Part 1. How would you sum up the past year? Choose the phrase that fits best, or come up with your own, and explain why. Which phrase definitely doesn't fit?

A year that was…

a mixed bag · a rollercoaster · a year of two halves · plain sailing · a baptism of fire · a slow burn · a turning point · treading water · a breath of fresh air · a bit of a write-off

Part 2. Take stock of each area of your life. Did things take off, tick over or go downhill? Tick one for each, then talk about the area that changed the most, for better or worse.

	Took off	*Ticked over*	*Went downhill*
Work or studies			
Relationships and friendships			
Health and energy			
Home life			
Money			
Learning something new			
Fun and free time			

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Part 3. Hand out some honest awards for the past year. Make a quick note for each, then explain your winners. Which award was the hardest to give?

Award	*And the winner is…*
Best decision	
Biggest waste of time	
Most overrated	
Unsung hero	
Plot twist of the year	
Money well spent	

Part 4. Discuss the questions.

- When you look back on a year, do you tend to look back fondly, or focus on what went wrong?
- Is a calendar year a meaningful way to measure your life, or just an arbitrary line in the sand?
- When you take stock, what matters more: what you achieved, or how you felt?
- Why do some years fly by while others seem to drag on forever?
- Do you remember the big events of a year, or the small moments in between?

Part 5. Write three newspaper headlines for your past year: the front-page story, the one buried on page 12, and the one that never made the papers. Then tell the story behind each one.

For example

Against All Odds, Local Man Finally Finishes Kitchen · Woman, 34, Still Insists She'll Start Running "Next Week" · Quiet Year Turns Out to Be Exactly What Was Needed

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Part 6. What would you do? Choose an option or come up with a better one. Be honest about what you'd actually do.

At a family dinner, everyone goes round the table sharing the highlight of their year. Yours has been quietly difficult.

1. *Put on a brave face and mention something small but genuine.*
2. *Keep it vague: "Oh, you know, a bit of everything."*
3. *Be honest. These are the people who should know.*
4. *Deflect with a joke and pass it on.*

A friend posts their end-of-year round-up: promotion, marathon, new flat, holiday of a lifetime. Your year feels like treading water by comparison.

1. *Scroll past and get on with your evening.*
2. *Congratulate them, and mean it.*
3. *Message them to catch up properly, beyond the highlights.*
4. *Mute them until January.*

Your manager asks for an end-of-year self-review and says, "Be honest about what didn't go well."

1. *Put a positive spin on everything.*
2. *Be completely candid and let the chips fall where they may.*
3. *Own one real mistake and show what you learned from it.*
4. *Bury the problems in the small print.*

Part 7. Read the two views. Which is closer to your own? What would you have to concede to the other side?

Viewpoint A	**Viewpoint B**
If you never take stock, you just keep making the same mistakes, and you never notice how far you've come. An honest look back at the end of the year is one of the most useful things you can do for yourself.	*End-of-year reviews are navel-gazing with a deadline. Life doesn't fit neatly into 12 months, and dwelling on what's been and gone rarely changes anything. Better to just get on with it.*

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Part 8. Do you agree, disagree or partly agree? Explain why.

- Hindsight is a wonderful thing, but it's also a bit of a liar.
- Most people overestimate what they can do in a year and underestimate what they can do in ten.
- A year where nothing much happened can still be a good year.
- Regret says more about who you are now than who you were then.
- Social media has turned the end of the year into a competition.
- It's healthier to look forward than to look back.

Part 9. Tell the story of a moment from the past year that, with the benefit of hindsight, mattered far more than it seemed at the time.

Think about:

- What happened, and what you made of it at the time
- When you realised it was more significant
- What it set in motion
- Whether you'd do anything differently

Reflection

Complete the sentences in your own words.

1. If I had to sum up the past year in one phrase, it would be…
2. Something I'm quietly proud of is…
3. With the benefit of hindsight, I'd…
4. An expression from today I'd like to start using is…

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