

“History informs us of past mistakes from which we can learn without repeating them. It also inspires us and gives confidence and hope bred of victories already won.”

— William Hastie (1904-1976),
civil rights attorney, law school professor and
first African-American federal judge



READY, SET, GOAL!

BY DEBRA L. BRUCE, JD, PCC

As we wrap up one year and begin the next, it's a good idea to engage in a “lessons learned” process before we make plans. By analyzing the results we obtained, we can avoid repeating our mistakes and be blessed to repeat our successes. To get real value, it needs to be a thoughtful process covering all aspects of your life. From my years of experience in helping lawyers through such an analysis, I have identified a few guidelines that may help you.

Give yourself full credit. First, take a look at what was successful. Allow yourself all due credit for your accomplishments, breakthroughs and wins, no matter how small. Don't just look for cases you won or big deals closed. We tend to gloss over our small victories, even when they took real effort or perseverance to achieve. We rarely let ourselves live down a shortfall, however. So give equal time to your successes. If you finally got those lingering files closed, or your office organized, or actually started using that to-do list app on your smartphone, include those accomplishments on your list. If you gained back five of the 10 pounds you lost last year, acknowledge yourself for *keeping off* five pounds.

Celebrate and replicate your successes. Take some time to fully bask in and honor that list of wins. Feel good about them. Own them. *Celebrate them.* Then try to figure out why you were successful. What did you do differently from before? If you can identify what worked, you can call on that ability again. Do you notice any patterns or commonality among your wins? Perhaps you can generalize the lesson and apply it in new directions.

Dissect your disappointments. After you have acknowledged yourself, take a little time to look at what didn't go

as well as you had hoped. List out your losses, disappointments, and breakdowns. Honestly identify your part in any disappointing results. Don't linger in blame or regret, however. Realize that these situations provide great feedback and an indication of a need for course correction. By looking for patterns, you may be able to isolate the common factors that cause you problems. Then you can set out to find remedies or institute prophylactic measures.

Now, you're ready to plan. Once you are armed with the self-awareness of where you shine and where you create your own setbacks, you are ready to formulate a fresh course for the new year. It's a clean slate, unwritten upon. Don't drag your old baggage into the new year, and don't just wander into it aimlessly. Choose new goals and set intentions. Set them mindfully, knowing that you are not burdened by your past, but enlightened by it.

If you want more guidance in setting goals for next year that you might actually follow through on, you can download our “Year End Evaluation and Goal Setting” form for free at lawyer-coach.com/documents/year_end_evaluation.pdf.

Plan to have a Happy New Year!



DEBRA L. BRUCE

is president of Lawyer-Coach, L.L.C. (lawyer-coach.com), a law practice management training and coaching firm. She practiced law for 18 years, and has been a professionally trained executive coach for 13 years. She is a past vice-chair of the Law Practice Management Committee of the State Bar of Texas. Bruce can be reached at (713) 682-4353 or debra@lawyer-coach.com.