



NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

BY CHARU SURI

Dealing with the Myths...and a Desire to Change.

THE TERM "NEW YEAR'S DAY" ELICITS SEVERAL PALATABLE VISUALS: FIREWORKS, THE NOSTALGIA OF HOLIDAY, COMMENCEMENT OF A NEW CHAPTER IN ONE'S LIFE, AND THAT AGE OLD THORN IN THE ROSE: RESOLUTIONS.

The art of making resolutions is attributed to the Babylonians, who also started the ritual of celebrating the New Year. They did this in the year 2000 BC or so, and their most popular resolution was to return borrowed farm equipment. Today, making resolutions has become as traditional as white wedding dresses, Monday night football, or annual family gatherings. Popular promises include: losing weight, buying a new house, quitting smoking, getting married, and keeping promises! But as we all know, making resolutions is like eating candy and resolving that you'll hit the gym afterwards. The hard part is to make this happen.

"You have to really want to do it," says M.J. Ryan, author of *This Year I Will...How to Finally Change a Habit, Keep a Resolution or Bring a Dream into Being* (Broadway Books, December 2006). "People have excitement and the desire to do all kinds of things for themselves, from being happier to getting more organized."

Ryan makes a good point. In the euphoria of creating resolutions, we sometimes forget to ask ourselves tough questions.

- **Do we really want this to happen?**
- **How are you going to achieve this?**
- **Are you willing to make the time commitment to make this resolution work? Or is it just wishful thinking?**

The quest to be better than you are is intrinsically human, say Robert McKelvain, Ph.D. and Jeff Reese, Ph.D., both professors at Abilene Christian University in Texas. They are jointly working on the book, *How to Keep your New Year Resolutions: Guide to Successful Personal Change Today*. "We all are very aware of the way we would like to be different or do better in our lives. We look in the mirror, step on the scales,

or daydream of being better than we think we are now. Then we resolve, at least for a moment, to do better. It's not that it's a popular thing to do; it's a human thing to do."

Resolutions make us feel we are striving to reach for the stars. Around two thirds of Americans make New Year resolutions, but many fail to keep them, and encounter feelings of failure and discouragement. Dr. Reese says that a sense of previous failure could be the reason why people are jaded and refuse to make resolutions.

Here are some of the common "resolution myths" and solutions of how to overcome them:

MYTH # 1: RESOLUTIONS INVOLVE A "GRAND" CHANGE.

Many people believe that resolutions involve setting "lofty" goals. In fact, aiming far too high is a sure way of shooting yourself in the foot. "It's of enormous value to simply start thinking of changing," says McKelvain. The idea that you want to start changing should elicit a pat on the back.

A resolution is different from "career ambition" or "lifetime goal"; yet, several people confuse the term and think of it as a life-changing event. A resolution could be as simple as "I will remember to water one plant every day" to "I will cook something for Thanksgiving this year."

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Praise and reward yourself when you accomplish baby steps. Solicit the help of friends who can see what you're trying to accomplish so they can support you and give you encouragement when you *do* succeed rather than critique you when you don't. "People should plan for when the inevitable failure occurs" says McKelvain. Don't be surprised by failure. Expect it.

MYTH # 4: I FEEL THAT IT'S POSSIBLE TO CLIMB MOUNT EVEREST TOMORROW. I CAN DO IT.

An important step in making resolutions is to assess where you are. What does that mean? It simply means that not everything has to be about "taking a giant leap for mankind" goal.

If you're into mountain climbing, make sure that before you resolve to climb Mt. Everest, you can climb to base camp first.

Unfortunately most peo-



MYTH # 2: SOME PEOPLE ARE BORN TO SUCCEED: THEY JUST HAVE THAT GENE.

Human beings love to idolize heroes, and draw inspiration from success stories. Think of Abraham Lincoln, quarterback John Unitas and Albert Einstein. All these famous figures never really had it easy, did they? They overcame failure to become enormous successes.

"It's not a quality or characteristic of a person that allows them to succeed," says McKelvain. "It's not about will power. It's about how to understand and capture the ability that we all have to change." The worst thing one can do is to assume that some people have more will power than others. This defeatist attitude can put a monkey wrench to you achieving your goal before you even begin.

MYTH # 3: FAILURE OR RELAPSE IS NOT PERMITTED.

Have you ever known a smoker who was just able to quit smoking overnight? One day he's smoking three packs of cigarettes, and the next day, zero. Well, that smoker really doesn't exist. It is not humanly possible to achieve a noteworthy goal without failing.

Dr. Don Rosen, director of the Counseling Center at Texas Woman's University says that setbacks are common. "Use setbacks to reevaluate yourself, as a learning experience and as a tool to make changes for the better," he says. "Remember, in baseball if someone hits the ball three times out of 10, he's doing well."

ple do not break their goals and resolutions into baby steps. They think that a change in eating patterns or weigh loss, for example, can result overnight.

MYTH # 5: IF I LOSE WEIGHT, QUIT SMOKING AND PAY OFF MY CREDIT CARDS, I CAN FINALLY BEGIN TO LIVE THE LIFE I WANT TO LIVE.

Find out what it is you expect from your life before you even make your resolution. The resolution is a step towards your ideal life, not the converse. Losing twenty pounds in three months sounds like a great goal, but will this enrich your life or will you treat it like a chore?

The more pleasurable connections you can make to your resolution, the more passionate you're going to be about achieving your goal. Tripp Friedler, the author of *Free Gulliver: Six Swift Lessons in Life Planning*, says, "To free Gulliver (from Gulliver's Travels) is to slice through all the problems that are keeping you from doing the one thing you daydream about. All those other yearly promises are just bandages...usually bandages with no adhesive!"

Treat the New Year as it should be treated: an exciting beginning and a chance to learn and start afresh. The key word here is "learn." A resolution can be a great learning experience, and a chance to challenge yourself into doing something new and fun. So don't give up on those exciting new resolutions. Make sure you assess your situation and goals with precision and objectivity, and make 2007 your best year ever! 