

RESOLVE YOURSELF

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BY NOW, IF YOU'VE MADE NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS, you've either broken them or are more resolved than ever to achieve them. Most people, however, have given up. The stress of everyday life makes living up to large-scale resolutions hard. I know. I keep changing my "daily yoga" resolution during the winter because it's too dark and cold that early. You're not alone.

To get ahead this year, we need to set those small goals that fit into our big pictures of ourselves and commit to meeting them. Each time we have a small success, we increase our chances for the big ones.

To start the process, determine where you want to be in a year. This past year left many of us with uncertainty about our jobs, our roles in society and even the world. Even if we hadn't come from such an unnerving year, I'd still only recommend projections one year out. It's a reasonable amount of time into the future and one most of us will surely see.

We all know people who have their whole careers planned out to their retirement – starting in their 20s. They even know how much money they'll have when they retire. Are they enjoying today and getting the most from it or are their lives on hold until tomorrow? Last year, I lost two friends who never got close to their retirement age. So, should we plan for that future that might never come? Or should we set goals that are achievable in short time frames?



I'm a believer in setting achievable goals that we can realize sooner than later. Once we get on a roll of successes, the harder, long-range goals become easier. Your resolutions can include some long-range goals, but they shouldn't eclipse the one-year goals. Otherwise, you might miss out on living now. And that's really all we can count on.

After determining where you want to be in one year in broad terms, list all the small goals that factor into that destination, including professional and personal goals. Some might even cross over. Do you want to get more politically active this year? Do you want to finish that degree you keep promising yourself? Or, do you want to change jobs to one where you're more appreciated? All of these sample goals involve both personal and professional parts of your life.

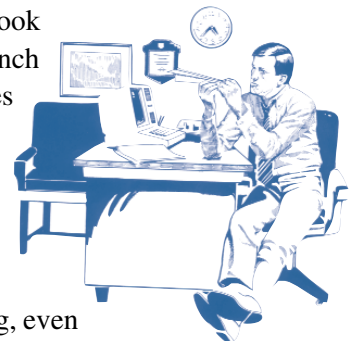
Unfortunately, we must make some sacrifices to achieve almost every goal. This is probably why so few resolutions make it to the second week. We're not willing to do without when our energy is dispersed in so many directions trying to keep up with our original obligations. Some of our bad actions become comforting because they are so familiar.

Assess the cost to your psyche or energy by making specific sacrifices to achieve your goal. Really look at your emotional investment if you're afraid to take a small step toward your one-year goal. What's the worst that can happen to you? What's the payoff if you win? Maybe it's not so bad after all.

How do we make the small sacrifices that are instrumental in meeting our goals? By selecting mini-milestones that aren't as painful. Let's look at a fictional resolution to spend more time with your family each week. A one-year goal might be to devote one whole weekend a month and one night every week to family activities. You might also include being part of the family vacation without your pager, cell phone, and e-mail. How would you tackle this goal?

First, identify your motivations for wanting to do this. Are you ashamed of not spending more time with family or do you really want to be more involved? How much time are you spending now? Look at how much more time you could spend by simply adjusting your schedule. Exercise over lunch three times a week instead of after work, for example. Host staff meetings at a time that gives you more time at home.

Next, tackle the things that require sacrifices. Look at all the parts of your life that demand time and determine which ones give you the most satisfaction. Keep those. If you have a number of things that don't bring you closer to your goal(s) and are not particularly satisfying, eliminate one of them this year and redirect the time to your goal, even if that means giving up specific business development or networking meetings or a night out bowling, even if these actions bring business to you. If it's important to your business survival, find others who have the time and are willing to take on these tasks. They'll probably be more motivated to participate and may even bring more back leads or information than you ever could.



Finally, applaud your successes. If you have a small success, be proud. If you have a setback, resolve to try again. Don't give up. Always look at how far you're come, not how far you have to go. Baby steps turn into giant leaps forward.