



You in review

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Published in Racine Journal Times—January 4, 2012

Now that the champagne toasts are over, it's time to begin acting on New Year's resolutions. I think it's also a great time to look back, and I encourage you to spend some time reflecting on the past year. In the process of reflecting on the past, we are often given insights into what worked well and what areas might need more attention as we set our sights on the future. Looking back is often a great first step in looking ahead and leads to an increased level of conscious appreciation.

As an exercise in reflection and appreciation, divide a piece of paper into four sections and label the sections personal, family, career and financial. Reflect upon and write a few of your high (and low) points from 2011 in each section. I actually did this exercise and in the process of self-reflection, I discovered some things that encouraged me to expand the idea further.

First, the exercise helped provide me with some added perspective about what I accomplished in each of the categories. The end of the year is usually pretty busy from a career standpoint, so reflecting on some of my personal and family achievements from earlier in the year helped me to feel more balanced despite the extra amount of time I've been spending in the office recently.

One of the tools I found helpful in completing the exercise was looking back through my business and family calendar for the past 12 months. This served as a reminder of some of the major events in my career and family life. For example, our family's trip to Disney World was clearly the highlight of the year, and I was able to revisit and appreciate the significance of that event. A personal highlight was competing in several running events (and finally placing in my age group).

Another benefit of reflecting was the opportunity to share my findings with others. Reminiscing with my wife enhanced the experience for me but also elevated her appreciation for the past year as well.

The third benefit I experienced was lessening the impact of recent events. Whether it's economic activity or life transitions, we tend to anchor to whatever has happened most recently and project the same thing as likely to continue into the future. This can be particularly difficult when overcoming a negative experience.

In economic terms, this is called recency bias and can lead to less than ideal decisions when we assume whatever has just happened to us will continue indefinitely. Spending time reflecting on a longer period of time can reduce the impact recent events have on our psyche.

Author and consultant Ed Jacobson shared a five-page workbook that expands even further upon the reflection and appreciation process. He has even more exercises in his book, "Appreciative Moments." Anyone interested in receiving a complementary copy of the "Appreciative Year-end Review Workbook" can request a copy here: www.toyourwealth.com/wellbeing.