

12 ways to make 2012 your best year

By Hugh Culver.

It's inevitable—year after year I start to worry in January. After all, the start of the year is when we are supposed to have our resolutions, goals, and hopeful ambitions documented and committed to action. But what if my goals don't happen, how will I feel then?

Some studies claim that only 10% of New Year's resolutions actually stick—meanwhile our failed attempts get tossed into our growing sack of self-doubt. We said we were going to lose those ten pounds - and it was looking possible - until that first late-night craving for ice cream. We committed to exercise everyday and we did—until Oprah reruns and Pringles won us over. We resolved to sock money away in our retirement fund every week—until we came home with that absolutely-essential flat screen TV. Our attempts at goal setting, self-control and determination inevitably arm wrestle with our habits, and habits usually win.

Goals are essential for setting direction, but habits are what gets us to save the money, lose the weight, have healthy relationships and raise children we are proud of. The trick is to have good habits.

This year my resolutions are all about creating successful habits. Sure I have goals for family, income, work and adventures – and I'm excited about them. But I am even more excited about my focus on strengthening the *habits I will practice every day*.

I want to share the 12 habits that I am committed to that I know can make your day a little brighter, your lists a little shorter, and success in work and life a lot bigger. But, before you read them I have a warning for you: don't make this another list! You already have enough lists.

Here is what I recommend you do instead:

1. Read the list and pay attention to what resonates for you.
2. Pick no more than three things you will commit to. Repeat after me: "only three".
3. Write these down and keep them visible for at least one month. Dashboard of your car, fridge at home, or tattoo on your arm.
4. Start every day with a quick review and renewed commitment to your healthy habits.

The more you integrate your habits into your day and your life the more they become simply your way of doing things and the more likely you are to gain all the success they can bring you.

1. **Admit fault first** – life's too short to waste on blame, instead: suck it up, apologise and move on. It's amazing how quickly a sticky situation can get unstuck when greased with a little humility. "Blame is for God and small children." (Dustin Hoffman)
2. **Treat your body better than your car** – get your body and heart working for at least 30 minutes everyday. Start by changing your morning, commute, or end of day habits — make exercise something you enjoy and look forward to. Isn't it time to do something great for you body everyday?
3. **Be here** – our mind loves to be busy worrying, thinking and scheming but it doesn't serve the conversation we are in right now. Give people a gift with every conversation: put down the phone, resist the inside chatter and be fully present—they will appreciate it and you might actually hear them.

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4. **Tell the truth** – you owe it to yourself and others to make truth-telling a habit. Resist rounding the corners on the sharp edge of what you need to say. You avoid a lot of unnecessary grief and, as Mark Twain pointed out, “...you’ll have less to remember.”
5. **See the best in others** – it’s easy to find fault in others, but rarely does it improve the relationship. Instead, pay attention to the strengths you value and remind yourself that the fastest way to change someone is for you to go first.
6. **Empty the mental RAM** – we are bombarded with information that fills up our mental capacity and limits our ability to think clearly and focus in the moment. Take this prescription daily: read a book, go for a walk, or meditate with a favorite hobby—your brain will thank you.
7. **Complete things** – nothing fuels success more than success; have a habit of breaking big jobs into small chunks and completing them. Design your day to be full of small accomplishments that build your overall success and have fun crossing tasks off your list.
8. **Declutter your life** – piles of paper, unfinished work and books unread only serve to make you feel busy and unsuccessful. Once a week do yourself a favour and clear your work space and home of unnecessary clutter. It’s good for clarity and great as a message to others.
9. **Create a Stop Doing list** – we are all great at creating To-Do lists, but what about a Stop Doing list? Create more capacity for what really needs to happen with a weekly habit to delete, delegate, or defer low value, time consuming, fun-sucking tasks.
10. **Eat better and eat less** – improve your health with better eating habits. Replace the drive-through with a healthy snack or meal, put greens on your plate and put down the fork before you want to. Good recipes, advice and tips are everywhere—there’s no excuse for not using them.
11. **Smile more often** – it’s a proven fact: smiling makes us feel better. Plus, when we smile others around us get the gift and can’t help but feel better. Practice in the line up at your favourite café and then graduate to your office and home—start giving the gift that smiles back at you.
12. **Pause procrastination** – When you procrastinate you get a payoff; you avoid the work, the conflict, or hard decision you know you need to make. The trick is to tip the scales by making the reward for “doing” (I will reward myself for finishing this report) outweigh the “reward” of avoiding.

Hugh Culver MBA, CSP speaks to leading organizations, like Imperial Oil, Shoppers Drug Mart, Royal Bank of Canada, Suncor, Telus, and the Red Cross on working smarter in the Age of Distraction. Learn more about Hugh’s keynote presentations and resources at www.HughCulver.com

