



How do you plan for the new year?

A beach holiday. When I was a child our family beach holiday was a couple of weeks on the South Coast of NSW in January. We stayed in a basic shack close to the ocean and we went to the beach every day. I loved it - the sun, the surf and generally hanging out and not doing very much. It was a time of year when everyone seemed to be calm.

Fast forward to today, and relaxation and calmness are definite themes for my own family beach holiday. Most of the time, anyway. Lazy days, sleeping in and time without schedule. The noise of day-to-day living starts to quieten and the "important stuff" rises to the surface. What a perfect time to reflect on learning and experience gained during the year that has closed, and create a plan for 2008!

An annual goal-setting session has become an important ritual for our family. It's a great way to engage the whole family in a discussion about achievements for the year and thinking about what is important for the year ahead. For parents returning to work this can be an opportunity to talk about your vision for work and family life with the important people in your life.

Create your own ritual with whatever elements work for your situation. (The process can involve friends as well as family) As a guide the essential ingredients for our family are:

1. **Be relaxed!** The beach holiday works for us, it is a family time and there is little pressure. A picnic in the park or a special evening at home can be just as effective. The important point here is your state of mind - choose an environment in which you know you will feel relaxed.
2. **Stay positive.** Reflect on the positives from the past, what you are grateful for and what you have gained. Mistakes or setbacks can always be interpreted from the perspective of learning something new.
3. **Everyone contributes.** Every family member contributes to the conversation. Interpreting the words of wisdom of your two year old may require some lateral thinking but it is important that everyone is part of the process.
4. **Plan positive, specific goals.** Talk about what you are going to do rather than what you are not going to do. "Stop procrastinating about finding work" can be demoralising and vague, whereas "To arrange a meeting with a company I am interested in by the end of March" is proactive, positive and specific.

5. **Fun.** Create a fun atmosphere, a serious discussion is not very attractive to anyone and is unlikely to hold the attention of younger family members. You can discuss the specifics and details with the grown up members later, keep things light and brief when the kids are involved.

6. **Write it down!** We have a small book that can be easily referred or added to at a later time. Writing down your plans and goals for the year will keep you more accountable and focused on what is important to you.

Best wishes for the new year from Akira Coaching. If returning to work is one of your goals for 2008, ask me about how coaching can help you to make it a successful transition.
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