

Written by Allan Besselink
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For many people, New Year's Eve rings in the start of a new year, new goals, and a rejuvenated existence. The new year is filled with the prospects of growth and new experiences that lie ahead.

To me, New Year's is just another arbitrary day. Your birthday, however, is truly the start of a new year. I have always found my birthday to be a time for reflection, a time to learn from the past and present and embrace the growth of the future.

My birthday this year was no different. With that in mind, here are a few not-so-random thoughts from my day of reflection this year. Maybe some will resonate with you.

1. Cherish the opportunity to be a presence in another person's world. It could be a moment, a minute, an hour, or many years. I have learned that simply being in the moment with someone, with or without words being said, can be one of the most powerful and fulfilling times in our lives. The value of this is priceless - to you, and to the other person. Don't under-estimate it.

2. Reflection is an opportunity for learning. As much as I agree with the phrase "seek first to understand, then to be understood", you have to start with an understanding of who you are, why you are, and what you are doing to grow into who you want to be first and foremost. Let's face it, understanding someone else becomes infinitely more difficult if you don't know *you* first. In my own experience, reflection can be difficult and challenging at times, but the dividends are huge and you can't attach a price to the peace you gain within.

3. Share your story with the world. We all have a story that needs to be told. Why? Although we have a uniqueness that we bring to the world, our life experiences share a degree of commonality with others. It will almost certainly resonate with someone, somewhere, some time. Trust me, the realization that you aren't alone in the world changes the game for all of us.

4. Expression comes in many forms - find yours. Find a means of expression that resonates with you - writing, music, photography, you name it. See the world in a different light. Share the beauty of your experience, and be open to the process of creating. Forget about the self-imposed limits and beliefs of your past. We all have art within us. You will be amazed at what flows over time.

5. Nothing good ever comes from ambivalence or indifference. If anything, they both breed ugly emotional responses like resentment and hurt. If you do nothing, you have chosen to do (and say) volumes. And is that what you really want to project to someone you love or care for deeply? It is not an error of commission - it is an error of omission. Frankly, I think those are far worse.

6. Be passionate. About something. Anything. This relates to the previous point. As the saying goes, "if you stand for nothing you will believe in anything". Again, is that really what we want to represent to our loved ones or the people around us?

7. Love deeply - no matter what. It will have its moments of hurt, anguish, and pain. But life is too short to not tell someone that you love them, that you care for them, and that they are important to you. Now. Because tomorrow may never come. I like to call this the "relentless expression of love". It appears in many forms and can be expressed in so many ways (see #4 above). Don't think about it - do it.

All of these require vigilant efforts. But I know that when I am living consciously with these elements, life seems to flow smoothly and peacefully. I hope that these will carry me well into the next 48 years of life (or more!). Maybe they can help you as well.

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