

## **Why Most New Year's Resolutions Fail – and How to Make Them Succeed**

Recent surveys show that most New Year's resolutions hit the dumpster before February. Survey respondents blame stress, lack of motivation, lack of time, and a failure of willpower for their poor results.

But it is really just a lack of willpower that causes resolutions to fail?

"No," says psychologist Phyllis Staff. "It takes more than motivation and willpower to carry out New Year's resolutions. Most resolutions fail because support systems were not in place at the start."

"Much human behavior," says Dr. Staff, "runs on autopilot. It's an efficient tool that keeps people from having to examine every action they take. For example, they know how to drive a car. And, every once in a while, they arrive safely at their destination without being aware of what they did to get there. They've been running on autopilot."

"Resolutions are simply behaviors not yet programmed into human autopilots. Until they are, people need a support system to make sure that they keep on practicing the new behavior."

She offers a few tips to keep resolutions alive until new behaviors run on autopilot:

1. Write down resolutions (goals) and the specific results carrying them out will bring. Writing down goals helps firm up commitment.
2. Set daily and weekly mini-goals, and write them down as well. Every evening, write down results such as goals accomplished and the feelings associated with those accomplishments. Do that for weekly goals, too.
3. Create support rituals. For example, if exercising five times each week is the goal, run through a mental checklist the night before to make sure that equipment and clothing are together in a special place. They'll be ready to go first thing in the morning.
4. Find a support buddy who is also working toward a goal. Set up regular meetings to review each other's progress. Be generous with compliments and suggestions. Bury criticism in the backyard, and leave it there.
5. Keep rewards small and frequent. The most effective reward is nothing more than a mental "pat on the back" or "attagirl." Large (and distant) rewards distract from the pleasure of achieving goals.

6. Ignore failure. Self-criticism and making excuses for failure to achieve a goal do more harm than good.

7. Be alert for stealthy saboteurs. Saboteurs often lurk behind the mask of kindness. Maybe a spouse keeps the candy bowl loaded and overflowing. Maybe watching TV has developed a couch potato. Maybe the real cause is self-sabotage.

Root out sabotage. Often, simply being aware of the sabotage will defuse it.

7. Work on only one goal at a time. Practice it until it becomes a habit before tackling another. After six weeks or so, the new behavior will become habitual.

With a little planning and regular attention, 2006 can be the year those great resolutions become reality.



Phyllis Staff is the author of *How to Find Great Senior Housing* (2005) and the just released *128 Ways to Prevent Alzheimer's and Other Dementias* (2006). See more of her work at <http://www.alzheimersfree.com>.

About AlzheimersFree

AlzheimersFree exists to help individuals thrive without the diseases of aging. We are a subsidiary of The Best Is Yet.Net Press. Online since 2001, we publish information dealing with aging.

Contact:

Phyllis Staff, CEO  
AlzheimersFree.com  
PMB 122  
800 Hwy 77, Suite 160  
Waxahachie, TX 75165  
PHONE: (972) 923-9163  
FAX: (972) 923-9163  
<http://www.alzheimersfree.com>