

Being resolute about your resolutions



• BATYA L. LUDMAN

January already – ah, the month of making resolutions and then breaking them, often within days.

Be it weight loss, exercise, going to bed before 3 a.m., quitting smoking, behavior toward the kids or your spouse or your mother-in-law, or just being more focused on work – how can we maximize the likelihood of success at keeping those promises we make to ourselves?

Whether we make our resolutions in January or standing in the synagogue on Yom Kippur, we all know that while we may have great intentions, fulfilling our mission is not an easy one. We are creatures of habit, and let's face it, it's not easy to resist that piece of chocolate cake that calls your name or to not check your Facebook feed one more time before going to bed.

So while you may have great plans but a history of coming up short on the follow through, if you take it slowly and set realistic goals for yourself, this can be the year that you can actually achieve success.

1. Your first step is to actually determine what your goal is. Be specific. Operationally define just what you hope to achieve. It's great to be ambitious, but be realistic as well.

To have a lasting impact, change must take place slowly, over time. The best way to start is by setting yourself up from the outset to maximize success. Pick just one thing that you'd like to change. Now ask yourself if your initial goal is realistic and not too big. If not, refine it some more.

Don't say, for example, that you'd like to lose 15 kilos, because you'll be shattered the minute you run into difficulty – and you will run into difficulty. Instead start with the goal of losing five kilos or 10 percent of your body weight. Once you achieve this, you can move on to the next five kilos. Remember, slow and steady wins the race.

2. Write down your goals. Studies suggest that writing down your goals helps you to be more accountable and therefore more likely to achieve them. Post them in a place where you can look at them frequently.

If, for instance, you'd like to lose five kilos, and your operational goal is to drink a glass of water with each meal and one between meals, post a chart on the refrigerator so you can check off each time throughout

the day when you succeed.

Send a memo to your phone with reminders, with your goal delineated along with a reason why you'd like to achieve the goal you set out. Make sure to review it frequently throughout the day.

3. Make your goal something measurable. Don't just say you'd like to exercise more. The goal should be clear, well defined and ideally something that can be broken into smaller, achievable steps. You might say you'd like to run for 20 minutes three times a week.

4. Reward yourself for each small step you take. In keeping with your exercise goal, for example, buy some sneaker stickers and paste one on the calendar each day that you exercise for 20 minutes. When you get 10, treat yourself to something small. If your goal is to declutter your closet and get rid of the clothes that don't make you feel good, reward yourself when you have gone through your shoes.

5. Visualize your goal. Imagine what a decluttered closet might look like or how you might look differently in your clothes.

6. Plan ahead for success. If you are meeting friends for dinner, decide beforehand what you can eat, and even what you will take home. As soon as you sit down ask to have half of your portion set aside in the kitchen to take home.

7. Find a buddy who can help you succeed. It is easy to sabotage your own chance of success, so it is super important to find someone who can help you be the best you can be and support you, both when you are doing well and when you need the help.

Share your goals and ask for assistance. You might want to plan to regularly check in with each other by phone or text. Or better yet, check in on each other by exercising together.

8. Check in with yourself. The journey may be a long one, but it's important to make many stops along the way and pat yourself on the back for each success. Yes, I even have clients who physically pat themselves on the back in some of our sessions. It seems so much easier to notice our failures than our successes. Take advantage of every opportunity you can to praise and reward yourself for the good you are doing.

This actually affects your neuronal wiring, perpetuating your positive feelings about yourself and life in general.

9. Be aware of the obstacles that might prevent you from achieving your goals. Is it dangerous for you to have chocolate bars in the house "for the kids"? Be honest with yourself. Can your children live without them? Have you really bought them for yourself? Can you wait until you feel more in control? If not, why not?

10. We learn how to be successful through awareness of our failures. Notice what goes on in your body that prevents you from achieving your goals.

Do you reach for the chocolate when you're feeling angry with your partner? Is there something else you might choose to do that would be more helpful?

What keeps you from getting out of bed in the morning and going for a run? Why aren't you turning off your computer an hour earlier?

Forgive, forget and move on. Practice forgiving yourself. When you fall short of your goal, remind yourself: If you were to fall on the street, what would you do? Of course, you'd pick yourself up and keep going – and that is exactly what you need to do here. Tell yourself "it's over," let go of the situation, say good-bye to it, acknowledge that you're fine, and start again. In other words, pick yourself up and move on.

Remind yourself of past successes and recognize that you can learn from setbacks. Learning to forgive enables you to learn from slipups and move forward.

Always remember that tomorrow is another day, which will provide you with new opportunities for success.

Be kind to yourself and practice being your own best friend, because that is really what we need to do in life.

If you need outside help to achieve your goals, don't be afraid to speak with a professional. You know that the first step is always the hardest.

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