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Year-End Game Honors Life's Star Players

By MICHAEL LEVINE

I hate games, even "Monopoly." And yet, for the last five years, there is one I wait all year long to play.

I call it "Person of the Year." It was inspired by Time magazine's annual year-end issue, done since 1927, which features the editors' choice of who has most affected the world—for good or bad—in the preceding year.

My game asks a similar question, only on a personal level. Which man or woman has had the most impact—good or bad—on my life over the last 12 months? Will it be a family member, an author—perhaps one no longer living—my therapist, a co-worker or maybe a woman who has simply broken my heart? It could even be myself or God.

Of course, some years are easier than others. Marriage, divorce and death make some years' choices clarion. The selection comes as fast as a lottery winner makes new friends. But you can't be too comforted by an effortless selection: A decision that seems to march toward you with the sound of a trumpet one year may come with the strain of a piccolo the next.



As I consider people, I look for certain qualities. Have they made a lasting impact on my life or participated in a larger lesson? I invariably wonder if this person will be a major player, or even a participant, in my life five years from now.

In sharing my game with others, I love to see how people react. Most are surprised at how difficult the game is. They'll say, "Gee, I have to think about it because while this person had a massive effect on this particular month, will it be lasting?" What's so fascinating is that they often end up sharing the game with others.

Carefully considering my annual lode-star has caused me much reflection. When you have a humbling experience, you tend to look at the world with gentler eyes. The process also reminds me that each of us writes the script of our life. Except for rare catastrophic events, we get to decide if the script is overwhelmingly a comedy, a drama or perhaps even a soap opera. And further, the game teaches that we get to cast and determine the size of the roles of the people in our lives. Perhaps next year we should write larger or smaller parts for certain people.

After agonizing over my choice, I then ask myself a second question as part of the game, one that takes even more courage: Am I anyone else's person of the year?

Michael Levine is a public relations executive and author.