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COLUMNIST

DEAR CHIEF: I can never seem to keep my New Year’s resolution. Actually, neither do the people I know. Why do we make such a big deal about making New Year’s resolutions if in the end they really don’t matter?

RESOLUTION QUITTER



DEAR RESOLUTION QUITTER: I’ll be honest: I normally don’t make New Year’s resolutions. I’m an action-oriented person to begin with and stick to routines and regimens that enable me to meet or sustain goals I’ve set for myself. However, I’ve certainly noticed others make New Year’s resolutions on New Year’s Eve only to abandon them within a month.

For instance, I take my dog for a 3-mile walk each morning on a paved path through the woods near my home. Normally there aren’t many people on the path but on January 1st, it was packed with new walkers striding with utmost enthusiasm. By January 4th, the number of walkers shrunk to about half as many and they no longer looked enthused. And by January 7th, you guessed it, only me and my dog were once again the only ones walking the trail.

Researchers have determined that approximately 8% of people who make New Year’s resolutions actually keep them. Most quit for various reasons. Either they tried to do it alone, made too lofty of a goal, gave up too easily,

New Year’s resolutions: gone in 30 days

didn’t efficiently manage their time to accommodate it, let it become a financial burden, had no real plan of execution, were dishonest about it, had the wrong perspective about it, or did not believe in themselves.

Behavioral psychologist Dr. Paul Marciano, author of *Carrots and Sticks Don’t Work*, gives the following advice to modify your behavior and motivation to allow you to keep your New Year’s resolution:

Clearly define your goals. Many people say they’ll do something but don’t declare to what extent they’ll do it. Think of the acronym SMART when creating goals. Your goals should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound.

Track your progress. “If you can measure it, you can change it” is a fundamental principle of psychology. These measurements will/should help motivate you as you reflect on where you started and where you are. They also can help you adjust your efforts during periods of “sticking points.”

Be patient. Progress is not always steady. There will be peaks and valleys, rapid gains and resistance. Sometimes progress occurs quickly then slows down or starts slowly then rapidly picks up with gigantic breakthroughs.

Publicize your goals. Maybe it’ll make you feel a little vulnerable but announcing your New Year’s resolution to the rest of the world can help you hold yourself accountable as well as gain social support from family and friends.

Put it on your schedule. This allows

you to make time to properly engage with it. And it forces you to give your resolution some degree of priority in your daily or weekly activities.

Don’t fall into the “all or nothing” trap. If you slip a little, don’t slip entirely. If you cheated on your diet last night, don’t resign yourself to starting over again next week. It’s still better to do something than nothing. If you’re supposed to walk on the treadmill for an hour a day and something came up that derailed your schedule, still walk 20 minutes if you can instead of skipping the walk all together.

If you slip up, get up. The legendary football coach Vince Lombardi would always tell people: “It isn’t whether you get knocked down, it’s whether you get back up.” With New Year’s resolutions, resiliency is the key to success. Don’t turn relapses or temporary failures into total meltdowns or excuses for giving up. Instead, just acknowledge the mistake and recommit yourself to staying the course.

Dr. Marciano firmly believes that achieving our goals isn’t about willpower. It’s about developing the right skills and strategies that, with patience, will lead to success. So keep his advice in mind and you’ll join the elite 8% who will celebrate the success of achieving their New Year’s resolution.



For an opportunity to have your question, issue or concern addressed in the Dear Chief column, go to www.DearChiefAdvice.com and submit your comments or email them to Jeff@DearChiefAdvice.com.