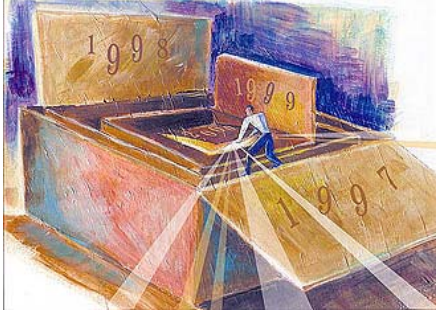


Workzone: The new year is no time to be timid about making changes

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By Erich Schwartzel, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



Diane Juravich/Post-Gazette

Hearing an expert recommend "bold decisions" this time of year may conjure images of resolutions past: dusty StairMasters, scrapped budgets, deleted Match.com accounts.

But that's exactly what Michael McGrath is suggesting. He heads the Thomas Group, a management consulting firm in Irving, Texas, and is the author of "Business Decisions!"

Looking for a new you in the new year? Don't forget workplace changes that could have an outsized impact on your whole life.

It's all in the decision making.

Mr. McGrath said you don't need a new decision right when the new year starts, but that the opening week could serve as a launch date for decision planning.

"Say things to yourself like, 'On May 1, I'm going to make a decision to stay or change jobs,'" he said.

First it takes some evaluating. One test: figuring out how hot the water is.

That's for Mr. McGrath's "frog in boiling water" situation, which he describes as a bad situation that worsens gradually before the "aha" moment of realizing you're stuck and unhappy.

"People fall into that trap more than frogs do," he said. "The way you get around that is to set yourself some deadlines for making decisions."

Want to be nicer to colleagues in the new year?

Group projects can benefit from some preliminary acronym-baring.

Mr. McGrath suggests sitting down with team members and taking the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator test, which provides a four-letter personality assessment.

Then, group members can talk about their personal approach to group dynamics before beginning the project.

Mr. McGrath used to keep a cheat-sheet behind his desk of his employees' Myers-Briggs Types so he could uniquely address their issues when they came to his office.

At the beginning of 2009, as Wall Street tremored and the economy looked susceptible to a depression, Mr. McGrath said his only advice for people was to "stay still."

But 2010, he said, will be different.

The economy is recovering, confidence is slowly growing -- and the season always warrants a fresh perspective for a happy new year.

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