



Tripwire dates and remembering what you want

by Phyllis LeFevre, Certified NLP Life and Wellness Coach, phyllis@inspiremomentum.com

Like many of us, you probably made New Years Resolutions.

How is that working out for you? Are you sticking to your resolutions, or have you reverted to old patterns and habits?

Many of us find that as the New Years Party fades into memory, so do our resolutions -- except the New Years Eve party is usually remembered much more clearly and frequently than "walk three miles every day", "eat more vegetables" or "quit smoking"!

One of the greatest hurdles we face when trying to stick with resolutions related to better diet and health are the maddeningly frequent "special" days embedded in the American cultural calendar and our mental maps of the year.

Just when you think that The Holidays are over -- boom! -- it's Valentine's Day, another reason to "reward" ourselves with a celebration and make bad choices.

To be fair to St. Valentine (and the 20th century American advertising industry that made the holiday *really* popular), there are so many other tripwire dates: Memorial Day; the 4th of July; Labor Day; Thanksgiving; your birthday or -- when looking for a handy excuse to fall off the Healthy Lifestyle Wagon -- the birthday of pretty much anyone you know.

The list of "special" celebratory reasons to break resolutions and revert to unhealthy patterns of eating and exercise is really pretty much limitless once professional successes and other events like your daughter's soccer team victories are included.



Even crueler, binge eating, choosing unhealthy foods (or unhealthy quantities of food), smoking and alcohol or other drug use are also associated with negative dates and mournful events like the anniversary of a loved ones passing, the anniversary of a divorce or other break-up, professional disappointments or your daughter's soccer teams' defeat.

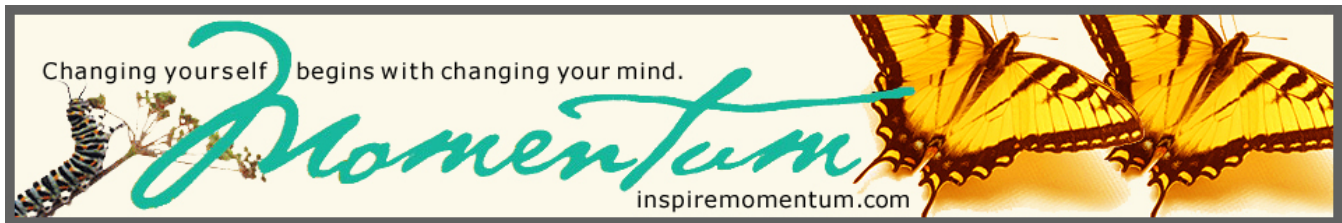
When attempting to set and keep resolutions about health and wellness it has proven helpful for many of us to learn from a lesson that most recovering alcoholics have had to face at some point in their recovery: there is no external "reason" why an alcoholic drinks.

The simple reality is this: an alcoholic drinks in joyous celebration; an alcoholic drinks to numb the pain of defeat and sadness; an alcoholic drinks on a regular 'ole day. Acceptance of this reality is considered by many recovering alcoholics to be fundamental to finding the strength to make transformative change.

Similarly, for those of us who have patterns of unhealthy eating, exercise-free lifestyles, smoking and, yes, drinking, those behaviors have become embedded habit and as we move forward toward positive change we must accept that we have become addicted to unhealthy habits -- and be very careful about making exceptions to resolutions that we know reflect clear thinking about health and happiness.

Some practical suggestions

- **Make sure that your resolutions are specific.** Often when we make resolutions they are non-specific like, "I will eat healthier this year". While a noble thought, this sort of resolution isn't really actionable in the sense that "I won't eat pizza more than once a week" is.



- **Write your resolutions down.** Nothing is more unreliable than the fuzzy-logic memory of exactly what we resolved to do. On a cold day in February with the Super Bowl filling the television screen even that nice specific New Years resolution to not eat pizza more than once a week can seamlessly morph into twice a week. By Memorial Day it's only to eat thin crust vs. deep dish pizza and by Labor Day it's forgotten altogether...
- **Make sure your goals are measurable.** This is particularly easy with weight and exercise because everything related to those issues can be expressed numerically, and a Life Coach can help create similar accountability mechanisms for resolutions that relate to other areas of life such as professional goals and goals related to emotional wellbeing.
- **Make sure your goals are attainable and that you have outlined the steps to get there.** And when I refer to "steps", I mean baby steps! There is little point in resolving to lose 40 pounds this year, but tremendous power in resolving to lose 2 pounds this week.
- **Make sure your goals are time bound.** Again: with "40 pounds this year", logically, you're not accountable for 364 days, with "2 pounds this week" you get an answer next Monday.
- **Don't buy into a mentality of "failure" if you sometimes fall short of a goal.** If your goal was to lose two pounds last week and you only lost one, that is not a failure, that is a success! Celebrate it and use it as a positive motivator to do even better this week!

So, back to Valentine's Day.

Only you can judge if this is a special occasion that warrants breaking resolutions about eating, drinking or smoking -- and I certainly believe that, for most people, there can be a healthy place for more indulgent behaviors on a limited number of occasions per year!



But remember that Valentine's Day is not only a perfect excuse to share love with your significant other: it is a perfect opportunity to express love and respect for yourself, which is the best gift you can give to those who care about you!

Happy Valentine's Day!

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