



TRANSITIONING INTO THE NEW YEAR WITH INTENTION

Winter 2019 newsletter

There is something truly magical about this time of the year, when many of us are brimming with—what feels like—a newborn sense of zeal for changing our life for the better and optimism for the future. For many people, the transition from one year to the next often signals a similar transition in their lives. This is why creating New Year's resolutions has become a popular holiday tradition, much like gift-giving and family get-togethers.

Unfortunately, many of us who participate in this annual holiday tradition soon find ourselves feeling overwhelmed by the resolutions we set, and before we know it, we have decided to either give up on our goals or have completely forgotten about them. However, New Year's resolutions need not (nor should they) feel like you are endeavoring to trek an unclimbable mountain. In this newsletter, we will look into the optimal way of transitioning into the new year that allows us to both celebrate our past and present as well as pave the way for bringing positive change into our lives.



Taking stock of the year gone by

The New Year nudges a significant number of us to come up with resolutions and begin work on changing our lives for the better. However, we often pay little regard to the year that has just ended. While striving for progress and change is beneficial, it is also important to reflect on what you have accomplished so far and to be grateful for your past experiences and lessons learned. The end of the year is the perfect time to do just that.

One good way to pay tribute to your life in the past year is to spend some time journaling and writing about key moments, both good and challenging, which made a strong impact on you. Perhaps you formed some relationships that are important to you, or you are proud (or possibly not proud) of the way you handled a difficulty. Journaling in such a way can help you see where you are at in your life, become aware of your strengths and achievements, as well as shed light on those areas that you may need to work on. It can ultimately help you develop greater self-awareness.

Being grateful

Another helpful end-of-year self-care practice is quite simply to count your blessings. Gratitude is a feeling that we often overlook, but it can completely transform the way we perceive our lives as it encourages us to focus on all the positive things in our life. According to *Psychology Today*, cultivating or practicing gratitude on a regular basis has numerous benefits, including improving our relationships as well as promoting our psychological and physical well-being.

Once you have created your list of blessings, consider taking some time to express your gratitude towards others, and even towards yourself. Perhaps, you can write a thank-you note to someone, or treat yourself to something you would enjoy.

Creating a vision for the upcoming year(s)

The idea of creating a vision for the coming year is similar to that of New Year's resolutions, however, it alludes to having a larger plan or idea of who and where we want to be in the coming years. Now is a good time to think about any long-held dreams that you haven't had a chance to pursue, or an area of your life that you feel could benefit from change.

However, thinking about our resolutions isn't often enough. In order for us to actually achieve the goals that we have created, it is important to form a plan that is realistic and achievable. The following is a list of tips that can help you create the best action plan for turning your dreams into reality.

1) Choose one part of your life that you would like to change

According to the *American Psychological Association*, trying to change everything all at once can be overwhelming, and it would likely make you want to give up on your goals fairly quickly. Instead, choose an area of your life or a habit that you think needs to be addressed more urgently than the others (e.g. career), and then start with focusing on improving that one area prior to tackling other parts of your life.

2) Break it down

Research suggests that breaking down a large goal into smaller steps makes it easier and more likely to achieve your goals. Lauren Whitt, a health and wellness expert at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, suggests this strategy to those looking to lose weight. According to Whitt, creating weight-loss goals that are over-ambitious, say losing 10 to 30 pounds, can actually be discouraging because they can take a significant amount of time to attain and may be deemed unachievable if one's progress is slow. The key therefore is to start off really slowly when making an important change in your life and focus on one small goal at a time.



3) Enlist the help of others

Another strategy that can be helpful in encouraging people to stay on track with their goals is calling on others' support. An article on New Year's resolutions by *Harvard Health* explains how making a written or a verbal promise (such as in a journal or to a group of friends) can be especially motivating because it forces you to commit to your goals, often to avoid disappointing others (and yourself). It may also be helpful to team up with others who have similar goals as you, so that you can challenge and push each other to keep moving forward.

4) Think about the "why"

When trying to change old habits, mindsets, or pursuing a long-treasured dream, it is inevitable that you will face some bumps on the road, and at such times, it is natural to feel tempted to give up. At these times, it is important to remind yourself of why you have pledged to make the change in the first place. Have you decided to be healthier so that you can live a happier, longer, healthier life, or perhaps you would like to experience the sense of deep fulfillment that comes with following your passion? Keeping the reason behind our goals or the desired destination in mind can help us slog through the most grueling parts of our self-improvement journey.