

New Year's Resolutions: Friend or Foe?

"I'm going to lose weight this year as my resolution," exclaimed a friend after a long holiday season full of sweet treats. "Not me," claimed another, "I never make resolutions because I never stick with them."

Why do we make New Year's Resolutions? Mostly it's just a tradition. However, there is a sense of renewal as we welcome a new year into our lives. We often reflect on our past year and our lives and think ahead to what our dreams are.

Most New Year's Resolutions are made to make a positive improvement in our lives. Most resolutions are health-related like losing weight, skipping desserts, or exercising more. Others resolve to get more sleep, spend more time with the family or go on a cruise.

No matter what you want to change, stating the resolution is the easy part. Making it work is the real challenge. Research shows that only about 45% of those making New Year's Resolutions will be successful. Here are five suggestions to increase the probability that your New Year's resolutions will stick in 2009.

1. Quantify it. Sometimes we are just too vague about what we want. Therefore, a resolution such as, "I want to lose weight this year" will probably fail. It is too vague. How much weight? Be specific such as lose 20 pounds. Or if you want to exercise more, say "I will walk for 15 minutes three times a week over my lunch hour with my co-worker Kelly." Don't just say, "I will walk more in 2009."
2. Set a deadline. Resolutions that are to be achieved "as soon as possible" wind up in the heap of "Someday I'll". Deadlines are commitments. Without a deadline as a self-imposed pressure point, getting started is easily postponed. Say, "I will begin January 15 walking 3 days a week for 15 minutes a day with my co-worker Kelly."
3. Change only one or two things at a time. We generally do not like change in the first place. We seek the familiar and avoid the strange. The more change you put yourself through, the higher the probability you will not be successful. Focus on one or two of the more important resolutions you seek to accomplish this year.
4. Be realistic. There's just something about the start of a new year that gets us all wound up for changes in our lives and sometimes extraordinary and unrealistic changes. We become much like the child in the candy store whose eyes are bigger than his stomach. Be realistic. You can only accomplish a certain amount of change within a period of time. Don't saddle yourself with unrealistic resolutions that will only spell failure later on.
5. Write it down and sign it. One difference between a goal and a dream is that you write a goal down. Therefore, it is more likely to happen. Write your New Year's Resolution on an index card along with the date. Then sign it and put it on your bathroom mirror. Seeing it each morning will help you stay on track.

Good luck on your goals in 2009.