

Another New Year's Resolution? No. It's A Life Resolution!

By Douglas Niedt

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Okay class, what's the one best way to become a better guitarist. Anyone? It's an easy answer:

PRACTICE.

I'll bet many of you have made the New Year's Resolution, "I will practice the guitar every day." And I know that most of you want to do that. Your intention is absolutely to practice every day. You love playing the guitar. It's fun. It's challenging. You're always learning something new about the instrument, music, and yourself.

But playing the guitar is not just another hobby or a satisfying thing that you enjoy doing. If you're a pro, it isn't just a way to earn a living. There is a lot more to it than that. The important thing to realize is that the guitar feeds your soul. That is the most important reason to play any musical instrument. And to do it every day.

I believe in Muses. I believe in Angels. I believe in God. I believe that every artistic creation comes from the infinite intelligence that created us and the universe in all its glory out of the Void. When I listen to the works of Bach, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, and hundreds of other pieces, I'm sorry; I don't believe they were created only by mortal men. The musician is the servant of the Muses, of the Angels, of God. Bach knew full well he was not the source of the creations he wrote down. We mortal men only facilitate, we carry. We are the willing and skilled (sometimes very unskilled) instruments of the Muses, Angels, and God we serve.

Up until now, you may have only been aware of the joy elicited when playing the guitar. You may even enjoy playing for others. You may enjoy teaching others. But I think if you look a little deeper, there is far more going on within you, between you and the guitar, and between the two of you and a higher plane of reality than you may realize. And it doesn't even matter if you play well or terribly. And it doesn't matter what others think of your playing. The bigger picture is that you are giving back to those agents of the infinite what they have deigned to gift to you.

I want you to see that practicing the guitar every day is not just something you do to have fun. If loved ones or other areas of your life put heavy demands on your time, don't think it a selfish act to ask every day to give you thirty minutes, an hour, or six hours to spend with your guitar. You aren't using that time to get away from your job, the kids, your spouse, or tasks you don't want to do. You are feeding your soul. Perhaps if you see the truth in that, you will find it easier to find the time to practice every day.

Have you ever bought exercise equipment with the very best intentions of using it to whip your sorry body into shape only to have the equipment gather dust in the basement? Have you started a diet and six months later gained ten pounds? Have you wanted to start a small business but never got around to it? Have you wanted to quit smoking or drinking but just couldn't get motivated? My friends, you have met the enemy, and he is RESISTANCE.

MANY activities elicit Resistance. Here are a few:

- The pursuit of anything having to do with the arts--playing the guitar, painting, writing, dancing, photography, filming. And it doesn't matter how marginal or unconventional the activity is or whether you are any good at it.
- Any diet or health regimen.
- Any activity whose aim is tighter abdominals.
- Education of every kind.
- Any course or program to overcome a bad habit or addiction.
- Any act of courage.
- Starting a business venture.
- Any commitment of the heart (marriage, having kids, helping others).

Resistance is evil. It makes us less than we are and were born to be. It prevents us from achieving the things that really matter. It fights any act that would result in long-term growth, health, or integrity. It tries to distract us and prevent us from doing our work. Resistance will tell you anything to keep you from your goals. It will lie, fabricate, falsify, seduce, bully, and whine. It will assume any form if that is what it takes to deceive you. It will make you think your spouse, your kids, or your job is the problem. Those are peripheral. Resistance comes from within, self-generated and perpetuated. It will pledge anything to get a deal and double-cross you as soon as you turn your back. Resistance can't be reasoned with or worn down. Its sole purpose is destruction. It wants to prevent us from doing what we know we should do.

Resistance is not out to get you personally or just mess up your guitar practice schedule. It doesn't know who you are and doesn't care. Everyone struggles with it. It's a force and falls upon us with the indifference of rain. And it rains every day.

The more important a call or action is to our soul's evolution (such as the simple act of practicing the guitar to feed our soul) the stronger Resistance will fight it. Resistance's goal is not just to wound, disable, or delay. Resistance aims to kill. Resistance means business. Its target is the epicenter of our being: our soul, our intelligence, and the unique gifts each of us has been given.

Resistance only obstructs when we seek to evolve to a higher station morally, educationally, ethically, or spiritually. So if you're in Calcutta working with the Mother Teresa Foundation and you're thinking of bolting to launch a career in telemarketing, relax. Resistance will give you a free pass.

Yes readers, I hear you. "Doug, what's all this? I thought you were just going to tell me to stop procrastinating and practice the darn guitar." I am telling you that, but I think you have to understand the stakes here and that this is a war. This isn't just about another innocuous New Year's Resolution that you probably won't keep. You have to understand that practicing the guitar falls into the category of evolving to a higher station and in particular the evolution of your soul. Resistance wants to kill that with everything it's got.

Here is the best weapon I know to fight the war. It's called the Principle of Priority. It states:

- 1.) You must know the difference between what is urgent and what is important.
- 2.) YOU MUST DO WHAT'S IMPORTANT FIRST.

Guess what's important? Yes, Practicing the Guitar. What's urgent? The urgent things are paying the bills, finishing that report for the boss, keeping that dental appointment, taking the car in to be fixed. The urgent list goes on and on. If you do the urgent stuff first, you will NEVER get around to practicing the guitar. Leaving the urgent for later defeats the two most common forms of Resistance: procrastination and rationalization. I don't even need to get into those—you know them well. Remember, you can lie to yourself, but it's another thing to believe it. If you cave today, Resistance will see to it that you are twice as likely to cave tomorrow. Resistance is like a telemarketer; if you so much as say hello, you're finished. Don't even pick up the phone.

"But Doug," you ask, "If I don't get that report to the boss I'll get fired. If I don't pay the bills the collection agency will come after me." Yes that's true. But you are going to get around to that report, you are going to get to the dentist. The difference is that you make the guitar the first priority, do it first. Then make time for the urgent grunt stuff. Yes, going to the dentist will keep your teeth from falling out, but it isn't going to feed your soul. Paying the bills will keep the bill collectors at bay, but they won't feed your soul. And when you don't do what your inner being knows you should be doing, what your innermost thoughts tell you, you are going to be unhappy and unsettled. You will be bored, restless, and you will feel guilty.

Make the decision. Make it your Resolution not for the New Year, but for the rest of your life:

“I am going to put practicing the guitar in the ‘Important’ category.”

Forget the urgent—leave that for later. If you don’t practice, you hurt yourself. You starve your soul—that’s plain stupid and downright dangerous. Whether you realize it or not, you have been given a gift, and no matter how pitiful or magnificent it may seem to you, it is not yours—it is to be given back to your Muse, your Angel, your God. Creative work on any level is a gift to the world. Give us what you’ve got.

Much of the material from this essay comes from *The War of Art* by Steven Pressfield. If you suffer from creative battles or blocks, I highly recommend it, especially if you are a professional. It is written from a writer’s perspective, but is applicable to anyone in the arts.