

## Futurist: Hang onto the old

■ Expert says trends aren't as important as family, friends

### MILWAUKEE

Who doesn't wonder on New Year's Day what the future holds?

But rather than study tea leaves, why not talk to a guy who by his title would seem to have all the answers.

His name is David Zach of Milwaukee, and he calls himself one of a handful of professionally trained futurists on the planet.



**ANNA MARIE LUX**  
BETWEEN THE LINES

Truth is, his hobby got out of control.

A few years ago, Zach earned a master's degree in Studies of the Future from the University of Houston.

"I didn't know how to make a living at it," the 48-year-old admits. "When I told people what I did, they either looked at me blankly or asked me to talk to their club or charity."

He did it for free at first.

Then, he started charging to explore the age-old question: "Where do we go from here?"

Zach (rhymes with lock) studies newspapers, magazines, books and online material for patterns and anomalies. He looks at what people are paying attention to and how they spend their money. Then he offers insight about what lies ahead to companies, schools and groups.

He's a popular speaker and has been on programs with Mike Ditka, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton and Newt Gingrich.

That means he's either on his way up or on his way down, he says.

The Monroe native tells you up front that he knows that he can't predict the future, but there are obviously fads and trends we can spot.



Zach

If you press him on technology, he might remind you that microchips continue to double in power at an amazing rate, making the com-

puters of tomorrow almost inconceivably powerful.

Or he might talk about how we've cracked the human genetic code, and now we're rapidly figuring out what each sector means.

Or he might mention those little gadgets called "iPods" and how they're revolutionizing how we distribute information.

Then he might discuss something called a "cPod," a device used by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to monitor the health of astronauts in space.

Someday, an elderly person might wear a version of the device, and it will immediately tell a care-giver if the person has fallen or had a heart attack.

This is where Zach switches gears and steps back from the gee-whiz forecasts.

Instead of rambling on about technology, he reminds us not to lose our humanity in the rush to the future.

"If you knew your parents were going to be monitored 24 hours a day, seven days a week, would you call them as often?" he asks. "New technology provides us with choices. But do we know how to make responsible choices?"

He suggests some things to keep grounded in the new year.

First, put yourself on a media diet. The news is seductive. It pulls you in, but: "Just say 'no.'"

"On some level, we can become far too obsessed with things that don't make that much difference," he says. "We pay too much attention to the news and not enough to the 'olds.'"

The "olds" are those things that haven't changed since yesterday—history, faith, family, to name a few.

He suggests that we're flooded with information but starving for wisdom. Periodically, we should ask ourselves: "What would my grandfather think about this?"

Second, he declares that work is overrated.

"I've been warned by people not to say this," he says. "But work has become the center of our lives, and it's pathetic."

Work is important, but it's not nearly as important as family, friends and community.

"I talk to intelligent people who work 10 or 11 hours a day," Zach says. "I hear them say things like, 'The work has to get done.' But where do you draw the line?"

Finally, he urges everyone to keep learning.

"Part of my emphasis as a good futurist is not what will happen, but how to think about what will happen," he says.

Too many people are unaware of emerging technologies. That approach simply won't work in the world we're building, he insists. People need to ask questions about the future. They never should leave discussions about tomorrow to the so-called experts.

"The great failure of the average person is to not take personal responsibility for the future," he insists.

"When I'm in Milwaukee, I often overhear discussions about the weather. But there's so much more going on out there. We're now required to think deeper."

If someone lectures on a current topic, go hear it. If the library gets a book on a hot issue, read it. If you have access to the Internet, find out how new technologies work.

Zach offers sound advice for the next 365 days:

"This is your future," he says. "You own it. Get involved in how it plays out."

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