

New Year, New You: Make Your Resolution a Life-changing Event

Once you have decided on a New Year's resolution, it is your job to actually implement the change into your life. While this is the most challenging part of the process, there are some things you can do to help make your resolution a reality.

Put it in writing: Writing down your goal on a piece of paper can often increase its significance. Once written down, your idea is no longer just a wish floating about in your head; it has more permanence, and you will view it as having greater value and importance. Think of it as the adult equivalent of a letter to Santa, only in this case, the "something you really want" is a gift you are going to give yourself, not something anybody else can give you.

Develop a plan for reaching your goal: It will be hard to achieve your goal if you do not develop a plan of action. Take time to write down the steps you are going to take to implement the change you want to make in your life. For example, if your resolution is to exercise more, write down exactly how you will do it. Ideas could include:

- I will bike to work two days per week.
- I will walk to the store instead of driving.
- I will walk up the stairs instead of taking the elevator.
- I will work out four days per week.
- I will exercise during my lunch break three days per week.

Use notes to remind yourself: Many people find it useful to leave notes to themselves in places they commonly look to reinforce the change they want to make. A good place to leave a note would be on the refrigerator door if your goal is to eat less. Put a reminder on your alarm clock if your goal is to exercise when you wake up in the morning. If your goal is to spend less time on the Internet, put a note on your computer monitor reminding you to log off after 15 minutes. Reinforcing your resolution with small, subtle reminders will help keep your goal always within sight.

Be realistic: Do not make a resolution that is unrealistic in scope or that will cause you to experience an undue amount of difficulty, problems or pain. If your resolution is something that you could not reasonably achieve, it will be easy for you to say, "Forget it," and move on with your life without trying to change. So instead of saying, "My resolution is to run a four-minute mile," try jogging four times a week.

Plan for the entire year: Many popular resolutions (like to lose weight, exercise more and get out of debt) will not be achieved in a few days or weeks. These changes are often month-long, year-long, and sometimes even life-long transformations. They need to be planned accordingly. For example, if your resolution is to exercise more, you might work to achieve this goal by joining a gym for the winter months, jogging in the spring, swimming in the summer, and then taking up cross-country skiing next winter. Plans like these are often successful because the variety of activities helps keep people interested in the process. Also, by breaking complicated issues like getting out of debt into smaller, easier-to-handle pieces, the process will seem less like an insurmountable mountain and more like a series of rolling, yet still challenging, hills.

Allow yourself to make mistakes: Do not be too rigid in the application of your resolution. Nobody is perfect, so you have to accept that stumbles will happen in the implementation of any meaningful resolution. For example, if you decide to stop smoking, and then on January 23 you give in to temptation and have a cigarette, do not say to yourself, "Oh well, so much for quitting," and start smoking a pack a day again. Just because you have one cigarette after going 23 days without smoking does not mean your resolution was a failure. It means that what you are trying to change is a very difficult, addictive habit. Accept your misstep and get back to implementing your change.