

Community Institute for Psychotherapy

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2021-2022 News & Notes



2022 January News and Notes Making Changes, Planning for Success By Robin Joy Berenson, PhD, MFT

Making Changes, Planning for Success

It's a familiar catch-phrase: *Failing to plan is planning to fail*. This is particularly true when we set out to adopt new patterns, change old habits, and otherwise go about improving ourselves. It is estimated that some 40% of us make New Year's resolutions. If you are one of them this year, here are some winning strategies gleaned from various studies on the subject to help you meet your goals.

Make it "SMART": Originally coined in 1981 in an article in *Management Review*¹, the SMART model has been adapted for use in every field imaginable by individuals and organizations alike.

S stands for "specific." It's not enough to say, "I'll lose weight," or "I'll make more time for exercise." *How much* weight will you plan to lose? Five pounds? Ten? *How much* time, and when, will you devote to exercising?

M is for "measurable." Quantifiable goals, such as weight loss or hours of exercise, are easy to track. For more intangible goals, such as "reduce stress" or "get better sleep," keeping a journal or log to chart daily progress can be helpful.

A is for "achievable." How realistic is your goal? You may want to be able to run fifty miles a week, but how likely is it? A more modest goal will be more helpful in maintaining your motivation to succeed.

R is "relevant." How relevant is the goal to your life; will it have a qualitative impact? Is it important enough for you to prioritize it amid the other demands on your time?

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T is “timebound.” Within what timeframe do you hope to achieve your goal? Two months? By summer? How much time will you invest to bring it about?

Once you have your SMART goals, write them out and revisit them from time to time.

What will it take? Positive thinking isn’t enough, maintains psychology professor Gabriele Oettinge. To the contrary, she found that “the more positively people fantasize and daydream about their future success, the less well they do in terms of having actual success.”²

Instead, imagine likely impediments to your goal, and what you will do to overcome them. What concessions will you need to make? One might be changing habits that lead to tempting situations. If you’re trying to lose weight, perhaps skip the going for beer after work, or Saturday breakfast at the bakery. Another successful strategy for maintaining motivation is rewarding yourself for your progress.

Let others help. Whether it’s finding a sympathetic friend or family member who can offer encouragement and positive feedback, or a buddy who will join you on your morning run each day, we often do better when relating to others.

Carrot or stick? While many respond well to encouragement, rewards, and other positive incentives, others prefer the motivation of negative consequences: Wagering \$1,000 with a friend, for example, that you’ll achieve your goal may give you the push you need to stay on track.

Two traits. Aside from the aforementioned strategies, people who are successful in achieving their resolutions have two personal qualities: According to psychologytoday.com, “The most important factor in predicting success was self-efficacy – the belief in one's ability to get the job done.”³

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The other important trait is persistence. A slip-up or setback does not have to mean you've failed. Instead, recommit yourself and pick up where you left off.

¹ "There's a S.M.A.R.T. way to write management goals and objectives" by George Doran, Arthur Miller and James Cunningham

² <https://www.nytimes.com/guides/smarterliving/resolution-ideas>

³ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/evidence-based-living/201712/how-keep-your-new-years-resolutions>