

IT'S ALL IN THE

Journey



A MAGAZINE OF RECOVERY

THIS MAGAZINE IS DEDICATED TO MY DAUGHTER JOY

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A New Year's RESOLUTION



by Kimberly Dennis, MD

As we cross over to a new year and embrace the hope of the season, we consider possible resolutions for a new year with a simple truth in mind – a new year's resolution is simply a goal we decide to declare at the start of a new year. Thinking of resolutions in terms of goals can make them more understandable and allow us to craft resolutions we are passionate about and, therefore, more likely to realize. But we also must remember that goals shouldn't just be made at the beginning of the year but throughout as change is needed and desired.

A new year brings with it a tradition of looking towards new possibilities. And when we think of possibilities, we begin to dream of who we can become. We see this time as a chance for renewal – for with a new year is an opportunity to embrace change and use the season of new beginnings as a way to ignite our good intentions by developing resolutions to guide us on our journey to new places.

The problem many people face with achieving resolutions is they make them as a “knee-jerk” reaction. This is traditionally the time of year when people look to change their lives and decide to do something different at the spur of the moment. The intention may be good, but actually reaching goals on this basis can be very difficult to achieve. Many promises we make to ourselves are broken fairly shortly after they are set.

When I was in the grips of an active eating disorder and alcoholism, I used to make promises to myself daily only to break them hours and sometimes minutes later. I had no idea on my own about what it would take to recover, and I didn't find any ideas about it in my medical school training either. I made repeated, solid commitments to myself to follow through with staying sober and abstinent. Making real change in my life required a new kind of commitment. It required a commitment with action, and it required the most dreaded thing of all – involving other people and a power greater than myself to help me on my way.

I found the following elements as key to reaching my goals:

- Make specific, non-broad goals
- Commitment with a plan of action
- Set clear and achievable steps within this plan of action

- Allow other people to help
- Believe in a power greater than yourself

One of the biggest mistakes people make in goal setting is failing to take any action. When it comes to goals, we need a plan of action. As many people have discovered, setting a goal or making a decision to change without taking any action ends in the same result as if the goal had never been set in the first place. We need clear steps that can be put into action to achieve a desired result.

Within our plans for progress, it is often beneficial to include accountability to others. For example, a person with an eating disorder is more likely to follow a meal plan if she involves a nutritionist, doctor, her sponsor and/or other support groups by sharing what she is doing with food on a daily basis. A

support team of friends, family members, health care professionals, sponsors and others is invaluable. As the scholar Isaac Newton said, “If I saw further than other men, it was because I stood on the shoulders of giants.” It is only from accepting the support of others, and believing in a power great than ourselves, that we can truly achieve our goals and succeed.

It is healthy to want to change our lives for the better on January 1. But we must not forget it is also healthy to want to improve our lives on February 1, May 12, December 30, or any other day. Also, it is exquisitely healthy to practice gratitude and acceptance of where we are at any given moment on the journey. Real and lasting change comes from the experience of awareness, acceptance, and then action. Every moment holds the possibility for positive change, not just the beginning of the year. In fact, I'd like to suggest the first New Year's resolution on your list – to make each and every day an opportunity for growth. Look unto this day, for it is life... 🌙

Kimberly Dennis, M.D., is medical director at Chicago-based Timberline Knolls, one of the country's leading and innovative residential treatment centers helping women and adolescent girls age 12 and older overcome eating disorders, substance abuse, self-injury and co-occurring disorders. Timberline Knolls uses an individualized, strengths-based approach to help create emotionally strong, responsible, radiant women who overcome problems, believe in themselves and have the ability to thrive in the real world.

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