



# **The Year Ahead...**

An Action Plan For Your Best Year Yet

# The Year Ahead

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# Introduction

What is it about a new year that makes us want to create a list of New Year's Resolutions? Somehow, we have come to think of a fresh, new year as being the time to create a *fresh new you*. But the sad truth is, that despite the depth of our resolve, more often than not these attempts are temporary and do not last much past Valentines' Day.

This eBook is not a booklet of promises and resolutions. Nor is it going to discuss those things you *should* do, like eating healthily and getting exercise. Instead of making a resolution that you may or may not follow for more than a month, we will take a look at how you can make lasting changes that might make this your Best Year Ever.

How? We will look at defining your year. We will ask you what you want it to be, and then you will be invited to dig into *why* you want it to be that way. we will look at the power of vision, in seeing the year the way you want it to be, and how you want it to go. We will explore the benefits of focusing on one issue at a time, the concentration of effort to succeed.

In short, we will take a look at what matters most to *you* (as opposed to what other people may *want* for you. And then we will tie it all together with an action plan that works. You will

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find this approach much more useful and concrete than saying, "I need to go to the gym more", right?

Are you excited yet? So, let us get started!

## Tips for Envisioning Your Best Year

It might sound like an infantile game of *let's pretend*, but the fact remains that we cannot do that we cannot envision. If you do not believe you can accomplish something, you are probably right. When you have a bias against accomplishment, you have already talked yourself out of it.

On the other hand, when you believe you can accomplish something, you are probably right. Having a vision of your ideal end state in full detail is a fundamental aspect of success.

This vision is not something you can merely create from nothing. It takes time and effort to create. The good news is, you probably already have some idea of the direction you want to take, the general finishing line for the coming year. That is something that comes from your imagination, dreams, aspirations, and fantasies. When you visualize yourself in your ideal *future state*, you should experience both excitement and a sense of anticipation. You should feel inspired to get going!

Having a clear vision will carry you through when your commitment is flagging, and the enthusiasm dwindles. Vision can restart a passion. Vision can bring back your willingness to push past the obstacles when that fades with time.

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Perhaps the most challenging question to answer is the simplest: **What is it you want?** The answer may sometimes surprise you.

More than that, it can be intimidating to admit your desires. Those thoughts can be embarrassing: what will people think if you admit you want that specific thing? What will they say if you fail?

For some, it may be arrogant or selfish to have a specific goal in mind, for others, it might be too fanciful or impractical. Answering this question honestly, however, is essential. Improving your life is not going to happen by accident. It takes work, effort, and perseverance.

Start with the following questions. Write them down and save them. Then go over them again in a month, in six months, and then again in a year.

**What matters to you?** Do not put down what matters to your spouse or your parents. What you are working on is not their goal. What matters to *you*? When you stop paying attention to external opinions, you reduce the "should factor" "This *should* matter." "That *should* be important."

The question is, what do *you* think matters the most?

**What do you want more of?** What are some aspects of your life that you feel are lacking? What is missing? What do you want more of in your life?

**If money was no object, would you still keep working in your present job?** What job would you do if money was not the deciding factor?

**What is your passion?** Now, what is the passion you do not tell people about? What about your dreams? What are the deep, dark hidden dreams you do not share?

**Is there something that would bring joy to your life?**

Answering this question is tricky. A new TV or a new car would bring a certain amount of joy and happiness, but that is surface level. The newness wears off, and the object that brought happiness is now merely another clutter item. Instead ask yourself, what would bring *lasting* joy to your life.

**Are you happy with your relationships?** What is missing? What do you need in a relationship that you are not getting? How could those relationships be better?

**What qualities would you like to have that are maybe missing in your life?** What qualities do you have that you would want to strengthen? How could you go about gaining/increasing them?

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**What are your values?** What are the things you care about? We are not just looking at the causes you support. Instead, ask what your *passions* are, what you believe in, what matters most to you?

**List your talents.** What are the things that make you uniquely you? Skills, abilities, innate talents. You might be musical without ever learning an instrument, you might be mechanically inclined and have no training in automotive repair. What makes you stand out?

**What would you most like to accomplish?** What is on your bucket list? What would you *want* to be able to say you did?

**What kind of legacy would you leave behind?** When all is said and done, how would you like to be remembered and by whom?

Keep those responses and revisit them from time to time. Why? The answers to those questions will change over time, especially as you grow and change as an individual. As a result, the goals you set yesterday, may no longer apply today.

Now, jot down these points for consideration:

**For every question you answered, go back and add the why to them.** Why do you want this? Why do you feel like that?

**Are any of the answers a negative?** In other words, instead of answering “I want a car,” did you put down “I do not want to drive a clunker anymore”? Focus on what you *want*, not what you do not.

**Allow yourself to dream.** Dreams are what motivates and inspires. Dreams are the blueprint to achievement. You have to dream it before you can create it. Remember, you need to protect your dreams. Anyone that tries to shame you for your dreams is toxic, and you should avoid them at all costs.

**Allow yourself to think outside of the box.** Be creative. Think about things creatively and from different perspectives. When coming up with the strange and comical answers to your strategy, you might just hit on some new idea that you might not have had otherwise.

**Go through the list again.** If any of those are answers that are expected of you by others, cross them off and try again. Remember, this is *your* list, no one else’s. These are the things YOU desire that YOU want. It is not your spouse’s wish list, or your children’s or parents’.

So now you that you have some goals and some ideas to start on. Let us take the next step and go one better. Instead of drilling down to the items, take a look at the person you are going to be once you achieve the goals.

Why? you are a different person now than you were five years ago. you are almost unrecognizable from the person you were ten years ago. Experience changes you. It is inevitable. The goals you are striving for will change you too. Maybe that is your goal, to be a more outgoing/confident/assertive person. You might already be focusing on whatever personality trait you want to have.

How will your life look? Where will you live? Will it seem different than it does now? How will your relationships look?

Again, here is a list to examine. Write down your answers to these questions too. In six months or a years time, you can review your responses and see how far you have come.

**First, give yourself credit for getting this far.** What have you already done? How close are you right now? You now have a baseline from which you can see future progress.

**How will you feel about yourself when you achieve these goals?** Proud? Energized? Free?

**What sort of people will be in your life then?** How will you feel about them? How will they think of you? Are they supportive? Are they positive?

**What does your best day look like when you have achieved those goals?** Write out what your best day looks like, from the time you wake up until you go to bed.

**How does your living situation look?** Are you living in a house? An apartment? What city? What furnishings are there? City? Country? Be specific.

**Are you working in the same field?** If not, what will you be doing?

**Are you alone, or part of a family?** A couple? A group?

**What will you wear?** Be specific about your clothing. How does it look and feel? How do you look?

**How do you look physically?** In shape? Healthy? When you think about your future self, how will you feel about your look?

**Examine that person closely. Does the thought of being him/her make your heart skip a beat and make you anxious to get started?** If it does not, you are probably not dreaming big enough. Go back over the questions again. This time, go for

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the gold, really dig in so that when you get to this question again, you are looking forward to being that person.

Right now, you are trying to get a handle on what is to come. It is too early yet to think about the journey. Your goal at this moment is to concentrate on the destination. Get a good vision of the person you are going to become. Feel what that person is like, then revisit that every day to keep the goal fresh.

In psychiatric circles, there is a technique called *act as if*. This method encourages you to act like you already are this person. When you do so consistently, you will find that you slowly become that person.

How do you do that? It is fairly simple. If you can get a good feel for what you are going to be like, you should allow yourself to incorporate bits of that person in your day to day life. If your goals make you more outgoing, start to be more outgoing in your day-to-day relationships. If you see yourself as more confident, start making decisions without agonizing over them.

When we are children and are given a maze to do on a piece of paper, we learn that it is sometimes easier to start at the end and work your way backward. That can also be a benefit for

planning out goals. It is the point where we start looking at the *how* of a situation.

Imagine that you have already reached your destination. you are standing in the winner's circle looking back a year to where you are now. Answer these questions from the perspective of the person you are going to be.

- What is the *last* thing that happened to achieve your goals?
- What is the most important decision you had to make?
- What is the biggest lesson you had to learn?
- What significant actions did you have to take?
- What beliefs changed along the way?
- What habits or behaviors did you have to build?
- What support did you have? From who? Did you have to create that relationship?
- How long did you take to realize that you had arrived at your goal?
- What were the milestones you achieved to get where you are?

Now take that insight and compare it to where you are now. What is the first step? Go to the future again and take the second to the last step, write that down. Narrow down the steps until you have bridged where you are with where you want to be.

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It might be daunting, but it works. If you take this one step at a time, it is achievable.

As a final note, remember that all of us are acted upon every day by external forces. Things change. Keep these lists handy and do this exercise again in six months. You will find that the next time you check your progress, that you are a lot closer to your goal than you thought. Not only will things have changed in your current state, but your goals might shift too. What seems impossible now might be within reach in a year's time.

# What Does Your Best Year Look Like

It might sound self-explanatory, but the fact is, many of us begin to make life changes without a clear idea of what our specific goals might be. So, the first step is to get a good idea of what your goals are for this year so that you have a clear result in mind. Then all your efforts are directed to one single question: “Will this advance me towards my goals?” If the answer is yes, then you are on the right track. If the answer is no, then you will know that you need to make a change to get back on the right path to achieve your goals.

To define your goals in a way that is clear, let us take a few steps to help solidify in your mind how you want your year to look.

## ***How to Determine Exactly What You Want***

There is a part of your mind that is goal-seeking and that focuses on the positive benefits that you will obtain when you achieve the goals you dream about. However, there is a separate part of your mind that will, at the same time, become fearful of the change that will accompany the attainment of new goals. Some people may refer to this as a “fear of success”.

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In order to minimize any fears you have about your goals, use the following recommendations to stay focused on the benefits these new goals will bring you.

**Ask yourself WHY?** “Why” is the first and most vital step in clarifying the goal for the year? So ask yourself:

- Why do you want this?
- Why do you *need* this?
- Why have you not been there/gotten this/achieved this before?
- Why is this important to you?
- Why does it matter?

Answering **why** will tell you if the goal is worth the pursuit. Someone once said, “if you are not passionate about it, you will never achieve it. If you are passionate about it, there is nothing on earth that can keep you from it.”

### **“What is in it for me?”**

Different from the “why?” question, this one serves to unite the two parts of yourself that are always at war. First, you have the short-term pleasure-seeking part that wants instant gratification. Instead of going to work and slaving away at a terminal, this is the part of your mind that would rather eat ice cream and watch movies on TV. The fact that you are working all day with nothing but a bag lunch to show for it makes this

part of your mind rebel and fight.

The other side of that coin is the part of your mind that knows if you work today, at the end of the week, you get a check that pays for ice cream and movies and electricity to operate the TV. This part of your mind understands delayed gratification and the benefit of payoffs in the pipeline to come later.

The problem with goals is that they usually involve long-term payoffs, which means the instant gratification part of our minds often gets discouraged and frustrated before we get there. There is a solution though. Making a list of the benefits gained by achieving the designated outcome will help calm the frustrations, even if the benefits are long-term. Reviewing them will help keep the “eyes on the prize” motivation running.

### **“What is the threat?”**

We fight and strive and go for the goal, and when we reach it, we find that it really was not worth all the effort we put into it. Sometimes that goal can be a bright and shiny new thing that we crave and want and desire, but it does not turn out to be as substantial as we had hoped. Often a teen will scrimp and save to buy their first car, only find that it is a money pit and in constant need of repair and maintenance.

Take a good look at your goal. Is it worth the effort in time,

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money and sweat to achieve that goal? Look under the hood, kick the tires. What could you potentially lose if you gain your goal?

It might sound counter-intuitive, but the part of the part of your brain that craves instant gratification does not quickly forget disappointments. It will cause you to look at the next goal with a jaded eye and assume that because the first goal turned out to be a shiny dud, the next goal will not be worth the effort.

Assume a detached curiosity. What do you realistically expect from the goal? What do you think is under the shine and pretty colors? And what are you willing to give up to get it?

**“Nothing” could be easier.**

It is true. The easiest way to proceed is to do nothing. Watch TV. Sleep late. Do nothing to achieve the goal. It is a valid option. It is also entirely your choice. But what happens if you do nothing at all?

Remember the fear of change? The problem is, if you do nothing, change works on you anyway. The law of entropy – in essence – speaks of the tendency of things to break down and fall apart if left to their own devices. You see it as you use anything that is mechanical or electrical. To keep a car running it needs frequent maintenance. Otherwise, it tends to break

and stay broken. The longer it is driven too hot or without oil, the worse it breaks down. So if you do nothing, which is decidedly easier than applying yourself to a task, the problem you have now, that *lack* you have now will eventually get worse.

Write down what you can expect if you do nothing at all. Write down what you are facing and how much worse it can get. When you are frustrated, or burned out, or angry that you have not reached that ultimate goal, refer back to this paper. Remind yourself that, even if you have not reached your goal, at least you have not fallen back into that trap.

Making *any* progress is better than what would happen if you did nothing at all. Remember that. Keep that near you.

**What if you make it?** Seriously, the fact that our imaginations seem to go to the worst-case scenario automatically is the biggest reason we do not try. Can you imagine crashing and burning? Can you imagine succeeding beyond your wildest goals? Why is one so much harder than the other?

Fear will always point to the disaster. There might not even *be* a disaster looming on the horizon, but there *might be*, and our brains are quick to find it.

Keep in mind that the same imagination that is projecting the

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darkest and dire warnings is the same one that can place you in the winner's circle. Imagine the accolades and awards and all the benefits that come with success. Train your brain to think about succeeding. Teach yourself to expect to win. Use your imagination to see how reaching your goal looks and feels.

When you start to doubt, or when your mind starts to fight the change that you are creating around you, cling to that vision.

## **Focus on What Matters**

There might be many parts of your life that you want to change. Or there might be many parts of your personality, or job, or relationships, or all of the above that need work. That is normal. Everyone has a laundry list of things they would like to change about themselves.

The problem is, when we try to make broad, sweeping changes to several areas of our life at once, we fall back into patterns of how we always did things in the past. There is a lot of energy and time involved in making changes, and many of us struggle to make them in *one* area, let alone several.

To make a sound, lasting change, it is essential that you concentrate on one area at a time. That way we can focus and work through that single item before tackling the next major life shift.

Let us take a closer look at focusing on what matters and how.

## **Why You Should Focus on One Major Change At A Time**

Research has indicated that real, lasting change comes through commitment. In several studies, the research has shown that writing down a commitment makes you much more likely to stick with it, up to a factor of 3.

What the research also found was that commitment only worked when the subject focused on a single goal. When people attempted multiple goals, even writing them down did not guarantee a follow-up commitment.

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How does this work? For example, writing out, "I will walk 20 minutes every day at 7 AM," makes you three times as likely to walk 20 minutes every day at 7 AM. But trying to commit to the walk **while also** telling yourself you are going start eating a healthy breakfast, start reading something enlightening for a chapter or two, followed by an hour of yoga means you are probably not achieving anything at all.

There is a reason for this. you have spent years in bad habits. Lack of exercise, poor food choices, and lunging for the remote might be what you know best. Changing bad habits takes a concentrated effort. Thankfully, after a few weeks of adhering to the change you want, that new lifestyle becomes more comfortable – and even automatic.

But until it is normal, it takes conscious effort. It takes up to two or three months to get a new habit ingrained. Trying to remember to do more than one significant change to your routine can make that habit challenging to recognize, let alone form. Old habits kick in, and we revert to what we know and with what we are comfortable.

To change your life, do not change your entire life at once. Change one part of it. Then master it for the next two or three months before choosing something else to work on.

That is especially true for significant life changes, like quitting smoking. Those kinds of changes follow the rule of three: The first three days are the worst, after three weeks, the withdrawals are easier to ignore and after three months not smoking, or whatever it is you were trying to change becomes "normal."



# What Matters Really?

If you feel like life has become chaotic and things are falling apart around you, it might be an indication that there are things you need to drop. The question is, what things are vital to your life, and what are not?

We have already seen that concentrating on one element at a time is the key to successful change. So, the question then becomes, which of the many possibilities is the right place to start?

That has as many answers as people asking. It is all different, depending on the person and their history and personality traits.

But the item to change or enhance or alter is usually only half the question. It might be that your goal is to cut back on the number of hours at work to spend more time with your family. As noble a goal as that might be, you also need to consider that there will be a loss of income, perhaps a risk of losing the job entirely. Approach decisions involving work or finance cautiously. Could you sustain the household if you left your current situation and retrained for something higher-paying? Could you survive on half your present salary?

The trick is to figure out what you are doing every day. Rate the importance of each item, and then decide to choose that place to make your change.

Here are a few items to consider that might help you clarify these things in your mind.

**What do you value most about your current life?** If you are going to change something about who you are right now, It is best if you find out what is best about who you are right now.

For this exercise pick a handful of things that you cannot do without and you would not want to lose. That forms your baseline. These are the basic foundations of your life. Thinking back to an earlier example, you might consider your relationship with your spouse and children something you simply ***must*** not lose.

**List your commitments and prioritize them.** List out your obligations in the order of what they mean *to you*. Compare them to the items in the first step. Which of those is hand in hand with your most important values?

Keep the ones that are in agreement with your core values. Renegotiate them if you need to, but do not take on any new commitments yet. Focus on the responsibilities that are essential to your life now.

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**Analyze how you use your time.** Which items that take up your day go to the core commitments and are therefore essential items of your life? How much time do you spend with family? How much time online? Most smartphones have a way to track usage. Discover how much time you spend on your phone. Are you playing games or surfing the internet?

How much time is spent watching TV? Reading? If you are always surfing the news online, you have probably noticed that the news is often repetitive. Try searching a reputable source once or twice each day and no more.

If you were able to reclaim these hours, what could you do to help satisfy your obligations to your core values?

**De-clutter.** do not just look at the clutter on the desk or in the room. De-clutter the emotional, and psychological confusion. Just like the old papers on the desk that once were important and now have little meaning, the habits and old values we once had served a purpose, but no longer have any bearing. Let go of the old fears and trepidations that are keeping you from proceeding.

Having a fear of loud noises is a universal terror among small children, but when we understand what thunder and lightning are, we can let go of that fear and let the storm pass by. What

things do you need to let go of in your life? How can you go about doing that?

do not be afraid to ask for help when it comes to dealing with the emotional baggage. Some things might benefit from the assistance of a friend, or even a professional.

**We are a social species.** The need to spend time with others is in our makeup; we take our cues from those around us. When we lived in caves and were the hunted as often as the hunters, we learned a few things. If others were frightened, there was probably a good reason, and we were frightened too, though we might not know why. Conversely, if the others were content and happy, we could relax and share in the happiness.

These feelings have remained with us over the millennia and continue today. Our emotions are, for lack of a better word, contagious. If people around you radiate negativity, it will not be long before you are feeling negative. If the people around you are upbeat and positive, you will become that too. With that in mind, spend time with people that are good for you.

Also, do not forget to spend time with your family. While it is true that sometimes family can be toxic, limit that exposure and that time. it is okay to want to be the one that holds them up, but do not let yourself be dragged down.

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**Remember the “me” time.** it is important to be alone from time to time. Being alone is when we can relax and let our guard down. It is a time when simply we can *be* without thinking, talking or interacting. As important as it is to be around positive people, a little downtime now and then is vital to keep things in perspective and to manage your mental and psychological well-being.

Need a pro tip? Part of “me” time needs to be “green” time. Many studies indicate that regularly walks through nature, seeing the green of plants, blue skies, and clear water will do wonders for attitude and energy.

**Set the right goals for the right reasons.** These are *your* goals, no one else’s. do not set the goal that will make your father/mother/wife/husband happy. They will not be the ones that have to live with your new life; you will. Those goals are for them to set, not for you.

Make sure that the goals you do set are the ones you want. You may wish for a new car, and scrimp and save for it, only to find out that the gas and insurance and maintenance are too expensive and not worth the investment. Remember that “things” often bring temporary happiness and fade quickly.

Earlier, we covered the goal, not the journey. Now that you have some ideas in mind try reversing that thought. Instead of

making the goal a “thing” like a car or money or promotion, **what if your goal is to have a different daily journey?**

For example, how do you want to fill your time? By now you are tracking your time and getting an idea of where you are spending it. But how would you prefer to spend your time? More time with the family? More time at work? What sort of day would make you want to leap out of bed excited to take part in it? What kind of life would you need to be happy to be in it? What do you want to learn? A new language? A new skill? Who would you ultimately like to spend time with and be around? Would you like to collaborate with anyone? Partner with anyone?

**do not write it in stone.** Throughout this eBook the same thing is being said over and over again: make these lists again in six months, and again in a year. Goals change, they shift. Always be ready to change a goal when the old one no longer applies.

Just like the clutter you got rid of, goals are meaningful today – but they might not be next week. Allow yourself to change your goals as you need to. If the current journey is not working for you, change it. Go through this process again from the start as many times as necessary.

Lastly, the entire point of setting a goal is to change your life. Sometimes the change we seek turns out to not be a change

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for the better. If that happens, then alter the direction and start over again.

# The Action Plan

We have spent a great deal of time and effort getting the goals set up. You found out what you want and why you want it, clearly identifying the journey as well as the destination. Now it is time to look at the how-to.

These are some simple steps to start you on your journey. This is not an exhaustive list, and you will begin to discover other actions on your own as you proceed, but here are some places to start.

1. **Take an inventory of last year.** Look at the ups and downs. You will get a much clearer picture of how to proceed this year if you can take an honest and encompassing look at where you have been. Write these down:
  - What was your most significant accomplishment?
  - Why were your accomplishments meaningful to you? What was the significance?
  - What are your regrets from last year?
  - What obstacles did you face? Which ones did you overcome? Which ones did you not overcome?



- What goals did you reach? Which ones did you not obtain?
- With what part of your life are you unhappy with right now? If setting goals are all about changing your life, then there is a part that needs improving. What is it?
- What was the re-occurring theme from last year? Was it the success in business? Was it a seemingly endless string of accidents? Was it beneficial? Harmful?

2. **Skip the New Year's Resolutions.** For one thing, you are just going to blow them off by Valentine's Day anyway. you are doing something more important and longer-lasting than a mere resolution.

Instead set a New Year's *Goal*. What is the difference? A resolution is a promise to do something indefinitely. A goal has a specific date. A goal is *measurable*. For example, a resolution is to quit smoking. A goal is to quit smoking by January 30<sup>th</sup>. It is measurable, you either meet that goal, or you do not.

Be specific, as much as you are able.

1. **Make your goal *quantifiable and measurable*.** A resolution would be something like "I will run more in the new year and take part in at least one marathon." A well-formed goal

would be, “I am going to participate in the Boston Marathon this year (specific date and place) *and* I will complete it in under five hours (quantifiable).” A resolution would be “I will lose weight,” while a well-formed goal would be “I will lose X pounds by this date.”

2. **Create breakthrough goals.** In 1968, the US was running behind in the space race. Apollo 8 had a breakthrough goal. It was the second human-crewed space flight from the United States, but it became the first spacecraft to break orbit, go the moon, establish orbit and return safely. That was a *breakout* goal.

If your goal is related to your health, instead of losing X pounds by a specific date, make a breakout goal of being able to run that marathon. Instead of being more politically active, make a goal of running for office.

But keep things realistic. Making a breakout goal of being the first couch potato to colonize Mars is likely not going to happen, but on the other hand, do not be afraid of reaching far past where you are now. The entire point of the breakout goal is to push through that envelop where you are comfortable and move into a very different life.

When you write your goals, remember these necessary steps.

- **Write them in positive words.** For example, instead of saying “I will quit smoking,” write “I am a non-smoker.” Instead of “I will lose weight,” try “I am at a healthy weight.” If you keep the wording light, the goal will seem less like a chore and more like an opportunity.
- **Write it down like it already happened.** That is the power of visualization. Your conscious mind can handle abstract concepts like time and future and past, but the primitive mind, the subconscious cannot. That can only comprehend the here and now. Writing in the present tense allows your brain to process things as if they are currently happening. Instead of saying, for example, “I will get that raise,” try writing, “I make \$X amount per year.” Instead of “I will lose weight,” try “I maintain a good healthy weight.”

It is the subconscious where habit lives, and if you are trying to establish a new pattern, like running every day, or not smoking, it is the subconscious that needs to be involved.
- **Keep it personal.** Always. It was mentioned here several times that these are your goals, no one else’s. That is important. That is why it comes up again and again; you need to claim these goals. Own them. Each goal starts with the letter “I.” “I am...”, “I have...”

Be proprietary about these goals, make them yours in name as well as fact. Let them be yours. That is because the way you word things, *especially* when they are written down is significant. When you write these goals, you are creating a contract with yourself, a promise to do, or be, or become. you are instructing your subconscious to kick in and join the party. Word it like you would any contract: carefully and as clearly as you can.

- **Make a timeline.** On a fresh sheet of paper, write your goal on the left side and the time of completion on the right. Today is the beginning of the timeline. Now mark the obstacles you need to face. If your goal is losing 10 pounds by the end of the month, you might have an enormous obstacle to pass if that month includes Thanksgiving. Or a birthday. Mark them, so it does not come as a surprise. If your goal is getting a raise, one major obstacle is just asking for one. That can be intimidating.

Add to the timeline the skills you are going to have to learn and when. Then add the support system you are going to need to have in place and when to gather them.

- **Under the timeline, write the goal as a question.** “How do I achieve being a non-smoker?” Under it, write down

as many answers as you can think of that help achieve that goal. Try for fifteen or twenty answers to the question. Answers could include nicotine patches, “cold turkey,” tapering off and so on. Force yourself to come up with as many ideas as you can.

1. Remember, you are setting yourself up to succeed. By coming up with a list of resolutions to the problem, you develop a plan. You have the entire year to work that plan, *and* you have fallback plans. “Cold turkey” did not work? There is the backup plan, the nicotine patch.

# Conclusion

As with anything, changing your life is about making small changes and letting those changes help create bigger ones. The most important things to note?

- Be specific as possible.
- Make your goals measurable and quantifiable.
- Give yourself room and permission to fail. Failing is part of learning, like a child falling as they learn to walk. Falling for a toddler is not “failing,” and neither is a setback when you are trying to develop a new habit or a new life.

Finally, congratulate yourself and let yourself be proud. Even if the result is not perfect, a lot of people do not even try. You have already won just by starting.