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10 Sure-fire Ways to Achieve Your Goals in 2010



1. STAGGER YOUR START DATES



Trying to break or begin three habits all at once is nearly impossible. Instead, use the force of singular focus throughout the year by staggering the start dates of your resolutions. You can quit smoking in January, then, once that doesn't occupy so much attention, you can begin working out in March, and so on.

2. MAKE IT MEASURABLE



You can't track what you can't measure. Make sure your goals have clearly identifiable results that can be monitored. Often-times, this requires little more than minor rethinking and rewording. For instance, the unmeasurable goal "spend more time with my family," can be reworded as "spend at least one hour a day talking with my children when they get home for school."

3. MAKE THE FIRST MONTH COUNT



Setting a strong foundation in the first month is pivotal. Make sure that you have a clear path to achieve your goal in the first month, and work daily towards your goal throughout the month, even if it lends itself to more periodic action. For instance, if you want to spend four hours a week volunteering at a local charity, take a few minutes each day to plan for the weekly event. By thinking daily about your goals during the first month, you will hardwire yourself for success throughout the year.

4. FIND A PARTNER



Researchers have demonstrated repeatedly the efficacy of accountability partners in achieving goals. If possible, find a like-minded person who is looking to achieve the same or, at least a similar, goal in 2010 and support each other throughout the year. For instance, if you are looking to lose weight, find someone else who has the same goal and schedule regular weekly weigh-ins.

5. TAKE BABY STEPS



When approaching a new goal (especially an exciting one), it is tempting to go full-throttle from day one. However, by doing this, you are setting a pace you can't maintain, which often leads to burnout. Instead, start very small and progress incrementally, building more momentum with each step. For instance, if you want to go to the gym three times a week, begin by simply setting your gym clothes out, then put them away. The next day, put your gym clothes on. On day 3, you can go to the gym, but don't work out. Simply tour the gym and think about a possible routine. By day 4, you can stretch out, but don't work out. Finally, on day 5, stretch out and start a light workout routine. This technique allows you to accomplish a small goal each day, without ever falling behind or plateauing.

6. PLAN REGULAR REFOCUS SESSIONS



To stay motivated throughout the year, schedule regular meetings with yourself when you evaluate your recent progress, consider upcoming obstacles, and adjust your plans, based on new information. For instance, if you decide to be debt-free by the end of the year and you later learn of a new debt consolidation tool that could expedite the process, you can implement the tool into a revised action plan at your next refocus session.

7. BUILD REPLACEMENT TRIGGERS TO DROP HABITS



Dropping bad habits can be much harder than starting new ones, because it requires you to rewire your brain. The best way to do this is to set replacement triggers. For instance, if you want to quit drinking in 2010, consider the situations in which you are most likely to want a drink, and plan a replacement that is similarly, if not equally, satisfying. For instance, if you like to drink on the weekends to relax, find an activity you can do on the weekend that relaxes you without necessitating alcohol, such as reading a book at the beach.

8. VISUALIZE PROGRESS WITH CHARTS & GRAPHS



It is easy to lose motivation when approaching long-term goals that may take several months to pay off. Charts and graphs can be invaluable in helping you visualize the progress you have made enroute to your end goal. Computer programs like Microsoft Excel are ideal, but even a lo-tech solution can do the trick. For instance, for daily goals, you can simply check off days on a wall calendar. Being able to see an unbroken chain of dozens of check marks will give you the motivational boost you need to keep the streak going.

9. MAKE IT FUN



Achieving your goals doesn't have to be a painful, arduous process. With a little planning, you can make even the most unpleasant tasks a bit more enjoyable. For example, if your goal is to eat less junk food, you can join an online message board or contribute to a blog that promotes a discussion about healthy food options that taste great. By doing this, you can make new friends while finding better food options.

10. BUILD A REALISTIC VISION OF THE FINISH LINE



Most goals worth achieving will test you in ways you may not be able to imagine. The only way you will find the requisite courage to overcome these obstacles is to have a realistic vision of what you are working towards. Take time to visualize the end result vividly and find clever ways to remind yourself of this vision throughout the year. For instance, if you want to save money for a new car, imagine what it would be like to drive to your favorite places in your new car--how it will look, feel, sound, and smell. Then, take a moment each time you deposit money into your savings account to remember that vision.

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