

The Tricky Business of New Year's Resolutions

Every new year sparks a lot of talk about resolutions: new or revisited commitments to things we'd like to achieve in the coming year. The turn of the year is a great opportunity to take stock of where we are relative to where we want to be. An important consideration though, and one that is often overlooked, is HOW to effect the changes we say we'd like to make. Recently I asked a friend what her new year's resolution is. "Same as always," she replied, "exercise more and lose weight." Most of us can relate to that one! And most of us can relate to recommitting to something year after year because we haven't been able to meet our goals. Why are so many new year's resolutions doomed to be discarded by the end of January? Because change is hard! Without concrete tools to support us in identifying goals and staying with them we end up making a lot of resolutions—without necessarily making a lot of progress.

Begin with understanding

A great place to start in making and sticking with resolutions is to understand what you are striving for. Knowing what you want and why you want it makes it much easier to stay focused, especially when keeping the resolution gets hard. Below is a brief checklist of questions to help you get started:

1. What specifically am I trying to achieve?
2. Why am I trying to achieve this?
3. Am I willing to make changes to my thought and/or behavior patterns in order to achieve this?

Let's stay with the example of my friend's resolution to exercise more and lose weight. She might answer the above questions as follows:

1. I want to lose 15 pounds.
2. I want to lose 15 pounds because I am going to Hawaii in the spring and want to feel good in a bathing suit.
3. It depends on what kind of changes we're talking about.

This is a great start. The intention is identified, the reason for the intention has been clearly articulated and she is open to making some changes but wants to know what those changes will have to be. Now, come February when enthusiasm for dieting and exercising starts to wane, she can refer back to these answers and be reminded of why she took this task on in the first place. STOP! Sounds easy, right? Is it? No, it is not. Why? We humans are creatures of habit. In order to effect change we have to change our habits. Most of us fall right back into old patterns unless we have tools and support to help us with our battle against the old ways. Here are some tricks that will support you in following through.

Tools and tricks

Once you are clear about what you want and why you are ready to set off on the journey to achievement. Below are 8 tools you can use to help you maintain energy and enthusiasm along the way...

1. Set goals you know you can achieve
Goal setting can be tricky business. Most people want big results and want them quickly – this is a challenging combination. Setting goals that are unrealistic leads to frustration and makes maintaining commitment to them difficult. Be kind to yourself. Make it possible to win.
2. Take responsibility for the outcomes of your actions
Here's the bad news: it's all up to you. Here's the good news: it's all up to you. The more you can take responsibility for what you have/don't have and what you want/don't want the more control you will have over the results in your life. How much weight you lose, how you feel in a bathing suit, whether or not you go to Hawaii are all up to you.

3. Envision yourself at your goal

This simple practice takes 1 minute and, when done regularly and consistently, is a powerful tool for helping you meet your goals. Creating a vivid image in your mind of where you want to be makes it easier to believe that it really can happen.

4. Post reminders

Come visit a collage workshop to create an personal visual reminder of what you are working toward! Spending an afternoon focusing on your resolution will deepen your commitment. Then, hang the collage up where you will see it every day.

4. Enlist support

Tell the people in your life about what you are trying to achieve and ask them to support you. Everyone needs cheerleaders as well as people to talk to when the going gets tough. If your friends and loved ones are not able to help you in this way find support elsewhere (a support group or a coach).

5. Don't tempt yourself

If you want to lose weight stay away from the bakery. If you want to exercise more don't turn on the television. Give yourself a break! Don't create situations that will prevent you from attaining your resolution.

6. Find replacements for unhealthy habits

The makers of Nicorette capitalized on this idea by making gum you can chew instead of smoking cigarettes. Maybe you can take the stairs instead of the elevator or walk around the block at lunchtime instead of surfing the web. Try to find an activity that will support your resolution. And don't forget to implement it!

7. Make it fun

Everyone is more motivated to participate in something if it's fun. Perhaps you can turn your resolution into a game or loving competition. Maybe your resolution involves learning some-

thing new or meeting new people. Whatever it is you are trying to achieve making it fun will be more...well...fun.

8. Reward yourself

Acknowledging achievements, even with smaller steps taken en route to a larger goal, is extremely important for both morale and motivation. Giving yourself a gift as a reward for hard work will inspire you to keep going and encourage you to take note of how far you have traveled.

Don't forget: you always have the option to change your mind and dedicate your energy to something else. If you find that, even after applying all of these tricks, you are still unable to stay on track you may want to rethink your resolution one more time. You may decide that this particular resolution requires more effort than you are willing to dedicate. That is perfectly fine, as long as it comes from a place of decision making (rather than just forgetting about it) and you can feel peaceful in your decision. Once you give yourself permission to drop this one goal you free up energy that can be used elsewhere. Note that when I say "permission" I mean that you fulheartedly embrace the consequences of dropping the resolution. If dropping your resolution makes you feel like a loser or failure you are still struggling with it and not at peace. In this case, I recommend hiring a coach. With the guidance of a coach you can find clarity on what truly matters to you and work on how to successfully implement the changes necessary to achieve your goals and make your vision come true.

Best of luck and happy new year!

