

MAKING YOUR MIND UP FOR CHANGE

By Dr. Roxanne Dryden-Edwards



Many people see the New Year

as a time of renewal, an opportunity to take stock of the last year and make a

fresh start on the next. While setting goals, sometimes called New Year's resolutions, can be the first step to meeting your own expectations, it can also lead to frustration and disappointment if done hastily or unrealistically. The good news though, is that without too much effort, you can achieve real, measurable success towards whatever you want to do as long as you establish an effective mindset.

Great Expectations

Dream big and act small. In choosing your ultimate, multi-year aspirations, it can be motivating and energizing to let your mind dream as big and lofty as you want. Let your mind soar, no holds barred, nothing off limits. Dreaming, reaching and imagining may have been what led Mother Theresa to imagine her amazing works for the poor. It may be what brought previous peace talks to the Middle East. Dr. Martin Luther King clearly had a "dream" for America. Dreams, by definition, are limitless and beautiful.

Get "Er" Done

Achieving a dream however, takes breaking the lofty aspirations down into doable steps. There is no need to feel disappointed in yourself if you don't build a homeless shelter this year. You can feel every bit as

successful if you learn about shelters, volunteer in one or otherwise contribute to such an organization. There should be no self-recriminations for taking the average five years or more it takes every author to write a book. Developing the book outline or writing some chapters is indeed cause for celebration. Making a list of steps you feel would advance you towards your goal is highly constructive as well.

As long as you think about or implement even the smallest step towards your dreams, mission can be considered accomplished.

Variety Is The Spice of Life

Except for the unusual few, most of us will find that any disciplined routine can become dull with time. Whether it's the same exercise routine, work schedule or spouse, few are those who will not one day find themselves bored to tears with the predictability. Thankfully, boredom does not automatically mean you need to stop exercising altogether, quit your job or leave your spouse. It just highlights the importance of developing new repertoires. When the idea of one more mile on the treadmill makes you cringe, opt for a walk, using an elliptical machine or even running up the stairs in your house, apartment building or local high school stadium. As the job starts to wear on you, ask your supervisor what new responsibilities you can take on, develop new professional contacts or update your resume. Trying out a new restaurant, travel place, item of lingerie or massage oil with your spouse can add much needed spice to your love life. Know that being bored with your resolutions does not automatically mean you need to give them up.

Do The Do Over

In the highly competitive, goal-oriented society that is the United States, it's no wonder that people consider their efforts a failure if they have even the smallest detour from their perceived path to their goal. Here, understanding that the path to achieving any resolution NEVER goes in a straight line is key. The two steps back in the process is every bit as much the course to success as are the two or three steps forward. I call this way of thinking enjoying the journey rather than just celebrating when you reach the destination. Knowing that will hopefully allow you to embrace the detours, changes and even clear set-backs you encounter in your journey as every bit as important and successful as the steps you take that clearly put you closer to your end game. So the piece of pound cake you break down and have during the holidays can be seen as a motivator to tackle exercise with renewed commitment rather than a sign of any weakness on your part. The lay-off you suffered can be the start of finding a job or career that really moves you instead of just financially scary. The writer's block you suffer for three months may free you up to take care of other tasks and relationships that may have been forgotten during your most prolific writing times. As long as you don't get stuck in feeling down on yourself during such times, the so-called deviations from your plans can serve as starting points for better things to come.

Do One Thing Different

One of the favorite book titles I ever heard was Do One Thing Different by Bill O'Hanlon. The message of the author was that even the smallest of changes, when added together, can

have major impact on your life and those of others. I think about the woman who started her exercise routine after many years of inactivity by spending 5 to 10 minutes just doing sit ups and push ups before she started her day three times per week. Despite being tired and winded at first from just that little bit of activity, she kept doing it until she worked up to doing 2 hours of exercise three to four times per week that included aerobics and weight lifting over the course of the next two years. No marathon or iron-man competition as her lofty goals. Only to halt the pattern of weight gain she had gotten into over the years.

One of the landmark moments in the civil rights movement in the United States involved a middle aged African American woman named Mrs. Rosa Parks simply saying no when ordered to give up her seat on a bus to a white person. Even that small but immensely powerful word, "no," was preceded by the efforts involved in planning and discussion by people whose names we will never know. Jimmy Stewart's character in the classic movie, "It's a Wonderful Life" learned that small things he did like grabbing his younger brother out of the ice when they were children resulted in the lives of an entire ship full of servicemen being saved by his brother years later during World War II.

While you may not see the impact of all the goals you set for yourself, the process of setting and reaching for them has value all by itself. Enjoy your resolutions and the journey involved in reaching for them. No matter how close you get to them, congratulate yourself for the effort. Best wishes.