

Keeping Your Focus

“If you focus on results, you will never change. If you focus on change, you will get results.”

- Jack Dixon -

A few years ago I took a shot at the “Best Year Yet” program. I had high hopes and not much else. My participation was very informal but even then there was a significant change in my life. For years I had written things publicly on the Internet, but I had always shrunk back from the idea of attempting to submit my writings for printed publication. I just could not get past thinking that what I had to say was not worthy of being published. I was making progress at changing this one thing and had actually submitted short stories to several magazines but had not sold any of them. Then life happened.

When you start a program called “Best Year Yet” the last thing you anticipate is tragedy and it certainly was the farthest thing from my mind that year. Through setting goals I was making progress on writing, had greatly increased contact with my parents and my sister, and had a pretty positive outlook on life. As part of this I scheduled a vacation trip with my daughter from my home in Phoenix to my parent’s home in California. During that trip I realized that my parents were being victimized by a conman who was getting a lot of money out of them and particularly my mom who was showing signs of having a serious problem with short term memory.

A few months later I made a second visit to my parents to take care of a few things and to encourage my mother to get into the doctor to see if they could determine a cause for her memory problem. As I kept in touch with my parents I was dismayed to find my mother being referred to a cardiologist. What? Why would she be referred to a cardiologist for memory problems? We were determined to get to the bottom of this when my wife, daughter, sister, brother-in-law and I had a surprise visit planned where we would meet at mom and dad’s home.

The unexpected reunion started off great. We had completely surprised mom and dad. Then the surprise was on us. Four days into the visit mom was hospitalized for surgery. After the surgery she had a stroke, and two weeks later she passed away. What had happened with mom had all stemmed from congestive heart failure that had been developing unknown to all of us over a period of years. My best year yet had taken a tragic turn.

Even though I was not putting much time and effort into “Best Year Yet” it was largely a result of this that I was more in touch with my parents that year, started putting a stop to a conman who had robbed them of about \$20,000 and it had a lot to do with the fact that our family was together for the last four days that mom was healthy.

Fast forward two years to the present where I am once again in the middle of a “Best Year Yet.” Dad had spent some time visiting with us after mom’s funeral, had spent some time with my sister in Missouri and us in Arizona during the holidays of 2005. Subsequent to him returning to California, my wife, Susan, and I prepared to enroll in “Best Year Yet” coaching sessions for 2006. I was looking forward to this because I knew I wanted to make some changes in my life

and things seemed stable on most fronts. Then life happened yet again. I didn't even make it to the first planning session.

Three days before the planning session I received a phone call from a cousin in California telling me that my dad was in the hospital, and she was really worried about his condition. He had fallen and was also ill. All of this had happened within four weeks of being back at his home. So, the next morning I was on my way to California hoping that all would go well but expecting the worst. Fortunately my expectations were off target. As it turned out dad was doing alright. He did have a cold and had fallen but nothing was broken. At the same time it was apparent that living at home was not working. In the four weeks he had been home he had not been eating well, had actually fallen multiple times, had not been doing well at taking his Parkinson's medication regularly and was pretty depressed about being home without mom. The following day he was released from the hospital. We packed up some of his clothing and together headed back to Phoenix two days later.

Having a "best year yet" was starting to take on a whole new meaning. How was it going to even be a "good" year let alone a "best" year? The fact was that I was really tempted to settle for an "average" year under the circumstances. We had no idea how we were going to handle the present situation and thinking about goals and making progress toward achieving them seemed unworkable. Yet, I had seen so much promise from my earlier brush with Best Year Yet and didn't want to let go of the possibility that I might finally be able to start making some changes in my life that I had been unsuccessful at achieving for so many years.

Something I soon realized was that I did not want to place my life on hold while helping my dad and even more I knew that my dad would not want me to do that either. So I thought that perhaps the Best Year Yet program would allow me to focus on those things where I desperately wanted to make progress while also helping me to provide dad with the help he needed. After all, I had already made an initial commitment to engaging in the program and I wanted to stay true to that commitment. In addition, I knew that without some way to help me focus on all the other important aspects of my life and marriage, helping dad could become overwhelming.

When it came time to prepare my new paradigm or vision for my Best Year Yet, I decided it would be, "I embrace change and have fun." This just seemed to make sense. After all, I was already going to be having changes taking place due to dad unexpectedly being with us, and there were other changes I wanted to see taking place. On top of all of this what I did not want to happen was to be depressed or worn down by the changes. I wanted to take on the changes as more of an adventure rather than an obligation or responsibility. I figured that focusing on the fun side of changes would make the changes more positive and something I would look forward to. At the time I did not realize how soon I would be looking for the positive side of an unexpected change.

The first couple of months went reasonably well except that I wasn't making much progress on my focus as a writer. So, I was all set to really work on that for the third month. Then life happened yet again. Just a few days before my 54th birthday I was told that I would be laid off from my electrical engineering career of almost 31 years. Happy Birthday to me! I had about six weeks to get things in order, clear out my Dilbertonian cubicle and join the ranks of the

unemployed. Yet, despite all of this, I turned in two short stories to publishers, did some additional “writing” in regard to updating my resume and was actually having fun with the whole idea of being laid off and preparing to search for a new job. I was living my paradigm of “embracing change and having fun.”

They do say, “Be careful what you ask for.” In a way I figure “embracing” change does imply inviting change so that you can embrace it. So, I decided to look at being laid off as an adventure that would include searching for new employment; something I had not done in 31 years. I even looked forward to job interviews as being exciting rather than being nerve wracking. I was focused and committed to having fun with the whole process.

After getting my resume updated and finding a few places to get it into the right hands at a couple of major businesses in the area it was time to focus on another goal. Vacation! My wife and I decided we were not going to let a little thing like being laid off deter us from taking a week of vacation time we had not only planned but had set as a goal for the month. So, the week after dad left to spend some time with my sister in Missouri we headed off to the mountain area of Show Low, Pinetop and Lakeside east of Phoenix. It was beautiful and we had a great time. We did some sight seeing, a little antique shopping (not buying) and even spent one day making a side trip over near Socorro, New Mexico to do a tour of the Very Large Antenna radio telescope installation that I had wanted to visit for many years.

One day in the middle of our vacation I got a cell phone message on my dying phone (I forgot to pack the charger), from one of the companies I had sent my resume to. They wanted to talk to schedule a phone interview. I left them a return message explaining I was out of town, my phone was dying, but I would get back to them about setting something up. It was sure easier being focused on having fun with change rather than stressing-out that I might be blowing a job opening.

Ultimately I went on four job interviews. Two of these I decided in advance that I was just going in to practice and have fun with the process. A third interview looked like a real good match and a fourth one looked like something for a completely different person than me. Two weeks later I had a job offer in hand and called back two of the other people to tell them I was no longer on the market. The whole process had gone so well and quickly that I actually found myself delaying the start date so I could enjoy a little more time off before starting back to work.

When it came time to score my goals for the month I was frankly a little surprised at what I had achieved. In spite of life being rather chaotic and along with job interviews and actually getting a job I had done more writing than I had done in quite a while and all while being focused on embracing the changes in my life. Amazing!

So, what was looking like it might not even be an “average year yet” may very well turn out to be my “Best Year Yet” after all.