

Taking New Year's Resolutions Seriously

John Cochrane, Trainer and Coach for The Guiding Path, discusses the effectiveness of resolutions.

Resolutions are just a choice to do something or to be a certain way. New Year's resolutions are only special in that they come at a time associated with a fresh start and after a period of traditional self-indulgence. For some a time of hope mixed with guilt.

But what does it take to convert a resolution into reality, into an actual and long-lasting or fully completed change? And why is it so traditional for New Year's resolutions to fall back into old habits so quickly?

It's a matter of motivation and challenges. Motivation is required to provide the energy and will to change. Challenges will inevitably come along which tend to threaten that change over time. With enough motivation great changes can be made, and challenges can be dealt with through knowledge and having strategies to cope.

Motivation comes in lots of different forms, and it literally guides our choices and actions throughout our lives, but we rarely choose to work it to our own advantage. It still tends to be something that we either think we have or we do not have. We think this because we don't often explore where it comes from or how to manage it. But it does not have to be that way, does it?

The Guiding Path designs tools and approaches to help us discover our sources of motivation and promote ways to generate motivation. Briefly, there are four significant qualities to explore when you want to make a change or go for something new, and you need a green light in all of them for motivation to grow:

- Do you have a solid want, passion, or reason for the change?
- Do you think you have what it takes to achieve the change?
- Does the change fit into your larger life goals and purposes?
- Will life let you achieve the change?

All of these can be worked on, or your change can be redefined to give you the motivation required to make a genuine and realistic start. If you don't get the green light that you will need in any one area then explore what is going on there and what will be required to change it to a green light.

And then there are the challenges. These will be different for each change that you go for and they will fall into two main categories:

- External challenges
- Internal challenges

External challenges are those that come from your environment and that you have little direct control over. There will be external challenges that you are aware of from the start and that you can address by adopting particular strategies that you have worked out in advance.

There will also be external challenges that come out of the blue which will require a clear appreciation of your motivation to respond to so that they do not derail you from your aim.

Internal challenges can often be more important though with New Year resolutions. These include such things as mixed motivations, where you have a motivation to succeed but another to either fail or to put your energy into something else. Or you may have unconscious aims that distract you from your target. Or you may simply have a drop in self-confidence or self-belief that saps your motivation leading into a downward spiral of missed targets, increasing self-recrimination, and eventual give-up.

Internal challenges can be dealt with through a combination of strategy, self-knowledge, and support. All of these can be crucial at different times, and all are actually quite simple to arrange. Strategies are simply ways to go about things. For example, how you plan to support yourself as you go along. Self-knowledge (and willpower) basically comes from reflecting on the inevitable setbacks and learning from experience to move forward more effectively over time. Support is often the real magic ingredient though. Let those around you know what you are going for and ask them to support you, if only to get out of your way.

Successful New Year resolutions are likely to be clearly made and realistic. They will be made public and will be supported. They will be worked on over time and reviewed until they are completed.

The Guiding Path can help in all these areas. Our small-group courses provide powerful and cost-effective ways to learn about self-confidence and to focus on purpose work. Our one-to-one coaching offers direct support to enable achievement.

Our free workshop offers an insightful starting point for all personal work.

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