

A New Year A NEW YOU

By Virginia Pillsbury

Stop sabotaging your resolutions and make your New Year's goals stick this year...for real!

Happy New Year! It's time to wipe the slate clean...take advantage of a "do over"...start with a blank canvas. As 2009 steps off the showroom floor, another year beckons us to start fresh. It's time to break old habits and make new, better and healthier ones.



Justin A. D'Arienzo, Psy.D., ABPP

This time of year, many people get caught up in the joy of habitual resolution making to lower personal debt, lose the extra pounds, exercise, quit smoking or stop some other unhealthy habit. But how many people actually succeed?

According to Justin A. D'Arienzo, Psy.D., ABPP, a very small percentage of those who make resolutions successfully follow through on them. "People fail because they want instant success and to feel better immediately," says D'Arienzo. "Resolutions require change and change causes deprivation; people get unhappy and go right back to the status quo of their lives."

The fear that can surround making a goal is real. "Something has to change when you set out to make your resolution," says Ellen Williams, Ph.D., director of behavioral health at Baptist Medical Center. "People are afraid of change. If you are going to make a change then you've got to be willing to let something go," she says. "And change is the process of letting something go and putting something else in its place." You have to be honest with yourself about what you want and what you are willing to give up in order to get what you want.

STEPS TO RESOLUTION SUCCESS

Resolution failure can also come as the result of doing something only to please someone else. "When you're not really sincere about making an effortful change, that makes it hard to be successful," says D'Arienzo. Others may rationalize their behavior and put themselves in situations where they find an excuse to fail. "People sabotage

their resolutions because they are not ready to make the changes required," he adds.

Another way of looking at resolution-making is to think of it as setting a personal goal. "Resolutions can be fun. They can give a sense of purpose and newness," says Williams. "The biggest mistake when making a New Year's resolution is stopping at the goal. You need a plan." That plan should include how you are going to work toward your goal, how you are going to monitor those steps, how you are going to know when you've reached your goal and how you are going to maintain once you're there.

"Some people write down their resolutions," says Williams, who suggests that along with listing your resolutions, you also plan your method as well as ways to monitor your progress. "Flesh it out," she says. "If your resolution is to exercise more, then talk to a trainer or a physician and figure out what exercise might work best for you," Williams explains. "Do things that you know have worked in the past, and make sure that you avoid what you keep failing at." So if you join a health club every January and then stop going to the gym after a few weeks, don't take that step again this year, even if it may seem like a logical thing to do.

"Monitoring is the hard part," says Williams. People like to give a first effort and then the effort drops off. "Tweak the plan so that it works for you," she suggests. "See if you can get it closer to something that you can stick with." For example, if you've decided to run for 25 minutes three times a week and it drops to twice weekly because finding weekend running time is hard for you, then you've got to figure out another time to fit it in. "Give yourself feedback, revise your plan, and then stick to it as much as you can," says Williams, who also suggests revisiting your resolution list quarterly.

REMOVING BARRIERS

What if you do end up sabotaging yourself and quit? Williams suggests removing barriers to success. "Try to look at why you failed," she says, "and then remove that barrier if possible." Was your goal unimportant to you? Did you make the resolution for

HOW TO BE A RESOLUTION FAILURE

Making resolutions under the following circumstances or in the following ways are a setup for disaster.

- Waiting until the last minute and quickly making your resolutions at 11:59 p.m. New Year's Eve, or even worse, making a resolution the next morning while battling a New Year's day hangover.
- Super-sizing your resolution so it is an impossible feat, such as a promise to be debt-free in six weeks or a decision to lose 10 pounds a week for a month.
- Focusing on resolution "daydreams" by not being specific about the change you want to make. Simply saying "I'll exercise more" or "I'll try to stop smoking" is a setup to fail, as that's often as far as the resolution gets.
- Expecting immediate results or having high and unrealistic expectations. If you haven't lost three dress sizes in the first week, you now have a good reason to give up.
- Throwing in the towel too soon just because you missed one exercise session or made one credit card purchase.
- Not creating a real plan. You may have a great goal, but if you haven't thought through an action plan to get to that goal, chances are you won't succeed.
- Keeping your resolutions a secret. If you don't tell anyone your goals, then you have no accountability and no incentive to keep your resolution.

HOW TO GET READY FOR SERIOUS CHANGE

Making your resolutions stick requires a little pre-work. Here are a few strategies to implement before embarking on a new path.

- Consider the consequences. "People have to know and see evidence of serious consequences before they are ready to change," says Justin A. D'Arienzo, Psy.D., ABPP. "Maybe it's that your partner isn't happy and is nagging and has a bad attitude." Or maybe it's the physical consequences of a health issue or bad habit that makes you commit to change.
- Weigh the pros and cons. Make a list with a pro and a con column for keeping your resolution. "This is a great way of getting over the hump," says D'Arienzo. "Visualize what your life could be like and think of your resolution in terms of no longer being bound by that thing that drags you down."
- Stay Positive. Focus on the victories and relish the moments of success instead of looking at your failures.

HOW TO MAINTAIN YOUR RESOLUTION

Success never happens overnight. Keep these strategies in mind as you work to keep your resolutions.

- Easy does it during the holidays. "Start the change early and you won't feel so deprived," says D'Arienzo. "It's no wonder that people fail after they've binged on food, overspent and neglected to exercise for the last two months."
- Embrace the discomfort that your resolution may present. "Look at it as nature's way of confirming that you are in the change process," says D'Arienzo.
- Recognize that it's not always an easy path. "Change requires perseverance," says D'Arienzo.
- Visualize. Think about and actually see in your mind the way you could look or feel physically and/or emotionally as the result of successfully sticking with your resolution. D'Arienzo says, "Visualize your life as it could be and let that be a motivation."
- Show up. "Capitalize on keeping a momentum going and celebrate the small victories along the way," suggests D'Arienzo.
- Accept imperfections. Just know that you're not going to perfectly adjust to your resolutions and accept when and if you backslide. "If you fail, start again and don't use it as an excuse to fall back into old bad habits," says D'Arienzo.
- Accountability. Ask a trusted friend to be your accountability and support buddy.
- Resolution reminder. Every three or four months, or more often if you need to, revisit your resolution and remind yourself again of the positive goals ahead of you. **HS**

"While some people are very self-disciplined, others need external structure to help them."

—Ellen Williams, Ph.D.



Ellen Williams, Ph.D.

yourself or to please someone else? Did you go back to old habits? Or was the goal just too hard? "Try to figure out why the goal didn't resonate with you," says Williams.

You may discover that your original resolution is neither attainable nor reasonable. Did you bite off more than you can chew? Look at the facts of the change you want to make rather than your emotions about wanting to make the change, suggests Williams. What is a reasonable goal? If you are trying to down-size your debt, then figure out how much money you can reasonably put aside each month.

It is hard to make the decision to change. "It is easy to get caught up in the 'can't' and face failure over and over," says Williams. "While some people are very self-disciplined, others need external structure to help them." If you require support, then enroll in a formal program, get help with your long-range plan, ask a friend to be your accountability and encouragement buddy or talk to a health professional.

And as you go down the path to positive, healthy change, be sure to reward yourself! "Rewards work better than punishment," says Williams. "And reward yourself in a way that isn't related to the goal." For example, if you've followed your workout plan for six weeks, then treat yourself to a new workout outfit, get a pedicure or download new music to your iPod. D'Arienzo adds, "If you're on a weight loss plan then give yourself an occasional holiday and enjoy a favorite food." You may even find that once you've made the change and are living in a new and healthier way, you no longer enjoy those forbidden favorites as much. **HS**