

# advice

## I want to make a change

**Don't just make a resolution. Get motivated, get specific, and get to work.**

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As another new year begins, so does the litany of heartfelt declarations and renewed commitments from people desiring to shed unwanted pounds, quit smoking, change careers or make other major life changes they've been putting off.

Many will wind up on the junk heap of failed New Year's resolutions before the end of the month, due not to a shortage of desire but more likely to a lack of emotional preparation.

"Emotional readiness is so very important," says Thomas Demaria, a clinical psychologist and assistant vice president of behavioral health at South Nassau Communities Hospital in Oceanside. "Part of it is sorting out the change process and how ready they are to accommodate change in their lives. Unless you do that, it fails."

If you've ever tried to change your behaviors or circumstances, you know how stressful and downright difficult that can be.

To succeed, mental health

professionals and life coaches say, requires not only passion, but also reason, research, planning, flexibility and tenacity.

Focus on your desires

Whether you're considering retiring from a job, adopting a child or going back to school, first decide exactly *what* you want and *why* you want it. For instance, if you're planning to retire, do you want to kick back and put your feet up, or investigate a new career? "Want is an emotional place that helps change happen. That's where we get our motivation to keep on going," says M.J. Ryan, a San Francisco-area executive coach and author, whose latest book is "This Year I Will . . . How to Finally Change a Habit, Keep a Resolution, or Make a Dream Come True" (Broadway).

But change doesn't result from "want" alone, Ryan and others agree. We often set goals that are too numerous and too vague to accomplish, "and we end up sabotaging ourselves. We get carried away with ourselves this time of year," Ryan says. "Change takes work."

In addition to your emotions, you also need to get your head into the game, spell out what you want and create what she calls SMART goals — an acronym which stands for specific (it involves concrete action), measurable (you can track it), achievable (it's possible to do), relevant (it *really* matters to you) and time-bound (a set time frame in

which you'll do it).

Goal-setting moves you from the "ethereal to the practical," Ryan says. "You're increasing the possibility of success."

Change requires a well-thought-out plan of action, agrees Lisa Furst, a licensed social worker and director of public education for the Mental Health Association of New York City.

She recommends the following steps: Write down your end goal — the thing you want to achieve. List the means at your disposal to achieve your goal. Examine how the change will affect every aspect of your life, including your bank account, personal relationships, family life, emotional and phys-

ical health and employment. Take stock of any roadblocks you might encounter. Use past successes to guide you, looking at the things you did that worked and things you could improve. Set a specific timeline to reach your goal, but be aware that that timeline may change depending on circumstances.

During the change process, try to find ways to motivate yourself, says Valorie Burton, a Washington, D.C.-area life coach and author of "What's Really Holding You Back?: Closing the Gap Between Where You Are and Where You Want to Be" (WaterBrook Press).

For example, if you're trying to lose weight, hang a dress or pair of pants you used to wear on the outside of the closet door as a visual reminder of what you're working toward. If you want to retire to a tropical island, tape photographs of the beach around your house and to the dashboard of your car.

Boil down your goal to a single sentence — "Six months from today, I want to resign my current job and go back to school to pursue a teaching degree" — and "put it in your planner or in your PDA," Burton says. "Print it out and put it inside your closet or a drawer or in the



### Tips to succeed

- **WRITE** your goal on a piece of paper and tuck it away in a place where you'll see it frequently, such as inside a dresser drawer or taped to the back of your closet door. Every time you see it, you'll be reminded of your goal.
- **RESEARCH** information from numerous sources, including people who have successfully done what you're trying to do.
- **SEEK** out others you trust, such as a mate, close friend, clergy member or mental health professional, who will listen, ask questions and offer moral support.
- **CHART** your feelings and progress along the way in a journal.
- **RUN** the numbers. Can you afford to do this? What are the financial challenges and payoffs?
- **ASSESS** the impact. What emotional effect will striving to accomplish this task have on you? What would happen if you achieved your goal? What if you failed? What if it took longer than you thought?
- **WEIGH** any possible consequences. If you do this, what's the worst that could happen? What's the worst that could happen if you don't do it?
- **CREATE** a timeline. Nothing says you have to accomplish your goal by year's end, but set a deadline and work toward it. Reassess along the way at set intervals, such as every six weeks or every three months.

