



Why Summer Resolutions Don't Work

It's the beginning of summer. For most of us, it's a time of hope. As we transition from the chill of the winter and fall to the warmth of the summer season, we look forward optimistically to the future, to what's possible. We promise ourselves that we'll quit bad habits, lose weight, maybe even start exercising. Yes, it's a lot like New Years, and we'll fix ourselves once and for all.

If you're like most people, you started out with the best of intentions in early spring. But within a few weeks, maybe even days, it seemed dieting became inconvenient, and exercising just wasn't realistic given your schedule. So, you started eating chocolate again, had that second glass of wine. And you feel guilty! But why? You have discipline. You could do it if you really set your mind to it. Couldn't you?

Maybe not—and it has nothing to do with your personality, commitment or discipline.

The reason most resolutions fizzle out so early is that they don't take into account recent research in neuro psychology. The research shows that when we are gripped by negative emotions like frustration, self doubt, and resentment, our mental and physical energy dwindles. We lose focus and concentration. In other words, we *can't* stick to our goals.

Because resolutions are usually about what we believe we *should* be and do, rather than what we truly want, they simply fade away. While they come from a place of striving for more, all too often the shoulds feel burdensome, irritating, or simply make us feel bad about not following through. Irritation, guilt and resentment most definitely do not spark energy for change.

But, you say, Isn't change supposed to be painful? And what has emotion got to do with it anyway? As it turns out, when it comes to personal development, emotions have everything to do with it.

Let's look at the classic example of a resolution that invokes negativity: "I'm going to lose weight."

Stated that way, the goal brings up feelings of present inadequacy, unattractiveness, even self loathing. It can also give rise to feelings of scarcity, taking away one of the basic pleasures in life. And for what? That state of mind is almost guaranteed to send you to the cookie jar.

Positive emotions, on the other hand, can trigger our parasympathetic nervous system, releasing biochemicals that enhance our capacity for creativity, resilience and focus. The Positive Emotional Attractor, as scientists call it, is a powerful driver of behaviors.

So, change is most likely to occur when we choose goals that inspire us, rather than make us irritated or ashamed. This small shift in mental framing makes a huge difference in whether or not we achieve our personal or professional goals in life. When the Positive Emotional Attractor is ignited, we are wired for success.

How would this play out for that classic summer resolution losing weight?



Rather than trying to lose weight, you may resolve to do something exciting and fun in this season that requires fitness and health. Maybe you'll commit to doing a bike ride, run or walk for charity. Or you might decide to choose an active vacation this year. Or you might resolve to look and feel your best, every day.

To have the greatest chance for success, tie your resolution to your personal vision—a clear and compelling mental picture of what you want in all aspects of your life and work. A life vision guides us to the goals and resolutions that are right for us. A personal vision provides energy, focus and direction for our efforts.

Are your resolutions tied to your personal vision? Do your personal and professional goals lead you closer to your ideal self and your ideal life? Do they take you a step or two closer to your dreams?

To chart a path for change, start by reflecting on, or even writing about, your vision for yourself, your family, relationships, work, lifestyle—all the people and things that are important to you. Then, if you choose to move towards your dreams this year, choose one or two achievable resolutions that will truly help you get there. And remember: choose dreams, not shoulds.

Have fun—it's going to be a great Summer!

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