



New Year's Resolutions

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According to Wikipedia, a New Year's resolution is a tradition in which a person resolves to change an undesired trait or behavior, to accomplish a personal goal, or otherwise improve their lives. According to Urban Dictionary, a New Year's resolution is a goal that you propose then forget about the next day. With that in mind, I would like to offer nine New Year's resolutions to improve your life as a structural engineer. Most of them you already know but, like any good resolution, you just need a gentle reminder.

- 1) **Work Smarter.** When I first started working, I complained to my father about the number of hours I had to put in to get the job done. However, I did not get the sympathy I was hoping for. Instead, he told me, "work smarter, not harder." Think about three things that you can do more efficiently. Is there something that you are currently doing that could be delegated? Can your e-mail box be decluttered? Are there distractions pulling you off task?
- 2) **Build Your Network.** As you have probably heard, it is not what you know; it is whom you know. More and more clients are viewing structural engineering as a commodity (even though I do not agree). What do you do to separate yourself from your competition? For us, it is whom we know. I have had clients tell me they hired us because of the network we have and our ability to navigate complex issues and challenges by picking up the phone.
- 3) **Be Punctual.** In high school, I never was able to be on time. I was so bad, my friends would tell me to show up 30 minutes before our actual meeting time, and I would still be late. In college, I became the President of the Hawaii Club at UCLA. I was in charge of our events and needed to be there on time. It would bother me that others would be late and would make me wait for them. It seemed they considered their time was more valuable than mine. From then on, I lived by the mantra "early is on time, on time is late."
- 4) **Reduce Stress.** Regular physical activity reduces the risk of high blood pressure, stroke, and coronary heart disease. On the other hand, sustained stress over time may increase your blood pressure and increases your risk of heart disease. One of my friends worked so hard, he had a heart attack. While recovering in the hospital, a client visited him to go over a proposal. Hopefully, it does not take a heart attack and a client hospital visit for you to realize if you are working too much.
- 5) **Get Out of the Office.** There are many benefits to a healthy work-life balance. It enables one to experience both personal satisfaction and professional fulfillment. For me, this means coaching my son's AYSO soccer team. Twice a week, I am forced out of the office at 4:00 to coach practice, 2 or 3 hours earlier than I would usually leave. Of course, trying to keep ten 8- and 9-year-old boys attentive and organized on a big field with balls might cause me more stress than sitting at my desk (negating the effect of number 4 above), but at least I am getting out of the office.
- 6) **Get Active in a Professional Organization.** It is not enough to just join an organization; you need to be engaged. Professional organizations are always looking for volunteers, so it is easy to join a committee or board. In exchange, you will get the opportunity



to practice leadership skills, learn about the profession, share challenges with like-minded colleagues, enhance your network, and give back to the profession. I can honestly say that, for each organization I have been involved with, I have gotten more out of it than I have put in.

- 7) **Get Educated.** It has never been easier to learn new things, as access to knowledge is all around us. STRUCTURE magazine comes to our office, and webinars and the internet are available at our fingertips. I tell interns in orientation, "There is such a thing as a dumb question: If I can Google the answer in 30 seconds, I am sure you can do the same in 15." If you prefer the old fashioned way, set a goal of finishing a book every other month or set aside 15 minutes a day. Then find ways to implement what you have learned.
- 8) **Improve Relationships.** Engineering is a team sport. To excel, one needs to create synergies with colleagues to increase the productivity and effectiveness of the team. A clear deterrent to this is challenging personal relationships. If there is someone in your office that you do not see eye to eye with, take the initiative and meet with him/her to discuss the issues that prevent you from having positive interactions. I know it is tough but, like with taking off a bandage, it is best done quickly and not left to drag out.
- 9) **Welcome/Deliver Bad News.** The bad news is not like wine... it does not get better with age. Create a culture that encourages people to communicate bad news and to do so early. Do not live in a firm where fear rules and a shoot-the-messenger philosophy prevails. In these firms, people withhold bad news hoping (like the ostrich with its head in the sand) that the situation will improve. If bad news is delivered early, firms can take action to mitigate any foreseeable negative impacts.

Now, if you will excuse me, it is time for me to renew that gym membership that I am never going to use again. ■



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