

Simple Steps for Creating *Lasting Resolutions*

BY JACKIE DOBRINSKA

We raise our glasses to the New Year, remembering the joys and losses of 2014, while setting new intentions for 2015. By next month, however, many of these goals may already be forgotten.

Despite deep longings to live in the direction of our dreams, why do so many of our well-intended resolutions fail? Ancient wisdom and modern science agree that it has a lot to do with the nature of the habits we've established.

Habits are essential. They are the things we do without thinking about them, allowing us to free up space in our brains to consider more creative and existential matters. Yet, habits can limit us by driving down the same old road when we want to go in an entirely different direction.

Understanding how habits are formed can be key to changing them. Essentially, we each have our own tendencies, like low points in a landscape. When it rains, water moves to these areas and creates gullies. The next time it rains, the water is more likely to move down this path of least resistance and deepen the channel. Similarly, when we perform an action, we create a figurative "groove" in the myelin sheath of the brain.

Our behavior moves like water. The more we do the same action, the easier it is to fall into it the next time.

Changing habits requires awareness, effort, and time. Studies show that a new behavior must be repeated over at least a 30-day period to become established. More challenging new actions, however, such as doing a hundred sit-ups each morning, may take much longer to cultivate.

Whether you want to lose weight, get organized, or create a more peaceful life, here are some steps to help you build new neural pathways and more rewarding habits:

1. Create a Clear Goal. Consider archery as a metaphor. The more clearly you see the shape, distance, and size of your target, the more likely you are to hit it. This is why kayak instructors tell us to look between the rocks, because we hit what we aim for.

2. Understand Why. Losing weight may be the goal, but the deeper driving desire may be to feel more free and comfortable in your body and life. Identifying the underlying values and needs creates flexibility and fortitude for the journey ahead. Local wellness coach

Medea Galligan, MS, CHHC, AADP, confirms that "shifting the focus from external validations (such as the bathroom scale) to internal sources" will help us reach our goals.

3. Make a Realistic Plan. Flesh out the day-to-day action steps. What is the very first step? Can you commit to it? What about the next and the next? To help produce a more positive outcome, steps should reflect your personality and also mesh with the realities of your life.

4. Identify Obstacles. Each goal will inevitably bring up obstacles, from family and friends to inner beliefs and attachments. Strategize for the ones you know and be willing to address new ones as they arise. "Compassion, acceptance, and self-love are key," says Medea.

5. Plan for Slips. We most likely will not be perfect in creating a new habit. Accept this and use strategies that keep you headed in the right direction, even if you step off the path from time to time.

6. Make It Fun. Mix it up, give yourself rewards, and celebrate the small steps. If you are not having fun, you probably won't stick with it.



7. Create a Support System. Whether you enlist friends, support groups, online forums, or a professional coach, checking in daily or weekly can help you stay honest with yourself as you progress toward your goal. "Many, many people want to share their stories and more often than not, they will resonate with something you have (experienced) or are experiencing," says Medea.

As you step into new habits, have faith in yourself and keep an eye out for the happy accidents that support you along the way!

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