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Austin experts give us their year end tips

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By **Sarah Beckham**

Updated: 9:25 a.m. Monday, Dec. 21, 2009
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I'm lucky enough to get to interview many smart, insightful Austinites for this column. As the year winds down, I caught up with some of the experts who have been featured in this space during 2009. I asked them to share something that had made their lives easier, richer, more productive or in any way better in the past year. Their tip could be anything a book, a gadget, a habit that readers also could put to use. Here's what they had to say:

Katharine Brooks

Director of Liberal Arts Career Services at the University of Texas and author ('You Majored in What? Mapping Your Path From Chaos to Career')

I had a chance to preview a book that hasn't been released yet, but is coming out soon. It's called "The Happiness Project," and it's written by Gretchen Rubin.

The author set out on a one-year journey to explore the nature of happiness in her own life. She researched the subject and then applied a variety of recommendations (focusing on different ones each month), starting with a list of 12 personal commandments about how she would approach her year of happiness.

A lot of her ideas are things we probably already know: get more sleep, practice gratitude, etc., but I like the way she systematically applies them to see how they work in her life. She also includes the experiences of the people who have responded to her blog, so you can read different perspectives on any given recommendation.

I think it's a clever project and might be needed in these tough economic times with so much negative information coming at us. And since many of us make New Year's resolutions anyway, this project might just come in handy when Jan. 1 rolls around.

("The Happiness Project" will be released Dec. 29. For more information, visit www.happiness-project.com. To read an interview with Rubin, visit www.statesman.com/life/life-guide.)

Ann Daly

Speaker, life coach and author ('A Year of Clarity: The Monthly Guide for Women')

As a solopreneur with another book about to be released, I had to do something this year about feeling constantly overwhelmed. So I decided to look up from my desk. What I mean is that I shifted my attention from the tactical details to the big-picture strategy. I stopped obsessing about every item on the endless "to-do" list and



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started focusing on my top-three strategies. It may be a good — or even great — idea, but if it doesn't advance one of those three strategies, it doesn't make it onto the to-do list. I can breathe again!

Marny Lifshen

Marketing communications consultant, speaker and author ('Some Assembly Required: A Networking Guide for Women')

Keeping track of our professional networking contacts and activities can be a bit overwhelming. Most of us have good intentions when it comes to following up after meeting someone new or spending time with someone important, but actually following through is much tougher. I have two tips that will definitely help keep you more efficient and effective with networking follow-up. First, start a "networking diary" — a small notebook of some sort where you can keep all your notes and action items when meeting with people. I jot down the date and the name and company/organization of the person I'm meeting with at the top of the page. Then I can easily reference the information we discussed rather than trying to remember or find it later. The second tip is to set a deadline for following up. I pull out my networking diary every Friday and follow-through on all of the promises I made and ideas I had. There is no question that follow-up is key to networking success, and a simple system can make a big difference.

Lorie Marrero

Creator of ClutterDiet.com and author ('The Clutter Diet: The Skinny on Organizing Your Home and Taking Control of Your Life')

"The Big Leap: Conquer Your Fears and Take Life to the Next Level" by Gay Hendricks was recommended to me by Renee Trudeau and I have since told a bazillion people to read it. It's one of those arm-twisting kinds of recommendations — "you HAVE TO read it so we can discuss it." That kind of book love is rare! What I love about it is it gives you a solid framework for understanding where your comfort zone is and why you need to bust through it — also why you're currently not doing that — and the concept of "Einstein Time," the idea that time is more flexible than we think and is actually created by you and is not the enemy.

Getting up early truly has also changed my life. I started doing it at the end of last year when I was finishing my book, and I just kept going. I get up now between 5 and 6 a.m. without an alarm clock. It gives me so much more time in my day to do things that are easy to skip, like exercising.

Thom Singer

Business development consultant, speaker and author ('Batteries NOT included: 66 Tips to Energize Your Career')

In 2009 I made the switch from a regular cell phone to an iPhone. This tool has made me more efficient. I worried about having full-time access to the Internet and social media, but it has allowed me to quickly see and respond to potential clients and others. While I am not a "gadget guy," I can't say enough good stuff about my iPhone.

Maura Nevel Thomas

Productivity trainer and owner of RegainYourTime.com

Multitasking has been a "hot" business skill for the past decade or more, but now that we've had time to live with it, scientists are discovering that in fact it's horrible for productivity. Multiple studies show that doing more than one thing at a time both increases the amount of time it takes to do something, and decreases the quality with which it's done. I've been reading these studies for years, and sharing them with my clients, but old habits are hard to break. I've discovered that mindfulness is the opposite of multitasking, and they are mutually exclusive. And the more I practice mindfulness, the happier I am: with my productivity, with the quality of my output, and with the caliber of ideas I produce. Multitasking has its place, but being thoughtful about when I engage in it is necessary. This is

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among the most significant concepts I've learned in 2009, and I plan to continue to practice and refine this habit in 2010 and beyond.

Renee Peterson Trudeau

Career and life balance coach/speaker, president of Career Strategists and author ('The Mother's Guide to Self-Renewal')

Taking five minutes (or 20 if possible) every morning before I start my day to close my eyes, get quiet, become present, connect with my breath and intentionally enter the day, has made a huge difference in my life.

You can even choose a theme for the day if you like.

I used to think you had to have a long, involved meditation practice, and that never meshed with my family's schedule. Research has shown, though, that taking as little as five or 10 minutes for quiet reflection before you begin your day can have a huge impact on how focused, clear and productive you feel.

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