

## Navigating the New Year

*The New Year brings new beginnings.*

We hear this every January. But it isn't true. Not exactly, anyway. The new year brings the *possibility* of new beginnings. We, the people, make the choice to bring those new beginnings to fruition—or not. Time simply opens the door to another second chance to get it right.

In fact, creating a new beginning can happen at anytime of the year. January seems more poignant. That's all. It's the time of year that ideas multiply, and we think about all the things we want to accomplish. Unfortunately, new years' resolutions fizzle more quickly than the fireworks we light to bring in the new year itself.

The problem is that an idea is not a goal. Worse, ideas based on novelty are nothing more than stage plays for the brain. They excite us, then the curtain closes once the pomp and circumstance fades, and we realize the effort it will take to implement our idea. We realize we don't want to put in the commitment or the effort.

New years' resolutions are examples of ideas that are based on novelty.

This isn't to say that change can't happen at the beginning of a year. It can, but the desire for change must come from a deep, deep, deep desire to change, and not from a date on a calendar. Only then will a goal stand a chance of surviving against all the obstacles that will try to take it down.

When we talk about goals, the mantra always includes something to write with, a pen, pencil, computer font, etc. "You must write your goals down."

Now, this *is* true. A written goal travels a lot further than a thought. It is a visible reminder of the idea. Next would come the strategic plan to achieve the goal. This is a personal blueprint of the journey to the new beginning. The desire to succeed is the fuel to keep you moving.

Experts can sit here all day, as they often do, and describe a strategic plan and the journey involved. It's good and vital information for sure. But rarely do experts talk about what it looks and feels like to start a new beginning. Grasping a sense of feeling from what to expect is hard, especially if we are starting something for the first time.

Fitness is no different.

So, how can we comprehend the feeling of a new beginning if we've never tried a certain thing before? Well, it's tough because everyone is different, and everyone's journey is unique to them. Luckily, there are two things that are universal to all new beginnings: 1. As important as goals are, we must focus on the process, not the outcome. 2. To embrace a new beginning, something else must come to an end.

Let's look at an idea, together, that we can all understand, and maybe equate this to succeeding in fitness.

Most of us can relate to social media. For many of us, the bad now outweighs the good, and many platforms have become toxic. The notion that these platforms imprison us to our past keeps gaining steam. Between the memories that pop up, the pictures we've uploaded for years, and the people we've been connected to who we haven't spoken to in a decade or so, it's easy to see why it might be true that social media imprisons our minds.

There is a disturbing and dysfunctional beauty about the status quo, whether it's sitting there scrolling out of habit or sitting there eating junk food. We take comfort in what we know.

Making the decision to deactivate social media and thus replacing scrolling time with something better is no different than leaving the couch behind and saying hello to the gym. Ending an old habit for the joy of a new one is scary, even if it is for our own good. The urge to revert doesn't leave immediately. It takes time and commitment to leave the past behind.

We've heard the quotes:

Faith is taking the first step even when you can't see the whole staircase – Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step – Lao Tzu

These statements are not only moving, but most of us would say they are also true. That doesn't make these first steps easy. When beginning again, or beginning anew, the road is long, sometimes arduous, and the start can often be lonely. Cutting out online connections that don't serve us in the real world can still sting, no different than wanting to get healthy when the people around us think we are taking too much time for ourselves because they don't understand the fitness lifestyle.

Look at it as if moving to a new city in another state. Say we need a fresh start and a change from the circle of people, places, and things that are in

our life. We relocate and initially, feel alone. We cling to the friends of the past through calls, texts, and social media. Then, time happens, and the weaker connections start to fade as we dig into a new life. We get a new job or new purpose and start making new friends. A better life ensues, and we realize our old life was, well, a lifetime ago, and moving was the best thing that has ever happened to us.

These feelings of angst happen in all types of new beginnings. Imagine hitting the gym, taking a class, and going home feeling great only to get hit with criticism that you weren't somewhere else, a coffee gathering, etc. It takes a toll on the mind. Maybe we give up. Preparing for the negativity that accompanies positive change is what takes our new years' resolution idea to a level of action and sustainability.

Our challenges don't just come from others. Roadblocks can come in the form of medical issues, emergencies, and other setbacks. Battling back from an injury can be just as daunting as criticism from others.

Without deep commitment and personal planning, we are prone to letting the headwinds beat us, and make us give up because we feel we are back to square one and can never start over again.

Here's the issue. Something can only be a setback if we make it so. Setbacks are feelings, not facts. The obstacle leads to setbacks if we let it. Plus, starting over only happens if we end something. Sure, we might slow down, but that's not the same as termination. Let's say we skip a workout to keep peace in a situation. While that's probably not recommended, we only quit if we stop working out entirely.

A note here. It takes time to break a habit. Some experts say it takes 21 days, while others say up to six weeks. Two months is about the going rate to develop a new habit. Either way, remember, there is vulnerability in the beginning. We must be aware that the first few weeks of change is a tenuous time and adherence is vital. Getting fit involves breaking a sedentary habit while developing an active habit all while trying not to look so much at the clock in trying to become that new, better person in that new beginning.

There was once a famous infomercial that is known for espousing, "Set it and forget it."

To a degree, when setting goals, this is true. We don't want to forget our goals, but we can't harbor the future so much that it takes us away from the steps to get there. When we focus so much on the finish line, it can grow in

our minds, and seem further away than what it might truly be. Throw in an injury or a setback and this can multiply the negative thought. When this happens, the past likes to creep in and take over. In cases like this, just take a step forward. You can't go backwards if you keep walking.

Now, there are those times when we need to remember the goals, and call them up as motivation, for example, when somebody tries to hinder our progress (By the way, often that person is the one in the mirror.)

Setting resolutions and making changes is a balancing act of moving forward in the present while keeping an eye on the future all while separating from the past. We can see why resolutions often fail to launch. Change is not found in celebration. It's found in lucidity, when the music fades and life seeps in after taking down the decorations.

The unfortunate reality is that there is no magic potion to keep us motivated and moving forward in fitness or in anything. All we can do is take that first step and keep on stepping until we get there. Sure, it's scary. We do have one trick up our sleeve to keep us going: Awareness. If we can acknowledge what we are feeling, what is going on in our mind, and what emotion is at play, that negative hold loses its power, and we can help break that negative thought and then take a positive action, whatever that action should be. This is where emotion wheels can become a lifeline. See attached.

The longer we stick with our journey, those obstacles that were once insurmountable will start looking like boulders, then rocks, then pebbles. Our goals will become reminders when we need reminding, but they won't consume us into becoming the goal itself. The journey will define us, just as our strength is born in muscle recovery, not in the workout.

And, in the end, no matter how much we grow, and no matter how much distance, figuratively and literally, we put between ourselves and other people, those who are meant to stay in our lives will still be here through it all.

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Attached is a link to an emotion wheel that might be useful:

<https://feelingswheel.com/>

As always, consult a doctor before beginning or changing any exercise program and reach out to a mental health professional if you feel down and unmotivated.

