NECESSARY ENDINGS IN 2012 LEAD TO REAL CHANGE IN 2013

By Dr. Henry Cloud

When I wrote *Necessary Endings*, it was not meant to be a book filled with strategies for the year’s end. The sooner you put an end to things that stall your growth, the better. That said, the end of a year is a natural time for us to stop, reflect, and ask ourselves what we want to take from 2012 into 2013. Do we really want to carry the burden of our failures, mistakes, or drained resources into another year? Or do we want to start 2013 anew, free of the burdens that kept us from advancing as far as we’d hoped to in 2012?

What habits, thoughts and actions must you put an end to, in order to achieve your goals in 2013? Here are some thoughts from *Necessary Endings* to help you answer this important question:

1. Determine whether a “season” has passed.

   Everything has a season. Remember CDs, cassettes, and phone books? They had their place and time, but their season has passed. And the truth is, no matter how wisely we invest in a product, strategy, person or even some relationships, eventually, the season for our investments come to an end. Endings are a natural part of the cycle of growth.

   I remember one support group I was in for several years that was life changing. But, years later, I was not in the same place, nor were they, and we all needed something different. It was time to initiate a necessary ending. Once I did, I was able to find new support systems to help me achieve new goals.

   Similarly, in business, someone who is right for a certain position when they’re hired may no longer fit the changing needs of the company as it grows. Or perhaps a strategy was implemented years ago that put your company on the map, but no longer works due to new market conditions or other factors. These are two examples of how necessary some endings really are, in order for a company to thrive.

   It’s important to remember that this does not mean that the person, idea, or strategy was “bad.” It simply means that the time for that phase in your business or personal life has come to an end, so that new ideas and directions can take root. Even good things run out their life cycles, and to everything, there is a season. Take some time to figure out whether what you’re doing belongs to a season that has passed.

2. Determine whether “pruning” is necessary for growth.

   In order for a rose bush to achieve its full growth potential, every good gardener knows that it must be carefully pruned. There are three circumstances in which a gardener prunes a rose bush: 1) when the bush produces more buds than it can sustain, 2) in order to remove parts of the bush that are diseased, and 3) to remove dead branches in order to make way for new growth.

   First, when the bush produces more buds than it can sustain, the overgrowth drains essential resources from the bush, and the gardener must choose which of the “good” buds are “best.” He then prunes the good buds so that all of the bush’s resources can be focused on helping the best buds thrive.
Our lives and businesses are just like the rose bush. We may have a lot of really good strategies, products, activities, relationships, or ideas that we’ve poured our resources into. But if we pruned some of the good stuff back, we would enable the best parts to get all that they need to thrive, making our businesses and relationships even more productive and happier.

Second, when parts of the rose bush are diseased, and every effort to nurse them back to health has failed, a gardener must prune the diseased parts to prevent them from spreading. Similarly, in business, when all of the coaching, mentoring and training you’ve offered cannot make some employees more productive, or a strategy you’ve worked on isn’t producing the results you’d hoped for, it’s time to get out the pruning shears. Whether products or people, there are some elements of our business and personal lives that cannot be helped, and letting them go – whether temporarily or permanently – is essential to your survival.

Third, many branches are already dead, and taking up space that living branches need in order to grow. Similarly, there are many aspects of business that have run their course and can no longer contribute to the company’s success. Those parts of the business must be shut down so that the rest of it can thrive. And in our personal lives, there are many activities and people that aren’t conducive to our health or growth, and must be lovingly pruned.

To recap, make decisions about what to prune by asking the following questions:

a) What is “good but not best?”
b) What is “sick and can’t get well?” and
c) What is “long since dead?”

3. Figure out the difference between “hoping” and “wishing.”

We all hold out hope for many things in life. In my career as a clinical psychologist and leadership coach, I often hear the following:

“I hope the business grows in 2013.”
“I hope he finally gets sober this time.”
“I hope she turns her performance around.”
“I hope this strategy takes off.”

Hope is one of the greatest virtues in life. However, it can also serve as an impediment to success if we don’t have a real, objective reason for our hope. Hope without reason is only a desire or wish; not a hope you can expect to materialize.

It’s important to ask yourself why you have hope for something to happen. If you’re hoping for growth in your business next year, are you expecting new markets to open for your product? Hiring talented new sales people? Planning exciting new product launches? If you answered “yes” to questions like these, then you have good reason to hope for a turnaround in 2013. But, if your answer is “no,” then your hope may be just a desire or wish. And putting off a “necessary ending” because you are wishing for something to change only delays the onset of reality.

Similarly, if you have personal goals, like weight loss, ask yourself whether you have a legitimate reason to hope for such change in the New Year. Are you joining a program? Revamping your eating habits? Hiring a personal trainer? Or, are you continuing to do the same things you did in 2012, but “hoping” to have a different result in the New Year?
In *Necessary Endings*, I devote an entire chapter to distinguishing between hopes and wishes, and to helping you figure out what’s worth fixing and what needs to end. Here are some questions you can ask yourself to help make this distinction:

1. Is there some sort of involvement in a proven change process? Real change requires implementation of new and proven strategies. If you’re trying to lose weight, kick a habit, or kick start your business, find out what processes need to be implemented to help you achieve your goals.

2. Is there a “time and place” structure to the change process? Goals cannot be achieved if you’re only working on them “when you have time.” Time and place commitments must be made in order to effect real change. Whether your goal for 2013 is running a 5k or getting on the Fortune 500 list, set and adhere to a time and a place structure that organizes your life around achieving your goals.

3. Are you seeking new wisdom? New information, knowledge, and principles are required to learn and grow. Doing things the way you’ve always done them won’t get you where you need to be in the New Year.

4. Are you learning new skills? New skills, abilities, and capacities are essential to real change. As a business leader looking to improve performance, are you putting your management team through leadership development programs? As a spouse trying to improve your marriage, are you seeking new knowledge to help you communicate with your significant other more lovingly?

5. Is there self-sustaining motivation? For real change to occur, a person must have a self-motivated desire to change, as opposed to being constantly pushed to change by others. That does not mean that they are not getting help and encouragement from others. It does mean that the motivation to change must come from within.

6. Is there an honest admission of need? Anyone seeking change must make an honest assessment and admission of their need to change. If they don’t see that they have a problem, or need help overcoming it, then it will be difficult for them to achieve their goals.

7. Is there an external source of support and energy? Support systems, groups, or individuals that provide external energy are essential to an individual’s efforts to achieve real, lasting change. Who are you drawing inspiration and support from in order to help you realize your goals?

8. Is any noticeable movement or change occurring? The process of change is always visible over time. This does not mean that things will constantly appear to improve; in fact, circumstances often get worse before they get better. However, noticeable movement in some direction always occurs if change is on the horizon.

4. Establish a clear vision of what you want your life or business to look like in 2013.

A gardener can only prune a rose bush if he knows what a beautiful rose looks like. In other words, he prunes towards his vision of the future. In order to know what endings should occur, you must first decide what you are trying to achieve. What kind of business are you trying to build? What kind of relationships are you trying to create? What kind of personal life do you want to have? Once your clarify your vision, you will be able to determine what “necessary endings” are required to bring about the change you desire in 2013.
ABOUT DR. HENRY CLOUD:

Dr. Cloud is a clinical psychologist, leadership consultant, best-selling author, and speaker whose books have sold over 7 million copies. Drawing upon his broad range of experiences in private practice, leadership consulting, and media, he simplifies life’s issues and gives easy to understand, practical advice. It’s Dr. Cloud’s humor, compassion and “in the moment” confrontation that make his approach to psychology, business and spirituality such a success.

Dr. Cloud has written, or co-written, more than twenty books, including the two-millionseller Boundaries and his most recent books, Necessary Endings, Integrity, The One Life Solution, The Law of Happiness and 9 Things You Simply Must Do. His books have sold over seven million copies. His works has been reviewed and featured by such publications as the New York Times, the Wall St. Journal, the Boston Globe, the Los Angeles Times and many others. He is a frequent guest on networks such as CNN and Fox News Channel and hosts, “New Life Live,” a radio show heard in 180 markets. He regularly speaks to audiences on the topics of leadership and performance.

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