



emerald city coaching

# **From Resolution to Reality**

## **10 steps to a happy new year!**

# Contents

## Introduction

## The Ten Steps

1. Be clear about what you want
2. Know why you want it – *or who wrote this list anyway?*
3. Be specific about what you will do
4. Know what stops you
5. Create support structures
6. Be in action
7. Embrace imperfection
8. When failing isn't failing
9. Reward yourself
10. Enjoy!

## Introduction

We've all been there. The new year feels like a perfect opportunity to take stock and start afresh. To look at areas of our lives we've been neglecting and to start on new projects. The blank canvas promise of an untouched year sits there beckoning us. And so we write our list of new year resolutions filled with good intent and optimism.

Come the beginning of February how are your resolutions usually doing? Some may still be limping along but usually most are a dim and distant memory and have been packed away with the Christmas decorations to remember about and bring out again next year.

The intention of this guide is to put a stop to that. This is about February starting with your resolutions very much alive and kicking. And it's about next January having the joy of creating brand new resolutions, not rehashing the same tired, old ones.

From Resolution to Reality outlines the 10 most important steps to make this happen. They are all clear and simple and easy to apply. There is no rocket science here. What is required is for you to read them and apply them. That's all.

Some of the steps are very short. This is deliberate for two reasons: firstly, if they are self-explanatory I don't want to waste your time with unnecessary waffle. I'm guessing, that time is of prime value in your life and I want to respect that. Secondly, in the words of Dee Hock, founder of Visa:

"Simple clear purpose and principles give rise to complex intelligent behavior. Complex rules and regulations give rise to simple, stupid behavior."

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## Step One

### Be clear about what you want

A typical list of resolutions might look something like this:

- Lose weight
- Get a new job
- Be in a relationship
- Spend more time with my children

This is a doomed list. It might mean something more to you at the moment you write it but very soon it will just be a vague sense of things being different from now. If you really want changes to happen you need to be as specific as possible about what you want, including a timeframe. So, the above list would look more like this:

- Lose 10 pounds by 28 February
- Start new job by 1 April
- Be in a stable, loving relationship by end of March
- Spend 30 minutes reading with my children every day

Notice, the all important phrase is **what you want** – this is not a list of things you don't want. If your list has any "I don't want..."s on it re-write them as what you do want. For example, if you have written, "I don't want to be single" change it to "I want to be in a lovely relationship".

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## Step Two

### **Know why you want it – or who wrote this list anyway?**

Being clear about why you want to achieve something has two key benefits:

- it acts as a check to see if you have the right things on the list. If you don't really know why you want something then don't include it. It won't happen.
- knowing why you want something will make it more compelling to you and therefore more likely to happen. It is always the quickest way to get yourself back on track by reminding you why it was important in the first place.

For example, losing weight is rarely, if ever, an end in itself. What is it really about? Is it about feeling great, looking great, being healthier, finding a partner, having children, preventing illness, having more confidence etc, etc.

Think about who wrote this list. This is not a trick question – I know 'you' wrote it down but whose things are they on the list. If you have a list full of "shoulds" then it was probably someone else's voice in your head when you wrote it. Even if they come from the best of intentions the list of shoulds that other people have about you say more about them and what is important to them than you.

A warning here is that sometimes we write "shoulds" for ourselves. There are many ways of describing where these come from (gremlins, saboteurs, limiting beliefs to name a few). Pick the term that suits you. What is important is that they come from the self-critical part of you, the bit that says that you will never be good enough or achieve anything anyway because you are too fat / too stupid / don't deserve it / aren't as bright as everyone else, and so on and so on.

Now is the time to IGNORE that voice. This is YOUR list. Make sure it is full of things that you really want and the best check for this is to know why you really want them.

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## Step Three

### Be specific about what you will do

You know what you want to achieve and why it is important to you. Now translate that into actions. What you will do, by when and how will you hold yourself accountable? Quantify your actions as much as possible. The idea being to make it as easy as possible for you to make them happen. Do the thinking now, not in the moment. For example, I will go swimming, to one pilates class and walk for 1hour each week takes less thinking about than I will exercise three times a week. With the latter, each week you have to then think and make a decision about what you are going to do. This gives an opening every week for you to have a discussion with yourself about all the reasons you can't do it. Make your commitment now whilst you are IGNORING that voice.

For each of your resolutions create a specific plan and keep it somewhere prominent and accessible – in a diary, on your computer, on your fridge.

Being accountable will keep you on track – whether it's to yourself, a friend, relative or online community – doing something simply because you have told someone you will is a very powerful tool.

Important elements of accountability:

- Be specific about what you are committing to
- Be clear about the time-frame
- How will they know? Make sure you are clear about how you will communicate with them; e.g. I will email you when I have been swimming.
- What do you need from them?

Give them permission to hold you accountable; they need to feel comfortable with whatever you have asked of them

Accountability is **not** about abdicating responsibility. It is a tool you can use to incentivize yourself and keep yourself in action when you might be inclined not to be. There are times when we just don't feel like doing what we've said. Having told someone else can be a very powerful "getting into action" tool. However, be clear about this role and its boundaries. Being accountable to someone is not them telling you what to do and nagging you into doing it.

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## Step Four

### Know what stops you

You're smart and you've probably been here before. Einstein's definition of insanity is "doing the same thing over and over again expecting a different result". You know yourself and if you're being honest with yourself you know exactly what will stop you achieving your resolutions. Look at the plan you have just created and write a list of sentences like the examples below:

*I know I won't go for a run when it's raining*

*I know I won't read a bedtime story to my kids when I'm tired*

You are on your own side here so don't use this as an excuse to be hard on yourself before you've even started. Feel empowered by knowing that forewarned is forearmed and that by being honest here things can be different.

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## Step Five

### Create support structures

For each of the things that will stop you put a support structure in place now. If there is already a contingency plan in place you are less likely to be thrown off track when things don't go exactly to plan. Which they won't because this is real life and not a TV show. Expect the expected - you know what stops you and what will help you in that moment.

Examples of support structures include:

- other people – e.g. an exercise buddy, someone to be accountable to, someone to use as a sounding board
- visual reminders – pictures on the fridge, post-it notes on your bathroom mirror, the wallpaper image on your mobile phone
- prompts – reminders scheduled in your calendar, setting the alarm on your phone for a set time each day as a reminder

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## Step Six

### Be in action

Otherwise known as the Nike step – Just Do It. Why? Because you said you would. And because it's important to you – and if you've forgotten why go back to step 2 and reconnect with why you really want to achieve this resolution.

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## Step Seven

### Embrace Imperfection

Work with your world as it is. Don't waste precious time and energy wishing the world were different or trying to force it into a 'perfect' shape. And what is perfect anyway? It is easy to use the notion of a perfect time to stop us from getting started – when I have lost weight I will start dating, when I am feeling more confident I will apply for a new job, when I am less busy at work I will spend more time with my family. You will always be able to find a reason why this is not the right time. How about just starting anyway. How about 'now' always being the perfect time?

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## Step Eight

### When failing isn't failing

Stuff won't happen to plan. It doesn't. Some things you do will work and some won't. Give yourself, and things you try, permission to 'fail'- ie not go perfectly to plan and you are less likely to be derailed by the unexpected. Look at the big picture and think about times in the past when you have felt like you have failed at something. As you look out it now with the benefit of hindsight does it still feel like a failure? Or just another event along the way? And most importantly, don't stop three feet from the gold...

...the following extract is taken Napoleon Hill's "Think and Grow Rich":

*One of the most common causes of failure is the habit of quitting when one is overtaken by temporary defeat. Every person is guilty of this mistake at one time or another. An uncle of R. U. Darby was caught by the "gold fever" in the gold-rush days, and went west to dig and grow rich. He had never heard that more gold has been mined from the brains of men than has ever been taken from the earth. He staked a claim and went to work with pick and shovel. The going was hard, but his lust for gold was definite.*

*After weeks of labor, he was rewarded by the discovery of the shining ore. He needed machinery to bring the ore to the surface. Quietly, he covered up the mine, retraced his footsteps to his home in Williamsburg, Maryland, told his relatives and a few neighbors of the "strike." They got together money for the needed machinery, had it shipped. The uncle and Darby went back to work the mine.*

*The first car of ore was mined, and shipped to a smelter. The returns proved they had one of the richest mines in Colorado! A few more cars of that ore would clear the debts. Then would come the big killing in profits.*

*Down went the drills! Up went the hopes of Darby and Uncle! Then something happened! The vein of gold ore disappeared! They had come to the end of the rainbow,*

*and the pot of gold was no longer there! They drilled on, desperately trying to pick up the vein again-all to no avail.*

*Finally, they decided to QUIT. They sold the machinery to a junk man for a few hundred dollars, and took the train back home. Some "junk" men are dumb, but not this one! He called in a mining engineer to look at the mine and do a little calculating. The engineer advised that the project had failed, because the owners were not familiar with "fault lines." His calculations showed that the vein would be found JUST THREE FEET FROM WHERE THE DARBY'S HAD STOPPED DRILLING! That is exactly where it was found! The "Junk" man took millions of dollars in ore from the mine, because he knew enough to seek expert counsel before giving up.*

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## **Step Nine**

### **Reward yourself**

Put in reward points for yourself in the plan you put together in step 3. Don't just hold out for the "big prize". Acknowledge yourself for being in action. It is too easy to focus on what you haven't done or what is yet to be done and to forget, or underplay, what you have achieved. Once we've achieved something we can devalue it - that voice again, "well if you can do it, it must have been easy / not worth having / ...". Value your achievements, recognise your progress. Reward yourself.

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## **Step Ten**

### **Enjoy!**

Don't make your resolutions a punishment.

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