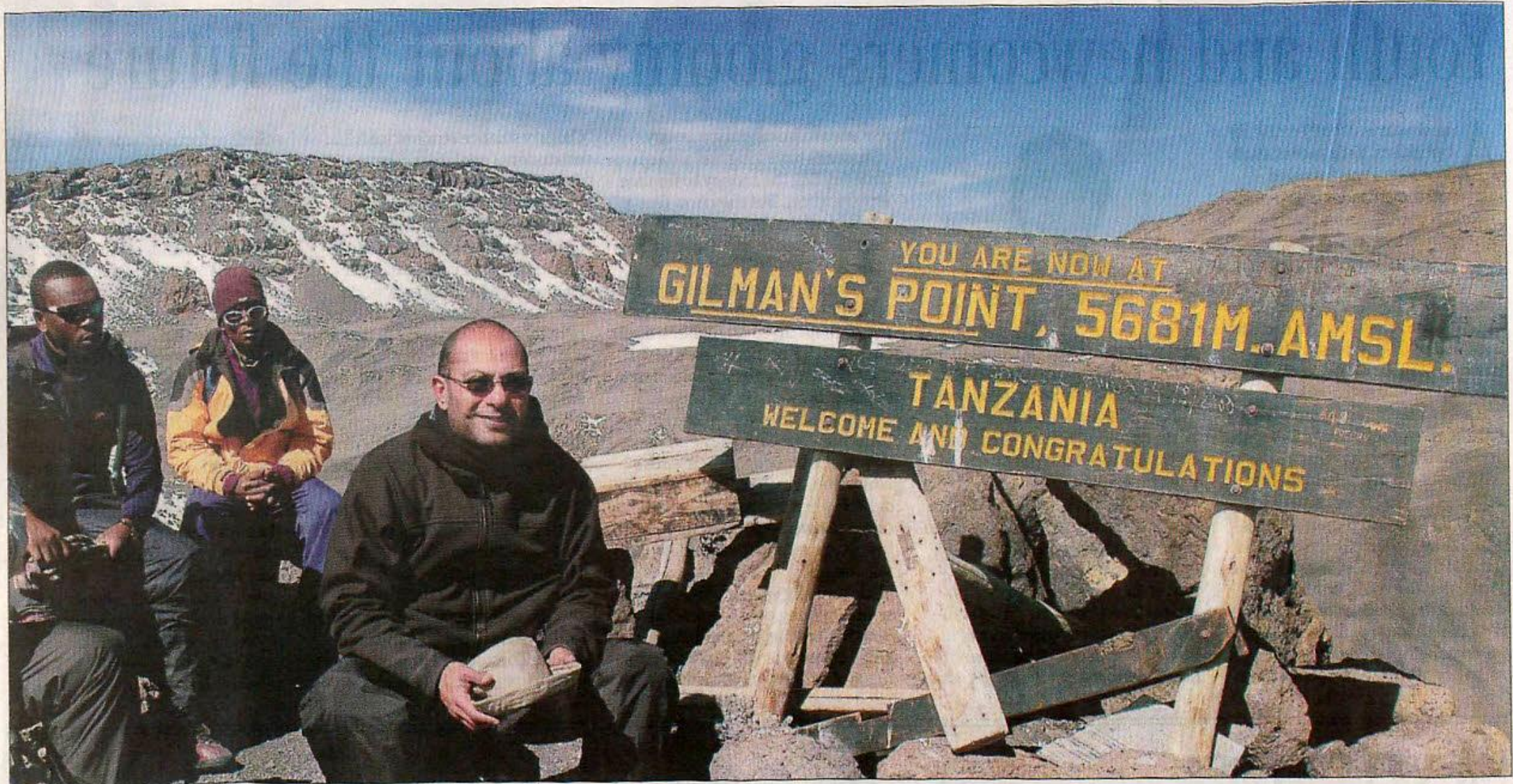


SPECIAL REPORT ON SETTING GOALS



After two decades of business success, Karim Ismail, right, realized his health and personal life were suffering. So he adjusted his goals, culminating with a 2005 climb up Mt. Kilimanjaro.

Goals are useless without a plan

New Year's resolutions usually fall flat because we have no idea how to make them happen

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

With the blurry celebrations of New Year's behind us, this first week of 2011 offers a chance to revisit resolutions.

However ebulliently those intentions of bettering ourselves were initially declared, a sober second thought often reveals that our lofty goals were made without any idea of how to meet them.

"If you ask a person how they would go about constructing a building, they'd say they'd need a set of plans," says Karim Ismail, CEO of Avidium, a Toronto-based company that provides performance training for business professionals, and author of *Keep Any Promise*.

"They'd say they need a blueprint; something both conceptual — how the building looks — and with details, right down to the door knobs. People want to have magnificent lives but they often don't have a plan for how to achieve that."

In order for goals to be meaningful, Ismail says three requirements must be met: They should be as specific as possible, there must be a plan on how to accomplish them, and they should be compelling to the person setting them.

That last point is arguably the

most important, Ismail says, (such as the difference between "I *should* quit smoking" and "I *want* to quit smoking"). We have much more success accomplishing things we care about. The perfunctory nature of New Year's resolutions is part of why Ismail has little use for them.

"Resolutions are not a very good way of reaching goals," he says. "It's a wish list; it has no structure, no framework for momentum."

However empty they may be, the statement of resolutions is often indicative of a desire to make personal changes.

"You have to first visualize a terrific tomorrow. That sets up your frame of mind," Ismail contends. "Then we need to figure out how we will achieve those goals, and why."

Ismail has not made any resolutions this year. Nor did he last year. For him, the process of self-improvement exists on a continuum. Focus and discipline — not the date — are paramount.

Not everyone agrees that New Year's resolutions are necessarily doomed. Ivana Pejakovic, a life coach in Toronto, says the occasion has its benefits.

"It's a new beginning; people feel energized and they want to make changes," she says, adding that if the

BROKEN DREAMS

Here are the top 10 New Year's resolutions people make, but fail to keep.

1. Lose weight and get in better physical shape.
2. Stick to a budget.
3. Reduce my debt.
4. Enjoy more quality time

with family and friends.

5. Find my soul mate.
6. Quit smoking.
7. Find a better job.
8. Learn something new.
9. Volunteer and help others.
10. Get organized.



goal is something a person feels compelled to achieve, he or she is unlikely to fail.

On his website, Ismail has posted a quiz to help people figure out their strengths and weaknesses. It is divided into categories, such as relationships, finances, spirituality, etc. Within each, you are asked to rank your happiness and successes. Once the quiz is complete, you can see which categories require the most attention.

"If there are seven key areas, people often find they are doing well in some and not so well in others. So in addition to giving pause for reflection, the quiz can help people see the one or two areas in their lives where they aren't doing so well."

Ismail's method of reflection, assessment, visualizing and strategizing has worked for him. After experiencing much professional success in his 20s and 30s, Ismail found himself feeling lost in his 40s. He

realized his relationships with friends and family were suffering, and a problem with chronic back pain had worsened to the point where he could barely walk from his front door to the driveway.

"I asked myself how I could have had such successes professionally, and yet, my personal life, my health, seemed so compromised," he admits. "When I thought about it, I realized I always had a formula for how to accomplish what I wanted professionally, but that I didn't have one for life. So I applied that formula to my personal life and I began to see some changes."

Those changes culminated with Ismail climbing Mount Kilimanjaro in 2005.

Jordan Peterson, a psychology professor at the University of Toronto, uses a similar approach to help his first-year students close the gap between who they are and who they want to be.

His program has three parts.

The first is largely autobiographical, designed to help students figure out who they are and where they are in relation where they'd like to be.

The second asks them to describe their virtues and identify how these characteristics have benefitted them.

The last part asks them to imagine their lives in three to five years.

"What we've found is that students who've completed the program have a much lower likelihood of dropping out and that their grade point averages have increased by around 30 per cent," Peterson says. "The effect has been huge, bigger than what we had hoped for. But it makes sense, it is a universal psychological truth that we have to exist within a structure, otherwise we're lost."

Peterson explains that by establishing goals and devising a plan to meet them, what we gain extends beyond the simple achievement of the goal.

"We've found that happiness is relative to our goals, rather than coming from the thrill of accomplishment," he says. "If you have a goal and you can see yourself moving towards it, you are more likely to feel productive and positive. What people don't always realize, too, is that goals protect from anxiety."