

Resolutions Workshop 2008

Support Tactics

You've crafted your New Year's resolutions with care. Now comes the tricky part: translating intention into action — ideally, the ongoing kind. **For this, you need more than a wing and a prayer.** You need pragmatic support systems and the good sense to put them to work.

By ALYSSA FORD



here's something about New Year's resolutions that brings out the reckless in all of us. We don't let the fact that we've been living a certain way for years slow us down. We don't let the reality that we have dozens of deeply ingrained habits and commitments get in our way. "Things are gonna change!" we say. And with that, we launch ourselves from the peak of our lofty ambitions into the thin air of our available time and resources — which are typically thin indeed.

When we're determined to achieve certain goals, but not particularly well equipped to overcome the inevitable obstacles they entail, we have a tendency to get frustrated and give up long before we should. We fall fast from our ivory towers. And the bold changes we were so gung ho about? They simply don't happen.

In past *Experience Life* Resolutions Workshops, we've explored some of the best ways to intelligently define meaningful goals and to take action toward reaching them. (To catch up on these stories, browse through some of our recent January/February issues at experiencelifemag.com.)

This year, because we understand that most serious resolutions require significant effort *and* sustained determination, we're emphasizing the importance of getting the support you need to accomplish your long-term objectives. Even if that means changing in a deep way; even if it means shifting habits that took you a lifetime to form.

This year's workshop is all about what happens when the recklessness of the New Year wears off and we're left with the sobering view of the journey ahead of us.

Getting Past 'Go'

One of the most pernicious obstacles to resolution success typically emerges almost as soon as we've said our "I will" vows: It's the "I can't" whimper. Negative self-talk sets up

a destructive inner dialogue that puts a gaping hole in even the most tightly woven resolution plans.

"First our voices tell us to go to the gym four days a week," says Zen teacher Cheri Huber, author of *Making a Change for Good: A Guide to Compassionate Self-Discipline* (Shambhala, 2007). "Then they convince us to sleep in, and then they beat us up for not keeping our commitments."

M. J. Ryan, a life coach and author of *This Year I Will: How to Finally Change a Habit, Keep a Resolution or Make a Dream Come True* (Broadway, 2006), surmises that if adults had to learn to walk, as toddlers do, many of us would not succeed — the negativity we impose on ourselves would be too great to overcome. "Many people would tell themselves, 'Oh, I'm so stupid. I can't do this. I must have some kind of walking disorder,'" she says. And then they'd give up.

We aren't born with this negativity. "When we're young, the possibilities are wide open," says Maryanne O'Brien, cofounder of Live Dynamite, a personal-growth company in Independence, Minn. "Kids say, 'I'm going to be president' without blinking an eye."

But over time, that optimistic inner persona — the ego — gets trampled. As authority figures label us, judge us and assign us places in life, we internalize those messages. Then the ego goes into "survival mode," says Huber. "What was once a joyful 'I can do anything' becomes 'OK, I'm a person who can do X, but can't do Y! This belief in our inadequacy becomes an aspect of our identity, and our ego clings to it desperately."

Negative beliefs and limiting self-perceptions powerfully undermine our ability to make big life adjustments. So the very first step in building a support structure involves what Huber calls "enrolling the ego."

Here's a good way to start: Sit quietly, focus your thoughts and have a heart-to-heart with those voices in your head. Hear them out. Then let your wise self speak. →

Reassure yourself that it is possible, and that you can do it — even if you don't know precisely how just yet. And, that's what the following support systems are all about.

"Most of us are in complete resistance to getting support," notes Debbie Ford, a life-coach trainer at JFK University in San Francisco and author of *The Best Year of Your Life: Dream It, Plan It, Live It* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2004). "We think, 'Oh, I can do it on my own.'" The reality, says Ford, is that being willing to seek out appropriate support systems is essential to overcoming obstacles of all kinds.

Ask yourself: What do I need to do — and how do I need to grow — in order to make my resolution happen? If you're lacking an important skill or strength, there's almost certainly a tool to help you bridge the gap.

Support System No.1

Helpful Tools

Grace Judson, an executive coach in Oceanside, Calif., was working hard but felt that she and her clients needed to learn to use time more effectively. She was putting in long hours building her coaching business, designed to help people function well in the corporate "game" without losing themselves. But it seemed that both she and her clients often had problems with the big projects, which tended to be slow to start and slow to finish. She wanted to be more efficient in her own work *and* have an easy-to-use tool to help her clients with their own time-management struggles.

Then, a year and a half ago, Judson picked up *First Things First: To Live, to Love, to Learn, to Leave a Legacy* by the venerable self-help trio Stephen Covey, Roger Merrill and Rebecca Merrill (Simon and Schuster, 1994). She read about Covey's Time Management Matrix, which divides tasks into four quadrants: Urgent and Important ("Firefighting"), Important but Not Urgent ("Quality Time"), Urgent but Not Important ("Distractions"), and Neither Urgent Nor Important ("Time Wasting").

"Being able to visualize my time this way was a revelation," says Judson. "It clarified a lot of things for me personally, and it's a great way to help my clients see where their time is going."

Judson realized, for example, that she had been falling into a common pattern: jumping to address urgent-seeming squeaky wheels, while allowing the projects that really mattered more to slip further down her list. "Email was particularly tough," she says. "I'd hear that little email ping, and I would go rushing off as if it were promising millions of dollars."

Using the Covey matrix as a time-management tool, Judson became more conscious and disciplined about prioritizing the things that were really important to her, both at work and at home. Self-sustaining activities like meditation took on a clearer importance once she identified that they were "Important but Not Urgent" pursuits that empowered her to be her best.

Judson now schedules time in her calendar to meditate, and she blocks out time for long-term projects, which has been an "enormous productivity booster" in her business.

She checks email periodically instead of constantly, and



she's careful to turn off her phone when she's working on an important project. As a result, she can now accomplish things in much less time, and she feels she's made headway toward her goal of working more effectively.

Take the book she's writing on office politics: "In about two and a half weeks, I was able to write a 55-page book intro, design the graphics for the cover, and get the text edited and proofread," she says.

Making more-conscious time-management decisions that sync with her values and goals has now become second nature to her, and that's benefited her personal life, too.

"I think to myself, 'What quadrant is this in?'" she says. "I ask myself, 'Am I spending time in the community, spending time with people I love, building my business — or am I frittering my time away?'"

Resolution-support tools take many forms: time-management systems like the one Judson embraced; spiral-bound resolution organizers that help you plot out the tactical steps required to achieve larger objectives; computer-

generated alarms to remind you when benchmark deadlines require action.

A "tool" could even be something as simple as the daily ritual of meditating on your goals for 15 minutes each morning, or an inspirational card deck that keeps you focused on the values that inspired your resolution in the first place.

The point is, if you are coming up against a limitation or challenge that's holding you back, there is probably a tool to help you overcome it. Ask yourself: What do I need to do — and how do I need to grow — in order to make my resolution happen?

If you're lacking an important skill or strength, there's almost certainly a tool to help you bridge the gap. Your job is to identify the tools you need (for ideas, see page 53) and embrace them, pronto. The best part: The combined benefits you gain from leveraging these new tools are bound to produce satisfaction far beyond the achievement of the original resolution they made possible.

Support System No.2

Powerful Programs

For most of Robin Rankin's adult life, goal setting seemed like a futile effort. "I would just think of things I needed to do, and then if I didn't get them done, I would beat myself up about it," says the 39-year-old marketing specialist in Salt Lake City, Utah.

So when she started working with life coach M. J. Ryan six years ago, her first step was to home in on the things she really wanted to change: her smoking habit, her tendency to avoid conflict, her chronic disorganization.

From there, Ryan helped Rankin establish priorities and action plans, and together they discussed Rankin's progress on the phone every two weeks or so. Ryan would assign Rankin homework, such as reading certain inspirational passages, and encourage her as she worked to develop healthier habits.

The process helped Rankin focus her energy in a way she'd been unable to before. "Frankly, it was embarrassing if I didn't make progress, so I was made accountable in that way," she recalls. "Over time, that taught me to be accountable to myself."

Many life-coaching and habit-shifting programs, such as Ryan's, offer concrete and controlled strategies coupled

with frequent person-to-person interaction.

Other programs, such as Traineo (www.traineo.com) and UltraWellness (www.ultrawellness.com), focus on providing structure and support for specific goals, such as fitness or weight loss. But the principles of interaction are the same: Ongoing phone or email contact provides focus, continuity and accountability.

"It helps so many people just to have that email in their inbox, that message on their cell phone," explains Debbie Ford.

Rankin has also found that working with a coach has made her less dependent on outside reinforcement. "It's really an ingrained skill now, knowing how to replace my old habits with healthier pursuits," she says. →



Support System No.3

Community

Big ideas are great — but making them happen often requires the help of others. “In the last couple of years, I was looking for more effective ways to reach students,” says Kathy Flaminio, a 41-year-old yoga and fitness instructor and social worker from St. Paul, Minn. Then she had an epiphany: Yoga could help her better reach the Minneapolis public school students she worked with. She was too busy, however, to think about how she could integrate more yoga into her social work with her students, a goal she set for herself.

That’s when she discovered Live Dynamite, and later, the Live Dynamite Playbook Club, which brings small groups of goal setters together for support. Flaminio connected with four people working through the program, and the group began meeting once a month to talk about their individual quests. “They were my personal cheerleaders, but they also challenged me,” she explains. “They’d say, ‘Why haven’t you done that yet? What’s your barrier here?’”

With focused effort — and encouragement and advice from her Playbook Club — Flaminio raised enough money through her private yoga business, 1,000 Petals, to enroll in an intensive 17-day yoga retreat. Then she applied for and received a yearlong sabbatical to integrate a new program, Yoga Calm, into public-school classrooms. Plus, she added a stronger mind-body component to the indoor cycling and yoga classes she teaches.

Ford says some of the most effective support systems have some element of community — whether it’s an organized contingent, like a Playbook Club or mastermind group (for more on those, see “Meeting of the Masterminds” in the April 2005 archives at experiencelifemag.com); a more loosely assembled online network; or a wellness or weight-loss class that meets regularly. (For more examples of tools, programs and community groups to support your goals, see “Get It Done,” next page.)

“When we’re by ourselves, it’s so easy to go back into D.E.N.I.A.L. (Don’t Even Notice I Am Lying),” says Ford. “When we are with other people, there are many more opportunities for moments of truth.”

It’s those moments of truth that often help us more clearly perceive what’s *really* standing between us and the bold changes we’re so drawn to each New Year’s Eve. And when we make our “Things are gonna change!” proclamations, it’s that kind of clarity that helps us better understand where the process of personal change really begins. ●

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GET IT DONE

Determined to make a change for the better? Here are some practical resources that connect you with the support you need to stick to your resolutions plans:

Live Dynamite Upside Kit

This snazzy, energizing collection of tools (www.livedynamite.com) puts you on track to accomplish whatever’s important to you. The 12-week program is based on proven life-coaching principles and is all about cultivating positive energy, setting meaningful goals, moving into action and maintaining momentum.

- The Live Dynamite Upside Kit (\$185) includes a 90-page “Playbook” workbook packed with insights and exercises that help you clarify your priorities, connect with inspiration and establish an intelligent action plan.
- The Daily Log journal, Daily Practice Sheets and Think Big Coasters surround you with ongoing support, keep you focused and help you overcome obstacles as they arise.
- A collection of Expand and Create Cards lets you create personal, portable reminders of your evolving goals and commitments.
- Additional support is available through Playbook clubs (local, live community groups), downloadable Boosts (podcasts, success stories, worksheets and other resources) and email “nudges.”

Blast Off!

A special offer for *Experience Life* readers: Log on to www.livedynamite.com using the password “resolutions” and enjoy:

- FREE online access to four Playbook exercises and an “attitude-assessment” quiz.
- 20 percent off all Live Dynamite products and services through March 31, 2008 (use the shopping-cart discount code “resolutions” when checking out).



Ta-Da Lists

A simple but powerful online tool (www.tadalists.org) for organizing information as you work toward your goals (or simply check off a collection of to-dos). Create as many lists as you like, and link them to lists of supportive or related information. It all remains easily accessible online.

- List out your resolutions or goals, then make adjoining lists of the steps you will take to reach them. All your lists are kept together on your own personal page at the site.
- Access your page from any portal, including PDAs or an iPhone. You can also have the service email your lists or send them as an RSS feed to post on your homepage or blog.
- The site lets you share your list with others, if you like — a fast way to get support, feedback and advice.
- The entire service is free, signing up takes less than 20 seconds, and you’ll never again be more than a wi-fi connection away from the information you need to support your dreams.

Traineo

This free fitness and weight-loss tracking Web site (traineo.com) lets you chart your progress online and then (accountability alert!) share regular updates with the posse of your choosing.

- Log info about your eating and fitness habits, and the Traineo system presents it back to you as an intuitive graph that lets you chart your progress toward your fitness goals.
- Choose your “Traineo motivators,” a group of four friends or family members who will receive automatic weekly updates of your progress and goals and who will send you emails motivating you to keep up the good work (or get back on track).
- You can also connect with the larger Traineo community for advice and support. The Traineo library offers tips, tools and articles to help you get smarter as you go.