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A Resolution to Be a Better You

How to take an objective look at yourself and change the things you don't like.

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Take advantage of your whole self this year and look at your attributes objectively.

You've made your New Year's resolution, "That's it, no more Mr. Nice Guy! I'm not letting my spouse and kids walk all over me anymore!"

You go, trampling hearts and chopping heads off, until everyone around you is cowering, fleeing or resenting the heck out of you.

"Well, that didn't work," you say to yourself, scratching your head. "My spouse and kids aren't walking all over me anymore, but they can't stand me either. Forget this."

Maybe this year's resolution is the opposite.

"OK, fine—from my spouse to my family—they all say I'm like a bull in the china shop, so I'll be nice... I'll be sweet." Now you're furious because nothing ever gets done and your family isn't paying attention to you anymore.

"Forget this," you say, "I'd rather be heard!" And back you go to your bull-in-the-china-shop ways.

Somewhere in all of this, you've forgotten what a wonderfully complex individual you are. You've forgotten that you're not 100 percent of any one thing, but that you are made up of many different parts. There's a nice part to all of us, an aggressive (the bull-in-the-china-shop) part to all of us, and all sorts of parts in between. Some of those parts are underdeveloped, some over-developed, some we use appropriately, some we don't. So, the problem isn't that your New Year's resolution is faulty, you're probably on the right track—you just hadn't quite figured out which part of you to use how or when.

For example, if you feel you've been walked on by your spouse or family too often, you probably have an underdeveloped aggressive side which you don't use appropriately. You may think that being strong means being confrontational, yelling at your spouse and insisting on getting your way. In fact, that kind of strong is just one facet of being aggressive. Other facets of being aggressive would be standing your ground; using a firm, low voice and repetition to communicate to others your position; and learning to negotiate rather than to sacrifice.

If your New Year's resolution is to be nice, having been forceful and demanding all of your life your vision of what

being nice is, is probably more of a vision of being a doormat. That isn't nice, that's dead! Of course you're not getting what you want. Rather than reverting to your old ways, learn what genuine niceness is all about: listening to others, caring about others as much as you do about yourself (not instead of yourself), respecting both your and your family's needs.

If your primary approach to life and others isn't working for you, it's probably because you are relying too heavily on what feels comfortable and easy for you in situations where your comfort zone and the situation at hand don't mesh. For example, ordering people around may work when you're the soccer coach or running the show at work, but it's not going to get you anywhere in your personal relationships. For that, you need the part of you that is willing to listen and care. You may have buried that part of you long ago, and now fear that listening and caring are part of being weak.

Listening and caring are just as important as the ability to show leadership. Each has its importance. The art of living is in large part the art of knowing when to use which, i.e. when to listen and care versus when to lead firmly and directly, versus when to do something entirely different.

Don't let your personal comfort zone rule your life. Take an objective look at yourself and recognize which parts of you are underdeveloped. There is more to you than you realize! Develop those unfamiliar sides of yourself that you recognize would be of benefit in certain situations and practice using them. Pay attention to other people. How do other people manage to be aggressive yet not terrorize everyone in sight? How do other people manage to be nice without getting walked on. You are a valuable human being. Become more of the whole person you can be and watch your marriage and your family life expand into greater and happier success.

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