

Will You Keep Your New Year's Resolutions?

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We're well into 2010. It's time to take a look at how well your progressing on your New Year's resolutions. Turning those goals into reality is a difficult task for many people, as good intentions fall into the "Oops," "Well, I really meant to...." or other category of wishes that didn't quite translate into action.

What can you do to keep your 2010 New Year's Resolutions and, in general, increase your ability to follow through on self-improvement goals?

A couple of key components in creating lasting change are to know yourself well and to build pleasure into the process. For example, if you want to lose weight and improve your health, you might join a gym even though you're not a "gym person" at heart. After a few weeks of doing cardiovascular exercise on a treadmill or elliptical machine, you might be bored to pieces and throw in the towel on the concept of exercising altogether.

If you had done some self-exploration before joining the gym, you might have remembered how much you loved playing AYSO soccer as a kid. Or you might have noted how much you look forward to watching one of the dancing shows currently so popular on television. If that's the case, you might be better off joining an adult soccer league or signing up for salsa lessons through your local parks and recreation department. You'd be getting your exercise in a way that meets your personal criteria for fun.

Other elements of successful change are making realistic goals with short-term steps, and forgiving yourself when you stumble. Some goals seem so overwhelming that people essentially give up on ever achieving them. But small, incremental improvements can be very powerful over time.

If your marriage is foundering, rather than creating a large, unspecific objective such as "We need to improve our communication," start with small, achievable positive statements. These might include things such as,

“During the coming week, I will make a sincere effort to stop interrupting my wife when she’s speaking to me” or “By next weekend, I will plan a date night with my husband where we can talk in a quiet restaurant away from the kids.”

Achieving these goals and seeing the positive results can then feed your belief that larger, more global changes are possible if you keep working toward them.

Compassion toward yourself can also go a long way. If you’re on a diet and find yourself face down in Belgian chocolate one day, that doesn’t have to mean your diet is a permanent failure. Be kind to yourself, look at what triggered your slip, take a break if needed and then get back on track when you’re ready.

And don’t be ashamed to ask for backup. Enlist the help of your partner, a friend or relative, a therapist or personal coach to achieve your goals. Life is short. Commit yourself to achieving your dreams, starting today.