

Zen Habits

Simple Productivity

The Definitive Guide to Sticking to Your New Year's Resolutions



Photo courtesy of [Perfecto Insecto](#).

‘Habits are at first cobwebs, then cables.’ ~ **Spanish Proverb**

Post written by [Leo Babauta](#). Follow me on [Twitter](#).

Let’s face it: most of us fail when it comes to sticking to resolutions — so much so that many people swear never to make resolutions again.

And yet the rest of us are eternally hopeful when the New Year comes around, believing without any credible evidence that we can improve our lives, that change is possible, that we’re not going to be stuck in the same old rut again this year.

I’m here to tell you that you can do it. It’s possible. I’ll show you how.

The Problem with Most Resolutions

While I love the optimism of New Year’s Resolutions, unfortunately, the enthusiasm and hope often fades within weeks, and our efforts at self improvement come to a whimpering end.

New Year's Resolutions usually fail because of a combination of some of these reasons:

- We try to do too many resolutions at once, and that spreads our focus and energies too thin. It's much less effective to do many habits at once (read more).
- We only have a certain amount of enthusiasm and motivation, and it runs out because we try to do too much, too soon. We spend all that energy in the beginning and then run out of steam.
- We try to do really tough habits right away, which means it's difficult and we become overwhelmed or intimidated by the difficulty and quit.
- We try to be "disciplined" and do very unpleasant habits, but our nature won't allow that to last for long. If we really don't want to do something, we won't be able to force ourselves to do it for long.
- Life gets in the way. Things come up unexpectedly that get in the way of us sticking with a habit.
- Resolutions are often vague — I'm going to exercise! — but don't contain a concrete action plan and don't use proven habit techniques. That's a recipe for failure.

There are other reasons, but the ones above are easily sufficient to stop resolutions from succeeding.

The 6 Changes Method

So what are we to do? I've created the [6 Changes Method](#), along with a new site called [6Changes.com](#), to solve these problems:

- We only focus on one habit change at a time, so our focus and energies aren't spread thinly.
- We implement the habit changes gradually, so we don't run out of steam.
- We start out really, really easily, so it isn't intimidating.
- We focus on enjoyable activities, so we don't need "discipline".
- We have two months to do the habit change, so if something comes up, it's but a small bump in the road. And because we're publicly committed, we're going to get back on track.
- We have a very specific plan with actions built in, using proven habit change techniques.

If you stick with the method, you'll do much better than you've done in the past with New Year's Resolutions. You'll focus on creating long-lasting habits rather than trying to reach a short-term goal that fails. You'll maintain your enthusiasm for longer and not become overwhelmed by the difficulty of change. You'll have habits that will change your life, and that's no small feat.

The Method

So how does the 6 Changes method work?

It's simple:

1. Pick 6 habits for 2010.
2. Pick 1 of the 6 habits to start with.
3. Commit as publicly as possible to creating this new habit in 2 months.
4. Break the habit into 8 baby steps, starting with a ridiculously easy step. Example: if you want to floss, the first step is just to get out a piece of floss at the same time each night.
5. Choose a trigger for your habit – something already in your routine that will immediately precede the habit. Examples: eating breakfast, brushing your teeth, showering, waking up, arriving at the office, leaving the office, getting home in the evening.
6. Do the 1st, really easy baby step for one week, right after the trigger. Post your progress publicly. (Read more.)
7. Each week, move on to a slightly harder step. You'll want to progress faster, but don't. You're building a new habit. Repeat this until you've done 8 weeks.

You now have a new habit! Commit to Habit No. 2 and repeat the process.

Further Reading

Read more on creating your new habits for the New Year:

1. [Suggest habits](#). Which six will you choose? Some recommendations.
2. [The Importance of Public Accountability](#). Why it's one of the foundations of the method, and how to do it.
3. [What's a Trigger & Why Is It So Important?](#) Another key to the method.
4. [Why You Should Do Only One Habit at a Time](#). Answers one of the most common questions people have about the method.
5. [How to Be Patient as Your Habit Develops](#). It's not easy to do it this slowly, but here's how it works and how to do it.
6. [The Art of the Start of a Habit](#). Why starting is so hard and how this method overcomes it.
7. [How to Kick a Bad Habit](#). Suggested method that has worked for me in the past.
8. [How to Form the Exercise Habit](#). How to apply the method to the habit of exercise.
9. [Key to Habit Change: Enjoy the Activity](#). Don't force yourself to do something you hate. Find ways to enjoy it instead.
10. [Make Your Habit Change a Priority](#). How not to let it drop by the wayside.
11. [Don't Worry So Much About Long-term Goals](#). Focus on the process, not the end point.
12. [Why Daily Frequency of Habits is Important](#). Daily habits are better than ones you do once a week, or even 2-3 times a week.

'It does not matter how slow you go so long as you do not stop.' ~ **Confucius**

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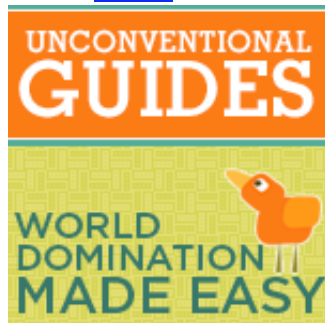
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