Look Back or Look Forward?

The end of any year brings on a curious onslaught of lists and stories and television segments on things that have happened over the previous twelve months. This year was no different. Pick up the local newspaper and there are articles on the top ten news stories of the year, the best movies of the year, and the bestselling books of the year. Magazines choose their person of the year. Websites are awash in slide shows and videos on sports moments, celebrity recaps—triumphant and lurid, and the highlights, and just as popular, lowlights, of the year gone by. These lists can be exceedingly puzzling, depending on who did the compiling, or they can be thought provoking and enlightening.

Of course the list of lists isn’t complete without a look at those who have left this earth. This look back can be a very profound and personal thing for those who have felt the grief of loss. For the rest of us it is a more detached look at the famous and the infamous whose time on earth has come to an end. This can be a very interesting peek into history as astronauts and actors, politicians and musicians, scientists and artists, activists and criminals are remembered. I was watching one such retrospective when I couldn’t help but ask myself whether looking back like this, whether it be at news stories of the year or the passing of luminaries, is worthwhile and inspirational, or depressing and a total waste of time. After all, many of these lists focus on the worst that life has to offer. Death and tragedy and sadness or, if not that, quite often curiosity more fitting of the circus than of the affirmation of life. What’s the point?

Looking back has never been my strong point. Focus for me has always been looking ahead. What’s the next challenge? How will I make life exciting, or if not exciting, at least interesting? What plans and dreams and aspirations do I have? Rarely do I take a truly heartfelt look at events or accomplishments or milestones reached that have made life rich.

This is the first year I’ve asked myself “why?” Why is what’s ahead so all-important and why is it such a struggle to enjoy the past?

As I get older it is becoming apparent to me that embracing the past will become more and more important. Watching people I care for reach the point in life when declining health and advancing age make the future more difficult to plan for and the present more difficult to participate in, has made me understand the important role life’s history can play.
As with many things in life though, it’s a matter of balance. Goals and hopes and plans and challenges do make life fulfilling and I will continue to set goals and make plans and strive to achieve them. However, I will also work harder to appreciate that which has happened. I will work harder to recognize the tremendous value of being able to sit back and reflect on what has been accomplished and how life has unfolded, in expected, and in unexpected ways.

So here’s to 2012. A year of life and challenges and excitement, joys and sorrows, goals reached and miles yet to be traveled. A year to be appreciated, learned from, and remembered.

Not to be forgotten though, have a happy, healthy and prosperous 2013! Best wishes for another year of accomplishments, challenges, and happy memories.

— Allen Collins
Managing Director, Chief Compliance Officer