UP front

Halloween resolutions. Not a thing. But I'm making them.

Nothing spooky. No promises to regularly appear in costume or commitments to continuous candy consumption. Rather, a redoubling of efforts around deferred aspirations conceived at the beginning of the current year.

If not now, when? The remainder of 2026 will sail by like a ghost ship that might never have been here at all if I don't grind for the next 60ish days. Doing holiday things – especially those that have fallen victim to chronic procrastination – creates a sense of frenetic busyness, but that activity distracts from mundane, pressing responsibilities. So our checklists remain unchecked. Remember the goals you set at the beginning of the year? I do…sort of. Today, I'll reconsider and reshape them and work towards their realization before they become a collection of guilt-provoking afterthoughts.

It's fall, so football is never far from mind. If you attend a college football game, no matter where, you're likely to see both team's players raise their hands in unison, each with four extended fingers, as the clock strikes 00 : 00 at the end of quarter number three. The tradition traces back to the 1960s. Legendary coaches like Bear Bryant at Alabama and Buck Nystrom, who developed formidable offensive lines, first at North Dakota State then Oklahoma then Michigan State, employed the four-finger concept to emphasize superior conditioning, mental toughness, and finishing what their teams had begun. During the 1980s, Miami ("The U") made the "four-finger salute" famous, using it to spur a dramatic comeback against Florida State on October 3, 1987, and signaling that the final period belonged to them. Subsequently, the gesture spread across the college football landscape at all levels, big schools and small, and eventually into the NFL as a universal symbol of endurance and grit.

Well…Imagine my four fingers are up, as what's left of the year determines if it's a win or a loss, of just another kiss-your-sister tie that leaves your longing for a fresh start. Unfortunately, as New York Mets and Jets fans (for example) know, a new season is often nothing more than a clean canvas on which to showcase your shortcomings en route to imminent heartbreak.

I teach a senior-level collegiate strategic management class. Each session, I like to use quotes from both famous and obscure people to illustrate concepts germane to the topics we'll cover that day.

Ever hear of Jim Rohn? I hadn't. He was an entrepreneur who ultimately achieved notoriety as a mentor to others who went on to recognizable success. Rohn said, "Discipline is the bridge between goals and accomplishment." Not particularly pithy, but undeniably true.

How about H.G. Wells? You know…the guy who, in the late 1800s, wrote *The War of the Worlds, The Time Machine,* and *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (and a bunch of other stuff). Wells proclaimed, "The only true measure of success is the ratio between what we might have done and what we might have been on the one hand, and the thing we have made and the things we have made of ourselves on the other." Perhaps a bit verbose, especially for a prominent author, but this was pre-Hemingway and you get the idea.

Strategic management scholars would tell you that setting goals, measuring outcomes, and adjusting dynamically lead to favorable results. There's plenty of literature that describes the elements of well-formed strategic goals. Among the recommended characteristics: They should be clear and specific, ambitious yet attainable, relatively few in number, and realistically actionable.

So, I'm making a list. I won't bore you further with the specifics, but it's already typed up. If I follow it and tenaciously muscle through the fourth quarter, I'll be primed and ready for kickoff when 2027 rolls around. And I have a feeling 2027 is going to be big.



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