The best New Year's resolution ever

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Lasting change comes from making slow and steady changes in your daily habits.

By Jennifer Raftis

I have found the secret to making the best New Year's resolution ever. Here it is: Do not ever make another New Year's resolution!

Why, you ask? Because lasting change rarely happens overnight – despite our dramatic proclamations (New Year's resolutions) that we are going to change right now. Rather than New Year's resolutions, I suggest New Year's reflections. Start by giving some thought to your core values and beliefs. Are you living a life that you are proud of? Each and every one of us only gets this one life. Is the way you are living it aligned with who you are and where you want to go? They say that hindsight is 20/20 and I find that to be true. As I look to the new year, I find it important to reflect on the previous year – what worked and what didn't, did my actions align with my values, what could I have done better?

What would you like to change in the new year?

As a professional organizer, I follow the rules of Project Management theory and the last rule is to write down lessons learned after completing a job. Even if the job appears to be perfect, there is always something that could be learned from the experience. You can apply this rule to the end of a year, too.

Look back and reflect on 2021. What did you learn? Think about how you can improve on your actions, so they match your values and what you would like to change in the new year. Use this insight to create your goals for 2022. When you set goals for yourself, it helps to break them down into smaller steps. I suggest to my clients that they create SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-based) goals. By setting objectives and designing a clear roadmap for how you will reach your target, you can determine the time and energy it will take to make progress. Remember the story of the tortoise and the hare? Lasting change comes from making slow and steady changes in your daily habits.

Here is a quick overview of how to create a SMART goal: Specific – be clear and specific; Measurable – if it's not measurable, how do you know you have attained it? (Instead of saying, "I want to improve my golf skills" your measurable goal might be, "I want to improve my handicap from 15 to a 12"); Achievable – can your goal be reasonably accomplished within a certain timeframe that will keep you motivated and focused? (Decide how much time and energy it will take to achieve this goal. Do you want to invest a lot or a little?); Relevant – does this goal contribute to your overall core values or needs; and Time-based – the goal should have an end date. When do you realistically want this goal achieved?

Design a roadmap for how you will achieve your goals. An example would be the classic "I want to lose 15 pounds." If I make this a SMART goal it would look like this: You want to lose 15 pounds; you will know when this goal is achieved because you will have lost 15 pounds; this is a goal that you can achieve (if you said you wanted to lose 15 pounds by tomorrow, that wouldn't be attainable); this goal meets with my core values ... taking care of my health; and, finally, you have set the deadline to lose 15 pounds by Aug. 1.

A well thought out and planned goal is achieved over time by changes in your frame of mind and daily habits, not by a declaration made on New Year's Eve.