

How to Set New Year's Resolutions That Stick – Part I of III

By Amy Scott Grant

If you're like approximately 90% of the American population, you firmly resolve to accomplish this or that every January, yet your interest wanes within about 3-8 weeks. Perhaps you are so saddened by past results that you lack the will to even set New Year's Resolutions at all. Well, don't despair. I've whipped up some practical hints to help you maintain your resolve all year long and finally accomplish what you've wanted to achieve for so long.

The most common New Year's Resolutions include fitness goals and smoking cessation. Many people also vow to "get organized" once and for all, as if it were a one-time event! If "getting organized" were a one-time activity, a lot more people would achieve that goal. Unfortunately, it requires a constant choice to "get" and "remain" organized. We humans are creatures of habit, and even weeks of progress can be set back by a few poor choices. That's why they call them "resolutions" -- because the "resolve" is such a key factor!

Step one in your nuts-and-bolts guide to "setting goals that stick" is to figure out exactly what you want. This may seem like an obvious step, but you'd be amazed at how many people attempt to set goals without any idea what they really want. Here's a hint: you don't want to lose weight, get out of debt or get organized. Perhaps what you really want is to look sexy, feel healthy, be in control of your finances and live life without stress. You'll get far better results when you focus on what you do want instead of what you don't want.

Figure out exactly what you want to be, do or have, and get specific about it. Do some research if you have to. If you want to win the lottery so that you can take that luxurious vacation you've always dreamed about, stop dreaming and start taking action that will get you there. Start by doing some research on the internet, at your local bookstore or library and by talking to people who've been there. For example, which countries do you want to visit? Which cities in each country? What national or historical landmarks do you have a burning desire to experience? What time of year is best for

the geographic area? What documents or immunizations will you need? What languages are spoken and do you need to learn these or can you get by in English? Start getting really clear on what you want to get out of this once-in-a-lifetime vacation you've been wanting.

In Part II, we'll cover the main reason that most people don't achieve their goals. Until then, start thinking about exactly what you want to accomplish this year. Right now, you have unlimited potential and a clean slate for the year. Whether your New Year's resolutions involve weight loss, Miss America or American Idol, the next two installments will put you on track to make 2008 the best year of your life so far.

How to Set New Year's Resolutions That Stick – Part II of III

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Don't fall prey to New Year's resolutions that lose their fizz before Valentine's Day. Set powerful, meaningful resolutions and goals that maintain their luster throughout the year with the next step in the goal-getting process: figure out why you want what you want.

Simply take a long look at why you want what you want. What do you stand to gain from achieving this goal? Really visualize what it will feel like when you have achieved your goal. What would be different in your life? Would you look at yourself differently? Would other people treat you differently? Would you have more confidence? More stamina? More time? Less stress?

When you take a look at the underlying reasons for wanting to achieve this, you can tap into some powerful emotions to super-charge your goal. Let's assume your goal is to get in shape. If you are concerned about your health, getting fit could result in peace of mind. If you want to slim down to look and feel more attractive, perhaps it's positive attention that you're after. Maybe you want to wear smaller clothes because you know that will boost your self-esteem and confidence.

An added benefit of this step can occur if you suddenly realize your reasons are nutty, or that what you really want can be achieved by something different entirely. For example, if you always wanted a luxury yacht and you realize it's because you want to feel wealthy and successful, you may be able to create that end result from something different entirely. At least until the luxury yacht is closer within your reach (maybe in 2010).

Once you've determined why you want what you want, the next step is to create a plan of action. It's often said that "a failure to plan is planning to fail" and this is the step where many people fall short of achieving their goals. Let's revisit our luxury vacation example from Part I. Assuming that you determined October to be the best time of year to go, and you set this goal in January, you can create a plan immediately and have nine months to save money. A lot can happen in nine months (just ask any parent!)

By creating a plan of action, you can decide how much money you'll have to save each month to reach your goal, and which tasks must be accomplished by what date (e.g., booking airfare, making hotel reservations, requesting time off from work, etc.) Without a plan of action, you will have no way to stay on top of everything that must be done to achieve your goal, which can result in "Oh well, I guess we won't get to go to Europe this year either." Whether your plan of action includes Weight Watchers or the movie "The Secret," just create that plan and make 2008 the year to "make it happen." Remember to read the final installment for the single most important step in the New Year's Resolution/goal-getting process.

How to Set New Year's Resolutions That Stick – Part III of III

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This final installment includes the simplest steps that are by far the most overlooked. Without these essential steps, everything you've done up to this point has been for naught. By the time you complete this article, you will be armed with the knowledge you need to simply and effectively conquer your New Year's resolutions and goals once and for all.

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Now that you've created a detailed plan of action, the next step is to take action daily. Take some sort of action every day (no matter how small) that will move you closer to the accomplishment of your goals. Keep in mind that an obese person did not get that way from one meal. People become overweight from a long list of personal choices made day after day after day. If your goal is related to weight loss, you have a number of choices every day that can either move you closer to or further from your goal. Should I exercise or blow it off today? Should I eat this doughnut? Should I take my vitamins and supplements? Should I take the stairs or the elevator? Should I skip lunch today? Millions of tiny decisions can add up over a relatively short period of time.

Instead of seeing your goal as overwhelming, look at each day as a series of choices where you can choose to move closer to your goal, or not. Take some form of action every single day, and you'll soon find that you sleep better and have less stress because every day you're getting closer to achieving what really matters most to you.

Did you know that anything you measure will improve? Tracking your progress will help you maintain your momentum and stay motivated. If you're saving for that dream vacation, get a posterboard and draw one of those huge thermometers on it, to color in as you hit savings milestones. If your goal is to get fit, take your starting weight, body measurements, body mass index, and shoot a "before" picture. Re-measure every month or so, and post your results on your fridge or pantry door if it helps you stay on track. If your goal is to quit smoking, make a "Smoke-Free Days" sign that increases for each day you don't smoke. Find a way to track and measure your progress and you will maintain your momentum far longer than those who don't.

In order to maintain your resolve the whole year through, make a commitment to revisit your goals at least quarterly (or monthly, if you can). If you are prone to give up those New Year's resolutions quickly, updates at shorter intervals will keep you on track. As you complete your goals, be sure to set new ones to maintain your focus. Congratulations on completing this three-part series and welcome to 2008: the best year of your life so far!

Amy Scott Grant is a writer, coach and public speaker who has assisted countless people in realizing their dreams by setting powerful, meaningful goals. Learn more about coaching one-on-one with Amy at <http://newsuccess.org/coaching.html> or visit her free success resource: <http://NewSuccess.org>