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Start Improving Today the Next Year of Your Life

Carla Kimbrough

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, ckimbrough2@Unl.edu

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Kimbrough, Carla, "Start Improving Today the Next Year of Your Life" (2004). *Faculty Publications, College of Journalism & Mass Communications*. 28.

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Start improving today the next year of your life

(Editor's note: Carla Kimbrough-Robinson is joining SPJ's stable of columnists and will write on personal and professional development for Quill. Carla will focus on surviving and thriving in a career in the rapidly changing world of journalism. She is eager to hear from readers with questions and suggestions.)

Is your life better today than it was a year ago?

That may sound similar to the political quip used during political debates, but the question is meant to prompt thought about you and your life — professionally and personally. Are you growing and learning? Has your reporting or editing improved? How about your knowledge of the newsroom? Is it stagnant or alive? How are your leadership skills? Has your work been memorable this year? Has your work changed the way people live, work or play?

Are you excited about going to work? And while you're thinking about that: How's your personal life? Do you have any new friends, any fresh interests? Have you read any books that give you another perspective or just give you a chuckle? How's your family? Does your spouse's face still light up when you walk through the door? Do your children know they can count on you to help them with their homework or navigate their social quagmires? How's your health and wealth?

Your personal life has everything to do with how you perform at work.

Nothing should be off limits in your examination. My 2 cents says we don't do enough self-examination unless something prompts it: a good run of stories; a series of breakdowns in the industry, such as ethical lapses; a missed job promotion or a divorce.

So who am I to share my 2 cents?



**CARLA
KIMBROUGH-
ROBINSON**

I am a journalist with nearly 20 years in the profession, working at daily papers ranging from 13,500 to 300,000 in circulation. I've been a reporter, a copy editor, an editor, a recruiter, a mentor, a failure, a success, a leader, a follower, a consultant, a diversity cheerleader, a change maker.

In other words, I live where you live.

On top of that, I'm a trained personal coach or life coach. A coach is someone who partners with individuals so they can achieve their success. Coaches do this by helping their clients clarify their values and priorities, and by helping them create and execute plans to turn dreams into reality. A coach holds a client accountable by seeing the client as the person he or she aspires to be and prompting the client with questions that force action.

So, I'm equipped to ask the tough questions and to listen. Some principles I operate by:

■ Investing in you is never a waste or selfish. You don't have to wait for your employer to pay for your professional development. Invest in yourself and write off the expense on your taxes. What a message this action sends to others watching you! It almost screams: "I'm important and worthy of development!"

■ You are in the driver's seat. If you are not enjoying the journey, then go a different direction. You have the power to change and learn. You can start conversations. You can apply for more challenging jobs at your paper or elsewhere. You should not be the backseat passenger when it comes to your career.

■ If you're not growing, you're dying. When we're growing and learning, we're more engaged and alive. That may be reading a book that refreshes your memory on grammar or math or taking a class at a

community college about history. We've got to stay sharp or life gets dull.

■ "Open" conversations are the key to success. An open conversation requires you to share your thoughts and aspirations and insists that you listen and heed advice. These conversations may occur with a mentor or a supervisor. Don't operate in a silo, but seek the opinions and experience of others to help you make informed decisions about your career.

■ Don't wait until tomorrow to make a move. The scariest questions I ever asked myself: "What if the Angel of Death showed up Tuesday morning? Have I done all I was called to do?" Nothing like a tough question like that to kick your actions into high gear.

These are some of the principles I will use in shaping this column — with your help. I invite you to send your questions about developing your career as a journalist or creating more balance in your life.

You have the power to influence the direction of this column and even the lives of others by sending questions or suggesting topics.

I also will supply some information on professional development. That may be a list of books worth reading or re-reading, or a list of seminars, or even some simple tips about improving as a journalist.

A year from now, your life should be better than it is today.

Don't let procrastination or fear stop you from being the best journalist and the best person you can be. We are given but one life, so make the most of it by asking yourself tough questions and answering life with focused action.

Carla Kimbrough-Robinson, the journalist's coach, has spent nearly 20 years in newsrooms and is a trained life coach with Inspire Higher International LLC, a Denver-based personal development company. Send her questions at coaching@inspirehigher.net.