

New year, new me? Maybe not this time...



ISEH Headquarters

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I am an optimist by nature, and not often plagued by regret. Yet, every year as the clock strikes midnight on Dec 31st, I ponder what I might have done differently in the past year and how I will change for the better –especially in regard to my scientific life.

To be fair, I don't have such a bad life. My job lets me try anything I want, in terms of Hematology, or at least have my lab members consider whether it is doable or financially feasible. I can hypothesize and fantasize about how things work, and see if I was right, or wrong, and at the end of the day either answer is actually OK. I get to travel the world to go to meetings to talk about our science, and meet amazing people. I set my own hours, and despite them always falling well above the imaginary 40-hour norm, I enjoy going to work. I have a family that likes me, and still (thankfully) wants to spend time with me, despite my crazy schedule that is somehow both planned out a year in advance and still simultaneously consistently unpredictable. But, probably like so many of you, as the year comes to a close, I am more than a bit worn down. I have agonized over the wording of a particular paragraph that sums up my entire 5-year research plan (what plan?) into 250 words or less, stayed up late to find 87 more characters to cut from a manuscript, distressed about how to pay for my lab members, and pondered at the reasons that people seem to like our work in abstract form (thank you!), but not necessarily as a grant proposal.

A new year is a fresh start. Aside of the standard resolutions to eat better and find time to get in shape, I usually vow to say “No” to all the things I volunteer to lead/participate in/cover for others that eat up my time. I promise to start grants months ahead of the due dates and ask people for letters well in advance of the submission deadlines, rather than the evening before. I will definitely catch up on reading all the papers that came out in the last 3 to 6 (OK, maybe 9) months that are relevant to my research interests. I commit to use my calendar to organize my life so I will not feel like I am constantly catching up, rather than leading the way. I pledge to be on top of all the projects in the lab and notice as soon as things start to go awry, and I will have the solution to fix it.

Yet, as is probably obvious from that not so short to do list, it isn't going to happen, at least not in its entirety. So maybe instead of this being the year when I do everything perfect – the year when all the pieces fall into place and I receive a Nobel prize AND a generous benefactor, the year when all my papers are accepted on the first submission (does that ever happen?) – I will make this the year to be realistic. Sometimes people will like my science, and sometimes they won't. And I will take their criticisms as constructive (hoping that they are) and not dwell any perceived animosity. I will write letters of recommendation and support as soon as I am asked, so its off my plate, and helps them out, and know they will do the same for me when I ask at the last minute. I will tell people- not just think it- when they give a great talk, or present a cool story. I will accept offers of assistance without questioning

motive, or being stressed about why they think I need it. I will be honest when I am frustrated or confused by data or a review, and I will try not to always burden the same people with complaints, or if I do, I promise to be their everlasting sounding board. I will be candid when reviewing papers or grants, but not cranky, and I will try to be helpful, not just critical. I will be focused and productive in lab, but willing to admit defeat and go grab an ice cream, on occasion (see eating better, above). I will try to remember that my students, postdocs and colleagues have a life outside of lab, and sometimes need a break, and hope that they give me that same consideration. I will celebrate the good news – big time – with food, toasts and cheer. And I will keep going. I will work hard and it will work out. It's actually fun. I'm lucky. I will make myself remember that and let it be the focus this year. To those who share my struggles, let's make 2016 the year of no regrets, for all of us.



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