

## **May the Force Be With You!**

by Helen Kornblum, MA

Trite as it may sound, *May the Force be with you* is my favorite New Year's greeting, especially for people who have promised themselves, once again, that this year they will "get organized."

Whether we admit it or not, most of us feel an inspiration for change, for improvement, for a fresh start when we use our new calendars. A week or a month don't seem to offer the same possibilities as a whole new year. It's too bad, really, because the weeks and months give us better benchmarks for making changes in our behavior.

Behavior modification is what a resolution is all about. Psychologists and life coaches give us good advice about how to get ourselves started.

### 1. Be realistic and specific

"I'm going to lose weight, upgrade the house, be a better mom/spouse/daughter, and get a new job" might as well be "I'm going to get a medical degree, become an astronaut, and grow 4 inches." Success hinges on narrowing your ambitions and stating exactly what you're aiming for.

### 2. Write it down

If you can't sketch out a plan for getting to your desired outcome, your resolution will remain a pipe dream and demoralize you later. If you're running your own business and you're aiming for expansion, you need to figure out what actions on your part will stimulate more business. Maybe more or a different kind of marketing would be appropriate. Maybe promotion to a new market segment would work.

### 3. Fill in the details and the dates

You have decided to target a new market. What tactics will you use? A mailing campaign? Speeches or seminars to the selected audience? Print advertising? Nail down the details and the dates for completion of the various steps you want to take.

### 4. List and prioritize the daily, weekly, monthly steps

Never underestimate the effectiveness of small, gradual steps toward change. Remember the proverb about the longest journey beginning with a single step? Once broken down into meaningful and manageable mini-goals, progress toward a big goal becomes palpable. You'll want to have a measuring stick to guide you—sales quotas, completion dates, readings on the scale—or else you will lose your way and your motivation.

#### 6. Remind yourself why you're doing this

The motivation for change has to come from you. If your job is intolerable and you want to move on, keep envisioning new circumstances and satisfactions that will make going back to school worthwhile, despite your already busy schedule. If you start a diet but don't remove all the temptations from your own cupboards, you're kidding yourself. If you resist getting up early enough to get to the gym, you might want to rethink the sincerity of your resolve to get more exercise. Or maybe you need to find a more acceptable tactic to achieve that goal.

Are you wondering where the mystical effect of “the force” comes into play? It's the force of *habit* that you need to pull or push you through making changes. Current habits may be counterproductive in your quest for new outcomes. Habits of the mind can undermine your progress. You may complain about the overwork, the boss, the system, which fills your workday with negative stress. Can you make it a habit to change your focus? Find constructive solutions for yourself or plan an escape route to a better job.

Most of us understand the power of habit when it comes to physical behaviors. We've heard before to put our keys down in the same place when we enter the house, to forgo carbohydrate-rich snacks in favor of fruits and veggies, and to carry our planners with us at all times. Changing habits in our thinking is a harder task but worth practicing. Understanding what we truly want to achieve, practicing the behaviors to move us in that direction, and celebrating our progress are the keystones to meaningful resolutions.

Happy New Year and May the Force Be with You!

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