

Check your 'BLIND SPOTS'

Early in the new year is a time for reflection and resolution; you know the drill, says **Adam Sheridan**.



TIME TO DO MORE: sleep, exercise, water, healthy food, meditation, sunscreen, time with family and friends, saying no, and saving. **DO LESS:** stress, multi-tasking, screen time and working for others... all to be enacted following the hectic Christmas and New Year break post haste... oh, and add finally finishing that inspirational book started over the summer break to the list!

There can be a certain marching repetition to this process, such that we miss the melody for the beat. Let's look at things from a different perspective to re-frame potential blind spots.

1. Good health. Leafing through my in-flight magazine recently I came across a profound line from Kelly Slater (legendary surfer). Asked

what his most prized possession was, he replied quite simply 'my health'. Robust health (often conflated with youth) is a priceless gift. Once lost it is hard-to-impossible to recover. Build and guard yours well; at the end of the day it is your unique form of wealth no amount of money can buy. I often think that God/the universe/our parents have it the wrong way around. We are born into youth and increasing health so never learn its true value until it is too late and our powers are on the wane. How different it might be if we were born hunched and infirm and grew slowly into the bloom of health. Would we then so readily trade it off for short-lived instant gratification, overtime, and second mortgages...?

2. Time. Another precious gift so often and easily frittered away. A friend recently showed me an on-line calculator into which you dial your date and place of birth. It then generates a live countdown clock that displays your statistical average remaining years, months, days and hours on earth. Confronting to say the least. It reminded me that we tend to regard time in abstract terms, as if it is a regenerating resource. If only each new

day were simply a reset of the last – kind of like that classic advert (am I showing my age?) with the magic Tim Tams. This may be so for the infinite universe. Sadly not so for we mortals. Take a moment to regard the babies and children in your life, how fast they change and evolve. It may not seem it, but this rate of change continues apace in you, the adult. Think carefully about the time you have; and how you may best spend this. Eliminate the people, activities and things in your life that waste this extremely precious commodity.

- 3. Body habitus.** How's this for a crazy original thought: there is an excessive focus upon the superficial beauty and look of things in our society. The rise of curated social media profiles and the second on-line life has not helped. Although a nice face is an undoubted and welcome bonus, it can seem incongruous and strange if sat atop an unhealthy, dysfunctional body. Take time to honestly assess your optimal BMI and recall that this, and a healthy muscle mass, correlate more strongly with a long and healthy life than the number of likes for your latest holiday selfie! You may need seek out a trusted health professional; the politeness of others often means they will be reluctant to confirm an unhealthy lifestyle or body shape.
- 4. Posture.** When reflecting on the above, also take some time out to assess your own posture. This predicts mobility, vigour and comfort throughout life. For instance, for every 1-2 cm your head cranes forward over time, the tension on your neck and shoulder muscles doubles. Flip this in a positive way to realise that simple postural alignment may dramatically reduce the tension you feel in your back, neck and shoulders. Reconfigure the 'T-Rex' posture encouraged by desk work, computers and driving; hunched back, raised tight shoulders and bent arms poised to hit a keyboard. Redress this and you will no longer be on a first name basis with your local masseuse. Reclaim your youthful poise!
- 5. Balance.** Place this article to one side for a moment. Stand on one leg and balance. Not too hard, right? Now close your eyes and try to maintain your balance on one leg. If you are over 30 this can be tricky beyond a few seconds. It is considered a lead marker of diminished balance, heralding ineffective gait and reduced mobility in later life. Work on this now to maintain your sense of balance; and the leg and ankle muscles which contribute to this. Once you get the hang of this, mix it up by attempting to squat up and down upon one leg with your eyes closed...
- 6. Flat profiles.** In the world of selfies, most people quickly get to know and prefer their best angles. To properly assess your evolving features, and to understand how others regard you in real life, take flat frontal and side profile photographs from time to time. These will allow you to properly identify strengths to maintain, and weaknesses to address. These images are especially invaluable in assessing oneself and others for volume and structural support.
- 7. Hands, feet, elbows and knees** – and no, this isn't a game of Simon Says. Remember to moisturise and photo-protect those extremities which bear the brunt of daily life. Well maintained and they convey a sense of body wide health and vitality. Once weathered however, they are quick to betray despite best efforts in the facial region. Consider laser, RF and micro-focussed ultrasound if the damage is done.
- 8. Treats and habits.** We are in large part defined by what we do. Remember that habits, including guilty treats, add up to a point where they represent your lifestyle, if indulged frequently enough. This goes for bad posture, unhealthy diet, and alcohol. Just because they are not on your actual to-do list does not mean they do not have an equivalent impact as your better intentioned actions. Make a list of your worst bad habits and work to actively minimise them. Start now. Oh, and procrastination is often top of the list (mine included)

9. Sunscreen. I remain surprised each week by patients exclaiming 'What? Every day?!' when advised to apply a 50+ broad spectrum sunscreen to their face and exposed skin. The act itself is quite trivial, but as with all beneficial health care actions, like the dreaded flossing (you know you should!), it can take a while to establish as a permanent feature in our busy schedules. By way of motivation, it is good to recall the manifold benefits of sunscreen. Beauty for one. Skin cancer another. And there is a confluence. A few seconds spent applying sunscreen daily pays big dividends, reducing the risk of skin cancer requiring surgery. Granted, advanced surgical techniques such as Mohs Micrographic surgery keep tissue destruction and subsequent scarring to a minimum, while laser and related treatments work to reduce the impact of any inevitable scars, but why not prevent surgery and disfiguring scars in the first place?

10. Humanity. A prevailing narrative presumes that we are all to be replaced by machines. Proponents parrot the famous Blade Runner line that our AI replacements will be 'more human than human'. Herein resides an important point. We are winning as we are already human. Embrace your humanity at least as strongly as you embrace new technology. Think carefully before trading this away for low-value social media interactions. Visit a friend. Engage in a meaningful, unscripted conversation and experience together.

11. Experience and wisdom. Time for a mental experiment. Stop, think and write down what age you would wish to be, if you had to remain that age forever. Consider this as if you will only ever possess the experience and knowledge possessed upon that birthday. This simple experiment highlights the value of time spent living, gaining experience and valuable insights. Sure, you may have looked and felt great at 18, but do you really wish to return or remain there in 'Groundhog Day land' forever? Probably not. Embrace the year to come, all that you shall learn and do, and all those you are yet to meet. I wish you a happy and healthy New Year! ■



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