

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

Every year I dutifully make a number of New Year's resolutions but I don't keep any of them for very long. Can you give me any suggestions about how to make my new ones last?

-- Stuck in a rut

Dear Stuck,

It is that time of year again, isn't it? We've eaten at least twice our body weight in sweets over the past two weeks. We spent money we didn't even know we had (actually, as our credit card bills point out...we spent money we didn't have). For a year, we've been rebuking ourselves for not keeping to the plan we made at the beginning of last year.

And here we are once more: The start of a brand new year – and a new list of resolutions. But here's the rub – will we have kept them by next year? We can all take comfort in the realization that making changes in one's life is not as easy as it seems. As a Spanish proverb teaches, "It is not the same to talk of bulls as it is to be in the bullring."

Did you know that the word "resolution" comes from the Latin, and means "the state or quality of being firm and determined," or "a course of action"? Like you, I've made my resolutions. Lose weight – is that on every person's list? Get more exercise. Get organized. Spend more time on my most important priorities. Yikes!

I started wondering about who came up with this idea of mustering the commitment to make all these changes on one single day. I mean, why now when we've just finished a busy year and have spent the last few weeks with extra cooking, cleaning, and wrapping presents? Why don't we make these resolutions in, say, the middle of July?

I wanted to get to the bottom of our insistence on this rather bad timing, and discovered that over four thousand years ago the Babylonians celebrated New Year's Day. They're the ones to blame for our glut of resolutions. Babylonians believed that what you did on the first day of the new year will have a big old effect on the rest of the year. But, here's something else I learned: the Babylonians celebrated the New Year in the beginning of March, to coincide with the spring planting. So, I've decided that if I break any of my many resolutions this year, I can have a new start in the legitimate Babylonian New Year...in March!

But, there is nothing quite as exhilarating as making positive changes in our lives and moving toward the realization of our fullest potential. Here are some suggestions to get started with this New Year's resolutions:

1. Select reasonable and specific goals and order them by their importance to you. Don't just say, "I'm going to change my life." Say instead, "I'm going to walk every day for one mile for one month and then bump my exercise to two miles for another month..."
2. Write down your goals in a place where you see them every day.
3. Maintain a strong intention about what you want to accomplish. Visualize yourself reaching your goals with a new waistline or better time management skills.

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4. Reward yourself for accomplishing your goals. (Note: If your goal is to lose weight don't eat a candy bar as a reward for good behavior. Instead, treat yourself to a massage.)
5. Don't give up just because you missed a goal or a day at your new practice. For example, if your goal is to lose ten pounds and you are keeping a healthy diet, don't throw in the towel just because you gorged on that cheesecake at an office luncheon. Remember that tomorrow is another day and you can get back on track.

These strategies can help you stick to your resolutions, through January, and past the Babylonian New Year in March. There's always room for improvement, but next year at this time, let's hope that our list of resolutions has all new items...no carryovers from this year! Good luck, and Happy New Year!

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2002 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) www.fullpotentialliving.com