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Get real with resolutions

Think small if you want change in the new year

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FLORIDA TODAY*

If you're like most well-intentioned folks, your New Year's resolutions will go something like this:

- Spend more time with family.
- Get out of debt.
- Lose lots of weight.
- Eat healthier.
- Make career changes.
- Quit smoking or drinking.

Looks good on paper, but you'll want to include this final entry:

- Expect to fail by February.

While resolutions may feel motivating, most people don't adhere to them.

Need a visual aid?

Join a gym of your choice on Jan. 3.

Then see how many new members you've met are still there in February. That is, if you're one of the few fitness newbies to have stuck around.

"Generally, we see a lot of people with unrealistic expectations coming in January," says fitness trainer Grant Trobaugh, who owns Simply Fit in Melbourne. "Maybe people have seen those commercials where they can get a buff body in a matter of weeks. They don't understand that you must make a commitment to see change."

One reason people don't meet their goals is because they create a huge giant whose needs are too overwhelming to meet, says local career coach Laura DeCarlo, executive director of Career Directors International, an association of professional resume writers and career coaches.

Whether it's resolutions or other life goals, the only way to get from here to there is by breaking tasks down into small bits.

"Health and wealth are very similar in terms of the small steps you need to take to meet your goals,"

says certified financial advisor Ed Donner of Melbourne's Donner Wealth Management.

Don't feel you can contribute four to six percent of your income to your 401K account? Try one percent and watch the results.

Want to lose 50 pounds? Why not go for five and then see what happens?

Starting out with simpler resolutions might lead to greater accomplishments.

With that, here are some resolutions to keep in mind while your own.

Resolve to think small: DeCarlo and Trobaugh refer to the old saying: How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time, of course. "When starting any fitness program it's best to think in terms of one step at a time," Trobaugh says. "Just as long as you are progressing and moving toward a healthier you."

Resolve to eat better -- gradually: Generally, if you eat smaller meals enriched with grains and fruits and vegetables, you are going to lose weight and feel more fit. Don't expect to become a health nut in a day. "Start out by eliminating sugar from your diet," Trobaugh suggests. "And don't skip meals, especially breakfast."

Revolve to get everything in (your own) writing: If you're looking to advance your career or change jobs, you can practice a shotgun approach by sending out a resume willy-nilly or throwing it on Monster.com and hoping for the best. Or you can come up with a plan of action that can help you break your search down in simple, obtainable steps, DeCarlo says.

For instance, make a list that includes forming a better resume. Include names of people who might be helpful in developing your resume or opening doors. Include a timeline of when you plan to complete each step.

"By having a written plan, you have tangible proof on paper that you are making progress," DeCarlo says. "See what you've done and pat yourself on the back."

Putting it in writing can also help you save money during the New Year. And that can better lead you to getting out of debt.

"Run your household like a business," Donner advises.

Seem like an overwhelming task?

Actually you can start by resolving to write down everything you spend money on -- especially food.

"As you continue to keep a daily budget you can refine it and see better results," Donner says.

The same can be applied to fitness. Seeing what you've done on paper can help push you to the next level.

"To this day, I write down every workout I do," Trobaugh says. "That helps me change the workout every six to eight weeks so that I get better benefits."

Resolve to get fit, not fight fat: "Stay off the scales" Trobaugh says. "Any exercise you start to do will eventually have benefits. If you go about it just wanting to lose 20 pounds and then quit you'll just put those 20 pounds back on in no time."

Trobaugh advises beginners to start with a three-times a week

workout program.

Don't be surprised if you don't see results right away. In fact, you might actually gain a pound or two at first -- muscle weighs more than fat and your eating needs will be different when you exercise. Some people who make it past February will actually see quicker results.

Resolve to expect the unexpected: Just as keeping a budget can help you save money for emergencies, expect daily disruptions that might prompt you to put fitness on the back burner.

One reason well-intentioned folks don't see results in, say, six weeks is because they haven't been consistent.

"It's the benefits that become the biggest reinforcements to the behavior change," Trobaugh says. "It's OK if you fall off the wagon and miss a workout. Just as long as you get back on. Fitness should be a lifestyle, not a short-term fix."

Resolve to practice the buddy system: "Success doesn't happen in isolation," DeCarlo says. "Studies have shown that people who either want to lose weight or quit smoking have a 40 to 60 percent success rate when done with a partner."

Visiting online chat rooms and sharing your struggles and successes with others can be beneficial and motivating, DeCarlo says. By asking others for help, you also might be helping them.

Since he began working out, Trobaugh always has preferred working out with other people to working out at home alone. "In a gym there is a degree of social atmosphere that can be very beneficial," he says. "People will count on you and if you miss a day you know they'll be asking about you."

Resolve to spend time with neglected children -- your own: It might sound flippant but folks may be squandering quality family time.

Leading career seminars, DeCarlo often discovers that parents and kids are often at home at the same time.

"It's just that they aren't spending quality time in the same room together. One solution is to plan family functions. For instance, tonight the family plays a game together and Saturday they go to the zoo."

Enjoy the payoff: It won't come today but if you keep with the program you'll notice small changes that can motivate you make bigger ones.

You won't get lean and mean in a month at the gym or on the exercise trail, but you might feel better.

"You first sense an increase in your energy levels," Trobaugh says. "Then you notice that your clothes are fitting better."

By keeping track of your results, you can look at how far you've come.

"What starts as a speck of snow rolling down a hill becomes a huge snowball," DeCarlo says. "And you can't help but get caught up in the momentum."

That's what happened to financial expert Donner, who began working out in the gym nearly 15 years ago.

By sticking with the program, he has been motivated to "always take it to the next level." He now regularly places in triathlons.

And he can successfully call himself a "financial planner by day and an athlete by night."
