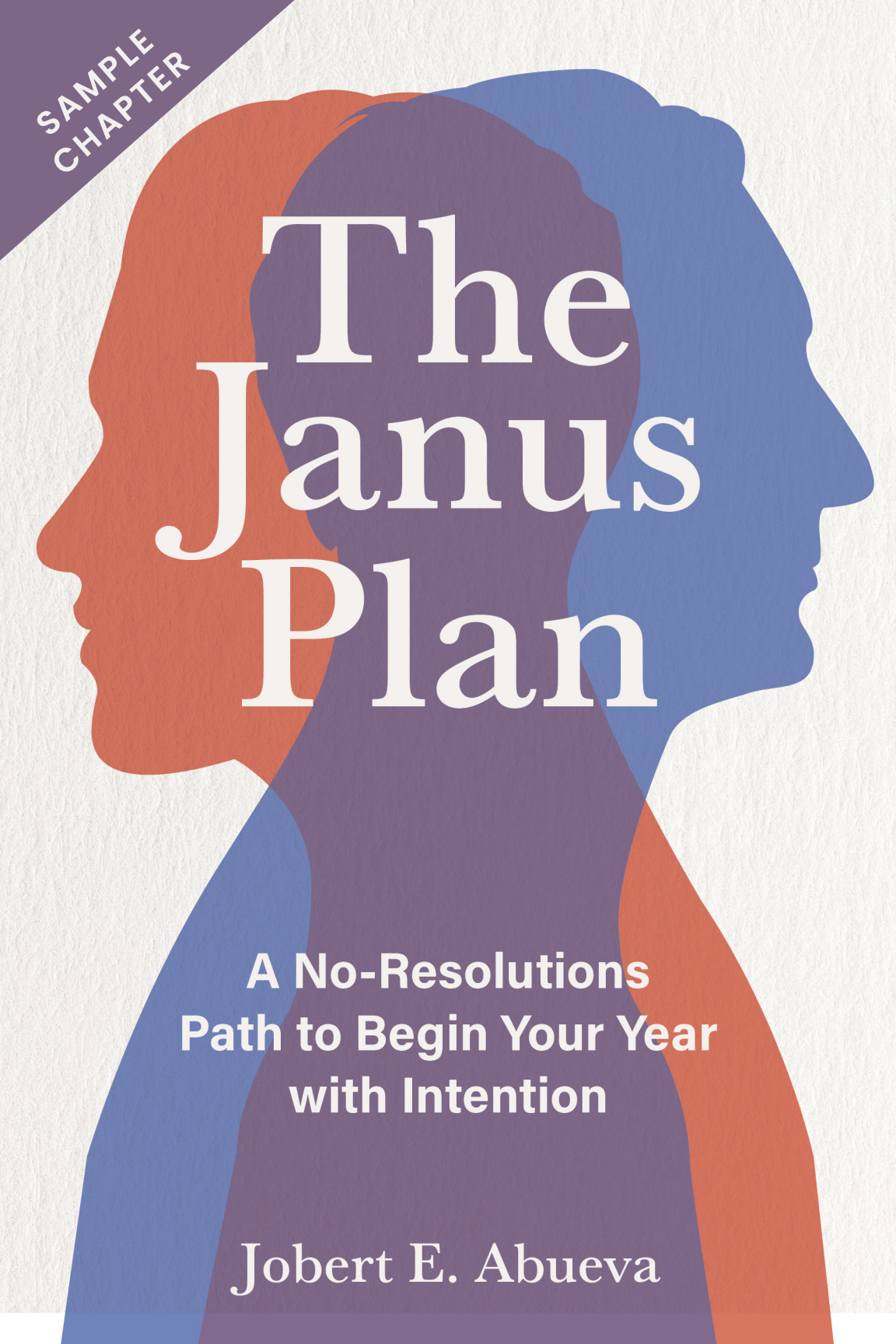


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The Janus Plan

**A No-Resolutions
Path to Begin Your Year
with Intention**

Jobert E. Abueva

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to Begin Your Year
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*To ESL:
Here's to shared vision, stitched seasons,
and the joy of beginning again.*

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“

*A friend is Janus-faced: he looks to the past
and the future. He is the child of all my
foregoing hours, the prophet of those to come,
and the harbinger of a greater friend.”*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882),
American essayist, poet, and philosopher

“

We will open the book. Its pages are blank. We are going to put words on them ourselves. The book is called Opportunity, and its first chapter is New Year's Day.”

—Edith Lovejoy Pierce,
British poet and author

“

*This is a new year. A new beginning.
And things will change.”*

—Taylor Swift

Introduction

Snags and Tangles in Life's Tapestry

Saturday, September 6, 1997, was a dark day. It wasn't just dampened by the BBC News wall-to-wall coverage of Princess Diana's funeral procession, ceremony, and hearse ride to her final resting place at Althorp, her family's estate. I, too, was experiencing grief and despair, but for my own reasons. I was sequestered in a Hong Kong hotel room, unable to get out of bed after a week of round-the-clock budget meetings focused on finding ways to meet new profit targets. My vision blurred. Sweat chilled my skin. I bawled my eyes out from exhaustion after a brutal night of insomnia and heaved, hungover from partying late with clients the night before. I was unable to touch the club sandwich or drink the hot tea I had ordered from room service. My mind seemed to be splitting in half. I was depleted. I was depressed. I was having what I can now say was a nervous breakdown.

From the outside, one would think I was on top of the world, in the midst of my third consecutive year of plum expat assignments launching Clairol Nice'n Easy haircoloring, as well as the newly restaged Herbal Essences shampoos and conditioners, throughout Spain, Greece, Poland, Russia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Israel, and Turkey, then across the Asia-Pacific region, from Shanghai to Southeast Asia to Sydney. I led A-list advertising and posh press launches with top models, as well as business strategy summits at five-star resorts in Bali and Phuket. It was a dizzying jet-set lifestyle characterized by sumptuous suppers, glitzy gatherings, and luxurious living, smack in the heart of London, Guangzhou, and then

Bangkok, complete with a driver and household staff for one person that could otherwise support a family of four.

But I also gained fourteen pounds in five months. I stopped regular exercise. I put in an inordinate number of hours at the office and on the road and took calls with US headquarters that ran late into the night. I worked well into my weekends. The truth was, I was officially burned out. Moreover, I was lonely and homesick. This was the same year that I had made New Year's resolutions to lose weight, go to the gym, get enough sleep, and even find someone special with whom to share my success. I was nowhere near realizing any of these goals. I was regressing rather than progressing. It was part of a pattern for this chronic resolutions-maker, perpetuating a vicious cycle of proclaiming then breaking resolutions that were forgotten by March.

Even before I had hit rock bottom, and as far back as my college years and into my twenties and early thirties, I religiously made a host of resolutions every January that were sweeping and lofty. Get good grades. Eat better. Sleep more. Exercise every day. Save money. Read books.

I prayed a bit over them, hoped for the best, then left things to chance. I always fell short and was left stressed and disillusioned that I could not achieve my lengthy list of dos and don'ts in my pursuit of a better me.

Soon after that miserable morning in Hong Kong, I asked my manager for a transfer back to the United States, thereby dashing my dreams of seeing even more of the world while opening markets and launching products—work I very much excelled at and enjoyed. But while I hoped this transfer would be good for me, coming home to the United States presented its own stressful challenges. I was caught in corporate limbo. I couldn't return to a domestic job that accounted for all the experience I had gained abroad. I would have to take a demotion, and I wasn't ready to do that. There were no easy answers, and while deliberating over what I should do, I was threatened by an HR manager that if I could not find a job that suited me within the company, I would have to resign.

I was downtrodden. I was desperate. Something had to change.

Tending to the Tears, Fixing the Frays

When 1999 arrived, I abandoned my usual New Year's resolutions routine and took a different approach by stepping back and taking a methodical audit of my frayed self. With pen in hand, I traced every contributing condition, insisting on rigor even when the truth hurt. What follows is a glimpse of that audit, the steps I took, and the raw insights I gleaned:

- **Cataloged thought fragments.** I filled a page with half-formed beliefs: “I must outperform,” “Rest is for the weak,” “Others expect perfection.” Each thought fragment became a clue to the automatic loops controlling my mind.
- **Indexed cold facts.** I logged both work and sleep hours, meals I skipped, and unread emails like ledger entries. The tally exposed an overarching attitude of “more, more, more” drowning out any whisper of wisdom protecting my well-being.
- **Mapped emotional flashpoints.** I highlighted moments of shame, panic, and rage, as well as times when my heart pounded like a warning bell. Plotting these emotional states on a timeline revealed a pattern: ambition spiking, then crashing into despair.
- **Rated intensity on a ten-point scale.** Every urge, ache, or longing got a score. That forced me to see which drives—addictive ambition, threadbare overachievement, perfectionist fear—were most corrosive.
- **Synthesized patterns into themes.** I wove these data strands into three core themes: validation hunger, exhaustion debt, and misaligned purpose. These themes combined to create the portrait of my frayed self.

Through this audit, I saw how chasing external praise had become a habit loop, how relentless overachievement had worn my edges thin, and how obsession with outcomes had eclipsed any sense of presence. This is the threshold I had to cross: a deliberate, compassionate unpacking of the

old so that I could weave a new way forward, free from punitive pressure and rich with intention.

From this reckoning came a handful of concrete, realistic goals. First: Leave my job and prioritize my well-being. Second: Take a class on how to get published, a dream I had long buried beneath the demands of my corporate professional path.

Sure enough, things did turn around. By year's end, I moved into a Greenwich Village apartment in New York City with a new partner and a new lease on life. I was taking writing classes at The New School, as well as the Gotham Writer's Workshop, and had a breakthrough when a "My Money, My Life" essay I submitted to *The New York Times* was accepted. That was followed by an invitation to pitch articles to them.

I was taking care of myself through mindful eating, daily walking, a stretching routine, and adequate rest. I left Clairol—unbeknownst to me, just in time before its sale to Procter & Gamble, thereby stepping away on my own terms instead of being swept into the chaos of a corporate acquisition.

The nervous breakdown I had experienced was like an unravelling thread that snapped under undue tension. I didn't know it then, but this collapse would become the blueprint for something better. Quitting my job was not an abandonment of the tapestry that was my life. It was a choice to reweave that tapestry with stronger fibers, more intentional patterns, and colors that reflect who I truly was and am, a marketer and a writer, focusing on what mattered most in the moment—to repair a battered me. I took what is now known as a *radical sabbatical*—pressing pause intentionally to explore who one is, how one is showing up, and what needs to shift—to recalibrate and rejuvenate. I gained perspective on work-life balance. I eventually returned to my marketing career with more clarity and insight on how to sustain my creativity and productivity.

When the world welcomed the new millennium in 2000, I continued my personal transformation journey by looking back at 1999 to see what was working and what wasn't in the context of my goals from the year before, then moving forward with a new set of goals. I added levity by

returning to a fun New Year's ritual I had grown up with in the Philippines (admittedly a superstitious one) of wearing round images to attract good fortune. I stayed awake for over twenty-four hours, tuned into *ABC 2000*, a global broadcast anchored by Peter Jennings that followed New Year's celebrations across every time zone. More than 175 million Americans tuned in.¹

What struck me most about the broadcast wasn't just the scale, but the unity: the entire world giddily welcoming a shared moment in human history. There was something magical about marking the moment of moving from one second to the next while switching days, months, years, decades, and millennia simultaneously. The world was truly "one" in this regard, if ever so briefly. And despite the diverse, sometimes peculiar celebratory customs of these different cultures, everyone had a common desire to exit the old in a spirit of reflection and enter the new with renewed hope. To clean the slate.

It was a reset—a foray into a new beginning, which we humans inherently crave. And we approach these new times in our lives with every intention of becoming our better selves.

All these elements I observed at the turn of the millennium—replacing resolutions with retrospection, resetting with intention, and rejoicing in ritual—became the seeds of what I now call the *Janus Plan*. Threads began to form in my mind, quietly at first, until a definite pattern appeared.

That pattern became the loom upon which I've woven my new life, year after year, with intention, reflection, and renewal. I attribute the transformation I experienced, the shift in my life's trajectory, and the resilience I've cultivated since to my commitment to the principles of the Janus Plan.

✦ *Stitch Note* ✦

Throughout this book, you'll come across Stitch Notes: brief insights, pro tips, and trivia stitched gently alongside the main text. Like the subtle threads that hold a tapestry together, these notes are intended to add texture and playfulness without interrupting the flow. First up: In case you haven't noticed already, the metaphor of weaving on a loom is indeed central to the Janus Plan. And there's a lot of it in here. Its inspiration traces back to my days as a Cub Scout, when one of our badge projects involved crafting a traditional Filipino woven headband using a manual loom. I remember being captivated by the rhythmic process, the interplay of warp (the taut threads stretching lengthwise) and weft (the horizontal threads stitched under and over the warp), the quiet focus that weaving required, and the satisfaction of watching a pattern appear thread by thread. I even got a little competitive, determined to weave the longest headband in the troop. That early experience planted another seed: the idea that life, too, could be shaped through intentional, patient weaving. Over time, this metaphor evolved into a guiding framework, one that honors both structure and creativity, tradition and transformation.

Step In, Look Both Ways

Are you tired of setting lofty New Year's resolutions, only to watch them fizzle by February, as I was? Whether you're a chronic resolutions-setter or someone who avoids them altogether, the Janus Plan offers a fresh, soulful way to begin again with clarity, intention, and hope. And whether you're seeking career growth, creative expression, deeper relationships, or simply a more organized and fulfilling life, the Janus Plan meets you at the threshold of change.

The Janus Plan isn't a checklist of resolutions. It's a loom for weaving meaning, intention, and action into the fabric of your year. It is inspired by Janus, the Roman god of doorways, transitions, beginnings, and endings. He was invoked at the start of every ritual, ceremony, or venture to bless the threshold between what has been and what will be.² His most iconic attribute is his two faces, which I first came across and was transfixed by as a boy sifting through the pages of an *Encyclopedia Britannica* in my family's library. With one face looking backward into the past and the other forward into the future, the two faces symbolize the god Janus's dominion over change and time. So, just as Janus looked in two directions, this plan invites you to stand at the doorway between past and future with clarity, courage, and care.

With one face turned toward lessons learned and the other toward what's yet to come, the Janus Plan helps you release the year behind you and welcome the one ahead with energy, vision, and purpose. Through clear steps and soulful prompts, you'll chart a course toward a more fulfilled, focused, and joyful you all year long.

Why Janus? Because beginnings deserve reverence. Because endings deserve reflection. And because your life, like Janus's temple, is built with two doors: one for looking back and one for stepping forward.

I've walked this path and watched close friends and family members walk it as well. Now, I want as many people as possible to experience the clarity, momentum, and quiet power that the Janus Plan offers. It's time to begin again, with intention.

How the Plan Works: The Design of Your New Start

The plan begins with a thoughtful look back so you can clearly see what you want to realize in the year ahead, all while taking on fun-filled New Year's traditions from around the world. It brings to life the adage that to know where we are going, we must look at where we have been. To quote strategist John R. Dallas, Jr., "Each year's regrets are envelopes in which messages of hope are found for the New Year."³ The Janus Plan is an invitation to be honest and full of hope as we turn our own gaze to yesterday and tomorrow before we walk forward in life.

Yet this is more than just a reflection and goal-setting exercise. It is also a call to attend to areas of our lives, big and small, that we may neglect all year long, such as our health—whether physical, mental, or fiscal. Or procrastination-inspiring must-dos to be addressed annually—items as mundane as car registrations, insurance, and maintenance. Or even more significant duties like filing taxes and making repairs on leaking roofs and other areas in our lives that need attention. When we address these areas head-on, we ease our burdens and find ourselves in a better position to tackle the new year and set ourselves up for success in the long run. Each coming year is filled with opportunities and challenges, many of which have yet to be revealed at the beginning. The Janus Plan offers clarity and confidence that helps us put our best foot forward, regardless of what may be in store.

The Janus Plan unfolds in six deliberate steps to help you begin again and make the new year a winning year—possibly your best one ever.

Step 1: Ponder the Past. Honor the year behind you by reflecting on its lessons, losses, and luminous moments.

Step 2: Frame the Future. Plant purposeful intentions across the key domains of your life—personal, professional, and relational.

Step 3: Nudge the Now. Let one long-neglected task open the gate to forward momentum.

Step 4: Clean and Clear. Refresh your environment and care for your body and spirit before the new year begins.

Step 5: Revel in Ritual. Embrace symbolic traditions that mark this transition with joy, meaning, and cultural flair.

Step 6: Revisit and Reignite. Throughout the year, return to your intentions like a keeper of the flame, reviewing your progress, adjusting your course, and reigniting your commitment with clarity and care.

These steps are designed to work together as you reflect, release, reimagine, and recommit. Whether you're mending old patterns or weaving something entirely new, the Janus Plan offers structure without rigidity and rhythm without rush. Follow the steps in order or dance between them. What matters most is that you engage each step with intention, and if you falter, always begin again on your own terms.

How to Use This Book: Threading Your Year

This book sets up the loom for a beautiful new masterpiece: your life's next chapter. It's a place to gather, sort, and weave the threads of your intentions before the new year begins. In the days or weeks leading up to your chosen threshold, whether that's January 1 or another meaningful turning point, settle in with this guide.

Begin by reading about the entire plan from end to end. This bird's-eye view will help you see the full design—the carefully threaded warp and weft of your goals, rituals, and reflections—and estimate how much time you'll need to weave Steps 1 through 4 well, followed by Step 5. Don't be surprised if you start sketching motifs or jotting down new threads of inspiration as you go. That's part of the creative unraveling of the past and assembling of the future.

Move through Steps 1 to 5 with care, allowing yourself time to stitch slowly, reflect deeply, and complete the full pattern before the first day of your new year arrives. When the new year dawns, you'll have a handwoven set of goals ready to place on your daily loom (your planner, journal,

or calendar) so you can begin weaving in earnest. Each goal then becomes a thread to track, a stitch to return to weekly, monthly, and quarterly as part of Step 6, guiding you along as your life textile grows. You can revisit this book anytime for a refresher, a re-threading, or a moment of pause as your year's tapestry unfolds.

Each chapter is a distinct step in the weaving process. To get the richest texture, follow the sequence. Each layer builds upon the last. You'll find guidance, prompts, and exercises interlaced throughout, helping you customize your design to reflect your deepest intentions. Some steps will invite you to step away from the page and engage in rituals or actions beyond the book. Each chapter then ends with a *Pause at the Loom*, which is a reflective section to help you gather your thoughts, respond with intention, and prepare for the next row of stitches. These pauses may include prompts, questions, or quiet rituals to help you integrate what you've explored.

But before we go any further, let's establish once and for all that . . .

Resolutions Are Often Made to Be Broken

F. M. Knowles, the Canadian painter renowned for his seascapes and harbor scenes as well as his wit, once quipped: "He who breaks a resolution is a weakling; he who makes one is a fool."⁴ He was onto something.

According to *InsideOutMastery.com*, 38.5 percent of US adults set at least one resolution every year, with young adults (18 to 34) leading the charge at 59 percent.⁵ If you include people worldwide, you have hundreds of millions of people making New Year's resolutions. But *Inc.* magazine reports that a staggering 91 percent of us who make resolutions break them, often by mid-January.⁶ Strava, the fitness app, even coined "Quitter's Day," which is the second Tuesday of the month, when physical activity plummets after the New Year's surge.⁷ At least the delusion of holding onto a faltering resolution is short-lived!

It's like that joke often said: "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results."⁸ But don't despair. You're in good company. However, it's time to stop the insanity (a term I use with a shout out to Susan Powter).

✦ *Stitch Note* ✦

Susan Powter is an Australian-born American wellness icon who skyrocketed to fame in the early 1990s with her bold catchphrase “Stop the Insanity!” The catchphrase was meant to wake people up to their counterproductive health habits, and she wrote a bestselling book by the same name.⁹

Only 9 percent of Americans who make New Year's resolutions claim to keep them all year. Kudos to those in this single-digit success club!¹⁰ For the rest of us, it's time to take stock and find a way out of the cycle of blind optimism followed by failure.

Journalist Eric Zorn once wrote: “Making resolutions is a cleansing ritual of self-assessment and repentance that demands personal honesty and ultimately reinforces humility. Breaking them is part of the cycle.”¹¹ That's all well and good, if you're happy with that. But what if we could approach our aspirations without having to break anything?

Resolutions are made in the spirit of self-improvement, and that intention is admirable. But despite the flood of advice each December on how to make better resolutions, we still fall short. To free ourselves from this annual disappointment, we must first uncover the deeper history and rationale behind resolutions themselves.

Let's start with the word *resolution* which has a history far more textured than we realize. It begins with the Latin *resolvere* which means to loosen, to release, or to break something down into its smaller pieces. That idea traveled through Middle French as *résolution*, a term for unraveling a problem into something simpler, and eventually entered English in the 1300s with that same meaning of taking things apart to understand them.

It wasn't until the late 1700s that *resolution* shifted into a word we now attach to the New Year's holiday: “a firm decision, a declaration of

intent.” That newer sense grew out of the term *resolute*, a word that by the 1500s already described someone purposeful and unwilling to waver as they resolve to make changes.¹² This is why there is a strong sense of determination behind the word; it means to declare, to commit, and to push through, come hell or high water. But sheer determination alone is exhausting. After all, obstacles are ever-present. Life is full of hell and high water. And none of us is immune. What we need isn’t more grit, but more grace. More flexibility. More thoughtfulness.

We need clear baselines, checkpoints, and pivot points; not pressure to fight to the bitter end. Setting grand goals without careful planning is like booking international travel without checking your passport’s expiration date. Desire alone isn’t enough. We need a self-reality check: an honest assessment of our strengths, weaknesses, blind spots, and past mistakes. We need a framework that guides us like a well-planned itinerary: valid passport—check; flight booked—check; ground transportation arranged—check; lodging confirmed—check. This is the type of prudent planning you’ll use when you follow the Janus Plan.

You’ll also be realistic in the goals you set. Often, our resolutions are unrealistic: lose fifty pounds (a third of one’s body weight); hit the gym seven days a week (ignoring rest days); save money without accounting for real expenses. These are recipes for burning out and failing. We lose steam, falter, and surrender, then wait for another new year to try again.

You may wonder, then: Are resolutions an endangered pursuit? Perhaps so, in the way we do them. Sure, they’re fun to dream about, and making lofty, ill-conceived resolutions is a hard habit to break, and popular culture promotes them at the close of every year. But you’ve come to the right place to reframe your approach—to hold onto the pure intent behind resolutions while ditching their punitive and self-defeating structure.

Resolutions are like brittle threads, spun with good intentions but prone to snapping under “I will,” “I must,” and “I won’t.” But life doesn’t unfold in straight lines, and neither should your plans.

The Janus Plan offers flexible threads, in the form of goals that can be woven into your life, adjusted as needed, and reinforced over time. This plan honors the loom of your life as something dynamic rather than fixed.

Unlike the old way of approaching resolutions, you begin with reflection, not reaction. You move with rhythm, not rigidity. And you create a tapestry that reflects your values, not just your staunch willpower.

Ditching the old tradition of resolutions doesn't mean abandoning hope. It means choosing a framework that's resilient, soulful, and sustainable. It means trading the pressure to change overnight for the power to evolve with intention. So let go of the brittle thread. Pick up the *shuttle*, which is a tool that carries yarn back and forth through the threads on a loom to make the resulting fabric, and begin weaving a beautiful creation that's durable.

The Shuttle and the Threshold: Why the Janus Plan Works

The Janus Plan thrives on the interplay between motion (as you weave the threads) and meaning (as you build something fulfilling and sustainable). The shuttle is your daily companion in the loom of life. Gliding back and forth, this device carries the threads of habit, choice, and ritual across the fabric of time. This rhythmic weaving builds momentum, shaping form from repetition and careful construction.

But weaving alone is not enough. Janus, the god of thresholds, reminds us that every passage—every turn of the year and every shift in season—asks us to pause, reflect, and choose. Janus stands at the doorway between past and future, inviting us to look both ways before we move forward.

When the shuttle and the god of the threshold work in tandem, life becomes a tapestry of intention. You choose your intention at the threshold, and then you use the shuttle to make each pass of the thread through the loom. As you go along, each new pattern you create reflects your evolving path. In this way, forward movement and reflection combine to create a product that represents your deepest truth. The Janus Plan doesn't just help you move forward. It supports precise, coherent advancement that's aligned with your highest ideals. Working in this more thoughtful, reflective, yet seamless manner offers many advantages, and I'll list a few of those here.

The Janus Plan can work for everyone. This plan is for anyone who would like to greet the coming year with the best chance of success. Whether you are a student completing a credential or pursuing a degree, a full- or part-time professional looking to progress in a chosen career, a parent nurturing a loving family and home, or a retiree who is seeking structure or is eager to check off a bucket list item, the Janus Plan is accessible to you. We all have the same finite number of minutes in a year available—in fact, 525,600 of them—a number popularized by the song “Seasons of Love” from the Broadway-musical-turned-movie-turned-live-TV-special, *Rent*.¹³ We want to make the most of every single one of them.

Whoever you are and wherever you are in life, you will get the most out of the Janus Plan if you fully embrace it in its entirety and see it through from beginning to end. That said, I am keenly aware how everyday life can get in the way. It may also be that certain elements of the plan will resonate more than others, and it is fine to adopt those parts selectively. It’s like when I’ve attended drop-in meditation classes at my local Buddhist center: All are welcome, and no one is trying to convert anyone. It’s just about being in the moment and seeing what works, and then integrating those parts into your own practice. Even if you only end up homing in on a few practices, I will be cheering you on toward happiness and success all year long.

The Janus Plan is for all kinds of New Year’s celebrations. The tradition of welcoming the new year based on the Gregorian calendar, which starts on January 1, remains popular and is observed by most nations, with some celebrations running for up to three days, such as in Japan, if not longer. New Year’s Eve and Day are my favorite holidays. Celebrating them in different countries since my early years is part of what has led me on the path to creating the Janus Plan.

But there are also New Year’s celebrations across cultures and religions associated with lunar cycles and other lunisolar calendars that go back even further. The Islamic *Hijri* New Year, which starts with the first month of *Muharram*, is based on a lunar calendar (eleven to twelve days shorter than the solar calendar) and migrates throughout a solar year. It

takes place when the first crescent of a new moon is sighted and goes back 1,400 years.¹⁴ The Chinese or Lunar New Year, which coincides with the new moon in late January or early February, goes back over 4,000 years.¹⁵

✦ *Stitch Note* ✦

Today, the Lunar New Year is when the largest migration of humans on earth occurs, as folks in China and neighboring Asian countries travel back to their hometowns to reunite with family (a phenomenon known as the Spring Festival travel rush or *chunyun*).¹⁶

The Jewish New Year of Rosh Hashanah is a high holy day, which starts with the first day of *Tishrei*, the seventh month of the ecclesiastical year. It takes place in September or October and is based on a calendar that extends even further back to nearly 5,800 years.¹⁷ *Nowruz*, the Persian New Year, which coincides with the vernal equinox (the first day of spring), stretches to 15,000 years ago.¹⁸ The Ethiopians celebrate *Enkutatash* every September 11,¹⁹ and Thai people have *Songkran* in April.²⁰ Not long ago, I learned of *Matariki*, the Māori New Year in New Zealand, which became an official public holiday in 2022. It is named after the Pleiades star cluster, which rises at that time of year, and its first rising in late June or early July is celebrated.²¹

You can find New Year's holidays occurring in just about every season of the calendar year. Diverse cultures all mark the passage of time, distinguishing a new year from the old, underscoring the universal if not mystical desire of humankind to turn the proverbial page to a new chapter. You can even plan to start your Janus Plan at the beginning of your fiscal year, if that's how you like to operate, or at the start of the academic school year in August or September. Whichever version of a new year

and twelve-month calendar you choose to observe, have your Janus Plan attached to it.

The Janus Plan can flex to the amount of time you give it. The steps of the Janus Plan that are meant to be completed before New Year's Day itself can be carried out over the span of a few weeks, if not an entire month. What matters most is tackling the sequence of steps and associated activities in some way. Some of these steps can be done simultaneously, though there are a few obvious exceptions, like looking back first before looking forward during goal-making. This is good news for multitaskers. I personally prefer to take the time between Christmas and New Year's Day as my Janus Plan time, devoting a day to each step. Feel free to experiment with the timeline and choose what works best for you.

You can put as much effort and time into your Janus Plan as you want, and the results you gain will be relative to those efforts. As the New Radicals song suggests, "You Get What You Give."²² How much you invest in yourself will pay proportionate dividends. No one is looking over your shoulder, and it's all up to you. However you approach the plan, you will end up with a blueprint that is flexible. It is yours and yours alone, unique in the direction you choose to take. You will have a sense of accomplishment even before the new year arrives and feel renewed and reenergized, ready to face whatever comes your way.

The Janus Plan can be done solo, as a duo, as a family, or as a team. While the plan is primarily designed for individuals, there are benefits to using it alongside a spouse, partner, or significant other. It serves as a bonding exercise whereby you commit to taking on priorities together that will deepen your love and friendship, fix any frayed nerves (which are natural in any lasting relationship), and help you join forces in conquering the world. All elements of the plan can accommodate parallel paths and are suitable for completing as an individual, as a couple, and yes, as a family (jointly or separately).

This plan can be extended to a small team unit, whether it be coworkers, teammates, or any other group of people committed to a particular cause. It can be helpful to a nonprofit organization, a neighborhood com-

mittee, or a business team. Think about how the plan can dovetail with your company's annual planning processes, regardless of the scale of your endeavor. It could even serve as the perfect framework for a company off-site meeting or retreat, whereby you work on the plan together as a group or as separate team members in tandem who share their goals with others.

The Janus Plan is not a one-and-done proposition. It is no different from having an annual business or marketing plan. In fact, many elements of a plan used to drive a business are applicable to the management of one's life. We will delve into this as we walk through the plan itself.

Conditions and life circumstances change from one year to the next, so your plan is meant to evolve as well. It was Heraclitus, the ancient Greek philosopher, who said, "No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man." Here's a more modern-day version of this same message, courtesy of Steven Spielberg: "Every single year, we're a different person. I don't think we're the same person all our lives."²³ My ultimate hope is that you will experience the plan's benefits firsthand your first time out and will want to replicate the process for years to come.

The Janus Plan is fun. This plan is not a weighty exercise devoid of any light-heartedness. Doing something good for yourself should not be a burden. Instead, it can be pleasurable and gratifying. It can even elicit joy. Yes, you want to take it on because you will get something rewarding out of it. But my aim is for you to smile, even laugh, along the way.

A lot is competing for our attention in today's world. With the pressures and problems that we are living through in this first half of the twenty-first century, a bit of stress relief is always welcome. Taking control of what we can enables us to better withstand life's uncertainties.

You may be reading this book weeks or months before the current year is up and another one knocks at your door. This is welcome news, as it offers adequate time to get acquainted with the plan itself. Alternatively, there may only be a few days remaining in December or before your selected new year, and you may wish to begin implementing the plan as soon as possible. Whatever your situation, I offer you my heartfelt

congratulations and gratitude. All I ask is that you read on. You may be pleasantly surprised by what you discover.

And on that note, let us finalize our preparations before we dive in.

Setting Up the Loom for Success

To get the most out of the process, I ask that you keep an open mind. And when I say this, I mean it. I am asking you to be willing to consider and implement new and diverse concepts and ways to move forward. Even if the ideas may not seem new to you, the way you execute the ideas will be different from what you may have done previously when approaching a new year.

It is easy to dismiss parts of the plan that you might consider hokey or too woo-woo to take seriously. Sure, you might question the validity of some of these ideas. That's fine. Also, you might prefer to skip the introductory steps and go right to the part on goal-setting. We all have varying degrees of patience. I know. Still, I ask that you adhere to the program as much in its entirety as possible. It does work when used that way, and I want it to work for you. I am proof positive, as are others, that the plan works amazingly well, and you can experience the full plan's effectiveness too.

As you start each step, try to set aside at least an hour or two on any given day to complete the exercises and activities. Block out time on your calendar. If you are sticking strictly to, say, the week between Christmas and New Year's Eve, timebox two to three hours each day. Otherwise, use as much time as you see fit to complete the exercises to your satisfaction.

Begin each session with quiet time, some form of mindfulness meditation (or prayer, incantation, or manifestation practices, if you prefer) to set aside any worries or preoccupations taking up real estate in your consciousness. As you know, meditation has taken off as a movement, with benefits that are backed by sound research. My hope is that by taking on a meditative practice, you will be able to process the new information being presented and, in turn, focus better on the activities throughout the plan.

✦ *Stitch Note* ✦

Multiple meditation resources are available on YouTube and through apps, and some provide free trial periods before requiring a subscription. Although you may not want to spend money on a meditation app, I swear by investing in a subscription and making meditation part of your daily morning ritual. Meditating in the morning brings perspective into your day. If you want to invest in a meditation resource, you can search “meditation” in your phone’s app store. Popular options include Calm, Headspace, and Buddhify, among others. Lately, I have been using Waking Up, which offers ten- or twenty-minute daily meditations. Whatever method you choose, the key is to slow down, be in touch with your breath and surroundings, and from that centered space, commit to the day’s Janus Plan activities.

Next, you will want a good pen and a notebook or journal where you can jot your responses and any insights as they bubble up during the process. You might even find yourself drawing pictures to convey the ideas in your head. It is preferred that you handwrite throughout the process, but a fine alternative is to create a Janus Plan document on your laptop or desktop. You could also populate Janus Plan templates (by hand or computer), which can then be printed out and serve as handy reference guides. For premade digital templates, go to joberteabueva.com/belikejanus and follow the instructions to access these resources.

✦ *Stitch Note* ✦

The benefits of writing things down by hand are well documented. The muscular effort to pen each word on paper has the effect of deliberately focusing our minds and magnifying the words' impact. Writing, as opposed to typing, is a slower process, allowing us to spend more time with the material, which inherently improves our comprehension of what we are composing, not to mention our memory of it. Then there is the unrestricted freedom of penning words, drafting diagrams, and even doodling, all of which enhance innovation and can lead to new insights and epiphanies.²⁴

Growing up left-handed, I have always struggled with making my handwriting neat, and others have struggled to read it. My penmanship marks in second grade were less than stellar, given the overextension of my southpaw hook, the position of which caused smudges on my fist and in my cursive workbook. So, writing by hand has never been my favorite activity. And now, with clacking away on keyboards being so much a part of how we communicate, it's no wonder that writing by hand is becoming more of an unnatural act. Nevertheless, I think writing by hand can be an important part of the self-awareness and growth process. So, whether you write left-handed, right-handed, or ambidextrously, and whether you create beautiful calligraphy or chicken scratch, I encourage you to write out your thoughts.

I prefer to use a generously inked black pen (specifically, the Pilot G-2 10-point). This pen easily glides across the pages. I know some folks like

to use multicolored pens and highlighters. If that's your preference, please do so. This process is yours and yours alone. And for the scrapbookers among us, have your scissors and glue ready for later in the process when you have the option to construct a vision board for the new year.

As for what to write on, it is up to you whether you prefer bound or spiral notebooks, lined or empty pages, compact or oversized pads. Choose whatever feels right. My only guidance is to have a dedicated notebook for the Janus Plan so you don't mix these notes with job or school notes, journal or diary entries, or anything else that is not related. The advantage of having an exclusive place to gather all your Janus Plan-related work is that you can return to it from one year to the next (or periodically throughout the year), easily finding where you were a year ago to decide where you want to go next. Yes, this notebook helps you look to the past as you envision the future. It helps you be like Janus at the threshold!

Finally, a word about location and where to carry out the planning process. Again, the best choice of location is the one that works best for you. You can do these exercises at your home office, the dining room table, or whatever space you typically use to get your life in order. Think about where you like to work, use the internet, pay bills, do homework, or write a term paper. Perhaps you may choose to venture out to your favorite coffee shop hangout. If you are in a moderate or warm climate that enables you to be outdoors, go outside and soak up the sun; breathe in any balmy breezes that inspire you to take on the plan. For those of you who are bound to freeze your tails off outside in the lead-up to the new year, find a cozy corner, a snug nook, or whatever feels like your most hygge-inducing space (*hygge* is a Danish term describing a cozy and warm winter aesthetic). Prepare some hot chocolate, tea, or your favorite cup of joe. Light a fire if you have a fireplace. Burn a candle or play some light background music. Do whatever it takes to get you into the right mood.

✦ *Stitch Note* ✦

I have sometimes chosen to venture a bit further out for my personal Janus Plan retreat. I've been known to check into a hotel in Philadelphia, about an hour from where I live, for an overnight stay. I treat myself to a good meal (Philly's food scene is incredible) and some pampering (a ninety-minute massage and a mani-pedi) after what may have been a long and challenging year. I look to put myself in the right state of mind to complete my plan and face the new year feeling invigorated. If it's within your budget and you have the time, plan your own retreat.

Success Patterns of a Well-Woven Life

I've practiced and refined the Janus Plan for nearly three decades, and I've never looked back. What began as a personal framework for reflection and renewal after I had lost my way chasing ambition at the expense of my own well-being and other callings has become the foundation for a life of purpose, vitality, and creative fulfillment. Today, I thrive as a global marketing and philanthropy professional, working in a dream role facilitating brighter futures for lifelong learners around the world.

Beyond my professional life, I serve on nonprofit boards that reflect my passions, including Lambda Literary, WHYY's Community Advisory Board in Philadelphia, and the ACME Screening Room in Lambertville, New Jersey, an art cinema house that celebrates independent film, documentary storytelling, and creative dialogue. These commitments are not just activities; they're expressions of alignment, values, and joy.

After a long dry spell, I rekindled my love of writing. I've won awards, published op-eds and essays, completed my first book, *Boy Wander: A Coming*

of Age Memoir, and now bring you this project. This book is a culmination of years of purposeful reflection, ritual, and renewal.

Life, of course, is never seamless. I still face setbacks, doubts, and seasons that don't go as planned. When they come, I return to the priorities and intentions I've named for myself. The Janus Plan helps me stay resilient in those moments—steady me, reminding me of what matters, and helping me move forward with clarity rather than urgency.

At this point, I'm in the best shape of my life—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. I eat mindfully, indulge occasionally, and protect my health with daily meditation, gratitude practices, and restorative sleep. I walk in nature, train with professionals in circuit and yoga workouts (hello KORU Wellness, my movement studio of choice in Bucks County, Pennsylvania), and most recently, do Pilates, all to stay energized and engaged.

After amicably parting from a long-term relationship, I spent eight years happily single, using that time to focus on my well-being and personal growth. That space allowed me to open my heart again, and today, I share life with a new partner—a relationship rooted in mutual respect, joy, and possibility. I'm surrounded by a global network of friends and family who love and support me, and I support them in return.

I travel widely, explore deeply, and find satisfaction in both worldly adventures and quiet projects at home. I manage my finances with care, contributing regularly to my 403(b), brokerage accounts, and high-yield savings. I do this not out of fear, but out of respect for the future I'm creating.

These outcomes didn't happen overnight. They were cultivated, year by year, through the steady rhythm of the Janus Plan. Its six steps have helped me reflect, reset, and realign—not just once, but again and again. This is a living framework, not a one-time fix. And because it's rooted in both structure and soul, it's sustainable.

Now, it's time to share this tried-and-true approach with the world. Whatever brings you to this threshold, I hope that you'll find the Janus Plan as fulfilling and fun as I and others have found it to be.

So, let's begin. Let your first thread mark the start of a newly transformed pattern.

◆ *Pause at the Loom* ◆

- ◆ What are some of your earliest New Year's celebration memories?
 - ◇ What made them memorable?
 - ◇ Were they loud or subdued?
 - ◇ Were you with family and/or friends?
 - ◇ Were there any traditions or rituals you participated in?
- ◆ How have you celebrated the New Year's holiday in recent years?
- ◆ Do you look forward to New Year's Eve and Day? Whether you answer yes, no, or with indifference, why is that?
- ◆ If you make New Year's resolutions, how long have you been doing so?
 - ◇ Do you recall when you started making New Year's resolutions?
 - ◇ What were your earliest resolutions?
 - ◇ Did you find yourself repeating the same set of resolutions from year to year?
 - ◇ Were you able to turn your resolutions into reality?
- ◆ What are some of your most recent resolutions?
 - ◇ Have you been successful in keeping them? If not, how long did they last?
 - ◇ Why do you suppose your resolutions haven't stuck with you throughout the year?
- ◆ The Janus Plan can be approached on your own, with another, and as a group. Which of these options could work for you, and why?

- ✦ Would working through the plan from Christmas Day to New Year's Day work for you? Or would you need more time, perhaps starting December 1? Alternatively, would you prefer to begin at the start of a fiscal or academic year? What time frame makes the most sense for you for taking on the Janus Plan?
- ✦ Do you meditate? Have you ever tried meditation? Was it a positive experience? Would you be willing to give it a try now? Why or why not?
- ✦ How much writing do you do by hand versus on a computer? What kind of notebook and pen(s) might you want to use for the Janus Plan?
- ✦ Where might you set up shop to tackle the Janus Plan?
- ✦ If you are considering a retreat away from home, where might you want to schedule that and why?

Praise for *The Janus Plan*

“A unique and engaging approach to self-improvement.”

— KIRKUS REVIEWS

“Beautifully written and deeply practical, *The Janus Plan* shows leaders how true transformation begins with self-reflection. Abueva blends cultural wisdom and modern strategy into a framework that helps us lead from both clarity and compassion.”

— DR. MARSHALL GOLDSMITH, Thinkers50 #1 Executive Coach and *New York Times* bestselling author of *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*

“The freshest take on new beginnings I have ever read. Deeply human, profoundly insightful, and incredibly practical — Jobert E. Abueva has written a truly soulful guide to hitting reset while staying true to who you are.”

— JULIE MORGENSTERN, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Organizing from the Inside Out* and *Time Management from the Inside Out*; trusted organizing and productivity expert to Fortune 500 leaders worldwide

“*The Janus Plan* offers practical ways to make this coming year the best one yet. It gives permission to pause, listen, and align, proving you don't need a new you, just a more honest relationship with the one you already are.”

— LAURA VANDERKAM, author of *Big Time: A Simple Path to Time Abundance*

“*The Janus Plan* is a rare blend of poetry and practicality. Jobert E. Abueva doesn't just teach us how to begin again. He shows us how to honor what came before so our next steps have meaning. Insightful, elegant, and empowering, this is the guide for anyone ready to cross their next threshold with purpose.”

— AHMET BOZER, author of *Soulgery* and former President, Coca-Cola International

“The Janus Plan is a deeply thoughtful and actionable guide for anyone ready to step into their next chapter with purpose and intention.

Through honest storytelling, global perspectives, and meaningful rituals, Jobert Abueva offers a powerful framework for reflection, renewal, and intentional growth. His insights help readers move from survival to thriving while creating a future true to who they are and who they want to become.

A powerful blueprint for aligning your future with who you are and how you want to show up in the world.”

— ANGELA CHEE, Author of *The Power of The Only: Own Your Voice, Thrive in Any Environment*

About the Author

Jobert E. Abueva has a long-standing career as a global marketer for corporate, start-up, and nonprofit entities and is the author of the multi-award-winning *Boy Wander: A Coming of Age Memoir* (Rattling Good Yarns Press). He is the inaugural recipient of the Lambda Literary J. Michael Samuel Prize and winner of the Writer’s Advice Flash Memoir contest. Other accolades include the Arch and Bruce Brown Foundation award for historical short fiction, *Fortune* “Leaders of the 21st Century” essay competition, and two National Arts Club scholarships for nonfiction. His work has appeared in various anthologies and publications, including *The New York Times*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Fortune*, and *Entrepreneur*. He has also given the TEDx Talk, “Beyond Resolutions: The Art of Beginning with Intention,” available online.

Jobert holds degrees from the University of Michigan—Ann Arbor (BA, Economics/Asian Studies) and Columbia Business School (MBA, Marketing). He is associate vice president of global philanthropy at ETS and associate vice president of marketing for its ETS Research Institute. He also serves on the WHY Community Advisory Board and is on the Board of Directors at the ACME Screening Room (Lambertville, NJ) and at Lambda Literary. *The Janus Plan* is his second book.

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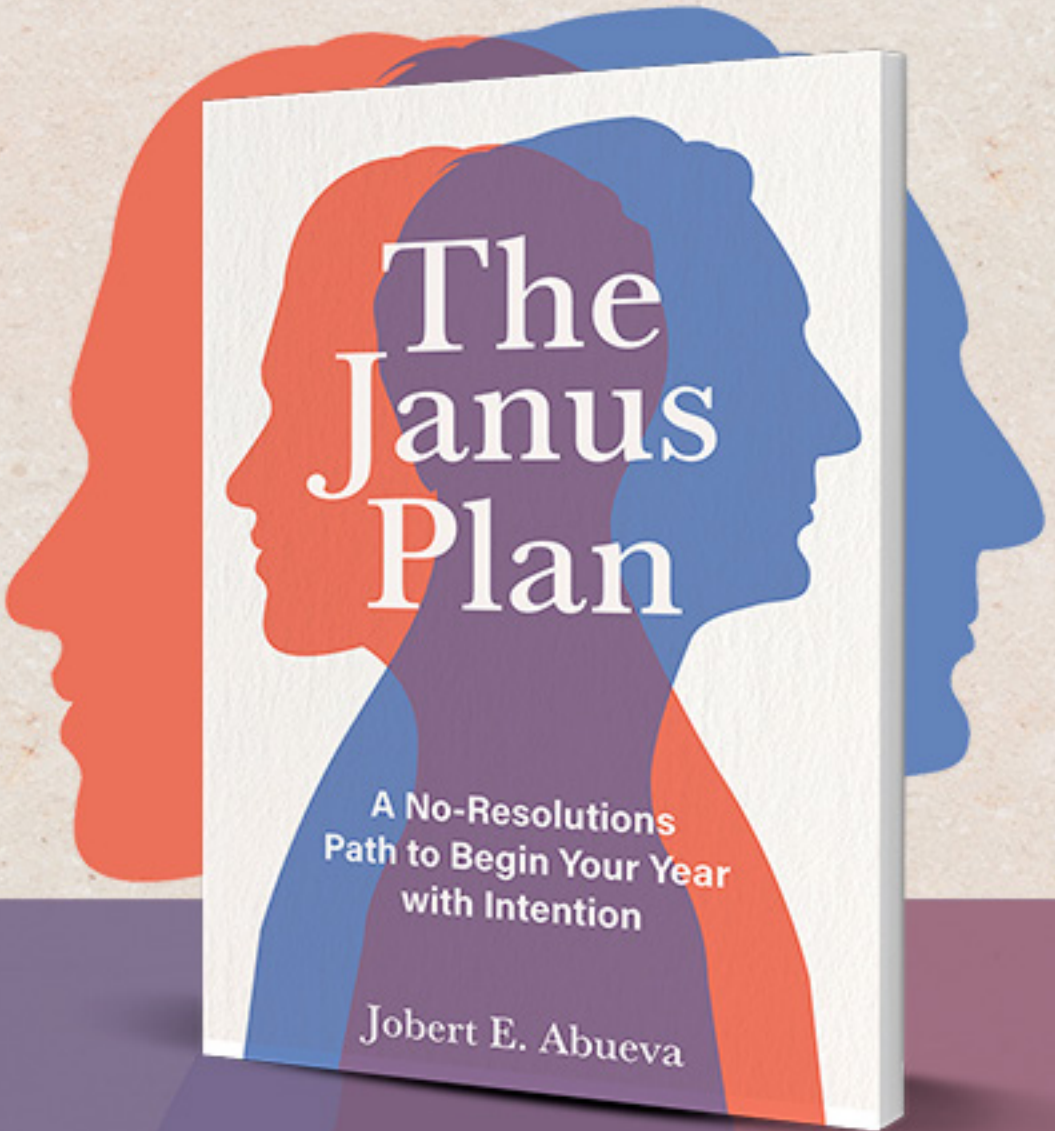
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