

# New Day's Resolution - Daily versus Yearly Goal Setting

New Year's celebrations are around the corner. This is also the time where people try to set BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goals) and mark January 1st as the first day on a path towards them. Here's the catch: this is the worst possible way to do goal setting! Why do New Year's resolutions feel so good, yet they also fail at the highest rate?

Resolutions are goals. We call them resolutions, but they need to be treated as goals and then put other things into place around them. If your goals are too easily achievable, they aren't really goals. I firmly believe in setting big goals but the key to reaching them is in all the stuff you do around it.

## **Annual Goals Lack Conviction**

There are some key failings in using annual goal setting. We see this play out at work all of the time with things like long-term software or business projects, yearly budget planning, and others. The odd thing is that we continue to repeat the behaviour with the same poor results. Here are a few reasons for that:

1. Long-term work is immediately allowed to be delayed - you have set a moderate to large goal and you already cap the duration at a year which makes it way too easy to defer and delay things which leads to dropping the priority and losing momentum. You know that you've done this already with the excuse of "I have a year to do it, so pushing it off by a week won't hurt".
2. Goals need Measurable Steps and Outcomes - setting a goal like "lose 40 pounds" or "get more exercise" does not attach strategies (how you will do it) or tactics (what will be done to execute the strategy) and does not assign regular measurable steps. These are good goals, but must also have strategy, objectives, and tactics to measure and reach the goal.
3. Measurement must be regular to ensure improvement - Number 1 and 2 combined show you that even if you have the right goal and the right strategy and objectives, you must regularly measure so that you can adjust and pivot as needed to keep working towards the goal (or adjust the goal as needed). Lack of regular measurement ensures a high chance of failure.

The irony of annual resolutions is that many of them are recycled from the previous year (save more money, lose weight, spend more time with family) but despite not achieving them in previous years, we keep reassigning the same goal without putting the right framework around measuring and successfully achieving them.

## **Successful Goal Achievement is About Trade-Offs**

Here's the real trick. It's not about how badly you want the thing you set as your goal. It's about what you are willing to trade off in order to get it. This can't be overstated enough. Nothing will be achieved without some trade-off. What do trade-offs look like:

- **GOAL:** Lose 20 pounds. **TRADE-OFF:** Remove 70,000 calories from your routine which comes by a combination of reducing intake and increasing output. 70,000 sounds like a lot but when stretching across a 4 month period that means reducing 583 calories a day for 120 days. That translates to one less mochachino a day or cutting dessert or sweet snacks out on most days. There are lots of ways to find those calories (bad ones preferably) and by adding a little mild exercise in the routine.

- **GOAL:** Exercise more. **TRADE-OFF:** Add small incremental exercise goals and increase across long periods. Don't race to the gym on January 2nd and work out for 60 minutes when you aren't used to doing it. Start with just 5 pushups, 10 setups, and 10 free-standing squats on day 1 and set a goal to do that every day for 5 days. Then increase the numbers slowly and work up towards bigger goals. Walk more, park further from the mall, do small, continuous, incremental things that add to your exercise output.
- **GOAL:** Save more money. **TRADE-OFF:** Drop regular, small spending out of your habits or forcibly set aside money from your pay cycle in automated ways to ensure that you are moving money to where it is "safe" from easy access to spending. It's not the big money purchases that kill your savings as much as it's the little and continuous spending that can eat away at things. Setting up a 100\$ per pay transfer into a savings account with interest attached means that you are starting a longer-term strategy to saving. As you get used to that, do things like taking bonuses and raises and adding them to the automated transfers so you increase the savings without adjusting to new income levels.

## **Incremental Work and Measurement is Hugely Important**

This is another thing that cannot be overstated enough. Just because you used to be able to run a 10km race in high school, it does not mean you should strap on the running shoes and head out for a 10km run when you have not done consistent exercise for many years. This is the fastest path to injury and disappointment.

Let me share a personal story on how I've made this part of my day-to-day. I set up a goal of doing 100 pushups a day, every day. This was done as part of a community online that was meant to do 100 pushups in any number of ways (10×10, 50×2, 2×50, etc.) just making sure that we did 100 per day for 30 days. There were about 30 people involved at the goal setting stage. By day 5, the numbers started to drop. By day 30, about 20 percent were not even reporting their daily results. So, why did this happen?

By setting up an audacious goal which did not have incremental achievements, we saw people getting sore, injured, and did not set aside time to reach the real goal which should have been "working towards 100 pushups in a day" rather than just going from zero to one hundred. My new goal that I set and measure is to do 50 repetitions of exercise a day at a minimum which can be a combination of pushups, ab crunches, pull ups, and squats. What that set for me is an achievable, measurable, incremental increase in output which I now exceed and have moved the number up.

It's like the old saying goes: "Q: how do you eat an elephant? A: One bite at a time"

## **Wait, Why is it about Money and Weight All the Time?**

The reason I zeroed in on these top goals is that they are also the least-achieved goals that people continue to set as New Year's Resolutions. Other great examples of poorly mapped out goals include things like:

- Get a raise at work
- Get a promotion at work
- Do more charity and community work
- Drive less and bike more

While these are all great sounding goals, they lack measurability and strategic planning when they are just left as the only part of the goal. What these need to look like is this:

- **Get a raise at work** - as measured by being more vocal with the management team on projects and participating more in team leading with my group and ensuring that the HR team has a path to growth in the position that maps to my personal goals.
- **Get a promotion at work** - as measured by a clear path mapped out with my management team and HR to take on more leadership within the organization on projects (which must be defined and measurable as well).
- **Do more charity and community work** - as measured by setting a weekly goal of 1-4 hours of work with or for a charitable organization or community program
- **Drive less and bike more** - as measured by riding to work on Tuesdays and Thursdays instead of driving during the spring and summer and booking a spin class commitment during fall and winter with a minimum of 6 classes per month.

There is a reason that we say “as measured by” in these goal setting scenarios. The moment that you state a goal but do not have anything you can attach to it “as measured by” then you are setting the wrong goal.

Goal setting is super tricky and we have lots of psychology around why it works and doesn't work. Here is my goal for you as you head into New Year's Eve and prepare your annual resolution setting: Set two specific and measurable goals that have incremental, measurable steps towards the end-state and write them down. Physically write them down. Then, write them down every single day in the morning. This is the start of your path towards better goal setting and more effective goal achievement. I'll share much more on why these things matter as well.