

## **Seven Reasons Why New Year's Resolutions Fail and What You Can Do To Succeed** **By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.**

Here we are again at the threshold of a new year. I am glad that there is a week between Christmas and the New Year. It gives me a chance to recover, regroup, and rethink. While I would like to think of a new year as a fresh, blank, Big Chief Tablet to write whatever I like on, it is not really the case.

The new year typically has lots of loose ends left to be tied up. There are also many things, situations, circumstances, and processes that transcend years and even decades. An example would be a career, an education, a marriage, self-improvement efforts, and other long term goals like financial management. A life time is not marked in finite sections of 365 days beginning with January one and ending with December 31. Life is a continuous process.

Even in the midst of these processes, a new year, however, gives me an opportunity to evaluate my progress, assess my accomplishments, and rethink the areas that need improvement. Looking back over the last year, I managed to accomplish some of my goals. Others—not so much. I hear people say that they don't make New Year's resolutions anymore, that they subjected themselves to making and breaking them year after year for decades.

I humbly suggest that New Year's resolutions still have a place in most of our lives. "Resolutions" only have real resolve if they are initiated and owned by the person making the resolution. If they are "shoulds" directed by nameless and/or not-so-nameless others, they are not truly resolutions. These "shoulds" dressed up like resolutions seem to reflect recognition of a need to change, yet without the commitment and/or the plan to do so.

We have all heard of the 80% failure rate of New Year's resolutions and perhaps have thought, "what's the use?" There are many possible reasons why New Year's resolutions fail, including the following:

1. They are/were other directed at the outset. An example would be the resolution to quit smoking because your wife/husband demands it. If your significant others are demanding that you quit, don't grumble about quitting for them. Don't approach quitting with resentment and reservations. Instead, acknowledge that even though you have some mixed feelings about quitting, put all your effort into it and focus on the reasons that you want to quit. Make quitting (and any other New Years resolutions) meaningful to you.
2. The expectation does not fit the reality of the goal. An example would be the resolution to lose weight. No matter what methods you may be using to try to lose weight and regardless of the ads you see on TV and on the internet, the pounds will not magically fall off. No matter what your goal, make sure that your expectations are reasonable. Otherwise, you may just give up. With the example of losing weight, consider how often have you given up upon losing "only" five or ten pounds after changing eating habits and walking daily for three months? In

reality, changing how you eat, regular exercise and utilizing other lifestyle changes should yield generally improved health and some weight reduction results within a year. For most difficult goals or resolutions, set backs and less than perfect results should be anticipated.

3. Goal may not include an appropriate method to achieve it. An example might be the resolution to cut back on drinking. When after multiple attempts at this New Year's resolution, it may become obvious that "cutting back" is not the appropriate approach to solving whatever problems are associated with the drinking. Previous attempts to cut back or to quit drinking may signal alcoholism, an illness that often requires formal treatment/help to arrest it--and total abstinence, not cutting back.
4. New Year's resolutions may involve a veritable laundry list, including everything but the kitchen sink. This shotgun affect just identifies some things that you might not like about yourself or your life, but does little to bring about actual change.
5. New Year's resolution(s) are verbalized but not written down and so are easily forgotten. There is no start date, no reminders, no criteria for measuring success along the way.
6. Resolutions may even be written down, but are not fleshed out with measurable goals or short term, mid-range, and long term objectives that serve as a roadmap or blue print for how to accomplish them. If you have a resolution, turn it into a goal, make it measurable, then plot out a strategy over time on how to get there from here. Develop a time-frame. Example: For saving money this year, I will have \$50 taken out of my checking account and moved to savings each pay period. By this time next year, I will have at least \$1200.00 in savings.
7. Reluctance to make a commitment or to tell others about your resolutions or goals may reduce the vulnerability that you feel about possibly looking foolish, but it undermines your efforts. When you let others know that you have a goal/resolution, you allow others to assist you in your efforts. Perhaps some of the people closest to you have the same ones. You could team up.

Some of the most common New Year's Resolutions are to 1) lose weight/get healthy, 2) save money/manage debt, 3) get a better job, 4) get an education, 5) stop drinking/smoking/gambling, 6) improve the quality of your life by spending time with loved ones/manage stress better/learning how to enjoy life, 7) find a partner/be a better partner. Most of these goals take longer than a year to accomplish, but much progress can be made within a year, and the process is the prize.

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