

How to Make a  
**SMART**  
New Year's Resolution  
and  
**STICK TO IT**

By  
Lisa Johnson

**Lisa Johnson Fitness**

<http://ModernPilatesBoston.com>

<http://LisaJohnsonFitness.com>

For most of us, making a New Year's resolution on December 31 is an annual tradition.

But, historians credit Babylonians for creating the custom more than 4,000 years ago – when the New Year began in the spring, around March 23. It wasn't until the Romans introduced the modern calendar that resolutions became associated with January 1. Back then, the Romans assigned the god Janus to January and gave him the ability to look both backward and forward in time. December 31 became the date for Janus to remember the old year and anticipate the new . . . Now, we do the same.

We all share a desire to live our lives a little better than the year before, and we also frequently share the same resolutions. For example, some of the top resolutions are:

**Lose Weight • Exercise More • Control or Eliminate Debt • Save Money  
Travel • Get a Better Job • Quit Smoking • Drink Less Alcohol  
Reduce Stress • Volunteer • Become More Eco-Friendly • Get Organized  
Spend More Times with Friends and Family • Learn Something New**

But, can a New Year's resolution really help you make lasting changes to your life?

**That depends.**

Studies show that 80 percent of New Year's resolutions are long forgotten by Valentine's Day on February 14.

**But, what about the other 20 percent?** Why do those resolutions work when all the others fail?

Over the years, I have seen people use resolutions to make impressive changes in their lives. After all, New Year's resolutions can be powerful and productive motivators. So,

**HOW CAN YOU  
MAKE A SMART NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION  
AND STICK TO IT?**

Based on my experience, the key to a successful New Year's resolution is to make a **SMART RESOLUTION**, rather than a **DUMB** one.

## What's a DUMB RESOLUTION?

Unfortunately, too many people make dumb resolutions. It's easy to bite off more than you can chew, get overwhelmed, and ultimately fail. Here are a few typical examples:

- ***"I'm going to lose 100 pounds in six months."*** This is a great goal if you need to lose that much weight, but this type of resolution is too short on specifics. How are you going to make it happen?
- ***"I'm going to become fluent in French."*** Are you going to buy videos? Sign up for a class? Is there a local group of people learning French that you can join?
- ***"I'm going to become debt free this year."*** Awesome! But again, the big question is: How? Let's assume you got into debt on your current budget. How are you going to dig out of the hole with the same amount of money? What are you willing to sacrifice?

You get the idea.

Instead of making a DUMB RESOLUTION . . .

## This year, make a SMART RESOLUTION

Break the process down into two parts:

**1. CREATE A REALISTIC RESOLUTION**

**2. DESIGN AN ACTION PLAN**

## CREATE A REALISTIC RESOLUTION

In order to succeed, you must choose your resolution carefully.

For starters, be sure to gear your resolution towards **ACHIEVEMENT**, not failure. Resolve to accomplish something relatively simple and specific. Once you've reached your first goal, you can always move on to set another one. **Take it one step at a time.** But, always move forward.

To help you brainstorm ideas, here's a sampling of New Year's resolutions that are smart, explicit and relatively easy to accomplish:

1. **Lose five pounds.** Please, DON'T resolve to drop 100 pounds. Instead, resolve to lose 100 pounds, five pounds at a time. Short-term goals are much easier to achieve.
2. **Take a class.** Is there a school in your area that offers adult education courses? Often, local groups offer one-day classes on topics as diverse as Tuscan cooking, gardening, or how to make your own soap. Enlist a friend for even more fun!
3. **Eat vegetarian one day a week.** This is a super-simple change that helps your waistline, your wallet, AND the planet. All you have to do is enjoy meat-free meals like pasta primavera or veggie pizza one day each week. Could it get any easier?
4. **Track your spending for one month.** Ever wonder where your paycheck is going? Write down your expenses for 30 days, and you'll get eye-opening insights into your monthly budget. Then, make adjustments so you spend money on what you really want.
5. **Lose one dress size.** Dropping from a 14 to a 12 is much more realistic than going from a 14 to a 4! Once you fit into a 12, you can start working down to a 10.

**REMEMBER: Baby steps guarantee success.**

Make small, attainable goals. Then, as you achieve each small goal, make a new one that keeps you moving towards your larger objective.

## DESIGN AN ACTION PLAN

After you have decided on a realistic New Year's resolution, you need to **PLAN A COURSE OF ACTION** that will help you achieve it. Most successful resolutions proceed through these stages:

- **RESEARCH.** Investigate your options and explore different paths. If you want to lose weight, you may want to schedule an appointment with your doctor, purchase a gym membership, or buy a fitness magazine or book. Check online resources, and ask friends and co-workers for help, too. Did your neighbor like the pottery class he took last year? Exactly how expensive is that vacation to Hawaii?
- **INITIAL STEPS.** Sometimes, getting started on a new resolution is the most difficult task of all. Many people use the “buddy system” to overcome inertia. For example, plan to exercise with your partner or a friend. You’ll be less tempted to skip a workout if it involves someone else. Plus, you can encourage one another to stay on track.
- **MAINTENANCE.** This stage can be tricky. Determine what **YOU** need to keep yourself motivated. Maybe the buddy system works best. Or, you can chart your progress by writing in a journal. Support groups (now both online and offline) can help, too. If you’re trying to lose a few pounds, try Weight Watchers. If you want to read more, join a book club. Find a way to keep yourself accountable and always moving towards your goal.
- **REWARD.** Set up a reward system to keep you motivated –but, make sure the reward is NOT directly related to your goal. (In other words, if you’re trying to lose weight, don’t make the reward a big ‘ol cupcake.) Think in terms of a treat for yourself (a manicure, a night out, or a new outfit).

**Follow these steps, and your New Year’s resolution will have a powerful and positive impact.**

But, what happens once you have achieved your goal?

**WHAT DO YOU DO NEXT?**

Once you have reached your goal, you can:

- **Take a break.** Maintain your success, but refrain from setting any new goals right away. Sometimes we need a breather, and sometimes we just don't have a goal that we want to achieve right away. That's fine. Take some time to enjoy your success.
- **Set a goal that's entirely different than the first one.** For example, if you have quit smoking, you may have rediscovered your ability to taste food. Maybe you can establish a new goal to sign up for a gourmet cooking class so you can expand your culinary skills. This is a classic "win-win" because expanding your palate will encourage you to remain smoke-free.
- **Set a new goal similar to the first.** Someone who has lost 25 pounds may want to try for six-pack abs. If you can keep your home office organized, why not tackle the kitchen next? There are a lot of options here, particularly for physical goals, which you have to maintain.
- **Build on your skill set.** Maybe you're not fluent in French yet but you can order food in a restaurant and work your way around a museum. Build on what you've achieved and go to the next level. Maybe set a goal to take a more advanced language course or attend a local French film series to increase your vocabulary and your ear.

Ultimately, the goal is keep your commitment going strong, so that you can

## CONVERT CHANGES INTO AN IMPROVED WAY OF LIFE.

To help you get started on your **SMART** New Year's Resolution, read through these two case studies. Then, print out and complete the "official" New Year's resolution certificate on the last page of this eBook. Hang it somewhere visible, so each day it can remind you of your pledge.

## Case Study #1. Janice wants to quit smoking.

Janice wants to quit smoking. She smokes like crazy on New Year's Eve, and then throws her last pack of cigarettes triumphantly and defiantly into the trash. Eight hours later, she's in her jammies at the local gas station shamefully buying another pack and promising she'll just smoke one or two. The next day, entire the pack is gone and she's back at the gas station more defeated than ever.

**A BETTER PLAN** for Janice would be to:

1. Make an appointment with her doctor for a physical and to discuss options about how to quit smoking.
2. Purchase a patch kit which steps her down slowly from her nicotine addiction.
3. Pick a date on her calendar to formally quit and throw a little party to mark the occasion.
4. Develop coping strategies that can replace the oral fixations of smoking, like chewing gum, eating celery sticks or increased exercise.
5. Tell her friends, family and coworkers so they can help her reach the goal.
6. Plan mini-rewards for achieving one week smoke-free, one month smoke-free, three months smoke-free, etc. Perhaps Janice could celebrate with a big party at six months smoke-free?

## Case Study #2. Steve wants to lose 25 pounds.

Steve wants to lose 25 pounds. So, he wakes up on January 1, throws on his sneakers and runs around the block. Since the last time he ran regularly was 10 years ago, he's sucking wind by the first quarter mile and can't believe how miserable he feels. Steve manages to walk/run one mile before he heads home.

Once home, Steve has only coffee so he can save his calories for lunch and dinner. At lunch, he has a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and a soda, but at dinner he's really hungry, so he helps himself to two servings of mashed potatoes. "Oops!" he says. "Guess, I'll start again, tomorrow." Steve imagines signing up for the gym and maybe taking cycling classes. But, he read somewhere those are killer.

**A BETTER PLAN** for Steve would be to:

1. Have a checkup with his doctor to get a baseline for blood work, weight and blood pressure and make sure that he's cleared to start an exercise program.
2. Talk to his wife and help her develop an arsenal of recipes that are healthy, low in calories and delicious. Nutrition is 50% of the battle.
3. Develop a lunch time strategy. Where can he easily get a salad or a healthy, filling soup? Maybe it's easier to bring his own lunch, so he's not tempted?
4. Create an exercise plan. Steve will need to work out five to seven days per week. He'll need to squeeze in about 200 minutes of cardio and another 60 minutes of weight training. How is he going to fit that all in? How will his support system help him?
5. Hold himself accountable. There are a variety of ways Steve can do this. He can work with a personal trainer, report to an online community, or simply check-in with his spouse or a friend.
6. Plan rewards along the way. I'm a big believer in rewarding yourself for every five pounds lost. Steve can pick mini-rewards that he can't have until he hits the five pound mark. He can make each successive reward a little bigger to keep his motivation.
7. Establish workout "dates" with his friends and family. Making weight loss social and incorporating it into his changing lifestyle is the best way for Steve to keep the weight off.

*New Year's*

*Resolution*

This is to certify that

---

Being of sound mind and body  
Has hereby resolved to

---

Here are three steps I will take to achieve this resolution:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Today's date:

---

Resolution end date:

---

*Lisa Johnson Fitness*

<http://ModernPilatesBoston.com>

<http://LisaJohnsonFitness.com>