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The new year is upon us and with it comes resolutions and new goals for 2019. At least, for most people. This year, I will not set any new resolutions because I have a long list of goals from years past that have yet to be achieved. There is no reason to add to the list. Don't get me wrong, I'm all for setting goals and resolutions. However, until I assess where I am, and decide whether those goals should continue to move forward, there is nothing to be gained by piling on.

Instead, I've decided the new year will have a theme. It's an idea that came to me from the books I've been reading. The common thread of the books, *The Success Principles* by Jack Canfield and *Secrets of a Millionaire Mind* by T. Harv Eker, reiterate the importance of taking responsibility and owning it.

It's easy to say that people should take responsibility for where they are in life, but it's a little more challenging in real life. We tend to look to outside circumstances to explain why things don't go the way we want. To be certain, things happen and circumstances are often unfavorable for what we've chosen to pursue. However, it is not those circumstances that keep us from our desired outcomes.

How do I know this? Because for every time we don't get what we want, someone else in that same situation did. How can that be possible if the problem was the situation? It can't. Therefore, it boils down to the choices we make and the actions we take. That can be a bitter pill to swallow, hence the reason it is easier to place blame.

However, if we instead accept responsibility, we can take control of the situation and move toward our goal.

In order to take full responsibility, we should practice these tips.

Responsibility roadblocks

- *Don't place blame:* It is natural to place blame when things don't work out. But part of taking responsibility is understanding that we should not look outside ourselves for outcomes.
- *Don't dwell on the past:* Except for the purpose of learning lessons, dwelling on the past doesn't provide us with the ability to do anything other than to get stuck in the past. There is nothing we can do about the past. The whole point of taking responsibility is so we can take actions that have the possibility of changing the future.
- *Don't justify:* When we justify what we've done, we are trying to give ourselves an out for knowing and doing better. We don't need to justify our past choices and actions; they are what they are. However, by remembering that the past teaches us lessons, we can accept that our choices and actions were not the best ones for the outcomes we sought, and we can make better choices and actions in the future.

Responsibility builders

- *Acknowledge what happened:* Taking stock of the current state of affairs is a good thing. It's usually never as bad as we think. And even if it is, so what? It's true, maybe we should have zigged when we zagged. But the bottom line? There are insights to be gained on what went wrong and if we give ourselves over to exploring options, we'll likely find there is still time to get what we want and plenty of ways to get there.
- *Clarify what you want:* Part of getting what you want is knowing what you want and having absolute clarity on why you want it. The reason most people don't have what they want is that they have unclear and vague goals. The more specific we are about what we want and certain on our why, the more power we have to bring about our desired outcome.
- *Accept your ability to choose:* In the end, it is about choice. We have the ability to choose to persevere or give up. We get to choose to be positive or negative. We have the choice to fight for what we want.

Whether you set new resolutions or goals for the new year or not, take a few moments to review where you are and ask yourself: "Am I where I want to be in my career, my relationships, my health, my life?"

If the answer is yes, celebrate. However, if the answer is no, step up, take responsibility for your past choices and actions, and decide how you will do what's necessary to get the outcome of your dreams.

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Whitnie Wiley was a long-time columnist for the *ACC Docket*, where she wrote the Lead the Way column for more than seven years. The column provided leadership tips for in-house counsel and others as they pursue their personal and professional goals.