



Now that January has come and gone, how're those New Year's resolutions workin' for you? It's only the second month, so maybe you're still rockin' along, feeling good, getting things done, fiercely determined to achieve your goal *this* time. If so, keep up that good work. If not, you may find comfort – and camaraderie – in the following statistics:

According to research by the University of Scranton, 45 percent of Americans usually make New Year's resolutions, but only eight percent successfully achieve their goal. Though 75 percent maintain their target through the New Year's first week, only 46 percent make it past six months. Many tank way before that. In fact, a study by Strava, the social network for athletes, found that January 12th is the day most resolutions go down the tubes.

Why such depressing results? The major cause is unrealistic expectations. That translates into setting a goal that's beyond one's capacities, making a bucket list of goals instead of sticking to one at a time, attempting an extreme personal or professional transformation, or tackling a goal alone that would be much easier with a little help. All of these can be psychologically daunting, making failure practically a given for the average person with competing priorities.

The good news is you're not alone and you *can* achieve your desires. You can indeed give a heave-ho to the old and embrace the new, whether it be a habit, behavior, project or major life change. Following are a few suggestions that may assist in that process.

□ □ **Think small.** □ Though modest lifestyle changes or projects may seem less stupendous, you're much more likely to achieve them, enjoy a “yahoo!” fist pump, and move on to the next one. Rebalancing your goals, i.e. setting more moderate, attainable objectives throughout the year can mean the difference between giving up completely early on, and experiencing a

positive lifestyle change.

When I sold my old, 1940-model Kentucky home, embraced my dream of living near big water and moved to Beaufort 14 years ago, I was determined to downsize and get rid of things I no longer needed. Lighten up. Two garage sales did the job before I happily became a Lowcountry resident. After yet another sale several years ago, I moved to a small, perfect-sized cottage. Unfortunately, I still had a system-less business file that this right-brainer found difficult to navigate, a messy office and unopened boxes in the garage from the initial move. After New Year's resolutions about straightening out the whole shebang failed for three years in a row, I finally broke the goal down into one-at-a-time, and by golly, got 'em done. Wisely, I took a friend's advice and hired a professional organizer (www.napo.net) to complete the first project. Following the methods I learned from her, the other two didn't take long at all.

This example segues nicely into my second suggestion.

□ □ **Seek assistance.** For a number of years, I had a room I called my "studio," the perfect space to write and seek inspiration from gazing out at my backyard-filling, flower-and-vegetable garden. The view was lovely... much more so than the indoor room that overlooked it. The door to that room usually stayed closed – not for creative privacy but because the space had become a junk room, its baseboards hidden by boxes I'd yet to unpack since moving in several years prior, and its closet crammed with clothes I hadn't worn in years. Some of which I was fairly clear I'd never wear again but that had memories attached. You know, those items that really need to go in a "clothing scrapbook" or be framed in a shadow box. Or better yet, tossed as ballast that was weighting down my house. When I'd enter that room, my eyes would glaze over and I'd think, *Gag! Not now... I'll do this another time.* Then I'd close the door, write instead at the dining room table, and feel like a loser.

Finally, I asked an organized friend for help. Which she provided. Beautifully. At her suggestion I went through that closet and stacked every article of clothing in one of three piles: Keep, Pitch, or Not Sure. The latter was enormous. On a rainy Sunday afternoon, she sat on my couch and I modeled each article in the "Not Sure" stack. Her raw honesty made the afternoon fun. "Did you ever really wear that out of the house?" "That color makes you fade into the wall." "You must've owned that since junior high." "Bell bottoms? Really?"

I played runway model, she critiqued, and we laughed a lot. By the end of the afternoon, five leaf bags filled with my rejects awaited pickup by a nonprofit on Monday morning. Her help had

been priceless.

□ □ **Believe in your capacity to achieve your goal.** Give yourself a pat on the back that you've set a goal because that obviously raises your chances of achieving it. But know that bumps in the road will occur that can throw you off the path to success. When that happens, people tend to blame themselves for lack of willpower and flog themselves emotionally. Here's the thing: You have as much willpower as you think you have. Don't make failure a self-fulfilling prophecy. Consider a temporary slip or setback just that. Then "get back on that horse" and ride again. The first of January is a day on the calendar. You can reset your goal any day you choose.

My mom had two daughters, and one of her favorite sayings was, "She can who thinks she can." I still use that inspiring adage often.

□ □ **Be grateful.** Finally, and perhaps most important, you must have gratitude from the get-go. Before you begin, visualize your clean garage, closet, studio, or whatever your makeover target may be – taking large bags of your no-longer-appropriate-for-you clothing to CAPA; bicycling the entire Spanish Moss Trail; passing up the dessert table at an all-you-can-eat buffet; high-fiving your LifeFit personal trainer at the end of a workout; or walking all the way around the block. And when your mind's eye "sees" it, give thanks big time with the enthusiasm that will help you get there.

Rumi, 13th century Persian poet and Sufi mystic, stated the importance of gratitude well.

"Whatever happens to you, don't fall in despair. Even if all the doors are closed, a secret path will be there for you that no one knows. You can't see it yet but so many paradises are at the end of this path... Be grateful. It is easy to thank after obtaining what you want, (instead) thank *before* having what you want."

Have courage and gratitude. Roll up your sleeves. Take and deep breath or two...and heave ho!