

FAIL-PROOF RESOLUTIONS
by Rebecca A. Stanwyck, LCSW
January 2007

It's that time of year again – everyone's busy making promises to change or improve ourselves, yet most of us won't succeed. I've studied human behavior for many years, and have observed **three main reasons why most people don't manage to keep their New Year's resolutions** (besides not being able to remember what they are by the next morning):

Never committed to it in the first place. You only made the resolution because you thought you "should" do it, or out of habit, or to please someone else.

Don't understand the difference between "trying" and "doing". To illustrate this point, is there a pen or pencil laying on the desk or table nearby? See what happens when you "try" to pick it up, without actually doing it: doesn't work, does it? "Trying" to lose weight is just as ineffective.

Lose momentum. This is the most common reasons resolutions fail – you start out committed, and manage to get moving toward your goal, but then after a few weeks, when the goal seems even farther away, or much harder than you realized, you give up. Or you get distracted by other more pressing demands, and find you have no time or energy left to focus on it.

What's the solution to this perennial dilemma? It's simple, really, though it won't be easy. First, start by tossing out any resolutions that are "shoulds", anything you can't fully commit to at this time. Next, pick one and "just do it", like in the commercial. Instead of "I'll try", say "I will," and start taking action today. Finally, expect a loss of momentum, and plan accordingly. **Here are seven more tips for making your 2007 resolutions foolproof, and fail-proof:**

1. **Keep it simple.** Start with just one resolution, instead of 10 or 12. If you manage to achieve it before the year is over, you can always make another one.
2. **Choose the one which will have the greatest impact on your life** (e.g. "Stop smoking" is probably a more important goal than "lose 10 pounds").
3. **Be realistic.** Weight loss goals of more than one pound per week are unrealistic, and not healthy, for most people. Nicotine is a highly addictive substance – you may need the help of a patch and/or a drug like Zyban to overcome your dependency.
4. **Seek out support.** Join a support group for compulsive spenders, or form a group of lunchtime walkers at your office (just make sure the other members of the group are also committed to their own goal, and not doing it just to please you).
5. **Reward progress.** Break down your goal into smaller steps, and build in small rewards for reaching each step. Make your rewards healthy ones (like a massage) and consistent with your resolution (no spending sprees if your goal is to become debt-free).
6. **Use the power of your mind.** Write down your goal, post it where you'll see it every day, and say it out loud. Put it in positive terms ("I will become a non-smoker"), and use positive self-talk to coach yourself along ("I can do this", "I'm up for the challenge").
7. **Expect setbacks.** Relapse is part of the recovery process; habits are hard to change. Don't allow yourself to get discouraged or give up, but rather use a setback to remind yourself what a difficult thing it is you're doing, and redouble your effort.

If you need more help to stick with your New Year's resolutions, read my article on "Overcoming Procrastination" on this website, or call me for a consultation.