

advice

I want to make a change

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

BY PAT BURSON
STAFF WRITER

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.


**KATTI
GRAY**

Counting on holiday miracles

From his physician's salary, Nanci Tomasetti's father would grant his children a Hanukkah gift from the five-and-dime, but never anything lavish. They'd get trinkets, maybe a doll, said Tomasetti, 61, remembering how her dad never let holiday hype subvert nobler, more enduring ideals.

"My sister and I also would go to the hospital party and we would sing 'Silent Night,'" said Tomasetti, noting her Jewish father's religious tolerance and respect for differences. Practicing Catholics dominated his roster of patients. Christmas was huge for many of them.

Tomasetti is not a religious person, but her sense of the spiritual has been tilled and cultivated, she said. It is rooted in old lessons, which seem new at every turn and are to be applied the whole 12 months. During the holiday season just celebrated, and throughout the year, she draws on what her father — and mother, too — taught about miracles and the joy of family.

Jewish lamps burned after the oil had run out, which is how Hanukkah came to be. Christmas flows from a fountain of conviction in another miracle story. Recognizing the miracles of her own living, Tomasetti, wife of a Catholic, gave her 7- and 12-year-old Long Island granddaughters porcelain angels on Christmas day, which departs from her usual gesture of money for their savings accounts.

"I want them to have something to hold in their hands that will remind them of me when I'm gone," Tomasetti said. Twenty years ago, she was diagnosed with lupus, which has given her a trouncing and put her, several times, on the threshold of death.

"In addition to the exhaustion and pain, I go through periods of time when I'm very sick," said Tomasetti, who lives in Sayville with John Tomasetti, the husband who took an early retirement to ensure she gets proper care.

"He's my blessing. He's a man who cooks and cleans and does everything for me. I'm at physical therapy, with the acupuncturist. The four months I was in the hospital three years ago, I think he missed five days of being there. We were planning my funeral. It was my pancreas



ILLUSTRATION BY TIM FOLEY

car, so you see it in the course of what you're naturally doing."

She and others also recommend discussing your goal with someone who's already done the thing you're attempting to do. That person could offer advice, lend moral support or raise questions you may not have considered.

Don't let "what-ifs" get you

It's also important to acknowledge your concerns and fears, Burton adds. What scares you about attempting this? "When they feel fear, it's usually all based in what-ifs. 'What if I fail? What if something goes wrong? What if I'm

not ready?' Well, what if?" she says. "Often the consequences are not nearly as overwhelming as you've imagined."

During the change process, build in an adjustment period. For instance, imagine that after quitting the job you hate and nabbing your dream job, you find that you're working 16-hour days and hit with a slew of demanding new responsibilities.

Getting what you want "doesn't mean the adjustment phase isn't stressful," Furst says. "Even positive changes can bring stress." If you can, try to identify the stressors that will come with the change and plan for them, she says.

Build in rewards for yourself along the way. "Acknowledge and celebrate your milestones," Burton says, suggesting that you might treat yourself to dinner, a small gift or a champagne toast at home for persevering toward your goal.

"You can pat yourself on the back for making progress instead of only patting yourself on the back for the goal reached," she says.

Expect to make some mistakes along the way. It's just a part of the change process, Demaria says.

Instead of permitting a mistake to overshadow any progress you've made, learn from it and let it propel you

forward. "A mistake is a milestone," Demaria says.

"If you accept it and greet it by saying 'I've just achieved another milestone,' you'll keep moving ahead. It doesn't mean you're not doing well. You're moving along in the change process.

"Expect that change is a hard thing to do," he adds. "Keep your eye on the goal. You're going to fumble a little bit, you're going to fall a little bit, but ultimately, you'll get there."

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