

How to Make (and Keep) a New Year's Resolution

Source: [The New York Times](#)

Are you making a resolution in the New Year? Warning: More than half of all resolutions fail, but this year, they don't have to be yours. Here's how to identify the right resolution to improve your life, create a plan on how to reach it, and become part of the small group of people that successfully achieve their goal.

Pick the Right Resolution

You'll give yourself your best shot at success if you set a goal that's doable – and meaningful too.

According to the time management firm Franklin Covey, one third of “resolutioners” don't make it past the end of January.

A lot of these resolutions fail because they're not the right resolutions. And a resolution may be wrong for one of three main reasons:

- It's a resolution created based on what someone else (or society) is telling you to change.
- It's too vague.
- You don't have a realistic plan for achieving your resolution.

Your goals should be smart – and SMART. That's an acronym coined in the journal Management Review in 1981 for specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound. It may work for management, but it can also work in setting your resolutions, too.

Specific.

Your resolution should be absolutely clear. “Making a concrete goal is really important rather than just vaguely saying ‘I want to lose weight.’ You want to have a goal: How much weight do you want to lose and at what time interval?” said Katherine L. Milkman, an associate professor of operations information and decisions at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. “Five pounds in the next two months – that's going to be more effective.”

Measurable.

This may seem obvious if your goal is a fitness or weight loss related one, but it's also important if you're trying to cut back on something, too. If, for example, you want to stop biting your nails, take pictures of your nails over time so you can track your progress in how those nails grow back out, said Jeffrey Gardere, a psychologist and professor at Touro College of Osteopathic Medicine. Logging progress into a journal or making notes on your phone or in an app designed to help you track behaviors can reinforce the progress, no matter what your resolution may be.

Achievable.

This doesn't mean that you can't have big stretch goals. But trying to take too big a step too fast can leave you frustrated, or affect other areas of your life to the point that your resolution takes over your life – and both you and your friends and family flail. So, for example, resolving to save enough money to retire in five years when you're 30 years old is probably not realistic, but saving an extra \$100 a month may be. (And if that's easy, you can slide that number up to an extra \$200, \$300 or \$400 a month).

Relevant.

Is this a goal that really matters to you, and are you making it for the right reasons? "If you do it out of the sense of self-hate or remorse or a strong passion in that moment, it doesn't usually last long," said Dr. Michael Bennett, a psychiatrist and co-author of two self-help books. "But if you build up a process where you're thinking harder about what's good for you, you're changing the structure of your life, you're bringing people into your life who will reinforce that resolution, then I think you have a fighting chance."

Time-bound.

Like "achievable," the timeline toward reaching your goal should be realistic, too. That means giving yourself enough time to do it with lots of smaller intermediate goals set up along the way. "Focus on these small wins so you can make gradual progress," Charles Duhigg, author of "The Power of Habit" and a former New York Times writer, said. "If you're building a habit, you're planning for the next decade, not the next couple of months."