Rethinking New Year’s Resolutions: Don’t Set Yourself Up for Failure

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Have you kept your New Year’s resolution?

If not, you’re hardly alone – 80 percent of people have given up by the second week of February.

To be honest, I find it somewhat comforting to know I’m not alone in this yearly success or failure story.

Given the statistics and my own personal experience, in this edition of Friday Focus, I found it a fitting time to talk about New Year’s resolutions.

You may think resolutions are harmless and you may think they are helpful – and many certainly can be either or. But could your New Year’s resolution be setting you up for failure?

Succeed or Fail? How About a Third Option?

A New Year’s resolution can be inspiring, daunting, challenging, or frustrating.

It can be full of hope – but for others it can be full of fear.

Fear of failure.

It is a part of our culture that we seem (for the most part) quite happy to accept and be a part of.

There have been years where I completely swore off

resolutions. Other years, I've had too many to count!

This year I had one simple resolution.

It was one I thought I could stick to – and I have.

Sort of.

Ish.

But really, it all comes down to how you define it.

Your success or failure is really no different than asking if a glass is half full or half empty. Is it neither, or is it both? Or maybe it truly is one or the other?

Who knows! It's all about your perspective.

Here's what I do know.

If your glass is only half full (or half empty), many people would consider that failure.

But why?

Really, what's stopping you from trying to keep filling that glass all the way to the top?

Resolutions = Unrealistic Expectations

I think I'm coming around to a new perspective on the whole point of this tradition:

A New Year's resolution isn't a reason to set unrealistic expectations for yourself, and then punish yourself when you don't achieve those unrealistic expectations.

If you know something has an 80 percent chance of failure, why would you do it?!

For me, a new year is a great time to think about the things in my life that I want to improve, and some ways that I may be able to attain those goals.

It is also a good time to accept my faults, to recognize my weaknesses, and to forgive myself for not living up to my own expectations (in about 2 to 6 weeks time).

But maybe, most importantly, it is all about learning that it is, in fact, a time to celebrate my progress and not beat myself up for failing to deliver perfection.

To all the people who made a resolution to get healthier this year and started going to the gym, I salute you! Make sure you celebrate the fact that you had a few great weeks of exercise.

I haven't stuck to my resolution perfectly either. But I absolutely have made progress in a positive direction.

Celebrate Your Success & Forgive Your Misses

If I truly want long-term happiness, I've decided I have to start looking at things in this light.

Honestly – I'm only just beginning to do this now. In the past, I have simply thrown in the towel when I "failed" to keep my resolution.

I've had a bit of a "Well, there goes that!" attitude and the end result has been the same resolutions being shelved for 10.5 months of the year waiting for the next stroke of midnight and the inevitable (mostly mumbled, because nobody *really* knows the words) "Auld Lang Syne" singalong to signal it's time for the next kick at the can.

I'm starting to see how many moments for progress and success

I have lost because I “failed” to keep my resolution.

Forget Your Expectation of Perfection

So, the next time the ball drops, the people cheer, and the world rotates me into a brand new year, I will do my very best to celebrate each moment that is in keeping with my resolution and I will be sure to pick myself up and keep moving forward every time I stumble.

I will celebrate my successes and I will forgive my misses.

Failure really truly isn’t an option if I change its definition.

Failure is quitting.

Success is keeping going – no matter how many times I wander off the path.

So, here’s to New Year’s resolutions! May they have many moments of progress and may they never be forced to carry the burden of the expectation of perfection.

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