

BROKEN YOUR NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS?? How to Get Back on Track by Dr. Eddie O'Connor



By now, perhaps you and a bunch of your friends have already broken your New Year's Resolutions. Research suggests that the advice commonly circulated doesn't work (or people aren't motivated to follow the advice - which you will see in a minute is the same thing). You are off that diet, or out of that gym, or haven't even started toward your goal to get out of debt by the time February rolls around.

U.S. News reported that 80% of resolutions fail by the second week of February, and newer research by Strava (a social network for athletes) called January 12th "Quitter's Day" after analyzing 31.5 million online global January activities. That is when motivation begins to falter.

That is the problem. Much of the advice you get is about how to increase your motivation so that you can be successful. Find a workout buddy, know your why, set a specific goal, etc. These things DO increase motivation, but who says we have to feel motivated in order to perform in an intentional and purposeful way? Yes, it is a heck of a lot easier to quit smoking and lose weight when we feel motivated. However, motivation isn't a requirement. If you are relying on it, you will fail because motivation doesn't last.

Commitment, no matter what you think or feel, to a behavior that is based on what you value most in life, is what is necessary. So, you have to start with identifying what you value. Is it health, financial security, intimate relationships? You can't change because your doctor told you to, or for your spouse, or for your kids. It's your life. You are responsible for it so your goal has to be personally meaningful. You need a very good reason to go through the pain you are adding to your life with this intended change.

This is where most "Sticking to New Year's Resolutions" advice goes wrong. Don't try to make yourself feel better and increase your motivation to do the hard things. Don't focus on how good you will feel when you achieve it (actually, research shows that if you do this, it can decrease your motivation to act!). Focus on the problems you are inviting as part of the process of achievement and be willing to go through them. The Army may say it best in their mantra, "Embrace the suck."

Let's be realistic here for a second. If you want to lose weight, you are going to be hungry, you are going to miss dessert and experience sugar cravings. If

you want to quit smoking you will have nicotine withdrawal and feel strong urges you must resist without relief. If you are going to get in shape, you will have to sweat and push your body to move in ways it does not want to move. Any thoughts of trying to avoid these experiences will sabotage your commitment and prevent you from doing what it is you need to do in order to succeed.

After you identify what is really important to you, and you figure out what you need to do to get there, the single most important thing to do next is identify what is going to get in the way. What pain or sacrifice did you just create that you now have to deal with? Are you willing to feel that discomfort fully in service of your goal? Can your pain have meaning and purpose to it? Will you accept the fatigue when you get up to run before work because it is an investment in your fitness? Can your increasing tolerance of urges for sugar or nicotine be consciously experienced as a sign that your body is changing in a healthy direction?

In my work as a sport psychologist, I help people be their best. I promise you, in every case of success, the performer has developed a willingness to sacrifice comfort during the process of working toward that goal. It is never easy. It isn't always fun. But their suffering always has meaning and they don't run away from it. In fact, it is no longer experienced as suffering because it has meaning! It is now "just" pain or discomfort without the emotional turmoil and struggle.

So, if you want to get back on track with your resolutions this year, don't focus on the positive experience of the goal. Don't rely on fickle motivation. Instead, focus on, plan on, and accept the negative experiences you will have to power through to obtain your goal.

And if you want some help along the way, The Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) has a list of Certified Mental Performance Consultants (CMPC) that can help: <https://appliedsportpsych.org/certification/find-a-consultant/>]

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