



INSPIRES

INFORMS

INSTRUCTS

K-12 FOODSERVICE

# Step Into the **NEW YEAR With INTENTION**

## What will you explore in 2024?

BY JEN LEWI, MBA, CAE, ACC



Brought to you by SNA with the  
generous support of  
General Mills Foodservice



When it comes to various techniques that we can apply in our pursuit of professional growth and personal achievement goals, the **power of reflection** is usually underestimated. The act of reflecting is like using a magnifying glass to examine, without judgment, our thoughts, emotions, experiences, decisions and actions more closely to gain a better understanding of the past, present and future.

There is no more compelling milestone than the start of a new year for taking the time to reflect and set fresh intentions for the months ahead. “Intentions” and “resolutions” are, of course, largely synonymous—you can resolve to follow through on your intentions and you can have the best intentions supporting your resolutions. But I encourage resolution-haters to view the exercise in a different light. Applying the power of reflection can help you avoid setting vague goals (“prioritize work-life balance”) and creating unrealistic expectations (“write an emergency response procedures manual by March”), which are said to be two of the top reasons New Year’s resolutions fail. Instead, pausing to reset and reflect as you dive into

a new year allows you to assess whether your path and your goals and values are still aligned. Much of the attraction of setting intentions and resolutions is in the recognition that life is short, and we want to make the most of our time, our health, our resources and our capabilities. Are we doing that? How can we do it better? Reflection is a critical tool to help uncover the answers and make the changes that will be most impactful.

Although January 1 has come and gone, it is still early enough in 2024 to explore all or some of the following suggested exercises to ensure you are spending your time and energy on what’s most important to you. So, find a quiet space, grab a pen, paper and your favorite beverage, and read on.

## Look Back to Look Forward

Delving into the prior year's experiences, successes, joys and challenges allows us to create clarity and honesty about the past and develop a clear view of the desired path forward. One of the best ways to reflect on the past year is to review your calendar and identify the areas where you spent your time. Scroll through any online or printed calendars that you maintained for work, family and personal time.

As you review your calendars to reveal the rough proportions of time invested in meetings, project deadlines, social activities, care-giving, self-care and so on, to dig deeper by asking yourself the following questions in three key areas:

### Professional and Personal Growth

- What were your most significant achievements this past year? How did they contribute to your personal and/or professional growth? How did they contribute to your general sense of satisfaction or contentment?
- What hurdles did you encounter? How did you overcome them? What did you learn about yourself from how you overcame them?
- Assess the quality of your relationships at work and away from work. Have they grown stronger or faced challenges? Have you drifted apart due to passive inattention? What can you do to foster healthier connections in the new year?

### Mental and Emotional Well-Being

- How effectively did you manage periods of stress and high emotions? What strategies worked well, and which ones need improvement? Were they the same

or different depending on whether the stress was at work or home? Can you identify emotional triggers that cause stress or are the result of stress? How can you mitigate the impact of these triggers or prepare yourself to react differently?

- Reflect on your self-care routines or activities. Is self-care even a priority? Can you differentiate between healthy self-care steps and activities that are really self-sabotage in disguise? What practices help you feel genuinely relaxed and rejuvenated?

### Goals and Aspirations

- Did you set goals (or resolutions) for 2023? If so, which ones did you achieve? Which ones still needed to be fulfilled? Identify and analyze the reasons behind both outcomes.
- Do your short-term goals align with your values and long-term aspirations? What adjustments might be helpful in making them align better?

Take a few days to let all these reflections simmer a bit. The ones that resonate the strongest—those that keep bubbling up and commanding your attention—will be obvious, and they will help guide you in your final steps: *What new intentions or goals do you want to set for the upcoming year? How will these intentions help you live out your values and progress toward your aspirations?*

## From Intention to Action

Once you have set your intentions for 2024, reserve time to identify specific strategies and tactics that will help you translate those insights into action. Think through what



“ A vision board **inspires** and reminds you to **align your activities** with your **vision.** ”

you want to achieve by breaking down intentions into small actionable steps. The goal is to create a general compass for the year with tangible tasks that will transform your aspirations into reality over the into reality over the months to come.

Make periodic but regular reflection a priority. Perhaps it's daily or weekly, or it may be more reasonable for you to make monthly or quarterly. Choose an interval that works best for you. Plan on at least 30 minutes to write down thoughts and observations that will help you to continue to clarify insights, track your progress and make adjustments. Be sure to celebrate achievements, as well. The intent here is to foster a continuous growth cycle. Need ideas to jumpstart your reflection? Check out the Stop and Jot box on page 5.

Consider the value in seeking feedback from trusted peers, mentors or supervisors. Sometimes, we can't get enough personal distance to be objective in our reflections. External perspectives can often provide revelatory insights and unexpected opportunities. Be mindful, however, about setting clear boundaries around the feedback you seek. If you don't want or aren't prepared to process possible criticism, frame your questions to others with that guardrail in place.

It's also important to embrace flexibility and keep a spirit of adaptability when it comes to your action plans. Understand that there may be multiple

factors out of your control that affect your strategies and tactics—and these could change along the way. You might find your progress delayed or even derailed. Be prepared to pivot and devise a new approach. Your intention is still secure, but getting there might require a detour or two.

### **Define Your “Word of the Year”**

A simple—and fun—approach to keeping your intentions front and center throughout the year is choosing a word that represents your vision for 2024. This word acts like a theme for the year and reminds you of what's most important. It helps you establish definitions and boundaries that keep you focused on what you want to do more of—and less of—with your time, energy and resources.

How do you select that all-important word? A quick browser search will reveal a wide variety of internet word generators that leave it up to fate or quizzes with algorithms to assign a word based on your answers to personal questions. But this exercise is likely to be more meaningful if you put a bit of reflection into the process!

Compile a list of strong, vivid, impactful nouns, verbs and adjectives that evoke positive feelings for you. Start with some of the words shared by SNA leaders on page 6 or in the illustrations on pages 2 and 3 and it will help kickstart your brain without use of a thesaurus. Narrow the list to four or five words that resonate and that you can

# STOP AND JOT

Need some guidance in how to tap into the power of reflection? Here are questions to ask yourself whether you have 15 minutes waiting for an appointment or an hour with your weekend coffee. Use a notepad or a notes app on your phone—whatever is easiest and most comfortable.

## 2023

### Looking Back at 2023

- 1 What were standout moments of happiness, success or achievement?
- 2 What were the most demanding challenges you faced?
- 3 How did you manage to tackle the challenges?
- 4 Where did you feel you made the most impact?
- 5 What have you learned about yourself?
- 6 Was there a goal or intention you were not able to accomplish? Should this still be a priority for 2024, or is it time to let it go?
- 7 What is one all-encompassing word that summarizes the past year?

## 2024

### Looking Forward to 2024

- 1 Picture yourself at the end of December 2024, looking back at a fantastic year. What made it such a success?
- 2 Jot down 1-3 things you can commit to doing to help make that great year happen.
- 3 What are you willing to let go of, or say “no” to, in order to stay focused on having a great year?
- 4 What do you want more of in the coming year?
- 5 What do you want less of?
- 6 How will you take care of yourself in times of stress or uncertainty?
- 7 What is one all-encompassing word to summarize your intention for the coming year?

*Concept inspired by Sonali Arukar, InspiredLeader Coaching*

connect to your priorities and intentions for the year ahead. Reflect some more and then let your instincts make the final choice. What words call to you as something you need more of in your life?

Don't take this exercise too literally, especially if it feels difficult to narrow the list to a single choice. Adapt the exercise to meet your needs; perhaps what you really want is a motto or an acronym or a short set of words. The goal is to create an easily

memorable reference that serves as a guiding principle for all aspects of your life as you seek to enjoy a positive and productive 2024! This can even be an effective team-building exercise with your staff at work. Each member can select and share their own word and together you can identify a word to represent the goals for the entire team this year.

# A LITTLE INTENTION INSPIRATION

Several leaders on SNA's Board of Directors generously shared their own 2024 words, mottos and intentions.

“**SIMPLE**”

“My intention for 2024 is to keep it simple, regardless of the situation. We sometimes get caught up in all the details and the complexity of a situation, and we actually lose sight of the original intent. Simple does not mean I'll take shortcuts or a less serious approach. It means I'll keep it straightforward and **simple**.”—Chris Derico, SNS, SNA President

“**INSPIRED**”

“I would like to spend this next year doing things that inspire me both professionally and personally. The last few years have seen a lot of uncertainty, so a lot of forward movement just didn't happen. This year, I plan on being **inspired** and inspiring others to make 2024 a great year.”—Shannon Gleave, RDN, SNS, SNA President-Elect

“**RECONNECT**”

“My intention for the New Year is to reconnect with old friends that I haven't seen or heard from in years. Life sometimes gets so busy that we forget to stop and smell the roses. I intend to smell the roses and **reconnect**.”  
—Stephanie Dillard, MS, SNS, SNA Vice President

“**MORE IN 2024**”

“I am ready for an exciting year ahead! My motto is 'More in 2024'; it's all about doing more for school nutrition. I'm thrilled to take on new challenges, make a bigger impact and bring positive changes to the meals our students enjoy. I am looking forward to this journey to enhance nutrition, foster healthy eating habits and create a brighter future for our school lunch program. Together, we'll serve up **More in 2024!** #KeepPushing”  
—Warren DeShields, SNA Secretary/Treasurer

“**HOPEFUL**”

“I'm always very hopeful as we close out one year and begin another. There is something exhilarating about new beginnings. This year, I am **hopeful** as SNA drafts its 2024-27 Strategic Plan and we continue our work to provide professional development, promote school nutrition programs and advocate for more funding and Healthy School Meals For All Students. Personally, I'm thankful for many blessings and look forward to new experiences, especially travel adventures.”—Patricia Montague, FASAE, CAE, SNA Chief Executive Officer





BRING ON BREAKFAST.

# SPOTLIGHT ON INNOVATION

## Start the New Year Strong with NEW, Innovative Products and Solutions

We know you go above and beyond every day to offer your students nutritious meals essential for their success. Explore new ways to:

- Boost participation
- Do more with yogurt
- Expand grab-n-go options

DISCOVER  
MORE >>

NOURISH

KIDS for

WHAT'S NEXT &

