Stop Whining and Start Succeeding in 2011

How to move past the excuses and get the impossible done

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I'm tired of hearing: "I intended to do it this year, but I just couldn't get to it."

Having spent most of my career in a really tough corporate environment, where the word "can't" simply wasn't part of the vocabulary, I have trouble getting used to hearing that phrase.

The environment I worked in was the Marine boot camp of business, I often say. If you didn't make an effort to creatively solve problems, you could easily wind up "dead." (Thankfully, not literally. It was in the form of a demotion or ultimate termination.)

That experience scarred me for life. It made me a super-tough manager, but also extremely tenacious in my approach to planning and problem-solving. One of my favorite movie scenes is from Apollo 13 when Ed Harris is leading his team in to bring Tom Hanks down from space. The "let's build a filter" scene is a great example of how the seemingly impossible becomes possible.

Although we as business professionals may not be saving men from death in outer space, we are often challenged with fitting square things into round wholes, acting quickly in the face of crises, and inspiring people to do really difficult things.

In one of my previous blogs, I mourned the death of planning. Although the ability to deal with the unexpected is critical in business, having a clear set of goals and a roadmap can be invaluable in keeping you focused on success in the year ahead. If you have a tough time with long-range planning, start with small steps and set 30day goals. Make sure your team members know what's expected of them.

You still have time – close to 30 days, in fact - to put your 2011 goals down on paper (or iPad or GoogleDocs or whatever your preferred mode of documentation is). Use your time wisely. Focus on the really important things. And take a calculated risk every now and then. If Ed Harris (Gene Kranz in real life) can get those guys down from the moon, just using a bunch of random hardware, how tough can our jobs really be?

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