

EAP Matters

The Resolutions We Make (and Break!)

Plan to make any New Year resolutions? A 2007 study by Richard Wiseman from the University of Bristol involving 3000 people showed that 88% of those who set New Year resolutions fail, despite the fact that 52% of the study's participants were confident of success at the beginning. If less than 2 in 10 people follow-through with their resolutions, then why bother making them in the first place? Is there a secret to resolution success?

Resolutions are born from a perceived need to change something, and the New Year is often seen as a convenient time for new beginnings. Popular resolutions include anything related to living a healthier lifestyle, which encompasses many things (losing weight, eating healthier, exercising more, quitting smoking, etc.), any and all of which are worthwhile endeavors. We start out with the best of intentions, feel good about taking this step and feel validated, and...revert back to old habits. WHY???

One of the big reasons we're not successful with keeping resolutions is they are frequently impulsive ideas or concepts and there is no real *intention* or intrinsic motivation ascribed to them. Unless and until we identify personally meaningful and concrete reasons for making a change, we will likely flounder. Which leads to another big reason why people can't realize success: the resolution is not specific enough. Try to think of a resolution as a goal. As such, in order to successfully meet that goal, it has to be a S.M.A.R.T. goal (or resolution).

You might have already guessed that "S" stands for *Specific*. It's not enough to say, "I want to live a healthier lifestyle." Much too general. Take one specific piece of a 'healthier lifestyle,' say losing weight, and focus just on that. 'Losing weight' is still too general, so you specify how much weight loss you want to target, which is a *Measurable* value. Setting small, measurable goals is most effective. You also want to make sure that your goal is *Attainable* and *Realistic* for you (if it's not, then your motivation drops when you don't see any progress). Lastly, your goal will need to be *Time-limited*; you have to specify a time frame which helps you objectively evaluate whether changes to your plan are necessary. S.M.A.R.T. can help you with any goal (or resolution).

Having a positive support network can also increase your chances of resolution success. Frank Ra, author of "A Course in Happiness," writes: "Resolutions are more sustainable when shared, both in terms of with whom you share the benefits of your resolution, and with whom you share the path of maintaining your resolution. Peer support makes a difference in success rate with new year's resolutions."

Contact your **Employee Assistance Program** (320.484.4555) for additional support with helping you reach your goals!