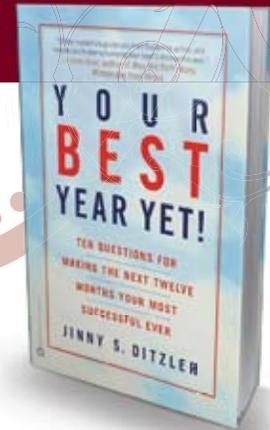


# Your Best Year Yet

## Ten Questions for Making the Next Twelve Months Your Most Successful Ever

by Jinny Ditzler



### QUICK OVERVIEW

*Your Best Year Yet* offers an excellent and definitive plan on creating a concise system of focused, achievable goals.

Jinny Ditzler adapted the process she uses in her *Your Best Year Yet* workshops for this guide. In it, she offers something you don't often see in goal-setting and year-planning works: a way to integrate your values into the process so your goals clearly reflect them.

Ditzler uses a number of simple, customized graphics to help you rank your past performance and plot your goals for the upcoming year. Some of these charts seem to plot irrelevant detail, but will be helpful for anyone who is truly overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of everything on their to-do list.

More than simply saying, "Here's how to achieve a goal, or several goals," *Your Best Year Yet* actually helps you wade through your life, your principles and your ambitions and craft a plan that will truly help you create the life you want.

### APPLY AND ACHIEVE

The most exciting thing *Your Best Year Yet* can help you achieve is a life plan with your personal values at the core of it.

Question Five, *What Are My Personal Values?*, devotes an entire chapter to clarifying what matters most to you. The exercises in this chapter help you drill down, past any pretty-sounding platitudes, past what you think you're supposed to value, to identify the principles and practices you truly esteem.

Then Ditzler walks you through integrating these values into the roles you hold in life as well as shaping goals for each of those roles.

Focusing on your values, Ditzler asks you to consider your various Life Pursuits, then to categorize the activities involved in each. Every activity can be classified into what she calls Life Pursuit I and Life Pursuit II. Pursuit I has to do with what we do to be good enough or prove we're good enough. Life Pursuit II asks, "What can I do with the gifts I have?"

Of course, activities that fall into the first category are time wasters—they don't elevate your values, nor do they bring value to your life. In fact, they are largely based on fear and self-doubt, often requiring a shift in viewpoint, which she explains how to achieve in Question Four.

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### SUCCESS Points

*This book will help you:*

- Learn the lessons of your previous successes and failures
- Establish your primary focus through the lens of your values as well as return on investment
- Rank and rate the various roles you play, and design goals for each
- Learn how to create a paradigm shift—changing how you view situations
- Create a one-page life plan

# SUMMARY

## *Your Best Year Yet*

**T**he Best Year Yet experience is a process of self-discovery. In it, you stand back, take stock, and then plan the next year of your life. At the end, you'll have a simple, one-page plan to guide you through your next 12 months.

## PART 1

### *Introduction: Principles Behind Your Best Year Yet*

You know about goals—we all do. By the age of 8 or 10, we begin to get an idea of what we want in life. A picture begins to form in our minds of a degree, a job, a car, a house, a family... and as we move through our teen years, our goals become even more clear to us. Soon we're 25 or 30, and we've achieved many of these early goals.

Soon, though, we begin reacting to circumstances and meeting our immediate needs and those of the people around us.

There are things that have to be done, and we feel as though we have no choice about it. And by the time we are finished doing everything that has to be done, we're too tired to think of doing anything else. Gradually, we become cynical. Why bother?

We feel that our most frustrating situations and problems are out of our control... so we give up and try our best to cope. We give up on creating a life that is more meaningful and fulfilling and settle for what we have. We give up on ourselves and our ability to make things happen.

Yet part of us is unwilling to settle—the part that wakes up in the middle of the night worrying and contemplating the things that matter most to us.

You've probably set a goal to do something, but then had your drive fizzle. That's because we've forgotten how to keep our attention on what we've accomplished.

The Best Year Yet method forces us to take a better look at ourselves and our lives. The process asks you to look back over your past year and then begin to think about the coming year by asking yourself 10 questions. Refined by so many over 20 years, it clearly and efficiently prepares you for success.

## PART 2

### *The Ten Questions*

#### 1. What Did I Accomplish?

No one is looking... start to tell yourself what you feel good about.

Force yourself to think about your achievements and times when you were proud of yourself, did something well or put a problem behind you. Make a note. Bragging is allowed.

Awareness brings its own reward. Shifting your attention to what you have accomplished in the past year awakens your "Can Do!" attitude and gets you back in touch with your ability to make things happen.

Several of my clients have been able to look back on some their toughest years and remind themselves how well they did considering how horrible the circumstances were. After a difficult year, it's even more important to acknowledge and appreciate yourself. We define our lives in any way we choose, regardless of what happens.

#### 2. What Were My Biggest Disappointments?

So, what were your disappointments in the past year? Pick up your pen and write them all down. Remember when you disappointed yourself and didn't do what you hoped to do. Recall the instances when others didn't do what you wanted them to do.

There's more value than you can imagine in just writing these disappointments down. While it seems like something to avoid—who wants to think about all this?—I've always felt a great weight lift from me when I gave myself time to think about what happened rather than pretending it didn't hurt so much.

Telling the truth to yourself provides a great release, and doing it inside the *Best Year Yet* context shows you the way ahead.

Watch out for a pitfall: I've listed five accomplishments, but there are 18 disappointments on my list. See! I am a failure.

It doesn't matter in the least. Think about it. Who do you know who achieves everything on their list? Have you heard of anyone who lived without failure or disappointment? No, but you think *you* should or you're trailing in the human race.

And then there are regrets—things you wish you hadn't done and things you wish you had. Let them go—except where you want to add them to your goals for next year. For now, remember, their only real value is in their lessons.

### 3. What Did I Learn?

Look back over your answers to the first two Best Year Yet questions to see what you've learned. In reviewing Question One, what you accomplished, what possible lessons do you see? Take a minute to answer the following questions:

- **What was the secret of my success?**
- **What worked?**
- **Why was I able to achieve what I did?**

Now, take time to read over what you saw as your disappointments and failures.

- **What didn't work, and why?**
- **What would have worked better?**
- **What's the lesson?**
- **Have I learned it yet?**
- **Is there evidence to prove that I've learned it? What is it?**

By the way, don't be too hard on yourself. If you think you've learned the lesson, you have.

There are also potential lessons. If only you'd done it differently. If only you'd done it not at all.

What advice do you have for yourself?

Answering Question Three gives you a big opportunity to learn, to change, to take on the challenges and make the moves you've been wanting to make. What would you have to do differently next time in order to have a better chance of success?

Some of our lessons are things we've been saying to ourselves many times over the years. Why don't you...? What did you say that for? Wouldn't it have been better to...? What annoys us most is when we hear friends giving us the advice that's the same as we've been telling ourselves for years—but haven't heeded.

### 4. How Do I Limit Myself and How Can I Stop?

The following questions are designed to help you discover your limiting beliefs.

1. *How do I limit myself?* As you begin to answer this question, you may come up with all kinds of answers. Write them all down.

Here are a few answers given by others:

- **I don't take time to think about what's really important to me.**
- **I'm lazy.**
- **I don't stand up for myself.**
- **I spend more money than I make.**

2. *What has this cost me?* Take time to confront the true costs. Doing so begins to loosen the grip of your past and how you think of yourself and what's possible. Write these down. Here are a few answers given by others:

- **A lot of money**
- **Relationships with people who matter to me**
- **My health**
- **Fulfillment and contentment**

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**Some of our lessons are things we've been saying to ourselves many times over the years.**

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3. *In what ways have I benefited from limiting myself? What? you say. How could I have benefited?* We usually keep our limitations around because there's something in it for us. We're getting some reward and we're afraid of giving it up. Whatever comes to your mind, just write it down. Don't question your mental process, just record your answers now.

Here are a few answers given by others:

- **An easy life.**
- **I can live in ignorance and not have to face up to all of it.**
- **Keep the peace—don't rock the boat.**
- **I have the handy excuse that I could do better if I really tried.**

4. *Am I willing to stop limiting myself?*

The answer here is a simple yes or no.

The answers to these four questions will help reveal your limiting paradigms. A paradigm is a way of seeing and thinking about yourself. A paradigm is a set of glasses through which you see everything around you, including yourself. *Except that you're not aware that the glasses are there—you think you're seeing things as they really are.*

By the way, our limiting paradigms are not corrected by facts. We believe we're right, and no external piece of data can change our minds. Facing that, it's important to acknowledge that *circumstances don't create our reality, our happiness, our contentment or our fulfillment. That's OUR job!*

There are four steps to shifting a limiting paradigm.

1. **Discover your limiting paradigm.**
2. **Think about what is holding it in place, such as limiting thoughts, feelings and perceived benefits.**
3. **Create a new, empowering paradigm.**
4. **Learn the art of transformation. Increase your awareness so you can shift to your new paradigm whenever you become ensnared by your old, limiting one.**

#### 5. **What Are My Personal Values?**

Your values are your personal principles or standards—your judgment of what’s important or valuable in your life.

What really gets you out of bed in the morning? Why do you work so hard? What drives you to do what you do?

Your automatic response may be that you have no choice—that you are a victim of circumstances. But it’s time to go beyond that.

One way of thinking about what’s important in the grand scheme of things is to think about the end of your life. How do you want to be remembered? What do you wish others to say about you as they stand around at your funeral? Above all, what do you want to be admired for?

If you remember instances when you weren’t true to your values, think of them as times when you weren’t being yourself. We all make mistakes—but we can learn from them and move on. That’s life.

#### 6. **What Roles Do I Play in My Life?**

As you define your roles, remember that this is your list just for now. It’s often necessary to drop old roles, add new ones or change some as circumstances change.

To clarify all the roles you play, think about these questions.

What are my current responsibilities?

What am I accountable for in my life?

What do I do during the day? The weekends?

What would I call the role I’m playing as I’m doing each of these activities?

Take a look at your full list of roles. If there are more than seven or eight, I strongly recommend that you consolidate several roles to narrow your focus. Give up feeling overwhelmed. Set yourself up to win.

Now think about how you would like to be seen carrying out each of your roles. As you begin to direct yourself to live your roles with more awareness, what guidelines or advice do you have for yourself?

#### 7. **Which Role Is My Major Focus for the Next Year?**

The purpose of seventh step in the Best Year Yet process is to create a breakthrough in your life by selecting one of your roles as your major focus of attention. Other roles will have goals as well, but there will be one area where you’ll want or need to make the most improvement or biggest change right now.

To help yourself select your major focus, ask yourself these questions:

- **If I could put one problem behind me, once and for all, what would it be?**
- **In which role do I want to have a breakthrough?**
- **Which role do I most want to feel a sense of mastery in?**

## Face the Music— A Personal Guideline

I call one of my personal guidelines, “Face the music.” By this, I mean that I confront troublesome issues and relationships. I stop avoiding doing what needs to be done and pretending that everything’s fine.

For years, I would find myself in tough situations and difficult relationships and yet do nothing. Nothing except practice angry internal conversations between myself and the other person, as I drove down the road in the middle of the night or as I was making dinner, letting the bitterness build up and working myself up to the boiling point. By the time something had to be done, it was too late to do it well. I was so filled with emotion and resentment—my side of the story—that I usually made a mess out of it.

Gradually, I’m learning to wake up and notice when something isn’t right and then take action right away. I book the time with myself to think it through, come up with possible solutions, understand how the other person might think and feel, and decide what to do and how to talk it over. Every time I succeed, the fog lifts and I’m again free and strong. I’ve discovered that continuing to avoid difficult issues is harder than dealing with them.

# SUMMARY

Your Best Year Yet

- **What's the biggest impediment to my success and happiness right now?**
- **Which aspect of my life is the biggest drain on my energy and willingness to go for it in life?**

## 8. What Are My Goals for Each Role?

In my experience, the goal factor is the most important distinguishing characteristic of truly effective people. It is far more important, for example, than a person's education or intelligence. But goals alone are not nearly enough.

People whose goals are aligned with their values achieve more satisfaction and fulfillment. Value-driven goals lead to behavior and performance that express who we are.

The more specific your goal, the more quickly you'll see what to do and be able to find the resources to achieve it.

*Nonspecific goal:* Reduce my stress level and increase my peace of mind.

*Specific goal:* Meditate at least 15 minutes each morning.

Goals must have deadlines, and you may want to set milestones throughout the year, too.

*Annual goal:* Write my first book and find an agent and publisher.

*Three-month milestone:* Write chapter outline and contact three potential agents.

To set your goals, begin by selecting one of your roles and writing down all the related areas of your life, then jot down the goals you have for yourself for the next year, remembering the guidelines for setting powerful goals.

The guidelines for powerful goals are:

- **Be specific**
- **Be measurable**
- **Be time-framed**
- **Start with a verb**
- **Be appropriate: a result or process goal**

Remember to place your list of personal values beside you as you review your goals. Catch goals that could lead you away from those values.

## 9. What Are My Top Ten Goals for the Next Year?

While I'm not suggesting that you need to eliminate all but 10 of the goals you've set, I strongly recommend that you select the 10 that are most important to you. You can certainly work on the rest of your goals and achieve them. But a list of your top 10 goals for the next year gives you a map with which to plan your journey.

Return to the list of goals you've set for each of your roles. Highlight the "musts." Next, consider them. Are there any

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**We usually keep our limitations around because there's something in it for us. We're getting some reward and we're afraid of giving it up.**

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conflicting goals? Can you achieve them without sacrificing your values, or perhaps, your health? You may have to select a different goal for a particular role.

Once you have the right 10, look at the words and the way each goal is written. Revise, rewrite and reword until you're completely satisfied.

Next, looking over these 10, which goal will give the greatest return on your investment of time and energy? Place that goal in the No. 1 position. Then, review the remaining goals, again selecting the goal with the greatest return. Repeat this process until you have a prioritized list of the 10.

The last step is to make your one-page summary of the four principal parts of your Best Year Yet plan. These four include:

1. **Guidelines for the Year (from Question Three)**
2. **New Paradigm (from Question Four)**
3. **Major Focus (from Question Seven)**
4. **Top 10 Goals (from Question Nine)**

## 10. How Can I Make Sure I Achieve My Top 10 Goals?

The problem in my life and other people's lives is not the absence of knowing what to do, but the absence of doing it.

The E-S-P model for achieving goals is helpful.

**E = External.** When we're aware of the external factors, or what we need to do in order to move toward our goal, we're on our way.

**S = Support.** Using a coach, a colleague or a friend—any form of support—helps us identify what we need to do, and supports us to shift to our empowering paradigm.

**P = Paradigm.** Our paradigm, or the way we see a problem, leads to success or failure. Removing internal obstacles makes the greatest difference to our success. Focus on your new paradigm as much as you do your goals.

Then use the E-S-P solution to get yourself moving again anytime you feel stuck. Here's the E-S-P solution:

# SUMMARY

*Your Best Year Yet*

**E**—What’s the next step?

**S**—Who can provide the support I need?

**P**—Does the way I see the problem lead to success?

Disappointments will come, but it’s possible to avoid many of them by becoming aware of some of the pitfalls and the damage they can cause to your enthusiasm. Then you can see them coming and sidestep them rather than falling into them.

## PART 3

### *Getting Started*

Before you begin answering the questions for your best year ever, make sure you are setting yourself up for success.

**1. Decide whether to do Best Year Yet on your own.**

Doing it by yourself works well. However, many friends find that doing it with at least one other person makes a difference.

**2. Get in the right frame of mind.** Tell yourself how much of a difference this could make for you.

**3. Prepare your workspace.** Clear a desk, make sure the lighting is good. Turn the ringer on your phone off. We have used classical music to positive effect in Best Year Yet workshops.

**4. Gather your materials.** You can use a pad of paper or even a journal. Find your favorite pen, and keep your calendar or organizer as a handy reminder of what actually happened over the past year of your life.

**5. Consider these hints and reminders.** While it’s possible to do Best Year Yet by staring into space and contemplating the questions, it works better to write down your answers. Allow space for one question per page, and don’t edit or judge—just write.

Use the process of answering these 10 questions to reach within yourself and be as honest as you possibly can. Tell the truth to yourself, above all. And get ready for your Best Year Yet.

## Recommended Reading

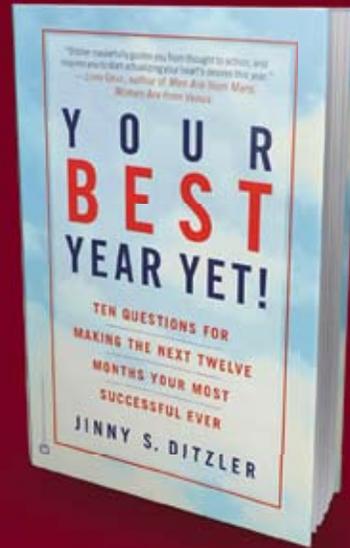
*If you enjoyed this summary of Your Best Year Yet, please visit your favorite bookseller to purchase a copy for your library. You may also want to check out:*

**The Truth About You** by Marcus Buckingham

**The Slight Edge** by Jeff Olson

**Goals** by Brian Tracy

**Design Your Best Year Ever** by Darren Hardy



## About the Author

**Jinny Ditzler** has been a teacher her entire adult life—from teaching high school to founding Montessori schools to helping adults begin to realize their personal potential.

When she created and launched the popular *Your Best Year Yet* workshops, the phrase and the profession “life coach” was virtually unheard of. As a pioneer in this now highly populated field, Ditzler is a consummate pro at guiding people in crafting an annual life plan that fulfills their greatest desires.

After dreaming of writing a book about the workshop for several years, she added the book to her personal Best Year Yet plan and wrote this anecdote-rich volume. This book is also available in Spanish.

Jinny Ditzler continues to write articles about leadership and development and serves as a coach to executives and companies. She also trains agents to lead *Your Best Year Yet* workshops so individuals and groups can participate in this life-changing experience.

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