

Making it Stick

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Originally published in *Coast Magazine*, January 2006

New Year's resolutions are often made with the best of intentions. Unfortunately, too few result in lasting changes. One reason for this is the perfectionistic tendency to set unrealistic goals, inevitably leading to failure. But even when the goal is realistic, lack of discipline may undermine our efforts. Feelings of shame, anxiety and frustration may result, leading us to try even harder. The cycle repeats itself, and we become chronically dissatisfied. Follow these steps for a better way to make, keep and benefit from your resolutions:

- Imagine the behavior changes you would have to make to achieve several resolutions and the results of the changed behavior.
- Decide which of the resolutions is meaningful enough to warrant disciplining yourself.
- Choose an end-goal. Your goal should be related to your past successful performance. Don't set a self-sabotaging goal or one you've never been able to achieve.
- Outline incremental steps to reach your endgoal. The sub-goals should be moderate, realistic and attainable.
- Set a realistic time limit for your resolution. A resolution that lasts too long or is indefinite will fail. Bad: "I'll go to the gym twice a week for a year." Better: "I'll go twice a week for two months."
- Set a "good enough" performance standard for your end-goal and subgoals. These should be written, objective, and measurable. Accept the fact that you won't be perfect and allow yourself to feel good about attaining sub-goals. Example: Your goal may be to write a full page every night in your journal – but writing four nights a week for two months might be "good enough."
- Carefully consider what you need to do to achieve your goal. Must you purchase equipment of some kind? Sign up for a class? What support do you need from other people? What fears and anxieties must you face and overcome? Will you tolerate discomfort and not expect to feel good instantly?
- Allow for slip-ups non-compliance or non-performance. Most resolutions are abandoned at the very first slip-up. Expect to slip up occasionally without abandoning the effort or tormenting yourself with shame.
- If a new life-pattern is needed, set a schedule and stick to it. Sure, it's easy to say but tough to do. That's where discipline comes in.
- Accept help when you need it. If you're resolved to break a strong, long-standing habit, get professional and/or group support.
- Reward yourself in some small way for achieving your sub-goals. Allowing yourself to feel satisfied and nourished when you reach these goals will increase your confidence and motivation for reaching your end-goal.

Once you reach your end-goal, allow yourself to feel good. Reward yourself again. If you wish, renew your resolution. Your best bet is to stick with the original program or accelerate only moderately. Guard against unrealistically inflating your follow-up goal.