

How to Actually Keep Those New Year's Resolutions

By Anne Whitaker

If you started 2006 with New Year's resolutions that have already evaporated, you're not alone. Many lawyers I coach say that they were caught for years in this cycle of making and breaking resolutions. It's frustrating and the cycle continues until you do something proactively to break it. It's not too late for you to do it differently this year and set goals that you can keep.

The key is to turn resolutions, which are too vague, into concrete goals with an action plan to anchor them in your life. Apply the following steps with one of your resolutions for starters and make a three-month commitment to follow the plan. You need paper, a pen, and your calendar.

- **Think of yourself as an important client.** Your mindset about how important you and your goals are is critical. You already know how to achieve goals – you do it for clients daily. You need to make your personal goals as important as theirs.

Break the cycle of frustration by scheduling yourself into your days.

- **Reframe your resolution as a specific, action-based, and time-bound goal.** For example, Joan, a client of mine, turned her resolution to "get more exercise" into "run two miles on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings at 6:30, starting next week for the next three months." Write your goal down. You can also write it on index cards and post them where you will see them often at the office, in your car, and at home.

- **Put the dates and times for those activities on your calendar.** If you don't schedule yourself into your days, they will fill up with other things.

- **Identify what support and resources you need.** If you need someone's assistance or there are other things you need to do to prepare, list them and put times for them on your calendar. Joan needed to buy new running shoes and talk to her husband about helping with the children on her running days.

- **Plan for possible roadblocks.** You can't foresee all the potential obstacles, but identify the major ones, strategize how you will get around them, and write these points down.

- **Establish accountability.** Who can hold you accountable by checking in with you regularly, preferably every week? It can be a friend, spouse, anyone who is willing. Schedule when you will talk to them.

- **Schedule a three-month review to assess your progress.** You can do it sooner if you want, but no later. Follow-up is critical. After three months, if you have had trouble sticking to your plan, don't give up. Evaluate what the barriers have been. Brainstorm with a friend about new approaches or get a coach.

If you have reached your goal, first celebrate your success! Then plan for the next three months: you may want to increase your current goal and/or add another.

Use this process with any of your resolutions - just not too many at once. Take it a step at a time and you will have a lot to celebrate on December 31st.



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