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It's official, the seemingly never-ending year of 2020 has come to an end. Every January 1st arrives carrying a blank canvas ready for each of us to decide what the upcoming year's portrait will look like, but this year the countdown to a fresh start has been long and loud. After this year we've all experienced together it's certainly no surprise that the general sentiment is goodbye and good riddance to 2020, but that sure puts the pressure on the new guy 2021 to really hit the ground running and be the best year ever.

Not to kill the New Year's buzz, but we can probably all agree that it's an unrealistic expectation that the world will suddenly be back to normal with a flip of the calendar page but what we can do is take steps to make sure it becomes the year we envision it to be.

That said, it seems timely to dedicate this Bar Talk to resolutions and goals as those topics are probably on our radar screen now more than usual. In particular, what I hope to do is peel back a couple more layers and shine some light on what propels us towards those resolutions and goals every day to help get going in the right direction out of the gate.

Setting and achieving goals are core components of BAR40, and I write about the topic extensively both in the book and posts on LinkedIn. I also have conversations with people on the topic continuously throughout the year and have the unique vantage point to see how success is achieved and where trouble pops up most often. Let's zero in on one area in particular as it ties in so closely to success and failure when it comes to goals: motivation.

All too often, there is a misunderstanding of where motivation fits into the story of reaching goals. Generally speaking, we expect that motivation is what we need first to start on our journey towards achieving whatever goal we have, but in reality, motivation comes from merely starting out and getting a small taste of success. I'm sure you have said or thought, "I'm just not motivated to do...xyz" and this is a mental roadblock we can quickly get around. Do yourself a favor and take that phrase out of your vocabulary and thought-process immediately. Waiting for motivation is a disservice to yourself and a surefire way to waste time and create regret down the road.

Think about your own experiences with procrastination for a minute. The mental lead-up to whatever task we aspire to do can quickly be built up into something much more complicated and arduous than actually getting started on it and taking the first steps (literally if it involves getting a walk a run in). This approach goes in the simple but not easy category, stop spending all the mental energy thinking about doing something and start actually doing it. Turn 'someday' into day one and take action. There is no substitute for that feeling of success that comes from even a small amount of progress in closing the gap between the start line and the finish. That small victory feels great and creates confidence; that confidence creates the desire to repeat the feeling, and that's where sustainable motivation comes from. You create it through the small daily successes that leave you with the satisfaction of getting that small win for the day in actually doing what it is you wanted to do instead of just thinking about it. There is no shortcut to actually putting the work in. Results without effort is a concept created by marketing companies that are effective in separating you from your money but not in delivering the outcome you're after. You already have the tools you need if you just commit to accessing that reservoir of determination within you. To be clear, it does not have to be a colossal achievement every day. Small amounts of continuous progress are all that it takes to create a snowball effect. This progress will provide you all the proof of concept that you need in making the goals/resolutions attainable as you will know that you are steadily moving closer to them.

Motivational books and speakers have been around forever and generate a tremendous amount of revenue from people looking to external sources for something that we all have access to within us. In my opinion, a very common shortfall is that while they can temporarily get you pumped up and inspired in the aha moment, it's a very fleeting effect. It's the equivalent of eating junk food, momentarily satisfying, but you're left hungry soon after because there's no real protein to it. Genuine motivation isn't something that is outsourced; it comes from the sense of accomplishment and achievement that we get from doing what we set out to do. Motivation is another word for the desire to replicate that feeling repeatedly and it becomes the mindset that we apply to all areas in our life. Think of someone in your life that you would consider highly motivated, and it's safe to say they were not born with any superpower. More to the point, they have discovered this fantastic loop of positive reinforcement:

- committing to the goal
- taking steps to make it happen
- feeling a sense of achievement in progress
- gaining confidence and improving the process of pursuing the goal
- resulting outcome: a desire to repeat the process and replicate the positive feelings, aka motivation

Another aspect to consider is that the journey is just as important as the destination. The moment of accomplishing a goal is brief, but the daily achievement of putting the work in is a well-earned accomplishment that will leave you feeling good throughout the process. For example, let's say

your goal is to run a marathon in November of 2021. Assuming you don't subscribe to any of those 'train for a marathon from your couch' schemes, the next 11 months will be filled with miles that are preparing you for race day. Every run is one more opportunity to build your perseverance and mental muscle, increase your endurance, and develop the habits and routine to get those miles in. When you signed up for the marathon and committed to the goal, the training becomes part of your week's schedule, no two ways about it. All of those weeks and hours of running are giving you so much fuel for the fire of personal achievement and each day is a small victory that fans the flames of your motivation even more. Crossing the finish line of the marathon on race day will feel fantastic, no doubt about it, but in the grand scheme of it, all the training leading up to it was a long series of victories. (At some point, these routines of small daily successes become a habit, and motivation is no longer part of the equation, your default operating system will be the constant pursuit of success like the 'highly motivated' person in your life mentioned earlier)

As a personal example related to running, in 2020, my goal was to run 2020 miles...a 'run the year' challenge as it's sometimes called. That averages 39 miles (38.85 to be exact) per week for the 52 weeks. This is a good example of a goal that benefits from adjusting your sights away from the finish line and instead focusing on staying present in the present. When it's a long way from point A to point B it's easy to lose focus or second guess the goal as being unreachable. Instead, trust in the process and just keep putting the work in, knowing that the results will get there. For the '2020 in 2020,' that meant the main objective was stick to the plan and run 39 miles next week. What you don't want to do is get bogged down thinking about having to run 168 miles next month or hit 1000 miles by July 1st, or anything that would add a mental headwind towards the goal. One way or the other, barring any injury, I was committed to that goal and hitting the weekly mileage was a non-negotiable part of the schedule. (That said, if you have a temporary setback in pursuing your goal don't let it throw you off your game, just pick it up tomorrow and keep going). Writing down the miles in the training journal every day and seeing the total mileage increase every week was a continuous source of proof of moving towards the goal, which gives the small feeling of achievement that makes you want to repeat it. In the BAR40 journal, there is a 'Daily Successes' section specifically for this reason... it's very satisfying to put pen to paper and capture progress. (as an easy example just think about that small feeling you get when you put a line through something on your to-do list...feels good, right?)

Some takeaway points which can be applied to goals you have for 2021:

- Do they pass the SMART test? (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-framed)
- What steps do you need to take? (a goal without a plan is just a wish!)

- Put tasks in your schedule or on your days' to-do list like any other priority, and it lessens the chance you will skip it. (the "I'll get to it when I can" approach is a road littered with unmet goals!)
- Focus on short term milestones more than the finish line (if your goal is to lose 30lbs in 2021, it can be discouraging to see those weeks where you only drop 1lb, so breaks it down into blocks of 5lbs, which gives you six mini-goals in the next 12 months)
- Don't waste your time waiting for some lightning bolt of motivation to strike to get you moving. Just start doing whatever work needs to get done each day to advance you towards the goal and create your own motivation loop. (action=progress=achievement mindset=confidence=craving to continue that feeling (aka: motivation))

I wish you a 2021 full of success as defined by achieving whatever it is you set out to do. Keep in mind that whatever goals you may have this year, often it's the simple act of starting that's the most challenging part of the journey. Stick with it, and each day you will be building that foundation of perseverance and grit, and soon enough, the slight but continuous improvement and progress will become all the motivation you need to keep the process going.