

Succeeding With Your New Year Resolutions

Lebanon Daily News, February 8, 2010



How many New Year Resolutions did you make this year? If you made more

than one, you may be heading down the path to failure. If you made one resolution, January was probably a successful month. Your January success is a good indicator that February will be a successful month. The month of March is usually the month when we start to abandon our resolutions. I came to this conclusion through my personal experience and the experiences of the individuals in my circles of influence (work, church, social events, etc.). Each year we make a commitment to do better than last year but the majority of us do not succeed. Here are seven tips that I believe will help you to succeed this year.

1 - Select one resolution. Succeeding at a resolution requires you to be able to stay focused on the resolution. Focusing on the resolution requires mental work. The more resolutions you make the more mental work you require of yourself. Do not kid yourself, mental work is hard work. Think about why you have not

succeeded in the past – did you talk yourself out of working on the resolution. An example of this maybe putting off working out today and justifying it by telling yourself “I can make up today’s work out tomorrow.” Tomorrow never comes, does it?

2 - Set a realistic goal and identify objectives. A New Year resolution is another way of setting a personal goal. In this case the goal is the change that you want to make. Your goal should be specific, for example – lose 25 pounds by December 31, 2010. You should have a system to measure your progress. Your objectives are the steps you will take to achieve your goal. I suggest you set an objective for each month. An objective can be a process or a mini-goal. Be prepared to reward yourself for accomplishing each objective. Develop a written contract with yourself, develop reminder cards, use post it notes to keep you on track, and engage others in reminding you of your goal and objectives. Be specific with your contract – state your goal, your objectives and your accomplishment dates. Review your contract frequently.

3 - Find your motivation. Be honest with yourself. Why do you want to make this change? For you to be successful with your resolution you need to buy into the change you want to make. If you are not 100% committed to the change and the need to

change, your chance of succeeding is greatly reduced – you will become a three month statistic. By the way, making a change because someone else wants you to change is not motivation. It is compliance which does not last long or results in negative outcomes.

4 - Develop a support system. There is a large amount of research available documenting the effectiveness of a support system in accomplishing personal goals. The best examples are the weight loss and smoking cessation programs support systems. You may not need a support group or professional coaches like the ones used in these programs but you need to have at least one person who will provide encouragement throughout your change process. I recommend a spouse or significant other who understands your situation and your motivation to achieve your goal. Other options are best friends, co-workers, and church staff or members. When you make your selection make sure the person or persons are able to provide you face to face support.

5 - Measure your success. When you set your goal and establish objectives you are setting measurement points. You need to track your progress. I recommend a visual chart. A good example of tracking progress is the thermometer used by United Way of Lebanon

County to track the pledge totals throughout their pledge campaign. Find something that will be fun for you to use.

6 - Reward yourself. Everyone desires and deserves to be recognized for his/her accomplishments. Achievement of your monthly objectives and your final goal(s) should be rewarded. Remember that a reward is something you should enjoy. Have some fun with this one. Write rewards into your contract. Involve your support group in the reward, they are working with you and deserve acknowledgement of their work.

7 - Be flexible. Be willing to look at what is working and what is not working. The last thing you want to be doing is spending time doing something that is not helping you to achieve your objectives and ultimately your goal(s). For example, within a month or two you realize that your support system is not working. Take the time to figure out why it is not working and make a change. The situation may arise that you can't accomplish an objective in a month. This is the reality of life. Do Not give up. It is okay to make adjustments to your time table for the objective which will still accomplish your goal(s) in your established time frame. I recommend that you involve your support system in making changes to your objectives. By using your support system to

revise your objectives, you are using a check and balance system which should help keep you on track with your goal(s).

Your success with your New Year's Resolution is dependent on keeping your mind focused on your goal. For those of you who may feel like you failed to keep your New Year's Resolution, it is time to regroup and start again. Do not wait until next year. There is no time like the present to improve your life.

The focus of my next column will be on mental preparedness for emergencies/ disasters.

By Shem Heller, Executive Director of the Mental Health Association of Lebanon County