
Creating Lasting New Year's Resolutions

“IT TAKES COURAGE TO GROW UP AND
BECOME WHO YOU TRULY ARE.”

~E.E. Cummings

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New Year's Resolutions have existed for thousands of years; the tradition is shared by multiple religions around the world. The similarity among all of them is a dedication, once a year, to better oneself (physically, morally/ethically, emotionally, and mentally). Unfortunately, research shows that today only 8% of us keep our resolutions. This sets us up for failure and disappointment. How can we keep with tradition, but also keep to our resolutions and feel proud of our accomplishments despite the challenges and difficulties the past year has presented?

Have you lost some of the passion you used to have for practicing the law? Have you replaced relaxation time with social media and endless texts? Have you been spending

less time on hobbies and activities you used to enjoy? Have you become addicted to the cycle of stress? If you answered yes to any of these, you have probably strayed from the person you really are, or want to be. In the law, and as a culture, we protect life, liberty, and property. As human beings, we prize happiness, contentment, peace, and joy. But we do not always protect them. What brings you happiness? What brings you contentment, peace, and joy? For this coming year, create a New Year's resolution that includes ways you can feel more like the person you want to become. Change can seem daunting, but it doesn't have to be. Think about simple ways you can gradually begin to incorporate a new habit. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- ⇒ Want to laugh more? Resolve to listen to a comedy radio station, read a comic strip, or watch a comedy at least once a day.
- ⇒ Want to be more present with your family and friends? Resolve to focus on really listening to and connecting to your loved ones when you are with them: your mantra, "be here now."
- ⇒ Want to feel more confident in yourself? Resolve to start a gratitude journal. Every day, write down at least three things you did that made you proud.
- ⇒ Want to like to be a more supportive person? Start by sharing words of encouragement with at least three people every day.
- ⇒ Want to be less anxious and stressed? Resolve to spend just a few minutes in the morning, in the afternoon, and at night to focus on your breath and quiet your mind, letting go of whatever your mind is racing about.

Sometimes we experience anxiety over cases, working with difficult people, dealing with large workloads, and worrying about the future. Sometimes we feel depressed and isolated because we don't have the support we need to be effective in our personal or professional lives, or our workload has been too slow for a while. Sometimes we just feel overwhelmed by the amount of responsibility on our shoulders, or the amount of tasks we have to accomplish in a day. Regardless of the reason, when we feel stressed, anxious, depressed, or overwhelmed, we don't allow ourselves to enjoy the present moment, and life does seem to pass us by.

Research in neuroscience suggests that engaging in mindfulness meditation, breathing techniques, mantras, and exercise such as yoga helps to relax the brain and the body, reduce stress levels, and increase overall happiness. Studies also point to practicing more gratitude, listening to fun or calming music, having pets, gardening, and cultivating meaningful relationships with friends/family that you trust will improve your health and wellbeing. And, as we all know, improving our diets and moving around more throughout the day can also help shift our body's chemistry to improve our life experience. Most of us have heard about ways we can take better care of ourselves. The question is, are we taking the time to do them?

The quickest and simplest way to reduce your stress and increase satisfaction with your life is to slow down: your thoughts, movements, speech, decision making, etc. When we slow down the "momentum train," we can discern what is best for us (what kind of food does your body really want or need?), we can choose more helpful thoughts that lift our mood rather than bring it down (focus on resources and solutions rather than the problem itself), and we can respond to the people around us rather than reacting from a survival mentality (when we get irritable or angry at others, it means we are in a fight-or-flight reaction and the rational parts of our brain will not function well).

Slowing down allows us to behave with maturity, grace, and wisdom. The people you respect the most are probably people who, despite being in difficult or stressful situations, respond with these qualities to the world around them. Research shows that people who are the most well liked aren't necessarily those with the most intelligence, are the most attractive, or even the most gregarious. People who are sincere, consistent, and compassionate rate as the most likeable. To be consistent in our moods and behaviors so that people feel safe around us, to be sincere and honest



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with those around us, and to show understanding and compassion rather than judgment about other people, we have to slow down and contemplate our words and actions. Doctor and author Don Miguel Ruiz uses “The Four Agreements” as a template:

- 1. Be impeccable with your word.** Do you say what you mean? Do you believe what you say? How do you speak to others? How do you speak to yourself? Is it true? Is it kind? To be impeccable with your word is to be truthful, to say things that have a positive influence on yourself and others, and to avoid treating others hurtfully. This year, practice impeccability with your speech.
- 2. Don't take anything personally.** When we take other people's words, actions, or choices personally (meaning we react strongly to them), we miss the point that their words, actions, and choices are based on their own perspective. This year, rather than reacting to what other people say or do, observe them with curiosity.
- 3. Don't make assumptions.** We often assume we know what other people are thinking, feeling, or the reasons they say or do something. But those assumptions are based on our own perspective, or our own reality, and superimposing that onto another person. It is also called narcissism. This year, ask people about their motivations or rationales, rather than make assumptions.
- 4. Always do your best.** This does not mean being perfect. This means that regardless of the circumstances, or our mood, we do our best to be present and mindful. It also means that we accept our best as “good enough,” without criticizing or berating ourselves.

This year, do your best in your professional and personal life despite the challenges and difficulties the past year have presented, and congratulate yourself on your accomplishments. At the end of the day, remember this mantra from Sophia Bush, actress/activist: “Let it be enough, what you did today.”●

Sarah Myers, Esq., LMFT, LAC, is the Executive Director of the Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program (COLAP). COLAP is the free, confidential and independent well-being program for the legal community of Colorado. For more information, go to www.coloradolap.org. For a confidential consultation, discussion about your stressors, or to obtain helpful resources, contact COLAP at 303-986-3345 or info@coloradolap.org.