

## WHY NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS FAIL AND HOW TO MAKE THEM WORK

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Tomorrow is the first day of a new year and for many people, it will be a time of forming new years resolutions. For a few of those people, the newly formed resolutions will become life habits and new changes in their lives. Yet for most, they will have forgotten what the resolutions even were by Valentine's day or will have broken them. What is a resolution, and why are they so difficult to keep? How can you make your new year resolutions work this time?

A resolution is to resolve. You resolve to make a change in your life (e.g., you want to stop doing something, or to start doing something and so, you resolve to do it.) Your new year resolution might be: I will stop drinking alcohol; I will lose weight; I am going to exercise; I am going to attend Church; I am going to get a job; I am going to eat better .... Your new year resolution can be one, or multiple things--something you want to do. But now that you have clearly stated your resolve, and you know what you want, this is only the very first step. While a first step is a first, it is not nearly enough.

Resolutions, like change, generally only works when (1.) you really want this to happen (e.g., when you are truly ready to stop using substances, or when you are truly ready to change your eating habits or your spending habits--thereby controlling your weight or finances). (2.) When you recognize that you must continue this change even after the initial pain has let up, or even after you have reached your goal. For example, many people reach their goal of discontinuing use of substances (drugs and alcohol) as long as they gain back a relationship or complete requirements for a program or legal requirements, then start using again. This is not true and total commitment to abstinence. Or, people will use fad or even nutritional diets to lose their desired weight, then once they have reached the desired goal, return to the previous unhealthy eating habits they had before and quickly gain all the weight (and more) that they lost. Or, they give up their credit cards, even pay them off but once that has been done, they apply for another one and the cycle repeats. So, although they kept their resolution for 3, or 6, or even 12 months of that year, they have not made a lifetime change or resolution.

Making a resolution requires commitment and defining the specific change. What do you, specifically, want to change? Define it in very specific terms. "I will stop all substances" is vague. What, specific, substances will you stop using? Then, why will you stop using these substances? If you want to lose weight, what foods will you remove from your diet, specifically? If you want to increase your exercise, what specific exercise will you do--some people can justify getting up from the TV to go to the refrigerator as exercise, or giving up the remote and using the channels as exercise. Be specific.

You need to develop a true support system. While writing your plan is advisable, and while sharing your plan is advisable, having a true support system is a must. You cannot rely on yourself and/or one or two individuals to make big changes (giving up drugs and alcohol, weight loss) happen for you, generally.

Ask yourself first: am I externally or internally driven? There is no right or wrong answer to this question, however unless you correctly identify the answer, you will set yourself up for failure--again. Externally driven people need and like approval and encouragement from others. They need or want others to tell them that they are doing well, have done well or when they are not doing well and offer

encouragement and suggestions. They seek their source of motivation from how others are responding to them. While it is important to learn to be more self-reliant, this is who you are now, and it is important to accept this in yourself. Internally-driven people seek their source of motivation through self-guidance, meditation, study and prayer. They rarely ask others' opinions and frequently do not seem to concern themselves with what others think--are easily annoyed when others attempt to tell them. Again, while it may be helpful to become more involved with people for support, this is where you are now. Therefore, knowing yourself and being honest with yourself is essential.

For the externally driven person, groups such as weight watchers, alcoholics anonymous, narcotics anonymous, celebrate recovery, over-eaters anonymous, gamblers Anonymous, etc. are essential and can be invaluable sources of support. Many are face-to-face, and some are online as well. These groups can provide sponsors, various people to talk and socialize with, share and support you as well as for you to support.

For the internally-driven, individual counseling, voocoos of self-help books (especially those with read and write responses), prayer/meditation, self-help videos, etc. are essential.

For all people, increasing activities, getting involved with others (in your community, Church / religious community / social organizations), volunteer work, working, learning new hobbies, increasing interest in self and others and changing your routine are all great ways of making the changes you are now resolving to make in your life.

"If you are not where you think you should be, I would not suggest that you try to change things tomorrow. Why...because that is what most other people will do and they do it simply because it's supposedly a special day. Your change of path will only come when either you make up your mind that you are going on a new path because you are determined to change OR the pain becomes unbearable on the current path. The problem with the latter is that once the pain eases you often return to the old path. The true Birthday is the day that you move from one path to another one (a better one) and stay on it. When that day comes mark it down on your calendar, for that day is really the special one." (Mountainwings.com).