

New Year's Resolutions: Why Are They So Hard to Fulfill?

By Tim Cosby

Now that the New Year hoopla has kind of died down, I find myself digging in for the long Michigan winter. We've had an unusually large dose of sunshine and unseasonably high temperatures, so perhaps we're in for a mild winter. In fact today feels like Spring is finally here! Since it's only Jan. 10, I won't get my hopes up. For those who suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder, the generous sunlight has been a welcome gift.

I did a live interview for a local radio station last week and the question was, "Why are New Year's Resolutions so hard to keep?" Good question. How are you doing on your New Year's Resolutions?

My Goals or Your Goals?

My doctor suggested that my heartburn might be a result of drinking too much coffee, so I stopped drinking coffee for 1 day. Does that count? "How much is too much," I asked? "Your esophagus will tell you what is enough, and it sounds like it might be speaking to you," he said. "But you don't understand. Drinking coffee is what a Life Coach does." I bet my doctor wanted to say, "Fine. Let me know how that goes for you." I admit that giving it only one day was a half-hearted effort on my part. The pain does not outweigh the pleasure. Yet. When it does, I may be singing a different tune. Until then, coffee I will imbibe. The coffee de-imbibing idea wasn't my goal; it was my doctor's suggested goal for me, and it lasted about 24 hours. Why?

The Push and the Pull

One of the problems with New Year's Resolutions is that they are often "forced" upon us from an external source. My doctor didn't "force" this idea on me, but it didn't come from me, thus it wasn't my goal. As good as it might have been, it was someone else's goal for me. And when I started to feel even a little resistance, I caved in because it wasn't something that I really wanted to do. External motivation is temporary, and unless it becomes internal, we won't carry through on the goals that we feel pushed into. People change when they understand, value and apply what we help them discover, not what we tell them to do. Our goals need to be "ours" and they need to pull us into the future. I think most of us resist being pushed into anything. To be fair, my doctor also wrote me a prescription to help my acid-reflux. And I think I would have responded better if my doctor would have asked me what I wanted to do with the new information I was receiving. Believe me, if the heartburn gets bad enough I'll do something about it. When the pain exceeds the pleasure, I'll start making changes. And so will you, when you're pulled by something that becomes YOUR goal. And those are two of the reasons people don't fulfill their New Year's resolutions: it's not their goal and therefore they feel pushed into it. But there's another reason we don't reach our goals.

Clarity is Essential

My business partner and I met a couple of weeks ago to map out our vision and business plan for 2012. That's something I'm internally motivated to do. On the motivational chart, it rates pretty high because I want the business to grow and prosper. So we wrote out clear, specific goals that are important to us. The more clarity you have about your goal, the more likely you will succeed. And, by the way, clear goals are written down. Example: One of our goals is to successfully complete one full training a month. That's a clear, measurable goal, and I will know when I have achieved that goal. Here's another reason people don't fulfill their New Year's resolutions: they are unclear goals, and therefore hard to measure. If we would have written, "We want a more successful business this year," how would we know when we accomplished that goal? We wouldn't, and that's

a problem. If we aren't specific about the "when, where, what and how" of a goal, how will we know when we have achieved the goal? Take the time to write your goal or resolution and keep working on it until it's so clear that a child could understand it.

Two are Better than One

Now, I have a goal that is mine, it's clear, it's written down, it's important enough to pull me through obstacles and it's measurable. But that doesn't mean I won't need some outside assistance to accomplish it. As a matter of fact, as every business owner knows, there are some down days when you wonder if things are going to succeed. On those days I'm grateful to have a partner to encourage me. Here's another reason why most people don't fulfill their New Year's resolutions: they try to do it alone. Even with high internal motivation, it is challenging to complete a well-devised goal when you come up against obstacles. The hill of change is steep. Support, encouragement and accountability are needed in high doses if one is to successfully complete a goal. After you have set YOUR goal and made sure it's a pulling-kind-of-goal, and when you have written it down and made it as clear as possible, be sure to ask for the help of a trusted friend to help you reach your goal. That's where the true value of coaching really shines. A coach, without telling you what to do, will provide support and encouragement and help you manage your commitment along the way. One is good. Two is better.

Celebrate!

Decide how you are going to reward yourself when you reach your goal or accomplish your resolution. If it's not worth celebrating, it might not have been worth setting. But that's just me talking. Be creative and design a reward that will help to pull you through times of doubt and uncertainty. Be kind to yourself.

Review:

1. Choose a goal that is YOUR goal.
2. Make sure it's important enough that it will PULL you into your future.
3. Make it CLEAR enough for a child to understand.
4. WRITE it down.
5. Ask for HELP.
6. CELEBRATE.
7. Rinse and repeat.

Go back through some of the New Year's Resolutions you have set. Think about the reasons behind the accomplishment or failure of each resolution.

- ✓ Was it your goal or someone else's goal for you? Was it a high priority at the time?
- ✓ Was it clear to you and to others? Was it measurable?
- ✓ Did you try to accomplish it alone?
- ✓ How did you reward yourself when you accomplished your goal?
- ✓ How will you do things differently this year now that you know why you succeeded or failed in previous years?
- ✓ If you know how to set and achieve a New Year's Resolution, why not keep setting goals all year long?