



New Year Resolution with a Grunt

Once again, it's that time of the year when all of us are expected to sit back and take a good hard look at ourselves, but I wonder how many of us really do. To find out, I asked a few people, after assuring them that there is no intention at all of prying into their privacy, but I am just curious to know whether they do spend some time on self reflection or personal stock taking during the festive season.

The good news is that I find Singaporeans do spend some time "thinking things over", the not so good news is that our thinking is mainly of the sub-type generally referred to as brooding and whining or as one politician put it, moaning and groaning, not the creative type we were told that is good for the country.

What about myself? The unanimous verdict of spouse, children and relatives is that I am brooding and whining. My friends observed that I am moaning and groaning. This won't do. It's Christmas, Hari Raya, Chinese New Year and the beginning of a new century and I am bad company. What ails thee, I ask myself? Is it andropause? Is it some unpleasant experience?

After some soul searching, I believe I have found the answer. The problem can be described in one word - "changes". Almost every aspect of our living and working environment is changing. It is true that change is an on-going process but never, I believe, is it at such a break neck pace. To remain in the mainstream is very demanding. It requires one to have the stamina of a marathon runner. But for

many of us in the older age group, the body and mind will find it hard to keep pace. Therein lies the frustration and the low spirit.

There are exceptions. I really admire seniors like SM Lee and Lim Kim San with all their pistons firing still and also people like, Prof Goh Lee Gan and Prof Tan Ser Kiat who are all over the place and doing 101 things at the same time. I wish all of us have as much energy. Those engaged in life science research may find it worth while to study them. I suspect their metabolism may be somewhat different.

Having made the diagnosis, how can a person who is less favourably endowed cope? What corrective measures can one take? Firstly, it is possible to adapt to some changes. To give a simple example, I wrote this article using a word processor (I don't know where to get a replacement ribbon for my old typewriter anyway) and sent it by e-mail to the SMA Newsletter editor instead of snail mail. An effort to learn is required, but it is not impossible.

Secondly, it may be better just to concentrate on one's chosen field of interest and not to have a finger in too many pies. I have read Dr Daniel Fung's Christmas article. I couldn't agree with him more. Few of us can be physician, counsellor, community worker, researcher, teacher, businessman all rolled into one and excel in all. Human evolution took place over many millenniums, the development of homo sapiens from hunter-gatherers to that of highly sophisticated industrial workers is a relatively slow process. If changes are too rapid and expansive, coping can be a real

problem for many. There is I think, no evidence of a recent increase in the size of our cerebrum.

Lastly, an honest self appraisal of one's aspirations whether fulfilled or unfulfilled is desirable. In this era of rapid changes one often has to pay a high price to acquire fame, wealth and position. I am reminded of a little verse that goes something like this:

**"You sacrifice your health
in search for wealth**

**You strife, you sweat
and you slave,**

Then you spend your wealth

in search of health

And all you find

is your grave."

All said, it isn't easy to come to terms with oneself, but one can at least try. For instance one can resolve to live peacefully, free from greed and envy, resolve to remain idealistic in order to view the future with hope and optimism and resolve to be grateful for what one has. Peace, Idealism and Gratitude - "PIG" for short. I will try not to whine in the coming year, I will grunt instead. ■

Garfield