
Your Bottom Line

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How to make New Year's resolutions work

It's that time of year again. Many of us will make resolutions that we promise to fulfill during the New Year. Good intentions and steady determination, unfortunately, are not enough to produce lasting results. Why are we incapable of following through? How can we improve the odds?

The reason we fail is simple: We try to change too much, too fast. The solution is also simple, but even more difficult to sustain and create a lasting change. When we take too global an approach and do not define those behaviors we wish to change, we see little or no measurable success. We then quickly tire and quit the project no matter how much we wanted to succeed.

In business, we might aim to increase sales this year by \$100,000. While this is an admirable target, it is difficult to attain. The objective does not include the actions needed to be implemented on January 1 to help us reach the goal. You can't just wish for success—you must develop a plan that will move you toward your goal. With a plan, not only will you know what steps to take, you'll also know when you make progress. The satisfaction of knowing your plan works is critical to continued success.

One of the easiest steps that yields significant results is planning each day. List the three to six most important tasks you need to accomplish, and as you finish each one, mark it off, and view your accomplishments. You may be tempted to skip this seemingly simple step, but many well known, highly successful individuals attribute this type of simple planning as a primary reason for their accomplishments.

A somewhat more complex system of goal achievement involves the use of a daily planner. People who successfully learn to use a planner treat it like a "Bible" that becomes a part of nearly every moment of their day. The planner is used to schedule future activities and goals, and to organize a huge assortment of information that may be needed in the future.

Three-ring notebook planners are now available as compact, pocket-size computers. However, many people find the

traditional notebook easier to use than computerized versions. Both, however, are superior to a pocket-size tape recorder, which has limited value. Whatever technique you choose, it is important that notes and information be easily entered and retrieved.

I avoided using a planner until a friend bought me one and strongly urged me to use it. Gradually, I've grown to appreciate its value. When I jot notes in my planner, I can forget them temporarily. A planner forces you to schedule future activities, reminds you what action you need to take next, and compels you to complete your plan. Many key people around my office now regularly use their planners.

What does a planner have to do with a New Year's resolution? Consider it a vehicle that helps you become more efficient and successful. It represents a "micro" behavior change that leads to "macro" improvement.

As you ponder what the New Year has in store, go ahead and think big dreams. But then take one step, and then another, toward your goal. Soon, you'll realize you are making progress, and this will encourage you to push forward even more until you reach your lofty goal.

Several years ago, while watching movers collect and pack 47 years worth of my parents' belongings, I asked how they managed to do this work every day. His response was very philosophical: "I just keep chipping away at it one piece at a time and, pretty soon, it's all packed up." He didn't look at the fully loaded house and wish it to be packed into this truck. He worked at it piece by piece until eventually the job was complete.

It's the same with your bottom line. If you want bigger profits, you have the best chance of reaching your goal if you have a plan and follow it, one dollar at a time. ■
