

# The Ultimate Guide to New Year's Resolutions

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The New Year is fast approaching, and it's up to you, right now, to decide:

**Will this year be better than the last?**

You're probably familiar with making New Year's Resolutions. You're probably equally familiar with breaking them.

Throw all those yesteryears out the window. This guide is going to show you **how to make New Year's Resolutions that you will actually achieve**, and more importantly, it's going to give you **the tools you need to REALLY achieve them this time!**

Remember: **freedom -- and achievement -- comes from organization.**

## **The Perfect New Year's Resolution**

The #1 reason why people don't achieve their resolutions is because **their resolutions weren't really resolutions at all.**

It's no secret around here that I'm big on goal-setting. However, New Year's Resolutions are a very specific kind of goal.

**A New Year's Resolution has to meet the following criteria:**

- It must be **achievable by 11:59pm on December 31** of that calendar year.
- It must be **measurable AND specific**. In other words, a complete stranger should easily be able to objectively determine whether or not you've achieved it.
- It should **positively impact your life**, if only indirectly.
- **A process of events should be required** in order to achieve it. "Visit Kenya" doesn't count if you normally travel and it's within your financial means and comfort zone. It would count, however, if you had to come up with some way of financing the trip, or if you moved there for a month, or if you were having an existential crisis about hippos and were going there to confront your fears.

## **Brainstorming Your Resolutions**

Forgetting the criteria I just mentioned for a moment, make a list of any and all goals you think you might want to achieve next year. Don't worry about details; just **list as many things as you can think of**.

Try to **brainstorm at least a goal or two in every area of your life**. Don't just focus on losing weight and quitting smoking. Consider new hobbies, your personal relationships, your reading habits, your educational status, and so on.

At the end of this guide, there's a printable goal-generation worksheet to help you with your brainstorming.

## **Narrowing It Down**

Out of all your potential goals, **choose five**. (Six if you must.)

(Keep that goal brainstorming worksheet, though! Maybe you'll want to embark on a 101 Goals in 1,001 Days adventure...)

**Don't pick five goals from the same topic area**. We all want to improve our financial situation, but five resolutions to spend less and earn more ignore the many other important aspects of life.

## **Refining Your Goals**

Referring back to the definition of the perfect New Year's Resolution, it's time to transform your five goals into **five iron-clad resolutions**.

Be creative and **try to incorporate two or more goals into a single resolution**. (You can always return to your goal brainstorming worksheet if you wind up whittling your resolutions down in this way.)

For example:

**Lousy:** "Lose weight"

**Better:** "Lose 20lbs"

**Good:** "Weigh 134lbs naked on the morning of December 31"

**Awesome:** "Run three miles without stopping wearing XXS Aerie sweatpants"

The awesome version of this resolution not only incorporates two common goals -- losing weight and exercising more -- into one, but it also focuses on **one of the real reasons we want to lose weight**: to fit into a smaller clothing size. It doesn't matter what number the scale shows if your pants won't fit!

Another example:

**Lousy:** "Save money"

**Better:** "Save \$1,000"

**Good:** "Have \$1,000 in an ING savings account on December 31"

**Awesome:** "Earn \$1,000 in AdSense revenue from a blog, put it in an ING savings account, and don't spend a penny of it"

A vague resolution is just begging to be crossed off **before you stayed true to the original spirit of the goal**. You could technically "save \$1,000" from your paycheck on Friday for two days and then spend it all on Monday. The awesome version of this resolution is awesome because it focuses on building a passive income stream, and it specifies that you don't spend any of the new income.

**Repeat this resolution-refining process** until you have five perfectly-tuned New Year's Resolutions!

## **Plan for Success**

For each resolution, you'll need to make **as detailed a roadmap as possible** guiding you from where you are today to where you'll need to be in order to declare the resolution a success.

**Every step needs to be so basic** that your fifth grade niece could read it and have a pretty good grasp of what needs to get done.

You might not be able to map out the latter end of the journey right now. That's okay. The important thing is that you have **at least one action step that you can take RIGHT NOW** towards each of your resolutions.

For example, for the goal "Earn \$1,000 in AdSense revenue from a blog, put it in an ING savings account, and don't spend a penny of it," you'd have to map out a few sub-projects, such as: AdSense; Planning for the Blog; Blog Layout; Blog Content; Blog Marketing; and ING Account.

Right away, you could:

- Signup for a Google AdSense account (AdSense)
- Read ProBlogger archives (Blog Marketing)
- Read Aaron Wall's SEO Book (Blog Marketing)
- Brainstorm blog topics (Blog Content)
- Signup for a Wordpress.com account (Planning for the Blog)
- Research minimum opening balance for ING account (ING Account)

At the end of this guide are some printable project and Next Action worksheets for you to use in your planning efforts.

## **Review for Success**

At least once per week, **make an appointment with yourself to review your progress** towards each of the five resolutions.

Enter this weekly appointment as a recurring event in Google Calendar and set an email or SMS alert to remind yourself.

At this weekly appointment, make sure that you have **at least one action item for each of your five resolutions**, even if that action item is just to brainstorm ideas.

Search Google to see if there's already a roadmap for achieving your particular resolution. For example, if you want to start running, the Couch to 5K Running Program will get you running three miles non-stop in just two months, at a steady pace. Your action items, in this case, would be to continually follow the program and move on to the next stage as outlined.

## **Ensure Your Success, Part 1: Create a No-Fail Environment**

The less ways you have to fail, the easier it will be to succeed. **Eliminate distractions and disruptions now**, before the New Year begins.

If you're going to start exercising, make sure all your workout clothes are clean. Fix the zipper on your windbreaker. Stop storing file boxes on the gym equipment in the basement.

If you're going to eat better and/or lose weight, go through your kitchen **now** and get rid of all the empty calories. Donate what you can to a local soup kitchen or give it to the neighbors.

If you're going to be more productive, cancel your cable television subscription. Clean off your computer desktop (and your computer desk).

## **Ensure Your Success, Part 2: Treat Yourself!**

The worst thing you can do -- and we all do it -- is to try to beat yourself into submission when embarking on a new goal.

Remember: the entire point of a New Year's Resolution is to **make next year BETTER than last year**. If you become your own personal slave-driver, you might achieve your goal, but you'll have **missed the entire point**.

If you're starting an exercise regime, invest in some new, comfortable, well-fitting workout clothes. (Or at least a GOOD pair of sneakers.) If nothing else, buy a box of pleasant-smelling dryer sheets to wash your workout gear in so it perks you up when you put it on.

If you're going to be eating healthier, don't stock up on celery and rice cakes -- take time to find filling, delicious foods to replace your cravings for the bad stuff.

If you're going to work long hours, spend some time turning your bathroom and/or bedroom into a sanctuary (heavy curtains, candles, warm smells, clean/soft sheets and towels, warm lighting, etc.) so you can really relax when you have the chance. Get a library card and check out a couple books you've been meaning to read so you have the means to unwind. Subscribe to a trashy tabloid so you can zone out when you're overworked and need a break.

**Bottom line: treat yourself gently!** You'll thank yourself for it later.

## **Ensure Your Success, Part 3: Constant Motivation**

"People often say motivation doesn't last. Well, neither does bathing. That's why we recommend it daily." -- Zig Ziglar

No matter how revved up you are now to see your goals to fruition, chances are that at some point (and probably a lot sooner than you think), your motivation is going to wane and you're going to be tempted to give up.

### **Luckily for you, you planned ahead for that!**

Surround yourself with motivation and reminders **wherever possible**. (In moderation, negative reinforcers can also help, but they should be mostly positive.)

Subscribe to motivational blogs and podcasts. Tape up pictures of people and things that reflect your end goals. Keep a motivational quotation journal. Post motivational stories and quotations on the fridge, on the front door, and in your office.

The best place to put a motivational reminder (or two, or three) is by your alarm clock. Not only will it help you to wake up [faster], but it will start your day off on the right foot!

There you have it! Follow this plan, and 2008 is guaranteed to be your best year yet!

If you want some one-on-one help with your resolutions, drop me a line at [marina@sufficientthrust.com](mailto:marina@sufficientthrust.com) or stop by the blog to see how others are making out!

**Places to Visit**

*(i.e. Hungary, the Rodin Museum, New England in autumn, Akibahara)*

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**Financial Milestones**

*(i.e. pay off a specific credit card, start a college fund for your niece, save \$10,000)*

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**Content to Consume**

*(i.e. everything by Albert Camus, all Matt Damon films, 30 new kinds of tea)*

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**Physical Changes**

*(i.e. 17% body fat, size 32 waist, braces, LASIK, get your tubes tied, rhinoplasty)*

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**New Things to Learn**

*(i.e. string theory, Calculus IV, 200-level German, name of every human bone, C++)*

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**Things to Create**

*(i.e. publish an article, paint a portrait, make a demo tape, launch a blog, write 50 poems)*

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**Skills to Learn**

*(i.e. finish a quilt, complete Wine 101, ski an expert slope, parallel park a manual car)*

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**Risks to Take**

*(i.e. skydive, quit your job, confess a crush, gamble in Vegas, go on a random road trip)*

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**Relationships**

*(i.e. get married, read to your baby nightly, have lunch with spouse twice a month)*

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**Things to Own**

*(i.e. a convertible, a rental home, a first-edition book, a diamond necklace)*

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**Business**

*(i.e. get a promotion, start a company, double earnings, signup 500 new clients)*

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**Pieces of Paper**

*(i.e. Master's degree, join MENSAs, apply for CCW, get CPR certification)*

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