

### Seven Ways to Keep Your New Year's Resolutions

New Year's resolutions seem so exciting and full of promise on Jan. 1, but by the middle of the week, many people have already skipped gym, eaten the stacked burger and been a jerk to their in-laws.

The good news: A *Journal of Clinical Psychology* study found that people who make resolutions are 10 times more likely to change their behavior than those who don't.

The bad news: Short-term urges can trump long-term plans. Another *Journal of Clinical Psychology* study reports that 54 percent give up on their resolutions within six months -- and only 8 percent ultimately succeed by the end of the year.

No one said goal-setting would be easy. Still, psychologists say there's no time like the present to give your goals a try. And if you want to be a better version of yourself in 2015, there's a science to conquering your resolutions.

#### 1. Choose Your Goal Wisely

The key to accomplishing your goal is to make it concrete and easy to break down into pieces, said Jeff Janata, chief of psychology at UH Case Medical Center in Cleveland, Ohio. Weight loss is actually an example of a resolution that sets you up to fail.

"Weight loss really isn't in our control," Janata said, explaining that no matter how rigid the diet and exercise, weight loss naturally plateaus. "That's one of the reasons people fail at weight loss. They focus on 'I need to lose a certain number pounds per week.'" Instead, cutting out fried foods or deciding to work out a few days a week are better goals, he said.

#### 2. Work on One Thing at a Time

We live in a society where more is better. But when it comes to goals, less is usually more. Another example: In business, even though 64 percent of executives believe they have too many priorities, companies with fewer priorities show more growth.

Instead of picking four resolutions that you'll abandon, choose one that will give you the biggest payoff. This doesn't mean you can't work on more than one resolution per year, it just means you shouldn't focus on more than one at a time.

#### 3. Translate Your Resolution Into Specific Behaviors

Keeping resolutions usually means replacing old, bad habits with new, better ones. People who successfully change their habits achieve something called "habitual automaticity" -- performing the new habit without having to think about it.

In one study, researchers tried to improve participants' dental habits. All participants were told to floss more, given floss, and shown how to use it. Participants who planned exactly when and where they would floss were more successful at changing their habits than those who didn't.

So, break your resolution into specific behaviors and put them on a timetable. For example, to get to the gym on weekends instead of lounging around drinking mimosas in your pajamas, join a gym and schedule time on your calendar. Before you know it, you'll be going without even thinking about it.

#### **4. Don't Beat Yourself Up If You Mess Up**

No matter how perfect the goal is, people are going to slip. But that doesn't mean they should give up completely. "Re-adjust the goal according to how difficult it is for you," Janata said. He advised taking 2015 goals week by week or day by day. "I remind people that we're human and we're not perfect," Taravella said. "We're going to mess up throughout our entire lives." He said one bad day "doesn't mean we're total failures and all progress we made isn't meaningful."

#### **5. Reward Yourself**

Building in days off is an important part of goal-setting. "Being totally rigid 24/7 is not sustainable over the long haul," Taravella said.

#### **6. Go Public**

Want to make sure you nail your 2015 resolutions? Make them public, psychologists advised.

"Talk to people about what you're doing, so you can be accountable," Taravella said, explaining that you'll be motivated to succeed because you won't want to fail in front of your friends.

#### **7. Make Sure You're Doing It for the Right Reasons**

Tackling a goal because someone told you to or because you simply think you "should" might backfire, Janata said. Sometimes, taking on a goal because of outside pressure just makes people want to rebel, he said.

"There's an important distinction to be drawn between goals that we feel that we should accomplish and those we believe we truly want to accomplish," he said. "Rarely do we attain goals unless we truly embrace the goal." So make sure you're only picking goals because you're ready and eager to fulfill them.



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