

# KEEPING YOUR SANITY THROUGH WHAT TO DO WITH NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

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Now's the time when we're supposed to make New Year's

resolutions. All those bad behaviors we've suffered from (or made others suffer from); all those good behaviors that we know would make life better for ourselves and those we care about. The things that we vow to do this year even though we've never done them before...

Even though we've resolved year after year to do them *this year*.

And then felt anywhere from a mild regret to deep shame when we don't make the new thing happen.

Magically, like a spell we cast on New Year's.

Well, this year let's make that a different story, because I'm going to tell you why it never worked before, and why this time you'll have a good chance of actually reaching those goals this year – assuming that they're actually reachable.

The reason the magic spell of New Year's resolutions doesn't usually work, is that we focus on the result, and not the process that will get us there.

We need to know what our goals are. Identifying what we want to achieve this year is essential. But once we have that clear, our main focus needs to be on establishing the regular *habits* that will enable us to actually reach those goals.

If my goal is to write a book this year, I can imagine it, I can dream about it, I can wish with all my might to make it so. But if I don't have a plan for the steps to get there, and the *daily habits* that will get me through the challenges I'll be facing, nothing will happen.

Nothing.

I'll come back to that in a minute, but there's another common reason why New Year's resolutions usually fail: if I haven't chosen goals that are actually possible, nothing good will happen.

One of the primary ways our mood system drops, and can drop into depression, is from having goals or expectations of ourselves that are not actually possible.

Today, at 62 years old, and even though I'm in very good physical shape and already compete in my age group for water polo, and even if I poured all of my resources of time, energy and money into it, I will never win a gold medal in water polo – or in any event – at the Olympics. I will never become a billionaire. I will never win a Nobel Prize in Physics. None of these are possible for me. This isn't pessimism, it isn't limiting my possibilities; it's a fact of life.

If I set anything like these as my goal, nothing good will come of it. I'll feel continually frustrated, disappointed, and even ashamed. Meanwhile, my mood system, which is paying close attention to all of my foolishness will be letting me know that I should really stop and reconsider what I'm doing, because it's not good for my well-being.

It will drop my mood a bit, lowering my energy and motivation, and enabling me to think more clearly – so that I can change course toward something that will lead me in a better direction.

Plus... If I ignore that kind communication from my mood system, which is wise and ancient, it'll drop my mood some more, hoping that I'll pay attention. Too much ignoring and too little listening and reconsidering will lead, fairly predictably, to some level of depression.

So let's not do that.

We also don't want to choose goals that are too easy, because that's just not much fun.

So now that we've chosen a goal – or maybe three or four, but not too many – we need to identify the concrete challenges that we face in order to actually reach those goals.

*Don't spend time envisioning your goals, feeling what it will feel like to have reached your goals, savoring the triumph of having succeeded. Don't do that, because part of you will then feel like you've already done it, then you'll have to come out of that reverie and face the reality that the work hasn't even started yet, and that will drain your energy and undermine your motivation.*

So identify your goal or goals, and then move quickly to identifying the steps you need to take to reach your goals.

If I want to write a book, I need to write consistently and well. Maybe there are some things I need to learn before I can actually do the job. Maybe I need to learn about writing a book proposal, or how to make my writing more engaging... Map out the specific tasks that will bring that knowledge and those skills.

If I don't need to learn new information or skills, but am ready to dive in, then I need to identify the *specific habits* that, if I practice them regularly, will lead me to reaching my goal.

That may mean writing several hours *every day*, whether I want to or not; whether I feel like it or not; whether writing is easy and satisfying that day, or it's a hard, frustrating slog. The habit of writing regularly is essential to writing anything.

Identifying and establishing the regular habits is the key to *everything*.

*Everything.*

Here are the steps:

- Look at your own goals. Make sure they're doable but challenging enough that you'll feel satisfied.
- Determine if you need to learn anything new in order to achieve them. If you do, then determine the habits of learning that will bring you the new knowledge or skills.
- If you already have the knowledge and skills, then determine the actions you'll need to take to achieve your goals. The steps to solving the challenges you'll be facing on your way toward your goals.
- Then determine what the *regular, daily habits* are that will enable you to take those steps and overcome those challenges.
- Write those down as a daily chart, so you can keep track of when you do them and when you don't – if you want to change something, measure it.
- Identify the first action you need to take, and when and where you'll take it (this makes it about three times as likely that you'll actually reach your goals).

Now we've filled in the details of how to actually reach our goals, so that it's not magic or luck or chance that determines whether you'll reach your goals this year. It's a process. The process can feel like magic if you work it, because if you do these steps, you'll have created something this year that you never would have otherwise.

Even if you don't reach the specific goal in the specific time frame you've planned for, you'll be much closer to it than you ever could have been otherwise.

And that kind of earned success is one of the great satisfactions of life.

Happy New Year!

PS: My new course, *Mastering Emotions, Moods and Reactions* can help you with this in much greater detail, with deep understanding and practical skills for mastering these systems and living well. And *A Master's Course in Happiness* can help you to take charge of your habits and your life in ways you may not have thought possible.

And I'm now offering both at a lower price.

You can also give a gift of *Mastering Emotions, Moods and Reactions* and *A Master's Course in Happiness* for a loved one or friend, simply by using their email when you place your order.

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*Joel F. Wade, Ph.D., is the author of The Virtue of Happiness, Mastering Happiness, his new course, Mastering Emotions, Moods and Reactions, A Master's Course in Happiness, and The Mastering Happiness Podcast. He is a marriage and family therapist and life coach who works with people around the world via phone and video. You can get a FREE Learning Optimism E-Course if you sign up at his website, [www.drjoelwade.com](http://www.drjoelwade.com).*

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