



Winnovation

BY ROWAN GIBSON

What have you done this year?

Tom Peters once posed this question at a seminar I attended back in the early 1990s. I remember it vividly. Sitting there at one those big round tables in the ballroom at Amsterdam's Okura hotel, Tom's question connected with me like a left hook from Mike Tyson. I vigorously scribbled those words on the notepad in front of me and sat there for a few moments staring at them. What had I actually done with one whole precious year of my life? And, more to the point, what exactly was I going to do with the next one?

When I left the Okura hotel that cold December day and headed home, I made a passionate resolution: I was going to start writing the book that had long been on my mind but not on my agenda. It turned out to be one of the major turning points in my life. That book, *Rethinking the Future*, became an international bestseller sold in over 20 languages and the launch pad for my public speaking career. It also gave me the great honor of working with (and getting to know) some of the smartest business thinkers of all times – luminaries like Warren Bennis, Gary Hamel, Charles Handy, John Naisbitt, Michael Porter, CK Prahalad, Peter Senge, and Alvin Toffler, among others.

As another year comes to an end, and we contemplate what lies ahead for us all in 2008, I challenge you to think about Tom's question. Sit down and write an annual report – not for your company or department, but for your own career and personal life. Doubtless you were very busy throughout last year doing all kinds of...er, "stuff". But can you list your most "stunning" accomplishments in 2007? Did you make a significant difference this year in your organization or, better yet, in your field? Did you start working on that book, or blog, or pet project, or new business you've been wanting get off the ground? Did you do something – anything – that could one day be *legendary*? What will your children or your grandchildren boast to their friends about you? Molly Sargent, OD consultant and trainer, asks a powerful question: "Have you invested as much this year in your career as in your car?"

Sometimes it takes an exercise like this to jolt us out of our complacency and get us to make those hefty adjustments to our careers and our lives that we know we should be making but somehow haven't yet gotten around to. So, having done the self-assessment looking back at 2007, the next challenge is to look ahead to 2008. What are you going to do next year that could meet the test of being truly "Wow"? What projects, goals, values, are you going to adopt a "fanatic's posture" toward? How exactly do you plan to make a dent in the universe?

Most people start the year with some kind of New Year's resolution. The usual suspects include "going on a diet", "joining a fitness club" or "reducing my personal debt". But how many of those resolutions ever get beyond January? How many even get off the starting block? I believe the reason so few resolutions ever go anywhere is that most of us are aiming too low. Instead of resolving to lose a few pounds before Easter (how inspiring is that?), why not aim to create an innovative new diet that will become the basis for a bestseller that will turn you into the next weight-loss guru? Instead of aiming to reduce your personal debt, why not aim to start building the business that will eventually make you completely debt-free and financially independent?

The greatest piece of advice I ever followed (which came from my friend, Al Ries) was just one single word: "focus". Make a list of all the things you will inevitably end up doing next year unless you *intervene*. Then make a list of what you would truly love to do, and where you would love to be. Throw the first list away and start crossing things off the second list one until you get down to just one big career-changing or life-changing goal. Then resolve to focus all your energy in 2008 on that one big thing and treat all else as secondary. Pursue your goal tenaciously as if it's the only thing worth doing

for the rest of your life. View it as a grand adventure. Before I wrote one single word of *Rethinking the Future*, I bought myself a T-shirt and had Helen Keller's famous mantra printed in large red letters on the front: "Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing." It certainly worked for me.

When I look back on 2007, I can happily say it's been the very best year of my whole career. I managed to notch up 25 speaking engagements in 17 international locations: Alpbach, Athens, Berlin, Capetown, Düsseldorf, Gleneagles, Helsinki, Istanbul, Johannesburg, Krems, London, Moscow, Oslo, Palanga, Porto, San Diego and Tallinn – along with plenty of air miles! I had the pleasure of speaking to thousands of wonderful people from a host of world-class companies, including Carlson Wagonlit, Hay Group, Investec, Microsoft, OMV, Philips, Roche, Siemens, Sonae, UPM, and Volkswagen Group. I collected lots of rich memories: of snow-clad Austrian mountains and exhilarating African safaris, sandy Californian beaches and breathtaking Scottish highlands, sizzling steaks in Moscow and freshly-caught fish in Norway, days of glorious sunshine in Greece and Turkey, and pleasant evenings with ruby-red dessert wine in Portugal. Most importantly, what I achieved this year is precisely what I want to be doing in my career, and exactly where I want to be in my life. What a feeling!

Another personal achievement in 2007 was finishing my new book, *Innovation to the Core*, (coauthored with Peter Skarzynski) which will be published globally on March 18, 2008 by Harvard Business School Press. The book – which was written in close collaboration with Gary Hamel – has been three years in the making and is set to make 2008 even more exciting than 2007. I'm looking forward to the New Year very much.

Hopefully, you are too. If you're gutsy enough to follow your dream next year, and to work like hell to make it happen, I salute you. As advertising legend Leo Burnett once put it, "When you reach for the stars you may not quite get one, but you won't come up with a handful of mud either." May 2008 bring you and your family wealth, health and happiness.

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Rowan Gibson is a global business strategist, a bestselling author and an expert on radical innovation (www.rowangibson.com). His last book, Rethinking the Future, has been translated into over 20 languages. Rowan's new book Innovation to the core will be published in March 2008 by Harvard Business School Press. He may be contacted at rg@rowangibson.com