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Foreword

One of the biggest challenges in 2013 is that there are so many unknown variables that should be clarified by now but are not. As this report is going to print, we are finishing the year without a solution to the Budget Control Act scheduled to take effect January 1. It is almost guaranteed that there will be new tax provisions as well as debt issues continuing into the coming years. The administration is on track to get even more involved in the world of business and education, but in what way and to what effect is still unclear.

This environment means that leaders in the coming year will have to continue to deal with enormous uncertainty. For many, this has created a paralysis where the outcome of any decision right now seems left to chance. Yet, while we focus on the challenges of this unclear time, there is no doubt that 2013 will also be a time of opportunity. We may not know all of the facts at this moment, but change will come fast and furious as some of these decisions are finally made. Those leaders who have used this time to ready themselves through strategic reflection, through developing their people and through constant customer communication will be poised to take action. Those who are sitting still, wringing their hands about what might be the future, will be caught unprepared.

As you read our CEO Resolutions report for 2013, you will notice a sense of determination and excitement even in this challenging time. There is a spirit in these resolutions that causes us to question the wisdom of those we hear and see in the news proclaiming the end of America’s entrepreneurial spirit. The leaders we spoke with are not only looking to maintain a viable business, most of them are looking to grow in the coming year. While recovering from the challenges of the economy for the last few years, it is clear that our business leaders have learned some hard lessons about the need for focus and for creating empowered and engaged workforces. It is also clear that they are ready to create their own success in the coming year.

Our mission at Northwood University is to develop the future leaders of a global, free-enterprise society. We believe without a doubt that the entrepreneurial spirit of our nation, and of the business leaders like those quoted in this report, will continue to grow as long as it is left free to do so. If there is one thing certain about 2013 it is that taking a passive approach to leadership is not an option. I encourage you to take the time to read each of these resolutions and consider how these ideas can inspire you and others to make your own commitments to action for the coming year.

Dr. Keith Pretty
President and CEO
Northwood University
Focus on Customers

Jamie Moyle, CEO, RealtyTrac
www.RealtyTrac.com
Increase access for our customers - we are working hard to make it easier for our customers to access our data more efficiently. We are improving the customer experience with a greater understanding of all of the products we have available and how they work. This begins with the launch of our completely overhauled website in early 2013.

Mahshad Koohgoli, CEO, Protecode
www.ProteCode.com
Concentrate on what the market wants, not on what we believe it wants. Simplify business processes and commercial models, make product adoption and use easy. Stay agile in response to customer demands, maintaining an excellent relationship between customer service, R&D and product management.

Kevin Schatzle, CEO, dinCloud
www.dinCloud.com
The focus on customers as individual people rather than a corporate entity starts with direct and frequent communication, perhaps a quarterly phone call. This is most effective with the principals that give us our business, but is also important with the tactical level that is working with us on a day-to-day basis. Specifically, I want to understand the same themes as for our employees such as areas for improvement and where we are excelling.

Nicole Wright, CEO, Food Body Me
www.FoodBodyME.com
For Food Body ME, I grew it from 1 to 30 team members and 0-4,000 clients the first 18 months. Because of the rapid start-up growth, problems came up. In 2013 I am scaling the company down and going back to basics. My high margin companies have 100% positive satisfaction rate while Food Body ME, a low margin, high revenue company, could use improvement. I’m interested in scaling down to improve the client experience and implement fail safes in 2013 so that we are well equipped to expand towards the end of the year.
Brock Blake, CEO, Lendio
www.Lendio.com
As Lendio’s CEO, my resolution for 2013 is to increase my daily attention towards our customer experience. As you can imagine, the life of the CEO is all about juggling responsibilities: strategy, meetings, hiring, marketing, sales, development, payroll, leadership, customers, press, board management, reporting, and daily execution are all a small part of each of my daily responsibilities. In 2013, my goal is to dedicate more of my time to customer interactions so that I can continue to improve the products and services that I deliver.

Charlie Polachi, CEO, Polachi
Access Executive Search
http://www.Polachi.com
In 2013, I resolve to do more face to face meetings with clients, I am tired of the impersonal and cold/blunt convenience of email and text messages. I resolve to listen more and talk live with clients and candidates.

Grow the Business...

Carol Barash, CEO, Story to College
www.StorytoCollege.com
In 2013 I am shifting my focus from a boutique business that teaches small classes in the NY Metro area to an online platform to expand educational access, empowering thousands—e even millions—of young people to lead using the tools of personal storytelling. I resolve in 2013 to stop getting in my own way. I will empower all young people, using my experience as a teacher, college admissions officer and mother and making essential knowledge about writing and college admissions accessible to all.

Andrew Schrage, Money Crashers
www.MoneyCrashers.com
In 2013, I plan to aggressively expand our brand identity, primarily by significantly increase our social media presence. We are already utilizing Facebook and Twitter, but I want to expand our presence on LinkedIn and possibly explore Pinterest and Google+ as well. I’ve seen the success other small businesses have enjoyed by adopting this strategy, and I think the time is right for my organization to do the same. I feel that this is the best way to lead Money Crashers going forward, as our expanded presence can help us reach more readers and gain a more devoted following.

Bank of America recently released a survey of over 1000 small businesses and found that over half (54%) said they expect revenue to increase in 2013 while only 8% said they expected it to fall. Additionally, 31% of small businesses said they plan to add employees with only 3% expecting to decrease employee numbers.
...and Create Clear, Focused Objectives

Deborah Sweeney, CEO, MyCorporation
www.MyCorporation.com
In 2013, I am going to really focus on establishing set goals based upon the fiscal year. I am going to ensure that the entire team is aware of our goals, is moving in the same direction, and focuses on the attainment of those goals within the time period we set. It is so easy to get into the year and just maintain. Instead, I want to focus on stretching to reach our goals. I believe that when companies have focus and direction, they are far more likely to look back at the prior year and reflect on everything that was accomplished. We have made big strides in that direction in 2012 and I want to continue to optimize on this.

Ian Aronovich, CEO, Government Auctions
www.governmentauctions.org
For 2013, my resolution for the company is to reduce any expenses because there may be a big downturn in the economy resulting in dropping sales and thus causing any debt payments to become exceedingly more difficult. An advice I’d like to follow and to offer other business owners is to cut expenses and avoid taking on additional debt.

Haralee Wintraub, CEO, CEO Haralee.com
www.haralee.com
For my company's 2013 New Years' resolutions I am going to aggressively use social media to connect directly with our customers. YouTube and Twitter and Pinterest are my direct concern. I have reached out on Facebook and will continue with that but the other social media platforms I need to make inroads in establishing a following and a connection.

Lenny Kharitonov, CEO, Unlimited Furniture Group
www.UnlimitedFurnitureGroup.com
Manage my people better by giving quicker feedback and making objectives and rewards more clear.

Kafi Martin, CEO, Degrees of Success
www.DegreesOfSuccess.org
As the CEO of 2 young companies Degrees of Success Inc. and Island Sweat Fitness LLC I found myself going in multiple directions, and very easily getting sidetracked by the immediate needs of one company versus the long term projects of another. This led to a lot of misused and underused time. For 2013, my new strategy very clearly outlines the major milestones that will take my companies to the next level, a timeline that incorporates peak seasons and the monthly, weekly and daily action items that will take me toward the full accomplishment of those goals. I've been very blessed this year to learn about how to put my million dollar businesses together.2013 will be a year of continued learning, but more importantly a year of precise, strategic action.
It is a crazy time for leaders to develop strategic plans, company objectives and personal goals as 2013 is predicted by some to be a time of greater economic recovery while others fear a second recession. But it is important to realize that business leaders and entrepreneurs may have very different views on the ability to impact the future regardless of economic outcome than the views held by investors and hedge funds. As 2012 drew to a close, bankers and economists filled the airwaves with predictions and concerns for slow economic recovery in the U.S. over the next 12 months. Yet nearly all of the business people we spoke to for this report felt that their future was in their own hands. While it may be necessary to reduce debt, leaders appear to have developed a prudent aggressiveness in their tone and thoughts about the coming year. In this case, “prudent” means being thoughtful and focused on expansion and investment while at the same time being “aggressive” in taking advantage of opportunities as they present themselves. This is the heart of American business and the view of bold leadership.

Focus on Employees

Mark Quinlivan, VP, Wenzel Metal Spinning
www.WenzelMetalSpinning.com
We are steadily working to recoup the hard-knocks that we, like most small manufacturers, took in 2009. Our primary goal for 2013 is to continue developing our work force. Wenzel faces the problem that has become endemic in small manufacturing; the lack of highly skilled labor. The problem that I’ve seen with Wenzel specifically is compounded because metal spinning is a highly skilled process, more closely resembling an art form than a trade. For 2013, I’ll be working with our existing staff to create an apprentice style system for new employees that show potential, as well as producing our own educational materials to help improve and supplement their knowledge.

Sara Sutton Fell, CEO, FlexJobs
www.FlexJobs.com
I’m really looking forward to taking action on a discussion I’ve been having with all of our staffers - what would make everyone’s jobs easier? I’ve been compiling lists of changes, large and small, that will help to improve the day-to-day experience of my staff and our clients as well.

David Underwood, CEO, TopSpot Internet Marketing
www.topspotims.com
(continued) We will be building our internal company culture and showcasing what an awesome place this is to work; continuing to attract and retain the best talent. Personally, I know our team is our greatest resource and the healthier they are, the greater the potential for happiness and productivity. This week we are starting the TopSpot Wellness Program, working with a Wellness Center to create healthy challenges and activities for the coming year.
Andrew Stoloff, Owner, Rubicon Bakery  
www.RubiconBakery.com  
We’re committed to making great, premium all-natural desserts for our customers, and we’re equally committed to giving people a second chance. Many of our employees came from a life on the street, drugs or jail. Given a chance to work, they are delighted to get their lives back on track, and learn new skills. We want to continue to give back to them and help them grow. Next year we will train our production staff on the financial side of the business to give them the skills to manage their own finances to help them become financially self-sufficient.

Peter Karpinski, COO, Sage Restaurant Group  
www.sagerestaurantgroup.com  
Focus on the human capital piece of what I call our Leadership Brand. A holistic approach to one’s life that embodies knowing how much, but sometimes more importantly how little, to be involved in any given situation. Keeping a clear vision, sparking creativity, curiosity, resourcefulness, and passion in others. Putting the greater good, and health and welfare of those you lead, before your own while never looking for personal gain. Inspiring others to grow, learn, push themselves further and deeper than they ever thought was possible, and succeed. My #1 reason for being able to find so much success at this stage of my life is because of the people that I have been able to surround myself with and work with.

Kristy Kitzmiller, CEO, Table Host  
www.TableHost.com  
2013 is sure to bring new and inspiring challenges for myself and my company, Table Host. One resolution that I have is to take a step back from the day-to-day as we grow. The management level that I currently provide to a staff of six is going to be untenable and unworkable as we continue to expand. To accomplish this, I am committed to developing my team as leaders in their respective areas and entrusting them to take on more responsibilities. Also, as we grow, I want to maintain the family-like environment that we have instilled for as long as possible. We currently plan retreats and outings together as a company, which fosters teamwork and raises company morale, and eat lunch together daily in the office. I am hopeful that we will maintain these practices even when we expand nationally.

Mahshad Koohgoli, CEO, Protecode  
www.ProteCode.com  
(continued) Find the best, multi-disciplined people for the internal positions, and bring out the best in the team, by training them, creating the challenge, and providing the rewards. Maintain the whole team as one, by sharing, discussing, listening and describing. Amplify the culture of innovation, encourage participation in innovation, and reward innovation success.

Kevin Schatzle, CEO, dinCloud  
www.dinCloud.com  
(continued) For the employees, the focus will be on giving them a voice in the company such as soliciting direct feedback on areas where our company can improve and what we are doing well. I would also like to better understand on an individual level what their personal goals are such as training, career development, and other areas of interest. We will also focus on employee recognition among peers.
Focus on Leadership Responsibility

Keith Pretty, President and CEO, Northwood University
www.northwood.edu

Going into 2013, I plan to make a great effort to stay aware of the market place. In the midst of uncertainty, I also hope to continue encouraging greater engagement throughout the university while leading internal change is a need for focus. I need to push the empowerment of others, not only so we can be successful as a university, but so that we can all have a balance in life to enjoy family and friends as well.

Joshua Weiss, CEO, TeliApp,
www.teliapp.com

I plan to be more focused on generating revenues for the company, no matter how distracted I continuously get by the overwhelming myriad of other responsibilities I have. I plan to hire VP’s, Directors and Managers of sales people in order to properly build the sales and business development teams from the ground up, instead of taking on the role myself (even though I do it quite well when I have the time). I plan to roll up my sleeves, get out of my office, and sit at a desk right in the sales department and make sales right alongside. Lead by example. Prove that they can make more than me if they try only a little.

Ralph Folz, CEO, WordStream,
www.wordstream.com

WordStream experienced aggressive growth in 2012 and at the end of the year and I lead an exercise to define our core values. The values are inspiring and include themes such as transparency, taking action, being authentic, and winning together. My resolution for 2013 is to make sure I live these values and show that they are not just words on a piece of paper. I will play an active role in making this happen by weaving these values into everything I do, by interviewing new team members for the “culture check”, and leading by example.

Michelle Hastie, President and Founder, Total Body Health Solutions
www.totalbodyhealthsolutions.com

I resolve to acknowledge that: You are your own best guide/Intuition always overrides "experts" advice. Life is meant to be effortless and flowing. And working harder does not equal better results."

Jay Ewing, CEO, Bird Golf Academy
www.birdgolfacademy.com

I believe that the minute that one thinks as a business owner that ‘I know it all’ or ‘there is nothing that we can do better’, that you are doomed. Our Registered Trademark at Bird Golf is that we are committed to giving our students/customers “The Ultimate Golf Learning Experience”. Those are more than just words or a clever tag line for us, they are the very credo with which we do all that we do. To ensure that, one must constantly self-analyze (not always easy) because being better begins within me in my capacity as the company’s CEO. Looking in a mirror and not liking all you see requires sometimes brutal acknowledgement. We are constantly trying to be better at what we do. Perfection is the summit of Everest. It can be reached with an enormous effort, but a stay there is fleeting. I have heard however that the view is spectacular!”
Matt Antonino, CEO, High on SEO
www.highonseo.com
My resolution this year is to stop trying to do everything for our company. As CEO of a small business, you are keenly aware that every decision your employees make and every action they take directly affects your clients and your bottom line. In our industry, innovation is everything. I need to be leading development and future strategy, not let myself get distracted. In the past, my tendency has been to micromanage and try to do everything myself so I knew it was done properly. We hire talented, smart people who are great at their job and I need to trust them as much as I trust myself.

Elle Kaplan, CEO, Lexion Capital Management
www.lexioncapital.com
My New Years resolution is to grow my business responsibly by finding new additions to our team who really attach to our mission statement and who are as passionate as we are about it. Also I am going to go for a daily walks in central park by myself, even just for 10 minutes. I get my best business ideas when walking alone. There is also something about the solace of trees in the midst of sky scrapers gives me a bit of serenity and allows me to come up with creative ideas. I call it a walking resolution.

Jeanne Frazer, President, Vitalink and The Expert Speakers
www.vitalink.com
I am resolving to be a better business owner in 2013. Strangely enough, this begins with making my personal interests more of a priority. I began Vitalink in 1996 and over the years have had success, but have always put the business first. It is a work ethic my father instilled in me from an early age, but it also something that can leave you a little flat. So my priority for 2013 is getting more balance so that I’m a better leader. Part of this is taking a better salary that recognizes my contribution, and actually taking a vacation, but it is also having more balance in the day to day running of the business. In addition, I am working to grow the business in ways that energize me and focus on things I’m passionate about. One of those is the non-profit division we’ve just started. The other priority is improving my skills as the president and ceo. I’ve been good at motivation, but recognize the need to work on processes and continuing to develop my management skills, as well as working on the financial planning side.

Brig. Gen. Jim Melin, CEO, AF Village West
www.afvw.com
As a responsible leader in a Senior Living community replete with type A personalities, I have resolved to help our residents feel a sense of certainty in a year that many of them perceive as cataclysmic. Their concerns run the full spectrum from the “financial cliff” to health care costs to the position of the United States in the global community and job prospects for their families and grandchildren. The last thing I want them to worry about is their home. While I constantly remind them that different is not bad, it is just different, I am keenly aware that change is even more difficult for those that have matured gracefully through a certain set of rules and expectations. My challenge is to move our community forward through new fiscal realities and technological opportunities without disrupting the comfort zone of our deserving residents. One can see today’s issues as challenges or as opportunities. From the point of view of Air Force Village West, our world today is filled with golden opportunities.
Dave Brown, CEO, Cigar Row
www.cigarrow.com

Having just spent 3 weeks traveling in Nepal and India, I have come back with a resolution for 2013 to enjoy the moment of running a business and being an entrepreneur as much as possible. Stepping away from the U.S. has left me feeling less goal-driven and more process-driven, with the expectation that this will in fact deliver the goal success I am looking for.

Kyle Marks, CEO, Retire-IT
www.retire-it.com

My resolution is to define success on my own terms. Of course, it is human nature to compare. Part of the popularity of reality TV, celebrity news, even Facebook can be attributed to our fascination with others (and our desire to compare ourselves to them). Sure, some comparison is healthy - it might motivate you to shed a few extra pounds. However, measuring your success based on how you compare to others is self-defeating. As a business owner, I can't let myself become distracted by how competitors appear to be doing. Focusing on them would divert attention away from my business priorities - my customers and employees. Worse, to become more successful would require me to act more like them. Trying harder to be like someone else is not success for me. Personal success is not a competition with others, it is about achieving personal goals

...and Giving Back to the Community

Chris Dyer, CEO, PeopleG2
www.PeopleG2.com

I feel like it's time for me to include charitable involvement on a level that truly makes a difference and that reflects my professional goals. I've just become involved with an organization called Working Wardrobes so that I can empower people who need help gaining meaningful employment in 2013. It can make a big difference to so many... to individuals who need respectable work, to their families and to their communities. I deal with employment issues every day, so I know I can really contribute. I want to make a mark within my profession, as well, because I think I can help businesses be better employers. Currently, many companies immediately disregard job applicants who "check here" if they have any type of criminal history - which leads to bad, possibly discriminatory, hiring decisions. My resolution for 2013 is to incite businesses to Ban the Box and make smart team-building decisions.

David Glickman, CEO, Ultra Mobile
www.ultra.me

I will make giving back to the community and helping others in need not just adjuncts to our business, but the heart of our business. I will ensure that this underserved market no longer gets second-class treatment and will welcome them to the U.S. with our very best technology and most innovative solutions. I will fight against monopolies to ensure fair pricing of our mobile services. Finally, I will ensure that our employees understand that our company is about a greater good. Doing good for humanity is good for business and this will be my key priority in 2013
Leadership in 2013

The entrepreneurs, CEOs, and other business leaders interviewed for this year’s CEO New Year’s Resolution Report have one thing in common: They have chosen to take ownership of an uncertain situation and make it work for them. As you read this report you will find that there is some concern for the future economic state of the country, some lessons learned from the past few years about prudence and planning and some effort to eliminate as much uncertainty as possible. Yet, there is also optimism and enthusiasm about their work that will remind you that leaders, by definition, set the pace. There is an old Swedish saying that “In calm water, every ship has a good captain.” The leaders you will read about here are well aware that the waters are less than calm, but have chosen to move ahead and sail their ships according to their own rules.

Courage is a leadership characteristic that is not often discussed, but is a key element of successful leadership. Courage is the willingness to allow your decisions and your actions to reflect your convictions and determination, whether or not they are popular or held by conventional wisdom. It would appear that many leaders in our survey have the courage to marshal on and to engage their followers to do so as well.

This year’s report is similar to the past in that the leaders profiled here are all action oriented and constantly developing their business, themselves and their employees. There are a few differences this year that are notable. For one thing, in the past there has been a focus on understanding the online world and the development of social media. This year you will see that social media stands less as a topic on its own and more of an imbedded topic in overall business strategy.

Two years ago especially, leaders were talking about recovering from the economic collapse and re-thinking their business model, reassuring their employees, and spending some time determining what their next steps might be. This year you will see an overwhelming response about growing the business and taking advantage of opportunities that are presented. It appears that many leaders have gotten their act together and are ready to be successful even in the uncertain times ahead.

Writing this report is always a treat for me. As an educator, it gives me hope and reassurance that we are developing the skills and talents of tomorrow’s business leaders at a time when they can truly make a difference. As a consultant and coach, it adds leverage to my message that leaders are leaders by choice. They see the need for action and direction and take it on themselves to provide it. As a father, it jazzes me to see that my children are not growing up in a world with less possibility for success, but instead are growing up in a world that is dynamic and ever-changing. To this they can adapt, and I look forward to seeing how they do so.

Thank you for taking the time to review this year’s CEO New Year’s Resolution Report. I hope you find it informative and inspiring. If you are a CEO or leader that would like to be included in a future report, drop a note to thomasl@northwood.edu and we’ll keep you in mind for next year.

Thank you and have a great 2013!

Dr. Todd Thomas
Dr. L. Todd Thomas is an author, speaker and associate professor at the Richard DeVos Graduate School of Management, in Midland, Michigan. As Lead Faculty of the Leadership Curriculum at Northwood University’s graduate school, Todd teaches and writes on challenges of leadership in the twenty-first century. Through his seminars and workshops, Todd has consulted and coached over 3000 leaders from forty countries covering four continents. He holds Ph.D. and M.S. degrees from Indiana University, an M.A. from Auburn University and a B.A. from Morehead State University in Morehead, Kentucky. He is also the author of the popular leadership blog Leadership Matters Now (www.leadershipmattersnow.com). For information about workshops or speaking at your event, you can contact him by emailing thomasl@northwood.edu or visiting his website www.DrToddThomas.com.

Northwood University's DeVos Graduate School is a specialized business school focused on developing the future leaders of a global, free-enterprise society. We provide a dynamic learning experience aimed at strategically expanding your managerial and leadership skill sets, equipping you with the necessary tools to lead and drive change in your career and life. Our methodology was developed as an interactive learning process where you are an active partner rather than a passive listener.