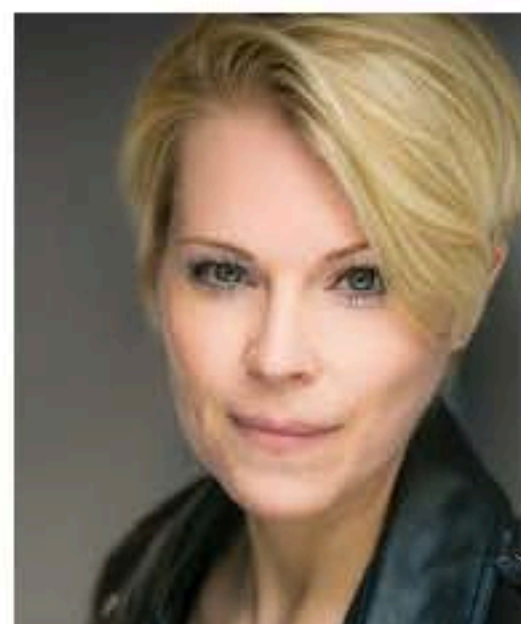




New Year's Revolution



TO CHANGE THE WORLD, BEGIN WITH YOURSELF. VICKY BEECHING SETS HER INTENTION FOR 2017

As 2016 ends, many are shaking their heads in disbelief at what a bizarre year it's been politically. The Brexit vote followed by Donald Trump's victory has been a heady mixture, leaving many of us worried about the future. Whatever we predicted 2016

would bring, few could have guessed those two bombshells would explode; even the most-respected analysts and experts were taken aback.

These political outcomes have hit the LGBTQ community hard. Rhetoric against minorities has become commonplace; those of us in the UK are left worrying whether our rights will be protected in post-Brexit Britain; those in the US are nervous about what a Trump presidency will bring.

All this, combined with June's Orlando shooting at a gay nightclub, has made for a challenging six

months. So as the year comes to a close and we reflect on all that's happened, Christmas is tinged with a serving of solemnity.

In times like these, it's easy to slip into defensive mode; feeling that events are beyond our control. It can create a sense of powerlessness and make us disconnect from politics and social change. We want to hunker down, desiring comfort and safety; a form of political and emotional hibernation.

I believe this is dangerous. Our voices and vision are needed now more than ever. So, rather than disconnecting, this is a time when we need to hope and dream. One thing is always true: we get to choose our own, individual response to the situations life throws at us. We can't choose what happens, but we do control the way we perceive, process, react and respond. And we can always be part of bringing positive change.

On that theme, I have been thinking a lot about New Year's resolutions. Some people have an instant, negative reaction to that topic. "Ah, they never work!" is a common opinion. This is understandable as

statistics show that the success of New Year's resolutions is pretty low.

A YouGov survey last year reported that over a third of people had already broken their resolution by the end of January! However, the same survey noted that 63% of people had decided to make a resolution in the first place; so over half of us still believe it's a good idea to try.

For me, there's something exciting about a new year stretching out ahead. Sure, things are far from perfect politically right now, but I see that as a challenge to work for positive change, rather than a reason to give up. Every year, as December comes to an end, I make time to take stock and think about what I want the 12 months ahead to contain.

Ask anyone what their New Year's resolutions are, and you'll typically hear very specific goals: "quit smoking," "go to the gym every morning," "lose 10 pounds" or "give up chocolate". Perhaps these often get broken before January's over because they are so narrow and rigid? Failing even once can leave us feeling deflated and like there's little point continuing with the quest.

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Because of this, I've found that setting "New Year's intentions" rather than goals or resolutions, works better. I see intentions as broader and more general; for example, last year I set an intention to "slow down and learn how to rest".

I didn't tie it to a narrow practice like: "I will get off my laptop by 6.30pm every night" as some days that's not possible with freelance work. I didn't specify: "I will take Sunday off each week and do nothing but replenishing activities", as that might not always fit with my schedule.

Instead, by keeping it as a broad theme, I avoided the sense of failure that highly specific goals bring. The results have been brilliant and I've learned lots about slowing down over the past year – something I've been terrible at my entire life!

What have my "New Year's intentions" been for previous years? One was: "Get out of my comfort zone as much as possible" (that was the year I came out as gay, so I felt I fulfilled that!). Another was: "Return to my love of academic study" (that was the year I decided to enrol in a part-time PhD, which I'm still slowly working my way through now). I've found them very helpful in setting a direction of travel for the year to come.

Regardless of the current political climate, I hope you'll allow yourself to stay positive about 2017 and the possibilities it holds. Melanie Beattie, an American writer, once said: "The new year stands before us, like a chapter in a book, waiting to be writ-

ten." I love that idea; our lives are a story, and we get to pen some of the narrative arcs. If you gave yourself permission to hope, what would the next chapter of your life contain? What theme would be prominent?

Maybe for you, it's adventure. Or perhaps it's rest. Maybe it's more community. Or more time alone for self-reflection. It could be a year of believing in your own potential. A year of healing broken relationships. Or of physically taking trips to new parts of the country, or world.

Some people love to have a single word for the coming year; one word that sums up their intentions and hopes. They focus on that one word all year, to remind them to stay true to their intention. Maybe that one word could be fearless, fitness, simplify, or surrender. Perhaps it's balance, or discipline. It could be move, or it could be stay. Only you can decide what best sums up your desires for 2017.

I've been pondering this idea of having "one word" for 2017. I think mine will be balance. So many of the issues we struggle with are rooted in imbalance; working too hard, sleeping too little, too much sugar and caffeine, too little time for reflection. So rather than set specific goals on those things – then feel bummed when I break them in January (!) – I'd rather focus on the broader intention of balance.


Balance has always been hard for me as I'm quite an all or nothing person! But I believe we can change

any aspect of ourselves if we try. Sometimes we get stuck in a rut about our identity; thinking the way we are is how we must stay forever. These assumptions can stop us from thinking outside the box.

Stephen Spielberg's perspective on this is fascinating. He says: "I don't think we're the same person all our lives. All of us – every single year – we're a different person". I find that empowering: change is always possible. We can choose to see ourselves in new ways; to believe that even the most ingrained habits and patterns can be rewritten.

So if you feel like it, grab a notebook and jot down some intentions for 2017. Maybe even choose one word that sums up your aims for the next 12 months. If you do, tweet me and let me know what you pick; I'd love to hear.

Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote: "Hope smiles from the threshold of the year to come, whispering: 'It will be happier.'" Sure, we have no concrete proof of that. But likewise, we don't have any proof that it won't be. The way we set our expectations and intentions has a vast impact, so why not lean towards expecting good things to happen?

Wherever you are as the New Year is welcomed in, I hope you'll be surrounded by love and peace. And I hope that, as you look towards 2017, it's with a heart that dares to believe it could be your best year yet. 

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