



## Fixing the Broken Windows

*By Barry Zweibel*

Well I'm a business/personal life coach and one of the things we coaches do is remind people of the things that maybe they shouldn't be ignoring. So for those of you who didn't email me your New Year's resolutions (see November/December 2001 issue of The Ticker), the question is this...

### What are you waiting for?

You see time is a pesky little bugger. It's always on the go. Never stopping. Never resting. (A lot like you, I'd surmise!) And it just tick-tick-ticks its way into the future - oftentimes leaving us AND our plans behind. Okay, so our lives are busy. And there's so much to do. And so many people, places and things want our attention -- RIGHT NOW. Yes, it's hard enough just trying to keep our heads above water, let alone make any meaningful upgrades to our lives. So it's no wonder we keep losing ground. It's hopeless. Or is it?

Malcolm Gladwell offers some interesting insights on the matter in his book, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. Among other things, Gladwell studied the sudden drop in crime in New York City in the mid-nineties. As many of you may recall, that was when tens of thousands of would-be criminals suddenly stopped committing crimes in NYC.

### What happened then and how can it instruct us with our situation?

Well, according to Gladwell, something called the Broken Windows theory was key. "If a window is broken and left unrepaired, people walking by will conclude that no one cares and no one is in charge. Soon, more windows will be broken, and the sense of anarchy will spread from the building to the street on which it faces, sending a signal that anything goes." The 'tipping point' started when David Gunn, new subway director at the time, put a plan into play based on the Broken Windows theory, to reclaim the city's subways. His target, of all things, was graffiti.

Many were outraged. They thought Gunn should focus on larger, more

important subway issues such as subway safety and reliability. But Gunn believed that, "The graffiti was symbolic of the collapse of the system" and attacked the graffiti with 'religious' fervor.

Next, came the crackdown on fare-beaters. Transit police head William Bratton, another Broken Windows theory practitioner, insisted that all fare-beaters be arrested and checked for weapons and prior arrests. The results were amazing - so many bad guys were caught that they soon realized it made more sense to leave their weapons at home, pay their fares and leave everyone else alone. Subway crime quickly dropped. When Bratton was promoted to head of the New York City Police Department, the program continued on a larger scale and NYC street crime fell dramatically.

### So what's the connection here?

How does reducing crime relate to New Year's resolutions? Well, maybe there's something to this Broken Windows theory. Maybe, our inability to change is in some way a result of us noticing our own broken windows not getting fixed and concluding that no one's in charge - that 'anything goes.' Surely that would put a damper on any meaningful intent to change. And maybe the implications just grew and grew until we found ourselves...wherever it is we now find ourselves.

Well, focusing on the little things is what turned the tide for NYC crime. So maybe...just maybe, that is... if we start small - and attack with a fervor - we can finally achieve some real meaningful change.

### So where do we start?

Yes, where do we start? Why with a few New Year's resolutions, of course! So come on, it's not too late. Just take a few deep breaths and repeat after me:

- I resolve that in the next 30 days I will identify and address a Broken Window in my career.
- I resolve that in the next 30 days I will identify and address a Broken Window in my personal finances.
- I resolve that in the next 30 days I will identify and address a Broken Window in my health and fitness habits.
- I resolve that in the next 30 days I will identify and address a Broken Window in my relationships with friends and family.
- I resolve that in the next 30 days I will identify and address a Broken Window in my personal growth.
- I resolve that in the next 30 days I will identify and address a Broken Window in my fun and recreation.
- I resolve that in the next 30 days I will identify and address a Broken Window in my physical environment.

Remember that we're talking about small things here, so don't over-commit, all you A-types out there. We're looking for tiny windowpanes. (Pains?) Just identify one change per category. One change that would automatically make you feel better about things. One change that would automatically make you feel different about yourself. I suspect you could probably do this whole exercise in about 15 minutes if you didn't over-think it. Try it and see.

Now, write down your resolutions so you can start carrying them around with you. Put them on a piece of paper, a 3x5-index card, in your DayTimer or PDA. It really doesn't matter so long as you keep them handy.

And, for the next 30 days, read your resolutions each day, on the way to work (via subway?) and again on the way home. Read them slowly and meaningfully. Focus on them and think about how you can make them come alive. That's what it's all about you know - coming alive. You being true to the Real You. Forgetting about the why not and focusing on the how to.

And to think it can all start with a set of early-February New Year's resolutions!

So don't let time steal any more of your life from you. Start small. Don't quit. Keep going. And, if you'd like some help sticking with it, email me your resolutions and we can work on fixing those broken windows together.

[I'll bring the Windex!](#)

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