



## The Granddaddy of All New Years Resolutions

What if you really needed only one New Years resolution?

It could be the granddaddy of all resolutions and cover off all things from more time with the kids to quitting smoking and even saving money. Well, there is one such resolution and it comes by way of Erik Erikson (1902 – 1994), a developmental psychologist.

Erikson discussed various stages of human development in terms of opposing forces meant to be reconciled for the successful transition to the next stage. Of interest to the issue of New Years resolutions, is the final stage of life Erikson talks about. The opposing forces to be reconciled are conceived of as “integrity versus despair”.

To understand, imagine you are old, very old, and on your deathbed. From your deathbed you are taking stock of life. Now imagine you have a ledger, a balance sheet, and into it you are noting on one side, those things about which you feel good when taking stock of your life. On the other side of the ledger you are noting those things about which you feel bad. According to Erikson, if those things about which you feel good outweigh the bad, then you die with integrity – a good feeling about yourself and your life. If however the things about which you feel bad, outweigh the good, then you are assumed to die in despair, feeling poorly about yourself and life.

The goal of course, is to die with integrity.

Here’s the rub. By the time you are on your deathbed, the ledger has already been written. It has been written by all the behaviors and choices made throughout your life leading to the time of your passing. By the time you are on your deathbed, it is too late to undo mistakes of the past. They are now taken to the grave.

This concept has profound implications for the behaviors and choices we undertake today particularly in view of New Year’s resolutions.

With every single decision, we are thus in the position of asking ourselves, will this lead to integrity or will this lead to despair? Will this decision or behaviour enhance my life and those of my loved ones or will it detract? In the end, the real end, will this cause me to feel good about myself?

As such we are all in the position of dying with integrity. Integrity in death will be achieved by choices and behaviour we make now. Integrity in death may require correcting for previous choices and behaviors to date. It may mean stopping some behaviors or improving others. The point is, start now.

If you are thinking of a New Year’s resolution, truth is, you are looking to save yourself from despair. You are on the right track. The only thing left to do is ensure you stick with your resolution vow, to move on with integrity.

So for this New Year, clip this article and pin it where it can remind you of your pledge, or write out the word “integrity” and place it in your wallet as an ongoing reminder.

Integrity is the granddaddy of all New Year’s resolutions worth remembering for all the new years.

(FYI – You don’t have to wait for New Years!)

Gary Direnfeld, MSW, RSW  
(905) 628-4847  
gary@yoursocialworker.com  
www.yoursocialworker.com

Gary Direnfeld is a social worker. Courts in Ontario, Canada, consider him an expert on child development, parent-child relations, marital and family therapy, custody and access recommendations, social work and an expert for the purpose of giving a critique on a Section 112 (social work) report. Call him for your next conference and for expert opinion on family matters. Services include counselling, mediation, assessment, assessment critiques and workshops.