

January 2016

10 Ideas for a New Year's Resolution Worth Keeping

New Year's resolutions, the skeptics say, are made to be broken. How about if you could prove the skeptics wrong by making a resolution you can actually keep, one that if kept, may drastically improve your financial outlook this year?

Instead of a grand gesture, total abstinence from sweets, for example, or quitting a bad habit cold turkey at the stroke of midnight Jan. 1 try making a resolution that's ambitious yet eminently attainable: a financial resolution.

"The important thing with a resolution is how you define it," said Molly Balunek, CFP®, at Inverness Advisers in Beachwood, Ohio. "That means defining it narrowly enough that it's achievable. You want to avoid being so ambitious that it's self-defeating."



1. Track household spending. "This is a real game-changer," said Balunek, and perhaps the most important step a person can take toward gaining control of their financial situation. Track spending the old-fashioned way, with pencil and paper, or use software systems like Quicken, FinanceWorks or Mint.
2. Save \$X per week/month/pay period. Rather than merely resolving to "save more," commit to setting aside a specific amount during a specific time period. If you don't have a savings account, open one that offers a decent interest rate.
3. Develop and follow a spending plan. A resolution to "spend less" is too general, said Balunek. Instead figure out exactly how much you take in and how you need each month to cover expenses. The difference determines how much you can set aside for retirement, education, etc., as well as goodies like vacation.
4. Establish a retirement plan (if you don't already have one) and commit to funding it. It's never too early (or too late) to save for retirement. If your employer doesn't offer a 401(k) or other type of plan, open an IRA yourself.
5. Meet with a financial planner. It pays to have an expert objectively examine your entire financial picture, then provide actionable ideas and advice to help you meet your goals and obligations. Find a financial planner in your area via the Financial Planning Association's national database at www.FPAnet.org/PlannerSearch/PlannerSearch.
6. Save for a child's education by setting up and contributing regularly to a college savings plan. Research plans online (via a site such as www.savingforcollege.com) and if need be, ask a financial planner for help establishing one.
7. Develop and follow a debt management plan. Assess how much debt you're carrying (on credit cards, etc.), then commit to paying down that debt by a specific amount each month.
8. Learn more about finances. The Internet, the library and the bookstore are full of insight and ideas you can put to work to improve your financial standing. Where to find those ideas? Ask financially savvy friends and relatives (or a financial planner) for suggestions.
9. Review your insurance needs. Ask a financial planner for help analyzing what you have and what you need in terms of life, disability, health and other forms of insurance. Also talk with the HR department at work to find out about insurance benefits offered by your employer.
10. Commit to saving just a little more for retirement. Setting aside even 1 or 2 percent more per month now, said Balunek, can add up to a much bigger nest egg later.

Simple Swaps for a Leaner Diet



Simply substituting skim milk for cream in your coffee can save you 10,000 calories a year. So imagine what five or six small changes will do. Your diet can become much leaner through food swapping, and you won't necessarily have to give up your favorite foods.

"Food swapping means substituting healthy choices for less healthy choices, but it doesn't have to be a remarkable change," explains Jo-Ann Heslin, M.A., R.D., co-author of *The Fat Attack Plan*. "People get nervous about making changes because they see themselves never eating another hot fudge sundae or going to a steakhouse again. That's when they throw in the towel and give up. But food swapping means finding alternatives you can live with."

According to Heslin, when people feel they must give up the foods they like, the process of maintaining a leaner diet becomes a real struggle. But instead of making eating an all-or-nothing proposition, you can learn to enjoy foods high in sugar, fat and sodium less frequently and to eat them in smaller amounts. This is a reasonable system most people can accept.

Benefits of Food Swapping

Food swapping offers long- and short-range benefits. By improving your eating habits over the long-term, you may increase your life span and minimize your risk of chronic diseases. In the short-term, by eating a leaner diet you will have more energy because you will be consuming better foods with higher nutritional quality. Plus, you'll lose some weight or maintain your current weight.

General Swap Tips

The key to successful food swapping is to start slowly. Make moderate changes in your diet at first. Don't try to tackle all foods at one time. Here are some suggestions of ways you might start:

- Prepare your vegetables without sauces or butter. Top them with herbs instead.
- Reduce your meat portions. The recommended 3-oz. portion is about the size of the palm of your hand before it is cooked.
- Replace the excess protein you've eliminated from your diet with more vegetables and complex carbohydrates.
- Instead of frying foods, grill, broil, bake or poach them.
- Replace sauces, gravy or salad dressing poured on food with a small amount on the side. Dip your fork tip in the sauce before picking up food, and you'll get the essence of the flavor.
- If you like to serve cake for dessert, substitute cupcakes for sheet cake. A cupcake is a defined portion that limits your intake more effectively than if you eat cake slices. Eat your cupcake with fruit slices or berries rather than frosted
- Try serving raisin, pumpkin or cinnamon breads as a dessert substitute.

Supermarket Skills

Supermarket savvy is very important in food swapping because if you don't bring home healthful foods, all your good intentions may not be enough to get the job done. Learn how to make healthful substitutions during your trips to the grocery store. Here are a few tips:

- Buy whole-grain bread, cereal and pasta rather than white or refined products.
- Buy canned fruit packed in light syrup or water, not heavy syrup.
- Choose low-salt canned and frozen vegetables without sauces.
- If you don't like to skin chicken yourself, buy it pre-skinned.
- Choose low-fat dairy products when available.

Mastering the Principles of Positive Thinking



You can learn to think positively, and doing so can lead to greater self-confidence, more respect for others and achievement of your goals.

The late Dr. Norman Vincent Peale's best-selling classic, "The Power of Positive Thinking," has inspired millions of people in more than 130 countries. The principles it teaches are as timely today as they were when the book was first published in 1952. The book teaches a simple system of practical techniques for successful living.

Master principles

Here are some of Mr. Peale's ideas on how to reach your potential:

Believe in yourself

A sense of inadequacy can prevent you from achieving your goals, but self-confidence can lead to self-realization and achievement. Make a list of all your good points if you have lost confidence in your ability to succeed. Reaffirming your assets will help you overcome your doubts.

Use your mind to restore your energy

How you think has a profound effect on how you feel physically. If your mind tells you you're tired, your body will accept it as fact and be fatigued. You can maintain your energy level indefinitely if your mind is intensely interested in what you are doing.

Create your own happiness

You have two choices when you get up in the morning -- to be happy or unhappy. Choose to be happy by telling yourself that life is good, things are going well, you can handle all your problems and you're grateful for all you have and will have.

Expect the best, not the worst

You release a force in your mind that promotes positive results when you expect the best.

Don't believe in defeat

Make your mind more positive by eliminating negative expressions in thought and speech. Statements such as "I can't do that" and "I'm afraid I'll fail" clutter your mind and condition it to expect negative results. Speak and think positively about every situation.

Break the worry habit

Several times a day, use your imagination to empty your mind of anxiety and fear. Picture all your worries flowing out of you, just as water empties from a sink when the stopper is removed. When all your worries are gone, fill your mind with faith, hope, courage and positive expectations. In time, you'll find yourself worrying less.

Practicing silence also is effective

Sit in a quiet place for 15 minutes. Don't read, write or speak. Think peaceful thoughts, meditate or pray.

Replace irritation, anger and hate

Deal with hurtful situations or misunderstandings immediately. Seek out the person involved and strive to resolve your differences. To cool an angry response, reverse your body's natural reactions by unclenching your fists and lowering your voice.

Maintain a positive, optimistic attitude

Instead of letting life's difficulties get you down, keep your mind open and responsive to new ideas, exercise initiative and resourcefulness when dealing with challenges and use your creativity and good judgment when solving problems.

Krames Staywell