

Reinvention

It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird: it would be a jolly sight harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg.

- C. S. Lewis

A new year rides on wings of hopeful circumstance. Already forgotten is the certainty of Armageddon – now twelve months wrong. On this new dawn we find ourselves returning to old traditions of holiday celebration, mistletoe kisses, and breaking every resolution planned for the coming year if only to get it out of our system. Reinvention is at hand, but it will need to wait another week – for today there is food to eat, booze to drink, and vices to enjoy. But on the first day of the new year, for many, a reboot of character is anticipated – John Doe version 32, Jane Doe version 45. But expectations rarely find their target, filling the next year’s list of resolutions with the previous year’s empty promises for change.

Why so much resistance? Why is it that the “*truth of doing*” finds itself at combative odds with the “*reluctance of trying*”? We say, I’m going to quite drinking, or smoking, or playing too much Candy Crush. Within a day, a week, or perhaps an entire month our old friendly vices return to fill unseen pits of emptiness with their imagined comforts. We might even stake a claim of joyful rediscovery as we allow them to retake their place at our dysfunctional table of vices.

Oh well, I tried. Right? Right.

Akin to tugging on a wishbone, few people believe that their resolutions have any greater chance of bearing fruit than the ownership of the larger piece of turkey bone has of granting unspoken wishes. So why make them at all? Why insist on promising self improvement if belief is not the primary tenant at the moment of declaration? The only possible reason to me is... well... tradition of course. Nothing else makes sense.

It is a known fact that putting a starting date-time group on change, such as this, has found success for many people. Evidence points to the concept that the “psychology of commitment” needs a baseline to flourish. Based on this it becomes understandable why the “New Year’s Resolution” tradition has continued for as long as it has. A new year, a new beginning, a new excuse to try and change things for the better. But the harder question to answer is why this approach so often fails. Perhaps we need to reassess the idea of reinvention absent of an annual excuse.

The truth is that we are a continuous flow of change – engaged in a swirling dance of renewal with every single breath. Ninety nine percent of our reinvention occurs beyond our ken. For instance, not a single atom that held its residence within our bodies seven years ago remains there today. We are, physiologically, one-hundred percent renewed.

But how do we translate the knowledge of unseen transition into tangible, observable changes? That's the tricky part, isn't it.

When I was 25 years old, I was absolutely certain that I knew exactly who I was and what I stood for. My conviction of this awareness was so strong that I would not hear the criticisms marring my adopted self interpretation. Today, at 55, I look back at that young man with an incredulous stare and a total absence of recognition. Who was that person and why did he occupy my body? How could THAT thing – filled with irreverence, irresponsibility, and pure stupidity – EVER have transformed itself into the more manageable version of today's mirrored reflection?

What happened? Well, in 1983 the woman who would become my wife happened. Everything after that became a domino. The truth is that it would take the better part of a year after the "wife event" before I realized that I was now behaving for two. This epiphany required drastic changes if our life together had a chance to flourish. This called for "reinvention".

Moving through the transitions of life's corridors has inspired us to grow with a diversity as varied as DNA or fingerprints. The lessons earned from my ill-fated wanderings are often different than others who've travelled similarly. The result of those choices almost always delivers different degrees of altered perceptions. One crashes their snow sled into an Oak tree and never sleds again, while another creates a better way to steer the sled.

As a Soldier in the Army, opportunities for reinvention manifest themselves with a greater regularity than in most other environments. Position changes provide some chances for a renewed perspective, but sadly this often comes burdened with the weight of history. People that knew who you have been will often exercise reluctance to accept the person you wish to become. An assignment to a new duty station provides freedom from these chains of the past, issuing instead an opportunity for rebirth. All that was required was a bit of self reflection combined with a critical eye towards the flaws of character that contributed to the failures of the past.

There is an ease with which we condemn our weaknesses and failures as abhorrent ramifications of the environment, while eagerly pointing our fingers at the other guy for putting us into positions that cause us to respond poorly. Self accountability, a trait rarely exercised with honest vigor, becomes an afterthought – if considered at all. The result is largely the export of our jaded attitudes. The product is the continuance of our failed operating systems. The solution? To reinvent how we define "self accountability" and then to embrace this new definition with every cell of our being.

If we consider the science of quantum mechanics, then it is philosophically plausible to understand that we are the masters of our own observations. Boiled down (and I've said this several times before) we observe what we expect to see. Victims continue to expect victimization, and so continue to be victimized. Winners expect victory, and, until they embrace their own doubts, continue to hit the jackpots of life. Bored people have a knack

for manifesting the blahs, while exciting people always seem to know how to find an adventure under every boring rock.

But knowing this doesn't do any of us any good if there is not a clue on how to change from one extreme to the other. The process of reinvention is an easy brief, but not so easy to execute.

And therein lays the curse!

This bold faced statement alone makes reinvention as distasteful as exercise. The moment we consider reinvention as a task that we need to overcome is the moment that reinvention becomes a task at all. Actually, reinvention is one of the easiest steps we will ever take. It is simply a conviction that previous attitudes and behaviors do not work and that new ones need to be installed. It is a decision... nothing more. The challenge is applying conviction to that decision, and enforcing it with passionate vigor.

Everything changed for me the moment that I decided that my bachelor life no longer applied to my new "wife-enriched" environment. I didn't need to make a conscious effort to change anything. Just knowing that an adjustment was required so that I could move forward was enough to create the metamorphosis that my new life needed. With a suddenness and effectiveness that baffled friends and associates, I became reborn. From that point forward the direction of my path was forever altered. There would certainly be many, many more reinventions to come, but the navigational correction imbued by this moment alone would create the future opportunities for additional reinventions. Let the dominos begin to fall.

Suddenly the concept of self accountability became more palatable. For years I identified this concept with negative virtues. I saw the idea of self accountability as one only necessary whenever I botched things up. "I did it... it's my fault." And "Voila!" – self accountability! But hidden in my perception was the greatest lie of all – that failure and weakness are flaws....that it is only appropriate to show honesty when engaged in the act of self deprecation.....that all other acts of strength are most appropriately dealt with in secrecy!

The first thing I've come to learn, and relearn, and then learn yet again, is that my greatest strengths have spawned from the seeds of failure. Absent of those 'not-so-glorious' days in the sun there would not be this more manageable reflection of self in my mirror today. There would only be lessons begging my attention, fighting for their spot somewhere in my future.

The process of reinvention provided the sun and rain that would bring light and life to the seeds of my shortcomings. Today I've learned to view my less admirable traits as challenges and opportunities to grow new limbs of character. I find it far preferable to beating myself up over the things I've not yet *decided* to change.

And there it is again – that simple decision. One that only requires us to recognize its impact with courage and honesty and make it with conviction. One that is really not any harder than deciding to take a left turn or a right turn... once the turn is made the only direction is forward, until a new intersection demands another choice.

Even today I find the flaws of my character as easily as my wife discovers each new wrinkle in her beautifully aged eyes. To her the wrinkles are flaws. To me each new line illuminates a greater definition to her loving ways – providing a roadmap to her smile and the many pathways to a happy soul. On the occasion I might learn to see my own flaws through that same lens, so also will be the occasion I no longer need to live a life at all. A prospect not at all inspiring, and yet another reason to be grateful for my shortcomings.

In the year 2038, when an 80 year old Sean reflects on his 55 year old self, will he look upon those youthful days with an incredulous glare and ask himself, “How in the hell did THAT thing – filled with opinion, ignorance, and naïveté – EVER have transformed itself into the more manageable version of today’s mirrored reflection?”

One can only hope.

Sean Yeterian