often, bankers fail to develop and then follow through rigorously on the action steps required for success. Employees object; management blinks; other priorities interfere. Whatever. Without positive rituals the greatest visions in the world are worthless.

5. Have the discipline to review progress. Years ago we completed an assignment that included detailed recommendations and an action plan. We were not involved in the ongoing implementation process. Many months later the client said the bank had reviewed progress against the recommended goals and had done very well in achieving them. Subsequently, I, and ultimately bank management, learned that the reality was different from the internal BS. As Robbins says, “The pain of discipline is less than the pain of regret.”

Tony Robbins ends his message with the following thought for the individual that should also guide bankers and their banks: “Don’t let this year be like last. And if last year was great, Raise the Standard.” Happy New Year and new approach!