

Reaching Your New Year's Resolutions



It's that time of year again! Time to reflect on the past year and look forward to the one ahead with a renewed sense of purpose. Many of us try to formalize this chance for a fresh start by making New Year's resolutions. Unfortunately for some, many of those resolutions will be broken by February, and the New Year's optimism is traded in for feelings of guilt and failure. But it doesn't have to be that way.

One study set out to understand the factors that best predict success in keeping New Year's resolutions. The study found that "resolutions are a process, not a one-time effort that offers people a chance to create new habits." The results of the study show that to be successful with your own resolutions you must have a strong initial commitment to make a change, develop strategies to deal with problems that will come up, and regularly track your progress. The more reviewing and monitoring you do, the better you will do.¹

Before you make your resolutions this year, consider the following suggestions aimed at helping you increase your resolution success rate.

- **Think about *reaching* your resolution, not *keeping* it.** By definition, a resolution is something we intend to do - a goal to reach. A resolution is a *process*, not an event. Think of your resolution as something to strive for, not a pedestal to fall from.
- **Keep your resolutions to a minimum.** Many people fail to reach their resolutions because they make too many to keep. It's not realistic to strive for several major life changes all at once and expect to be successful. Instead, pick only one or two for starters. And remember - there's nothing magical about January 1st - it's just a natural starting point. You can always decide to make other resolutions later in the year.
- **Make a plan.** Develop a plan including your goals and the steps it will take to reach it. Be specific and modify the plan as often as needed. Make a list of the benefits you will receive if you reach your goal, and the risks if you don't.
- **Start small.** Set realistic goals so you don't set yourself up for disappointment. For example, "I will walk briskly for 30 minutes three days this week" is a much more attainable goal than "I will run a marathon in two months."
- **Reward yourself.** Just as it is hard to begin to change a behavior, it is equally as difficult to maintain it. Reward yourself for any improvements you make, and monitor your progress frequently to help keep you on track.
- **Get help.** Ask friends, family, and anyone else around you to help support you in achieving your goals.

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Following these suggestions can help you keep your resolutions from becoming a set-up for failure, and instead turn them into daily opportunities to move forward and reap the rewards you had hoped to in this new year.

References

- ¹Marlatt, A. & Miller, E. (1998). How to keep up with those New Year's resolutions: Researchers Find commitment is the secret to success. University of Washington Press Release. Retrieved December 16, 2004 from <http://www.washington.edu/newsroom/news>
- ²Schwarz, J. (1997). How to keep up with those New Year's resolutions, researchers find commitment is the secret to success. Retrieved December 12, 2006 from <http://www.uwnews.org/article.asp?articleID=3002>

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