

Resolution, Revolution, Evolution

BY MIKE SUTTON

As we start the new year, many of us may be thinking about making some changes in our lives such as:

- ◆ working only 60 hours instead of 100
- ◆ losing 50 pounds (one of my annual favorites)
- ◆ training Rover not to drink from the aquarium ... or dine on the expensive tropical fish in the process

Now I'm sure that someone deep in the heart of academia has done a study on New Year's resolutions in terms of percentage of actual success. Well, you don't need a "Ph.D." appended to your name to know that most resolutions fall almost as flat as Congress' recent attempt to reform campaign fundraising. Why is that? Here are a couple of theories.

In my experience, successful change requires two essential ingredients: desire and opportunity. Like the old joke about how many psychiatrists it takes to change a light bulb; only one, but the bulb has to really want to change.

Which leads us back to Congress and fundraising reform. Even though the Republicans thought they had a chance to burn Clinton and Gore, and they hold a majority in both Houses of Congress, they weren't the least bit interested in making it more difficult to raise campaign money — the life blood of any politician. Asking Count Dracula to get a day-job and make skim milk his drink of choice would have been easier. So, the Republicans — as well as the Democrats — had the opportunity to change but lacked desire.

EXPECTATIONS

How about something closer to home, such as a goal of drastically reducing time

spent in the workplace. Many of us certainly have the desire to do so, but is there any real opportunity?

If you're spending an excessive amount of time at your profession because you're doing the work of several people, your hours probably won't decrease until the head count in your department increases.

Someone once said, "If at first you don't succeed ... then lower your expectations," which is amusing at first glance, but may be good advice.

If you resolved to reduce the amount of hours you work a week by four instead of 40, would you have a better chance of success? Probably. You might be able to work "smarter" and accomplish that goal. Granted, it isn't as much of a transformation, but it's much more attainable.

REVOLUTION THROUGH EVOLUTION

It seems to me that many resolutions fail because they are something else: revolutions. Let's take my 50 pound weight reduction goal for example.

First of all, with my metabolism all I have to do is get within sniffing distance of a taco and I gain weight. So, in order to lose 50 big ones, I'd have to survive on lettuce leaves in a hermetically sealed environment. While this might be appealing to those around me, it wouldn't be my first choice.

But, if I did something to change my metabolism, like say exercise, not only would I be able to eat things more fattening than members of the genus *Lactuca* family (can you tell I received a pocket Latin dictionary for Christmas?), I could lose weight faster and maintain it more easily. So, if I'm willing to engage in a little change (evolution), my revolution has a higher chance of success. In fact, that's what I've done. Almost every evening I look like a 225 lb., steroid sucking hamster

as I jog for an hour or so on a treadmill in the garage. Not only has it helped me lose weight, it gives me a sense of accomplishment — in the IS industry, there's often not a lot of "closure" or "fulfillment." But, that's a topic for next month.

Anyway, will I get down to 175 lbs.? Probably not. And, if I did, I'd look like death warmed over! However, if I made a resolution to take off 10 lbs., chances are I could not only attain but also maintain that goal.

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

Finally, let's talk about Rover and the piranha pond. You may think it's evolutionary that he's drinking out of the aquarium instead of the toilet, but it can certainly be more expensive. If he's acquired a taste for anchovies, or whatever else might be swimming in there, your work won't be easy.

Why? Because in order to change his behavior, Rover needs an incentive, too. Of course, for a dog, the latter could be disguised as a swat on the nose with a rolled-up newspaper. However, in the case of *Homo sapiens*, changing ourselves is difficult; changing other people is like campaign financing reform — virtually impossible. **ts**



NaSPA member Mike Sutton's Vietnam novel, *No Survivors* (ISBN 0-8338-0226-7) is available from Marshall Jones Co. at (800) 258-1505. Mike

is donating 33 percent of the royalties from his book to the Center for Homeless Veterans.

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