



The difference between Resolutions and Goals

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Have you ever noticed that right after someone wishes you Happy New Year there is a very good chance that they'll ask "What's your New Year's resolution?"

If you did make a resolution, you're in good company. A study published in the Journal of Clinical Psychology reported that 45% of all Americans usually make New Year's resolutions.

The perennial top 10 New Year's resolutions are: 1) *losing weight*, 2) *being more organized*, 3) *to decrease spending and increase saving*, 4) *to enjoying life to the fullest*, 5) *to increase health and fitness*, 6) *to learn something exciting*, 7) *to quit smoking*, 8) *to help others live their dreams*, 9) *to fall in love* and 10) *to spend more time with family*.

Resolving to change for the good is certainly better than passive acceptance of the status quo, but the problem is sticking with your resolution long enough to experience the desired results, and unfortunately the same study indicated that only about 8% of people who make resolutions are successful at fulfilling them.

The problem with these resolutions is that they really aren't goals

They are, however, good intentions. An intention is the idea that we are going to do something. Intentions are good to have. In fact, everything begins with an intention.

To go beyond intention is to act upon it. Acting upon your intentions is what leads to success, which mean being able to take steps towards getting what you want or need. Success leads to satisfaction.

To go beyond satisfaction means to achieve your goal and fulfill your resolution.



When working with life coaching clients, NLP teaches us to always start with the question, “What do you want?” The most important thing about how you answer this question is to answer it in the positive. State what you want, not what you don’t want.

What bridges the gap between having the intention to begin doing something on January first and actually taking concrete steps towards getting what you want?

The first step is to realize that the way that you have framed your resolution is probably a want or a need, not a goal.

A goal is a want or a need which you have addressed with a plan. New Year’s resolutions are often all want, need and intention but very little planning for sustained action.

Weight loss -- the number one resolution -- is a perfect example of the difference between having a vague intention and having a plan. "Lose some weight" is not a plan, or even a tangible goal. Goals need to be specific. The amount of weight loss needs to be specified, a projected time frame needs to be visualized -- and all of this needs to be realistic.

"I'm going to lose 30 pounds" without a time frame is not a goal.

Goals have to be stated in positive terms

Are you moving toward something, i.e. being healthy to play with my children / grandchildren or away from something, i.e. I don’t want to be sick with diabetes / high blood pressure?

Goals stated in negative terms like “loosing, giving up, quitting and reducing something” sap your energy and often contain traps that will cause you to change your behavior in ways that are incompatible with the positively stated goal, and that undermine your intention.

NLP Life Coaching is about transforming motivation. Often times, our clients start out wanting to not be sick and then move toward wanting to be healthy and a role model for their children.



When you look at the goal of weight loss, to turn this into a positive goal, seek the purpose and meaning of your will to eat healthy food and to exercise, for example.

Ask yourself: What will losing weight bring me? You might answer, “well...I will be healthier” “I will be able to play with my children / grandchildren without difficulty breathing.”

Now these are things to move towards!

The second question may be: Besides eating healthy food and exercising, are there other ways by which I can be healthier?

There may be many answers to that question, e.g. relaxation, taking time for yourself, etc.

These answers are consistent with an overall healthier lifestyle. By focusing on losing weight you actually open a portal to a wealth of other positive goals that lead to permanent lifestyle transformation.

An overall healthier lifestyle that will automatically include no longer being overweight, and overeating and not exercising will simply become incompatible with who you have become.

Five more tips

- It helps that your goals benefit more than just yourself. Ask yourself the question: “Who else will benefit from the achievement of my goal?”
- Make sure that your goal is in harmony with what is going on in your life so that you will not have given up too much to achieve it.
- Get interested in the steps towards your goals, not just the end result.
- Set goals that are challenging that require you to expand your zone of comfort.



- Set goals that will serve as their own reward. Don't pursue something to impress others.

Happy Goal Setting!

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