

Make a New Year's Resolution and stick to it

lose weight · learn a language · get fit · spend more time with family · stop smoking · change career · get out of debt · declutter your house · meet new people · take a trip

**Welcome to the 1st issue of *Challenge*,
a quarterly newsletter for personal & professional development.**

Chances are that you have made a New Year's resolution in the past, started off full of energy and found yourself discouraged by mid - January and had given up on it by February. This issue of *Challenge* shows you how to make a fail-proof New Year's resolution by choosing goals that are important and meaningful to you.

By the way: this guide can obviously be used at any time of the year and I will suggest below that you start on any ordinary Tuesday or Wednesday rather than at New Year, on your birthday, or on a Monday.

OK, let's get started. I suggest you find a quiet corner and a note pad and pen to work through the step-by-step guide and realise your dreams.

7 Steps to achieve your goals

Step 1: Taking stock

Make a list of all the things that you want to change in your life, things you always wanted to do but never got round to doing and ideas that have been floating round your head for a while. This might be a long list and I suggest you really take the time to write it all down. Having all your wishes, dreams and possible backlog of things retained on paper helps to focus your mind. The following steps will help you to establish which of these steps you want to tackle now.

Step 2: Is it in your power?

Now, go through your list and delete all items that rely on other people to change or on luck. Choose only goals that you can influence. Winning the lottery, wanting your boss to be more patient/on time/less aggressive, your husband to pick up his socks or for your dream home to come on the market is not in your power. Focussing on changes outside your control can be very frustrating and certainly is unproductive. So let's focus on the things you can change.

Step 3: Is it really important to YOU?

In order to keep your goals they have to be meaningful to YOU. People have proven over and over again that it is possible to achieve personal goals in the most unlikely circumstances if we put the effort and energy in and show persistence and determination. Well, it is unlikely that you (or anyone) will find sufficient energy and determination for a project that is not all that important to you. So, take the time to really sit with your list, look at one item at a time and ask yourself „Do I really want this?“ Be open to your answers, you might be surprised. I will give you two examples from my own life:

For years I told everyone including myself that I wanted to lose weight. My actions spoke a different language: half-hearted attempts of dieting, family packs of chocolate (especially on the days before I started on a new diet) and irregular visits to the gym. I finally realised that right now it is not important for me to lose weight and instead of wasting money on new dieting products, feeling frustrated at the lack of success and guilty for eating chocolate, I gave up on the idea and decided to enjoy life.

It took me five years to complete my PhD and while I can account for the time (job, relocation, marriage, child) the real reason it took so long is that it just never made it into my 'Top 3', there where always more interesting things around. Eventually I decided it is now or never and wrote most of it within six months during the first year of my little boy's life. It was the most unlikely time to be successful given the lack of time to write and the tiredness of interrupted nights, but I set my mind to it and got it done.

Finding out now what is important to you saves you the frustration of unaccomplished goals later on.

Step 4: What is it you really want?

Chances are your list is getting shorter now. Before you finalise it into this year's New Year's resolution make sure your goals are specific. So take each item on the list and ask yourself „What do I really want?“. Let me give you a few examples:

<u>Item on your list</u>	<u>Possible questions?</u>
lose weight	Do I want to be thin or stop worrying about eating?
stop smoking	Am I really worried about my health, or do I just want my family to stop nagging me?
change career	Am I after more job satisfaction (and if yes what determines this) or more money?
meet new people	Am I looking for friends? A new hobby to share? Or to meet my neighbours to make me feel more at home where I live?
declutter house	Do I want the space, get more organised or shake unwanted memories off?
learn French	Do I want to find my way around France during the family holiday or learn it to use it in the job?

I am sure you will find your own questions to ask and answer. Use your answers to come up with a list of goals you want to achieve NOW. I suggest you choose a maximum of 3 to start out with (keep your list for later, once you have achieved your goals you can tackle some more).

Step 5: What are the downsides of achieving your goal?

Take a moment to think about the possible downsides of achieving your goal and write all concerns down. The more you are aware of subconscious concerns the less likely they are to interfere once you have got started.

Step 6: How will you know you have achieved your goal?

When writing your resolution make sure you are specific. Make your goals measurable. I know that might be hard and this step is often skipped because it is inconvenient to commit to something that can be proven. Look at politics: politicians love to be vague, it is hard to measure their success or hold them to account when they set out to 'meet the needs of citizens' or 'support communities'. The more specific you are the easier it is for you to know what to do to be successful.

Step 7: What motivates you?

This step is about choosing the right support. Before telling others about your resolution think of possible downsides: How would you feel if somebody in your support group is more successful? Would you be discouraged by negative comments from family or friends? Below is a list of possible support systems. It is not comprehensive and it is up to you to find the right combination.

<u>Motivator</u>	<u>Possible support</u>
deadline	set by you, set by somebody else (e.g. supervisor, mentor, coach), take part in a competition, enroll for sporting event, special day like wedding or family gathering
treat	day out, long bath, night out, new jeans, good book, ...
role model	somebody who has already achieved what you are aiming for; this could be a mentor or (online) support group
fellow sufferers	people in the same situation: join existing support groups on- and offline or start your own
(public) accountability	tell family and friends, start a blog, keep a diary

And Finally: Start now!

Certain times of the year seem to have an aura of a fresh start and are more likely to attract resolutions than others. New Year is the obvious one, closely followed by ones birthday. For some it is after the summer holidays when schools start again. A lot of people focus all their intention on Monday as the beginning of the week. The problem is that each Monday is followed by a Tuesday, a Wednesday, a Thursday and each new Year's day or birthday by a long stretch of ordinary days that carry no magic charisma. Don't wait for a special day. Start now! If you have enough energy to start today on an ordinary and possible rainy midweek day, chances are you will see it through.

Looking for more challenges?

Challenge is published four times a year. Each issue focuses on a different area of personal development. If you liked this issue and wish to receive *Challenge* regularly please subscribe to it using the contact form on my website. www.katrinbain.info or send an email to challenge@katrinbain.info
