

Eleven plus

By Stuart White
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So that frantic first week back at work is over and done with but if you are thinking it's going to be another whole year of haste and stress, think again. According to the Chinese Zodiac, 2011 is the Year of the Golden Rabbit, which means according to Chinese tradition, a year in which you can catch your breath and calm your nerves. It's a placid year, very much welcomed and needed after last year's ferocious Tiger. Indications are that we should go off to some quiet spot to lick our wounds and get some rest after all the battles of 2010. Good taste and refinement will shine on everything and people will acknowledge that persuasion is better than force. It will be, we are told, a congenial time in which diplomacy, international relations and politics will be given a front seat again. We will act with discretion and make reasonable concessions without too much difficulty.

It's a time of relaxation, being cool, and with an air of acceptance permeating through personal and business matters, people will be busy enjoying themselves, entertaining others or simply taking it easy. The scene is quiet and calm, even deteriorating to the point of somnolence. We will all have a tendency to put off disagreeable tasks as long as possible. Apparently it's a good year for money and it should be made without too much labour. Our lifestyle will be languid and leisurely as we allow ourselves the luxuries we have always craved. A temperate year with unhurried pace where, for once, it may seem possible for us to be carefree and happy without too many annoyances.

Now of course that all depends on whether you believe in horoscopes and oriental insight but regardless, it's funny how we all feel compelled at this time of year to think about our theme for the coming twelve months and label it accordingly. It doesn't matter when your financial year runs from, we all come back from the holiday break feeling the need to mark the New Year with a prediction of sorts for the 12 months ahead, or at least provide some direction and focus.

So I sat back today and thought what should I be busy with? Of course there are run-of-the- business-mill things that we will have to do and there are projects that we are carrying on from last year but what shall our 'thing@work' reference point be for 2011? I have always had themes – like the time when everything was so good in the business; staff happy, customers happy, bank balance healthy, future looked bright – I called these 'The Cappuccino Years', as the Director's meetings were characterised by deciding whether we should have a café mocha or cappuccino and that seemed about as tough as the decision-making was.

In contrast, this was followed by a year which appeared fraught with stress, bad luck, poor decision-making (eek - self-induced spill over from the cappuccino years?) and other negative forces which I termed our '*Annus Horribilis*'. Having a theme provides focus but it also helps us to make sense of the periods. If we can term something and label it, it helps us to operate effectively within it. Call them slogans, strap lines, taglines whatever – we need them to keep motivation high and direction clear. I tend to have them every year and I am a sucker for rhymes in my themes. I remember one year it was 'Stay Alive in 2005 (2004 had been disastrous and we just wanted to keep our head above water the next year), 2009 was about time – 'Do the Right Things at the Right Time, Right Way'! Of course that was after 2008, 'Get Your Act Together Mate'!

So reflecting about this year, our theme at HRMC is going to be all about development - developing the business and its people. It's about building capacity within the team – ensuring that we enhance what we do and how we do it and develop our core competencies. It's not a time for radical change but rather gradual improvement.

Our slogan? 'Let it Be Leaven in 2011'. If you don't know what leaven is, in culinary terms it's an agent, such as yeast, that causes batter or dough to rise or (im)prove, but in strategic planning it also refers to an element, influence, or agent that works subtly to lighten, enliven, or modify a whole. So we will be asking the question of our activities – does this make us rise, like leaven bread, to the occasion? Does this make us better and greater than the sum of our parts? and will it help us reach fruition or is it simply half-baked and likely to flop?

Of course I will be as tormented as a dwarf in a bar next year as there is practically nothing that rhymes with twelve, except elves and unless you're Father Christmas you can't really do much with that. But hey that's another year away and I am sure with all our leavening experience, we will rise to the challenge. Perhaps we could link our themes and work around a baker's dozen – a little extra bang for the buck. Next thing you know, we'll be offering sandwich courses!

Agree or disagree with this? Don's twitter amongst yourselves – tweet your chirps to http://twitter.com/Stuart_Botswana

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