

Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog

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Do you have your New Year's Resolutions ready to go for January 1, 2021? How long did it take you last year to break any or all of your 2020 New Year's Resolutions?

If your 2020 New Year's Resolutions did not make it past the first week of January, do not worry because you are not alone. Studies suggest that 20% of resolutions are broken within the first week of January. At least 80% are broken within one year, and the actual figure is probably much higher.

But the big question is: Why are New Year's Resolutions broken so quickly? An even bigger question: What can we do about it?

In this final edition of the Carpe Diem-Seize the Day Blog of 2020, I will explore the top seven reasons for breaking resolutions, and proven science-based techniques for avoiding them.

1. All-or-none thinking.

"Resolutions" set us up for failure by luring us into all-or-none thinking. Most people think in terms of "keeping" their resolutions, or "breaking" them.

Thinking in black-or-white terms of "success" or "failure" can be fun as long as you are making good progress. But the joy of feeling like a "pure success" soon fades with the first minor setback, and you plunge into feeling like a total failure.

In other words, all-or-none thinking leads to the next cause of breaking resolutions: the snowball effect.

2. The snowball effect.

We have all experienced the snowball effect: letting a minor lapse snowball into a major relapse and a total collapse. Because all-or-none thinking is a major factor, it happens to resolution-makers all the time.

Dieters frequently suffer from the snowball effect as well because they typically think in terms of being "on" their diet, or "off" it. Any little setback leads them to think that they have "broken" it, and they pig out.

3. Overlooking progress and dwelling on setbacks.

The "law of effect" is the most fundamental law in psychology. It is simple: actions followed by rewards are strengthened and likely to recur. It seems obvious, but most people do just the opposite. Study after study has shown people who try -- and fail -- to make life changes self-reward too little and self-punish too much.

Resolutions-makers (and dieters) do this all the time. After two weeks of healthy eating and exercise, for example, they have an ice cream cone. But instead of rewarding themselves for two weeks of solid progress, they beat themselves up over their minor setback.

4. No plan (and bad goal setting and we forget).

These reasons all go together, and they all have the same root cause. Most people resolve to do X in the coming year and do not think much beyond that. But an annual resolution is too far in the future to be motivating. You will not be inspired to take action or to make a plan and follow through. And because such a distant goal simply will not show up on your "radar screen," you will soon forget about it. Until next New Year's.

Instead, studies show that resolution-keepers use the proven principles for setting goals that will keep them focused, motivated and confident.

5. The "nice-to-keep" syndrome.

Let's face it -- for most people, their resolution is a "nice-to-keep," not a "need-to-keep." Sure, they would like to be fit, or quit smoking, or have better relationships, or whatever. But by January 7th, they get focused on issues that are supposedly more "pressing," or get bogged down "putting out fires." Their longer-term, nice-to-have goals keep getting put on the back burner and are soon forgotten.

Resolution-keepers do it differently.

They use a variety of commitment-enhancing and pre-commitment strategies that ensure they avoid the "nice-to-keep" syndrome. They find ways to keep themselves accountable and follow through on the things that are truly important to them.

6. No Vision (and not understanding the all-important "why").

The motivating power of any goal comes from truly understanding "why" you want it. But most resolution-makers do not think through their underlying motivations.

Just wanting to lose ten pounds for its own sake may be a fine goal, but it will not be enough to motivate you when you have to make sacrifices or suffer a setback.

But you will have that motivation if you know that getting in shape will mean having more stamina for playing with your kids or going on a big hiking trip with your friends.

As Antoine de Saint-Exupery once put it: "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea." Clarify your vision, and motivation will come.

7. Not enough action.

All of the "small" reasons for not keeping resolutions add up to one big reason: not enough action.

Most people know what to do in order to keep their resolution. They have the blueprint for success. But they do not take sufficient action.

There is no great secret to weight loss success -- just burn off more calories than you take in. Eat more vegetables, watch your portion sizes, and exercise more (studies have shown that weight loss maintainers average one hour of exercise per day!). It is not hard to figure out. It is just hard to do it and maintain these lifestyle changes over the long-term. Most people start out OK but do not take sufficient action to make cement their new habits and make their life changes permanent.

Editor's Note: The Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog will be distributed and posted weekly.
Always remember – **CARPE DIEM – SEIZE THE DAY!**

Happy New Year to everybody! Good luck with sticking to your 2021 New Year's Resolution!

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