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Foreword for Transform SA

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Each New Year, we are challenged to consider what we can do differently, to better ourselves in some way or other. Alongside such obvious candidates as exercising more, eating and drinking less, or quitting smoking, perhaps we look to more personal, or ambitious, goals, like learning a new skill, or ticking off some long-held ambition from our bucket list.

Yet how far do we use this essentially arbitrary calendar milestone to consider what changes should be made within our own organisations – changes that we have the capacity to drive or otherwise influence? And what about the potentially wider impact of refocusing how we operate or conduct business?

It is easy enough to look back on South Africa's failings in 2012. From Marikana to vigilante killings, from violent strikes and service delivery protests to lamentable education standards, and more besides, our shortcomings are well known. We can all point fingers, raise voices and demand politicians do better, not least in delivering on promises that are simple to make but harder to implement.

But we must also look to ourselves. Readers of this magazine are by no means powerless. The reverse is true. We read it because we believe ourselves to be, or aspire to be, transformational actors. How are we using this capacity? It is not wrong to be ambitious, if we use our ambition not only for honest self-advancement, but for the advancement of our nation and especially those of its members who are in greatest need, who are generally also those with the least capacity to better their situation.

The fundamental question for this New Year is therefore this: What can we each do, to help South Africa's overcome its challenges? For, if we are not contributing to the solution, we are frankly part of the problem. There is no neutral fence-sitting option. As the National Development Plan, which I heartily endorse, makes clear, unless we all work together shared well-being is likely to elude us, with dire consequences.

But making effective New Year's Resolutions is hard. Aspirations that are too lofty, too vague, or too demanding all tend to fail, probably before January is out. Worse, this falling short then undermines our commitment, and even belief in our capacity, to change and make a difference. Goals must be tangible, reasonable and sufficiently flexible that they are not derailed by small setbacks. Remember too the old adage: elephants are best eaten one bite at a time! The more Biblically minded might recall that even Jesus (according to Luke's Gospel), in feeding the 5,000, broke the task into manageable chunks by seating them in groups of 50.

Finally, we must contextualise our undertakings within our overarching goal – the glorious vision for our country outlined in our Constitution. As long as this – rather than fire-fighting or short-term problem solving – remains the touchstone for our reflecting, our policy-making, our acting, then we will find the common ground we need to share, if we are to journey forward so our wonderful country may fulfil its potential. And may God bless us as we seek this through the coming year.