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The Art of a Fresh Start

By Liz Ashe

A “New Year” initiates talk of resolutions that start out with the best of intentions often becoming an empty promise to ourselves or others.

Most of us know logically what is best for our health, happiness, relationships, body, and mind. But trying to make changes or stick to a resolution is mired in all the intricate details of our lives; our thoughts, feelings, habits, and desires.

Why aren't all New Year's resolutions kept? Maybe it is because we really, emotionally, don't want to make the changes we “resolve” to. Perhaps we don't know what we need to do. Maybe it's fear of the unknown or lack of money or time. It could be that our stressors drain our energy and erode our commitment.

Whatever the reasons or excuses, tomorrow is a blank canvas and is spotless. What we did or didn't do today does not have to be the same thing we do or don't do tomorrow. Each of us can choose a Fresh Start.

Fresh Start Fundamental Truths

THE PAST IS OVER

Artists can sketch a picture, erase it and sketch it again. Brush strokes can be altered or painted over.

Not so our past. Nothing in the past can ever be erased, nor can we make it come out differently no matter how many times we play and re-play it in our minds. We've all experienced good and bad. We've all done some things we wished we hadn't or that we feel badly or guilty about.

Starting Fresh requires letting go and forgiving. That doesn't mean you condone or approve of your own or someone else's behavior, it just means you are no longer willing to punish yourself by reliving it and keeping the wounds open. If the past is affecting how you live in the present, you may need to seek some professional help such as EAP.

HEALING DOESN'T NOT OCCUR IN THE PAST

Says Marianne Williams (author), *“People tend to*

analyze our neuroses and use the analysis to justify, rather than heal the wound. After a certain point of seeing the WHY (my mother left me) and WHAT IT DID TO ME (that is why I am afraid to trust), we need to decide to be healed.” The past gives us a reference point...or an “Ah ha....so that is why I do this or that, or feel this way.” But the key to a Fresh Start is saying, “Okay, now what am I going to do with all this information? In spite of the past, how am I going to paint my tomorrows?”

BLAME AND VICTIMHOOD WON'T HELP

Clearly, we all have baggage, perhaps some real emotional scar tissue that was because of someone else, but there seems to be a mania for blaming others, particularly our parents, for all the ills in our lives. Blame puts the responsibility somewhere else.

Staying a victim (*“I can't be or do anything else, I'm stuck.”*) renders us powerless. There are always challenges and limitations and no one's situation is the same, but there are always choices. Once, during one of my “poor me” laments about a past job, a friend cared enough about me to say, *“You are where you are because you haven't taken yourself anywhere else. If you are a victim you choose to be.”*

A FRESH START IS ABOUT ACTION

Too many people follow this pattern; *one for the money, two for the show, three to get ready...three to get ready...three to get ready.* And the *four to go* is lost in excuses such as “Someday I will...”

Two psychoanalysts, Dr. Bernard Berkowitz and Mildred Newman (authors of the book, *How to Be Your Own Best Friend*) wrote, “One reason therapy can take

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- It really works.

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so long is the refusal of many to realize that change is up to them. No matter how many insights they gain or how much emotional catharsis they achieve, change does not just happen.” Each of us ultimately has the final responsibility for taking (or not taking) action. It means deciding to be accountable for our own behavior.

Action gets you out of a holding pattern.

The Art of Fresh Start Strategies

FIGHT YOUR SELF-SABOTEUR

We all have inner “voices” that try to undermine our resolutions; *“Dieting is no fun. I love chocolate, one little candy bar can’t hurt.”* We can be our own worst enemy. Identify how you are working against yourself. Talk back to the disempowering conversations in your head. Say, “Stop, Scratch that, Delete or Cancel.”

UNPLUG THE “OTHER PEOPLE” STOPPERS

Bill Cosby said, *“I don’t know the key to success, but the key to failure is to try to please everybody.”* Your desire to have a Fresh Start can meet major pockets of resistance from those close to you. Be alert to people who put you down and try to keep you or discourage you from your goals. No one can stop you unless you give him or her the power. You’re the driver; you have the power of choice. It is important to remember choice also means taking other’s feelings into consideration.

TRASH YOUR EXCUSES

... I tried and it didn’t work

Walt Disney went bankrupt at least five times. So you didn’t stick to your resolution or goal say, “Oh well,” and start again.

...I don’t like change

Change can be hard because with every change there is a loss. People don’t like loss.

Change also means giving up a habit; behavior we do automatically with little conscious thought. Changing a habit developed over a lifetime requires conscious thought, willpower, determination and time. It isn’t easy. Each individual has to want to change and must decide that the personal gain is worth the effort.

GET YOUR VALUES, NEEDS AND PASSIONS CRYSTAL CLEAR

Once clear, ask yourself are you supporting these things behaviorally? If not, determine how that makes you feel. An emotional shift or wake up call is more likely to transform your mind to make wise decisions and

set goals. Focus on the word “Willing.” What are you willing to do to make positive changes in your life?

IDENTIFY YOUR GOALS

Get a fix on precisely where you are and where you want to be or don’t want to be and write it down.

BE A CONSULTANT

What advice or steps would you give a loved one with the same goal as yours?” Now take that advice yourself.

What encouragement would you give this person? Cheer yourself on.

BREAK GOALS DOWN

A big goal can be daunting and easy to avoid. Breaking a goal into smaller, more manageable ones is easier to handle. For example: Reduce smoking to one pack per day by March 1; ½ a pack by April 2.

IGNITE YOUR MOTIVATOR

Motivation to change varies from individual to individual. Some people choose not to change; some easily keep their resolutions, while others need the motivation of adversity, hitting rock bottom, fear, or the threat of death. If you can’t see the benefit of a fresh start, the resolution may not seem worth the effort. Try listing all the benefits of the resolution or Fresh Start. Example: LOSE WEIGHT: Benefits: become healthier, like self better, look better in clothes, reduce cholesterol, more energy etc.

Keep focusing on your gains. Recounting how hard this is, or what you have to give up, plays on your emotions. Emotions tend to be more motivating than logic and negative emotions can erode your resolve and dissipate your will power.

GET HELP IF NEEDED

Tomorrow is spotless. Goals sincerely and realistically established and committed to can be met. Keep in mind a fresh start takes work; change can demand a lot more from us than we realize and lifestyle changes can be stressful. If you need help with your Fresh Start or in making changes, EAP CAN HELP.

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