

10 WAYS TO DERAIL YOUR RESOLUTIONS

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The beginning of a new year just seems like a natural time to take a look at our lives and determine the direction we want to take. It's a common practice that goes back at least 4,000 years to the ancient Babylonians. We could probably benefit from doing it more than once a year, but since the failure rate for New Year's resolutions is notoriously high, each year fewer and fewer of us bother to make them. Does the decrease in resolution-making indicate a more

enlightened approach to behavior change or does it simply reflect resignation in the face of all that failure?

And why are New Year's resolutions so hard to keep, anyway?

Well, maybe the attempts we make to change our behavior at the beginning of the year aren't actually different from the attempts we make any other time of the year—with one exception. Because there's no other point during the year when so many people simultaneously attempt to change their behavior, New Year's resolutions are heavily researched and scrutinized. A surprising amount of data exists on both the nature of people's New Year's resolutions and the rates of success or failure. No one keeps track of what we do the rest of the year.

But the underlying issue is the same no matter when we attempt to change our behavior. The frustrating inner struggle we experience is really a struggle between the two different parts of our brain (conscious and unconscious). While we may be consciously aware of the benefit of changing some aspect of our behavior, **the part of our brain that controls our moment-to-moment reactions and responses is highly resistant to change.**

The good news is that it's entirely possible to make positive changes. The bad news is that the way we usually go about doing it tends to be ineffective and counterproductive. The methods and means we use predictably lead to failure, and our repeated failures lead us to believe there's no point in trying.

If that sounds at all familiar, check out the following 10 things you may be doing to derail your attempts to change your behavior any time of the year.

1. **Resolving to do something you *should* do instead of something you *want* to do—or to *not* do something you *do* want to do.** Your brain definitely doesn't want to change, so if you don't want to change, either, change is highly unlikely to happen.

2. **Having unrealistic expectations about the effect one change will have on the rest of your life.** If you think that successfully altering your behavior or achieving a particular goal will transform your entire life, you're likely to be disappointed. And your disappointment can lead to back-sliding that negates whatever you accomplished.
3. **Having unrealistic ideas about what you can accomplish or achieve.** If you aim unrealistically high, you're likely to struggle and fall short, which again leads to disappointment and back-sliding. Having big dreams is great, but not if they are completely out of reach.
4. **Being vague or overly broad.** The majority of New Year's resolutions fall into this category. If you don't get specific, you won't be able to measure your progress or know when you've accomplished what you set out to do. Being vague both lets you off the hook and keeps you hanging.
5. **Creating too many resolutions.** This one is definitely more common at the beginning of the year. If you decide to do a complete make-over by fixing everything you don't like or aren't satisfied with, your attention will be so divided you won't be able to focus on, or accomplish, anything.
6. **Letting obstacles and setbacks discourage you.** You *will* face obstacles and setbacks. If you assume that everything is going to go according to your plan (or that it means something if it doesn't), you're only making it harder to deal with the difficulties you encounter.
7. **Relying solely on will power.** Will power can provide you with that burst of energy to power through the first days or weeks of a new resolution. But will power is limited and easily depleted. If you think you can strong-arm your brain, you'll quickly discover just how limited your will power is—and who's really the boss.
8. **Failing to reward yourself for your successes.** Rewarding yourself helps overcome your brain's resistance to change. If you think you don't need to do it—or *shouldn't have to* do it—you're needlessly handicapping yourself.
9. **Not being prepared.** If you don't have a plan or don't know what it's going to take for you to achieve the change you want to make, your brain simply won't take you seriously.
10. **Going it alone.** Are you tempted to avoid telling anyone you're trying to make a change so no one will know if you fail? Then you're robbing yourself of potential valuable support. And if you believe you're likely to fail before you even begin, you're probably right.