

Start the New Year Off Right

New Year's Resolutions: most people make them, yet very few people stick with them. Some strive to eat healthier, others to save more money, some to be nicer to their family...the list goes on and on. Most make leaps and bounds during the first few weeks of January. Then, gradually, the motivation tapers off and progress plateaus. Immediately, old habits are revisited. This year, be smart and deliberate about your goals. Read on to learn about effective goal setting and an evidence-based way of achieving the best you.

Instead of making broad, general statements like "I want to exercise more," be more precise by using something called the SMART method.

Specific
Measurable
Attainable
Realistic
Time-Specific

In making a goal more specific, a person is more likely to achieve it. "By March 1st, I want to be able to run one mile in seven minutes" is a SMART goal. This is very specific. It can be measured, with time and distance. Depending on the person's current fitness level, it is attainable. Again, depending on the person, it is also realistic. Lastly, it is time-specific because this person wishes to achieve his/ her goal within two months. By adding more details, the person is more accountable to what they wish to achieve.

The next step in achieving the SMART goal created previously would be to create smaller, mini-goals that aid in accomplishing the larger goal. For example, this person could strive to run one lap at a 7-minute mile pace every other day during week one and then 2 laps at a 7-minute mile pace every other day during week two, and so on and so forth. By breaking down the large goal into smaller parts, a person is less likely to give up.

It is important to look at the big picture when trying to stick with New Year's Resolutions. Get to the root of the desire to change. What is there to gain from making this behavior change? How would you be different as a result of making the change? What are the costs associated with this behavior change? How can they be accommodated?

Take all of these ideas, and write them down on a piece of paper. Write your large, SMART goal. Then, write your smaller sub-goals. Next, write the tools or resources you will need to succeed. Also, write the worries you have that are associated with achieving this goal. Lastly, positive self-talk is shown to do wonders for performance. Remind yourself of what motivates you, and get to work!

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