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Finally, New Year resolutions that are guaranteed

By Curtis Seltzer

BLUE GRASS, Va.—Like many Christmas toys, New Year resolutions are soon broken. This is predictable, since neither toys nor resolutions are made to last, and the latter are usually contrived while resolving under the influence.

We're not out of the first week in January, and I've broken two of my 2011 pledges right off the bat: Be nicer and grow head hair.

So far I've kept my third resolution: When driving, avoid any vehicle -- particularly those with mag wheels and a NASCAR sticker -- operated by a texting teenage boy with his baseball cap turned backward. I define "teenage boy" as males between 11 and 35.

I considered a fourth resolution -- Diss any woman who utters either "Oh my God!" or "awesome" -- but that would have required junking "Be nicer" before I'd given it half a chance.

Resolutions have to be mutually supportive (or at least not inconsistent). You could, of course, use one of your resolutions to not be bothered by details of this sort.

Americans commonly promise to lose weight, quit smoking, quit drinking and get out of debt.

I've run the numbers. They show that if every American carried out these goals, our economy would be in a shambles. That is, worse than it is now.

Eat less, and family farmers would have to choose between selling their farms or selling their families. Grocery sales would be cut by one-third; fast-food franchises would be fast out of business. Prohibition again, and industries that produce or sell alcohol -- from the snootiest winery to the humblest blue-collar bar -- would be shuttered. End smoking, and the tobacco-industrial-medical complex would disappear. And clean up our balance sheets...why every bank in the country would go under without our debt payments to keep them sort of solvent.

Sarah Palin is right—eat, drink, smoke and spend. Our economy depends on it. Desserts all around!

Since most of us break our resolutions within the first month of making them, it's clear that we need a better way of improving our lives.

So the first new rule for 2011 resolutions is to make none. Why dance down the path of guaranteed failure?

You can get around this rule by inserting an innocent little “not” in any resolution you do make. Thus, “I resolve to not lose weight in 2011.” Adding a three-letter clarification should be considered a procedural rather than a substantive rule change.

The second new rule is to privatize all future resolutions. No more making them up on your own. Pay an unemployed person to bear this burden.

This will create jobs in the private sector at no taxpayer expense. At the very least, that person can do yours, and you can do his or hers. Sophisticated economies like ours often depend on citizens taking in each other’s washing.

The third rule is to pay someone to break resolutions you don’t like on your behalf.

This way of handling distasteful obligations emerged in the Civil War where a draftee could purchase a substitute for \$300 or more. On the Northern side, about 60 percent of professionals and skilled labor paid a substitute, often recent immigrants and newly freed slaves.

Today, we can pay to get out of many unpleasant chores, from holding our place in line to doing itemized taxes and having babies. Breaking New Year resolutions should be handled in the same way.

And think of the employment implications!

The 65 percent of American adults whom the government considers overweight or obese -- including all NFL running backs -- could pay others to lose weight for them. I could pay a neighbor to lose weight for me, and he could pay me to lose weight for him.

But the real beauty of this idea is that these payments would also finance breaking any resolutions we find inconvenient. I would pay my substitute to either lose weight or gain it, since I have freed myself of both outcomes. Nonetheless, I would be credited with any weight loss. And if the sub gained, it would never be recorded on my permanent record card.

What a deal! You either succeed without effort, that is, someone loses weight for you, or getting fatter is borne by others.

And think of the international benefits!

Poor, hungry people in the Third World could be paid to lose weight. They would, of course, use their fee to buy food and become healthy. Their failure to get skinnier would be wonderful change, and we could finally feel terrific about running another program that achieved a result opposite of what we intended. This is a much better foreign-aid program than any we now use.

My fourth resolution for 2011 is to be serious, though the reasons escape me.

I will pay one honest soul from a good home one dollar to be serious on my behalf when that's called for; I will pay myself a dollar whenever I break this resolution for anyone's benefit.

And my last resolution is to arrange a marriage between the GEICO gecko and that bizarre, space-alien lady in white who pitches for Progressive Direct. One hopes that they will be run over by a texting teenage boy in a backward cap before their insurance kicks in.

Oh my God! That would be so awesome. But I will try not to clap in anticipation, because I'm still trying to be nicer.

Curtis Seltzer is a land consultant who works with buyers and helps sellers with marketing plans. He is author of How To Be a DIRT-SMART Buyer of Country Property at www.curtis-seltzer.com where his weekly columns are posted.

Contact: Curtis Seltzer, Ph.D.
Land Consultant
1467 Wimer Mountain Road
Blue Grass, VA 24413-2307
540-474-3297
curtisseltzer@htcnet.org
www.curtis-seltzer.com