

This New Year's, Set Goals Not Resolutions



Every New Year we tell ourselves “I’m going to....” And then the year ends and we repeat the cycle over again. Research shows that 80% of New Year’s resolutions fail by February because they seldom have actionable steps, and are often created out of peer pressure surrounding an arbitrary date.

“Eating better” and “Exercising” are some of the more popular resolutions every year. However these are not achievable because

they are subjective and often left open to interpretation. What does it mean to eat better? And what constitutes exercise?

While resolutions are at the forefront of everyone’s mind, setting goals could be far more beneficial as they are more specific and action oriented than resolutions. This makes it easier to create a plan to achieve them. This year, try setting **SMART goals** instead of resolutions. **SMART goals** are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant, and **T**ime-bound.

Here are some steps to help you achieve your 2024 goals:

- 1. Reflect over all areas of your life to determine where you are –and where you want to go.**

Strictly speaking, goals are the object of your ambition or effort. They are personal. Our lives are not centered on one common axis. We are complex beings. Reflect on the personal (relationships, health), professional (money, career goals), emotional (mental health), and spiritual (self-actualization, self-care) areas of your life.

Reflection will be different for everyone. You can do this alone or with friends and family. This is the first step to determining your goals. If your goals have no meaning, you're unlikely to achieve them. Also, if you have too many goals, you're unlikely to achieve them. Pick your top five to get started.

- 2. Write down your SMART goals for the areas in your life you are committed to changing. Use the SMART acronym to set goals.**

- Be **specific**. Your goals should answer the questions of what you want to accomplish and why it is important to you. The best goals are incredibly specific, with clear steps to take you from where you are now to getting the results you want to achieve. The more specific you can be when breaking down your goals, the more likely you'll accomplish them.



- Make sure it's **measurable**. Quantify your goal in a way you have control. Don't rely on someone else to measure your success such as receiving a raise. That is outside of your control. When goals are broken down into manageable and measurable pieces, you'll be able to track your progress and stay focused. This helps to ensure that you'll keep working on the goal until you accomplish it.
- Make sure your goal is **achievable**. Even the loftiest goals can be accomplished. It all starts with a single step.
- Determine its **relevance**. Why is this important to you now? Is this goal relevant in your life right now? Relevance is particularly important when setting professional goals.
- Time bound means setting a specific deadline for accomplishment. A deadline creates a sense of urgency to motivate us to act.

Here's an example: I will lose 5 lbs. (specific and measurable) before my wellness exam (relevance) in February (time bound) by substituting a piece of fruit (achievable) for my morning muffin.

3. **Post your goals where you can see them.**

I'm a true believer in affirmations, vision boards, and visualization. I believe you should post your goals where you can see them every day. There's a reason famous athletes visualize— and it's because even science affirms that it makes an impact and moves the needle forward. When we write down our goals and then close the notebook, weeks go by without ever seeing or revisiting our goals. Posting them where you can see them keeps them top-of-mind.

You'll be more likely to keep working towards your goals when they're literally sitting in front of you. Write your goals on a sticky note and keep it on the side of your monitor, or keep them in a note on your phone's home screen. Keep a document on your computer where you can keep track of your progress and physically check off the boxes as you make progress. The more time you spend seeing your goals, the easier it will be keep up the progress you're making with accomplishing them.

4. **Tell a friend.**

New research shows that if you tell the right people your goals, you're more likely to keep them. Accountability, right? You need to tell someone you trust – a friend or mentor. However, that same research found that talking about your plan to achieve the goal is more effective than telling someone your goal. And then keep them informed of your progress.

Interestingly, however, is that when you go public with your goals, studies show you get the same satisfaction as completing your goals and you are, therefore, less likely to stick with it. So, don't tell everyone!



5. Be flexible.

Sometimes our goals become outdated or irrelevant. Ditch those. Write new goals if it is relevant or see how you might tweak the other goals you've written.

In a study led by professor Dr. Gail Matthews, respondents were 42% more likely to accomplish their goals when they were in writing. The success rate for achieving goals was 76% when study participants wrote down their goals, developed a plan, told a friend, and kept the friend in the loop.

6. Choose no more than three goals to work in at a time.

The fewer goals you're working on at once, the better. If you try to do too much at once you'll end up getting overwhelmed which can hinder your progress. This in turn can lead to feelings of frustration and decreased motivation, and ultimately can lead to you abandoning the goals you've set because you aren't seeing any progress.

Working towards just one or two goals is optimal, because it's easier to maintain your focus. You'll see more tangible results, which will increase your motivation to keep going and working until you've turned those goals into achievements.

So, this year as you ring in the New Year, take some time to reflect on where you are and where you want to be. Set your big hairy audacious goals for 2024. Write them down and divide them into manageable bit-sized pieces you can share with a trusted mentor. And don't forget to celebrate your wins.

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