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Resolutions easy to make, easier to break

Life coaches offer tips to help you keep on track to your goals

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By PAULA LAVIGNE / The Dallas Morning News

At 11:59 tonight, you swear that chocolate-covered peanut butter ball is going to be your last.

As of tomorrow, you're on a diet.

Or you've just vowed to quit smoking, find a new job, take a vacation or stop drinking – as soon as you finish that champagne toast.

People have been making and breaking New Year's resolutions for 4,000 years. Way back when, they didn't have self-help books, motivational tapes, hypnotists and life coaches to help people stay with their goals.

The custom stems from Janus (hence, January), a mythical Roman figure. His two faces allowed him to look both forward and backward in time, and that symbolized beginnings and endings.

In Roman times, it was common to resolve to forgive one's enemies. Modern resolutions have less to do with forgiveness, and more to do with stick-to-it-iveness.

Dallas life coach Michele Wahlder favors making New Year's resolutions. In fact, she worked on hers for four hours on a recent flight home from New York. (One of them is to travel to Spain and learn Spanish.)

She writes down specific steps she'll take to reach the goal and then visualizes how they'll play out. Many people break their resolutions because they didn't plan them out, she said.

"You say you're going to lose weight, but then you didn't remember to pack nuts and carrots to eat at the office. And they have cupcakes," she said, and your hunger will give in to the sweet-tooth temptation. "It's not just about losing weight. It's a lifestyle change."

Ms. Wahlder offered three tips for sticking to a goal:

- Write it down.

- Share it with someone else.
- Set 30-, 60-, and 90-day benchmarks and review your progress.

"You have to think of the long-range goal of what you want and then break it down into smaller bits so you feel successful on a month-to-month basis," she said.

Ms. Wahlder gave the example of a client writing a novel. The overall task was daunting, so they set a goal for him to write a certain number of words each week.

Although people blame lack of motivation or willpower for falling short of their goals, Ms. Wahlder said they need to look at other reasons as well. Perhaps they're afraid of success.

A woman struggling to lose weight told Ms. Wahlder she feared that slimming down would make her husband want to have sex with her again – something she didn't necessarily desire.

People also might misstate their goals, Ms. Wahlder said. Wanting to be a famous singer might simply mean you crave the spotlight. Maybe you can accomplish that by speaking up more often at PTA meetings, she said.

Pick "heart-inspired" goals as well, she said.

"Take the word 'should' out of your vocabulary. Do things that you really, really desire," she said. "Not things that other people want from you."

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