

GET YOUR DUCKS IN A ROW

Never mind useless New Year's resolutions. Here are six steps to getting a fresh start.

**By DORY DEVLIN
FOR THE STAR-LEDGER**

One week later, chances are many of us could name at least one New Year's resolution already broken. I write this with confidence as I finish a late-night snack of the high-fat variety that I vowed to eschew in 2002. But as the new year we eagerly awaited begins, there is one set of resolutions each of us would do well to return to often this year: professional goals.

A steady stream of corporate layoffs and the 9/11 attacks that killed nearly 3,000 at the start of their workday led many of us to re-evaluate careers before the traditional year-end time of reflection. But the new beginning January's crisp winds offer fosters a fresh introspective look. Here's how to get started:

- 1. Organize your workspace.** Clear the clutter. Toss the papers that you do not need to file for frequent use. Sorting through past months' (or years') work also helps you prioritize work undone. "Clearing out breeds clarity," says Laura Berman Fortgang, a Montclair life/career coach. For tips, check out Julie Morgenstern's "Organizing from the Inside Out" (Holt), and for home workspaces, "Homeofficelife: Making A Place to Work at Home" by Lisa Kanarek (Rockport).
- 2. Organize your life.** Sounds impossibly overreaching, but you can't focus on whether to make a job change or prepare for a layoff without knowing how much money you have, reducing debt or evaluating your investments and retirement savings.
- 3. Prioritize your work.** Determine what projects must be done and which can be dropped. "Where is the most bang for the buck if you're worried about becoming redundant?" asks Fortgang. What projects will highlight your skills and value to the company most?
- 4. Strengthen relationships.** Evaluate whom you respect and can continue to learn from most through your current job and past work experience. Reach out to former colleagues before you may need to for a job search.
- 5. Ask yourself lots of questions.** "The best time to begin this process is when you are still in the driver's seat with a job and income on your side," says Nat Stoddard, CEO of Crenshaw Associates, a Manhattan outplacement firm. He suggests these questions — some standard, some less so:

- Where do I want to be 10 years from now in terms of salary, title, work situation and personal situation?
- What kind of role do I want? Do I want to work alone or manage a team?
- What do I love most about my current job?
- What would be the ideal job for me?
- What do I do best? What do I have the potential to do better than others competing for the same job?
- What was my dream job when I started working? Has that changed or have I gone off course?
- What are my current strengths? (Look for clues for new pursuits.)
- What resources or skills do I need to get to where I want to go? Do I need to go back to school? Take a professional training course?
- Would a career coach help?

“Life can either happen to you or you can have some degree of influence,” Stoddard says. “You can’t control it, but if you have a plan you’re in a better position to deal with whatever comes your way.” All of this self-study can be overwhelming.

To keep focus, Fortgang suggests one final practical tip:

6. Set three professional priorities at a time. That way, you’ll have a chance of accomplishing at least one of them before 2003 begins.

NOTES: Dory Devlin writes about the workplace. She can be reached at ddevlin@starledger.com.