

A Psychologist's Secrets To Making New Year's Resolutions Stick

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[Research](#) suggests that approximately half of all Americans make New Year's resolutions yet only 8% actually achieve them.

How can you join this elite few? How can you actually follow through on your plan to lose weight, get organized or to spend less and save more?

Recently I had the pleasure of sitting down to lunch with noted behavioral psychologist, [Dr. Paul Marciano](#). Dr. Marciano is the author of *Carrots and Sticks Don't Work* and specializes in the area of behavior modification and motivation.

In a wide ranging conversation around goal-setting and behavior change, I noted seven pieces of advice.

1. Clearly define your goals. Many people in the spirit of New Year's loudly proclaim, "This is the year I'm going to finally get in shape." But what does that mean? Do you intend to lose a certain number of pounds? Reach a body-fat percentage goal? Run three miles without rest? Bang out 10 pull-ups? Dr. Marciano is a fan of goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART). The first step to behavior change is to clearly understand what "it" is.

2. Track your progress. "If you can measure it, you can change it" is a fundamental principal of psychology. These measurements will be a source of motivation as you reflect on where you

started and where you are. They will also help you to identify plateaus or “sticking points” in your progress so you can adjust your efforts.

3. Have patience. You must set realistic goals and realize that progress is never linear. Some people will see rapid gains only to hit resistance later in their efforts. For others, initial progress may be painfully slow but then they suddenly achieve rapid breakthroughs. Making lasting changes takes time.

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4. Publicize your goals to friends and family. As embarrassing as it might be to announce your specific resolution to the world, social support is critical. Yes, it takes some personal courage and vulnerability to share something that you might actually fail at, but to dramatically increase your odds of success you’ll want support from those around you.

5. Put it on your schedule. How often do you hear people say they can’t “find the time” to do something. Nobody finds time. We all choose to spend our time the way we do—whether that’s eating junk food or going to a spin class. Make your new goals a priority and actually schedule them into your calendar. If you have a fitness goal schedule time for your workouts. If you want to declutter, schedule time to clean out your closet on your calendar. If you want to save money, put in a weekly budget review onto your Sunday afternoons. Think of these time blocks as important appointments—just like an appointment with a doctor. Don’t automatically schedule something else over them. That which is scheduled gets done.

6. Stop “all or nothing” thinking; it’s better do something than nothing. Are you guilty of “all or nothing” thinking? Do you ever think, “Well, I might as well get dessert since I already ate those French fries?” And then, “I blew my diet last night so I’ll just restart it next week.” The difference between doing something rather than nothing is huge. If you don’t have a full hour to workout at the gym, just decide to make it the best 20-minutes you can. If you have a slight cold or minor injury, decide to just walk the track for a couple miles. If you have a financial emergency and can’t save your full 10% this month, just save what you can. The bottom line is, any effort towards your goal is better than no effort.

7. Get up, when you slip up. None of us are perfect. As the great Vince Lombardi said, “It isn’t whether you get knocked down, it’s whether you get back up.” Resiliency is the key. Don’t turn relapses or temporary failures into total meltdowns or excuses for giving up. Instead, just acknowledge the mistake and recommit to the path.

Dr. Marciano firmly believes that achieving our goals isn’t about willpower. It’s about developing the right skills and strategies that, with patience, will lead to success. Keep these seven secrets in mind in 2016, and you’ll join the elite 8% who will be celebrating their success later in the year.

Kevin Kruse is a bestselling author and keynote speaker. His new book is [15 Secrets Successful People Know About Time Management: The Productivity Habits of 7 Billionaires, 13 Olympic Athletes, 29 Straight-A Students, and 239 Entrepreneurs](#)