



New Year's Resolutions: Yay or Nay

by Lori Hewitt

Happy New Year to you all! Like 90% of the population, you may have developed a list of New Year's Resolutions. We'll eat better, sleep better, exercise more, be happier! Our intentions are good, but our actions sometimes tell a different story. Many of us often fail in our attempt to stick to our lofty and vague, though well-meaning, goals. According to the University of Scranton, only 19% of people maintain their New Year's resolutions and 80% of all resolutions are dropped by February (which, by the way, is the best month to purchase second-hand exercise equipment!)

It's not our fault. It is often our approach that is not serving us, not our commitment. We fall into the trap of setting too broad goals. The goal of "being happier" for example, is too wide open. The goal to eat better is too vague. We say we are only going to eat healthy in 2025, but that's way too extreme. One slice of chocolate cake and you've failed the whole year! By setting open-ended goals we set ourselves up for failure, sabotage our efforts, and perpetuate negative beliefs.

I fall into this trap every January. It is very tempting at the end of one year to look at the next as a clean slate, a time to make long lists to improve our lives. The turning of a new calendar (yes, some of us still love these hard copy gems posted on our walls!) carries with it the symbolism of fresh starts and new beginnings. We think the promise of newness allows us to let go of past hurts, habits, relationships, and behaviours to embrace the possibility of something new and better. We may not be able to change the past, but the future can be full of potential, hope, and improvement!

Don't get me wrong, resolutions themselves aren't the problem. It's the lack of a plan. Swapping out vague resolutions for well-thought-out, actionable goals improves our chances of success. Identify goals that are manageable and measurable and give yourself permission to adjust course if needed. Perhaps we

ditch the New Year's resolutions trap and adopt instead a focus on daily resolve. We still set goals, but instead of grandiose and unattainable statements, we identify small, meaningful actions we commit to every day.

So how do we interrupt the yearly cycle of "set resolutions, break resolutions, feel bad, commit to trying again eleven months later?" It begins by understanding the barriers to goal setting in the context of our own personal intentions. Before you even begin setting your intentions, ask yourself the following questions: WHY do you want to change? What's your motivation, and why is it so important to change NOW (as opposed to February 9, or March 14 for example)? Understanding your WHY provides a powerful internal compass, helping to keep you on track.

Once you have a better understanding of your "why", it is helpful to understand some of the possible barriers and how best to mitigate them.

1. We set unrealistic goals: In that rush of enthusiasm and motivation that comes alongside New Year's celebrations, we often shoot for the stars. However, setting goals that are too ambitious or vague can often feel overwhelming (especially after a few weeks), which can make us feel discouraged in time. Unrealistic goals can also lead to anxiety, depression, and issues with self image, so take care of your mental health. Remember, a little movement is better than none.

"Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could only do a little"

~Edmund Burke

2. Insufficient tracking: it's hard to stay motivated when you don't see progress. Track your progress, both big and small. Use a calendar, journal, or app to monitor your progress and celebrate your efforts.

3. External factors: Be prepared for these. Life throws us curveballs – there's no way around it. Unexpected events can derail the best laid plans. It

is essential to be gentle and kind to ourselves – the goal is progress, not perfection. Embrace flexibility and practice self compassion.

4. Perfectionism Paralysis (Practice Positivity):

Aiming for the gold medal every time can be daunting, and sometimes harmful. It can trick you into all-or-none thinking patterns and immobilize change. The need to be perfect to feel good enough can create black or white thinking. For example, I ate that one cupcake so the whole week is a write off, but I'll start again next Monday. We may say this on a weekly basis, constantly making excuses, and getting no where with our goal. Before we know it, 2026 is around the corner and we are still eating all the cupcakes!

5. Try this instead: remember that small steps move us forward; consistency and perseverance, not perfection, is the key. And give yourself permission to go slowly or remain still for a time. You can still progress, even if it doesn't feel that way. The way we talk to ourselves can foster a positive and realistic outlook and can contribute to a healthier approach to our mental health and success in meeting in our goals.

6. Underestimating the resistance:

Change is hard! We are creatures of habit, and our brains prefer the familiar, even if it's not ideal. Acknowledge there will be resistance and implement strategies to help overcome it. Lean on others for support and encouragement.

7. Not acknowledging the impact of stress:

You may aim to give up some bad habits as a resolution, but have you addressed the stressors that may have led to the development of these bad habits? Stress can affect our ability to make new decisions and shifting focus to address the underlying stress can help us make positive and healthy changes.

No matter if you make large resolutions or daily intentions, remember to show yourself some grace and patience, especially during the times when you may struggle as you work towards your goals. Please take time over this new year to engage in something meaningful to you and be kind to yourself in the process.

If you feel you could use additional support in any area of your personal wellness, please feel free to reach out to your Employee Assistance Program (EAP). We're always here to help.

Lori Hewitt is a Coordinator with the Employee Assistance Program for Teachers. For confidential assistance contact Lori Hewitt (ext. 242), lhewitt@eapnlteachers.ca or Nancy Ivany (ext. 269), nivany@eapnlteachers.ca.

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For more information:

Contact one of our EAP Coordinators:

Lori Hewitt

709-733-3242

ext. 242

lhewitt@eapnlteachers.ca

Nancy Ivany

709-733-3265

ext. 269

nivany@eapnlteachers.ca

1 – 800 – 563 – 3599 (in-province)

mail@eapnlteachers.ca