

S.M.A.R.T. Goals For The New Year

We've all heard the New Year, New You propaganda. A chance to push the reset button on life and get a kind of do over. We've all been there, tried that and we know life just doesn't work that way. So why do we continue to make those New Year's resolutions? And is there anything we can do to make them stick?

I'd say we make those resolutions because what we're trying to achieve is important to us. We're taking any opportunity to set up a structure that will help. Trouble is most of the time we either set up the wrong structure or one that's so ambitious and difficult that we can't sustain it long enough to reach our goals.

So what's the right strategy for success this year?

What I'm about to propose will work for any set of goals. But since I'm a health coach, I'm going start with a story that will show you a formula I use with my health clients.

You go to your annual check-up and your doc says "whoops your blood pressure is up and you're 15 pounds heavier than last year. I can give you some meds, but you'll have to lose weight and get into shape, OK?"

You say OK, you walk out. Then what?

Join a gym? Hire a personal trainer? Go on a diet? You might do one or several of these because, after all, it's a New Year and a new you.

So you try something. But how long is it till you throw up your hands and say, "ugh, I got started and now I'm off the track just like last year."

What went wrong? Maybe nothing, except you might not have been psychologically ready to take those steps.

For any change there is a process. One of the models I use is the transtheoretical model of behavior change (TTM) developed by psychologist Dr. James O. Prochaska.

There are 5 stages:

Precontemplation – going along not aware of a need for, or not wanting a change.

Contemplation – recognizing a need to do something to improve your situation and considering making some sort of change.

Preparation – doing some research, making small changes, or at least thinking about what you're going to do to help yourself.

Action – Actively making lifestyle changes,

Maintenance – Having made changes, maintaining the status of your goals

All too often we jump from contemplation to action without being ready for the change, which is what happens with most of our New Year's resolutions. It can feel like getting off a plane in Antarctica wearing shorts and a T-shirt. You wanted to be there but you weren't ready for what that change would be like, and what you'd need to do to stay there comfortably.

Here's the formula that can help you define what's most important to you, what you really envision for yourself. And by answering these questions, you brainstorm and formulize what you're going to do and how you're going to do it.

- So ask yourself what is your wellness vision? This vision can be about health or anything else.
- Now what's motivating you? Why do you want to make this change and why is it so important to do it this year?
- What strengths can you draw on to help realize this vision. It can be anything you're good at. Maybe you're organized. Or have family or friends who will support your goals.
- What are your challenges? Stuff like, I procrastinate, I lose my focus and get discouraged.
- What are the strategies that will help you realize the vision and meet your challenges? If you procrastinate or lose interest easily, maybe you want to partner with a like-minded friend. You can keep each other motivated. Maybe you want to get in shape, lose some weight, learn to sail, cook like a professional. This really does work with any goal.

Then there's time. Some theoretical physicists say that time does not exist. It's just a human construct based on the rotation of the earth broken into 24 segments. OK, but how we manage those segments is up to us. Time management can make the difference between success and failure. Start with the 21/90 rule. It takes about 21 days to make a habit and about 90 days to make it a part of your lifestyle. So, set 3-month goals. Start with just one that is your highest priority, the most important thing you want to spend your time on, the main goal of your vision. Break this 3-month goal down into S.M.A.R.T. Goals. S.M.A.R.T. stands for: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound. For example, I'm going to make time to take a brisk walk for 45 minutes, 3 days a week. A series of small S.M. A.R.T goals helps you create the habits that will lead you to permanent lifestyle changes.

It's rare when anyone succeeds at anything right out of the gate. That's why "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again" is a classic proverb. So if you fall off the wagon one day, just climb back on board the next. And remember you're not a failure, you're a success story in progress.

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