

## How to make this New Year's Resolution a Reality.

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This is the time of year when people make New Year's resolutions. Some of the most popular resolutions include: I'm going to lose weight. I'm going to stop smoking. I'm going to save more money. I'm going to exercise more.

Chances are if you have made a New Year's resolution in the past that even with the best of intentions on January 1<sup>st</sup>, by the end of February you were back to your old habits. So how can you make a New Year's resolution that you can keep?

Consider asking yourself these questions. Where am I now? Where do I want to be? How am I going to get there?

Any kind of resolution or intention, needs to be **S.M.A.R.T.**—Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely. When you follow those guidelines, it is easier to get where you want to be.

Let's use the example of getting more exercise. You can be **Specific** by stating "I will go to the gym, walk at lunch time, or sign up for an exercise class by January 7<sup>th</sup>". Your goal is **Measurable** by plotting how many times you actually do what you say you will do. Make your goal **Achievable** by stating "I will walk three times a week". You may end up walking more often, but it's better to under-estimate and exceed than over-estimate and call yourself a failure. This also makes your goal **Realistic**.

Finally, consider the **Timeliness** of your goal. You may want to walk more often, but finding time in your schedule may be difficult at first. Keep in mind that outdoor walking in northern New Hampshire in January can be a challenge, especially on a dark, cold morning. Instead, you might sign up for a dance class, join an indoor sports team, or a fitness center. When it warms up in the spring you can start your outdoor walking.

Give a voice to your goals. They always seem to be more effective if you put them in writing or tell someone what you want to do. Once it's written or said, you own it and can start working on it.

Try plotting your progress, setup a chart to document your work. If you live in North Haverhill, your initial goal may be to walk the distance from home to Lebanon, about 40 miles. If you walk three times a week for 13 weeks, you could be in Lebanon by the end of March. At that pace you could walk 150 miles by the end of the year— all the way to Boston. Chart your progress like some fundraisers do with a big thermometer. Fill in the chart as you progress. It's there for everyone to see, and a good motivator for you!

Be aware of some common New Year's resolution mistakes. Recognize that you are working on a behavior change and that it will take time. There will be good days and bad days. Don't let the bad days discourage you. Do not try to take on too much at once. If you have more than one goal, start slowly. Tackle the most important goal first. As you make progress, you can start working on a second goal. It doesn't make a difference **when** you start, as long as you **do** start.

Finally, many people stumble several times before they are successful. This is normal and expected. You have to keep going, understand where you made a mistake and then change your behavior. Many successful people are that way because they have failed, learned and tried again. Repeatedly. Successful

people view these challenges as valuable lessons and look at the positive ways they can make the experience help them achieve their goals.

So, think of one thing you want to change, plot the steps to make that change, and begin.