

## PSYCHOLOGY

# Tips to Keeping New Year's Resolutions

A leading motivational psychologist says the best way to keep on track with your goals for the new year is to think hard about why you're pursuing them.

By Susan Hagen

AS ANYONE KNOWS WHO HAS RUNG IN THE new year with a vow to lose weight, exercise more, or stop smoking: resolutions are easy to make, but hard to keep.

For advice on how to stick to our well-intended pledges, we turned to Edward Deci, one of the nation's most influential psychology researchers and a cofounder of self-determination theory, one of the most widely regarded approaches to human motivation. During the past three decades, the Gowen Professor in the Social Sciences has collaborated on scores of experimental studies and clinical trials on changing the kinds of health behaviors that typically top resolution lists.

Deci says that being able to keep a resolution over the long haul is directly dependent on why you want to change.

"If you're deciding to lose weight because someone is pressuring you to, it's not going to last very long, because you don't endorse it as your own," he says. "And even if you're doing it because you think you should and you'd feel guilty if you didn't, that's not going to last long either, because we don't like to be forced to do things even by a voice in our own head that says, 'You'll be guilty if you don't.'"

But if you can search deeply and come to the point of believing and understanding that a behavioral change or other resolution is meaningful, important, or perhaps intrinsically interesting, then, says Deci, chances of long-term success are good.

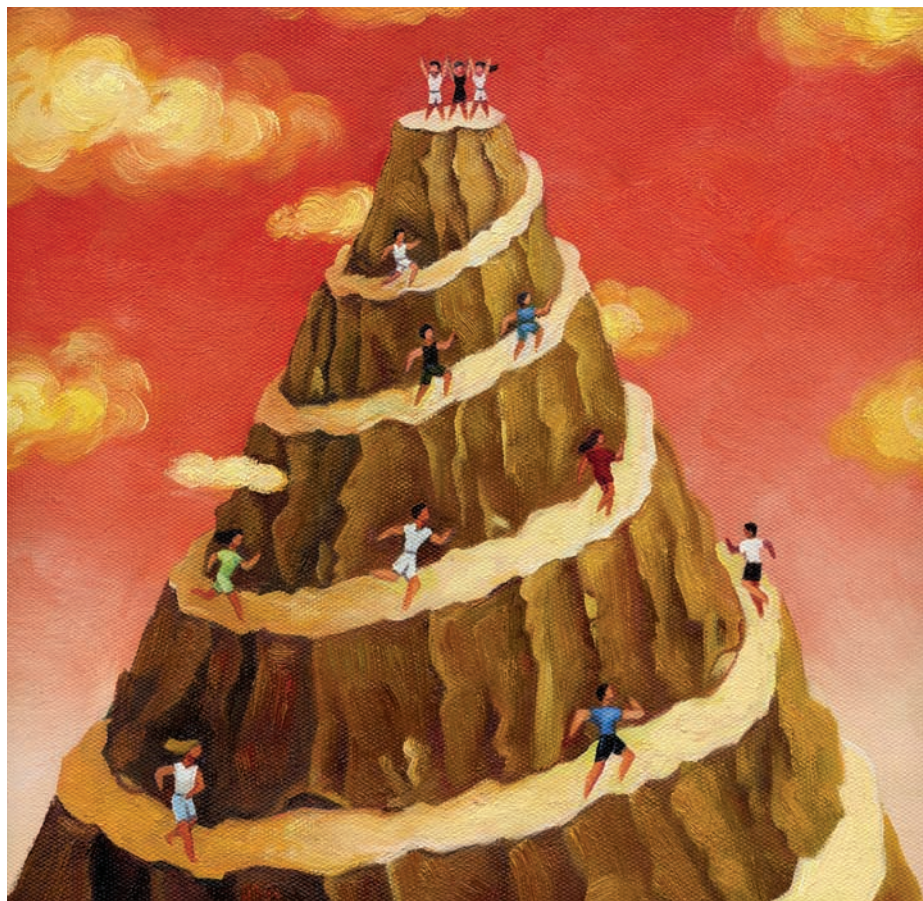
With that in mind, here are Deci's five tips for staying motivated in the year to come:

## **No. 1: Think deeply about why you want to make a resolution**

It's very important that you give it serious consideration. Don't make snap judgments. Don't say, 'Oh yeah, this is the thing that I should do for the new year.' But think about why you want to do this. Why would I make a decision of this sort?

## **No. 2: Do it for yourself**

Don't do it for somebody else. Don't do it because someone else wants you to. Do it



because you think it's really important for you. If you can get to the place in yourself that you really want to do it because it's meaningful and valuable for you, then you're likely to be quite successful.

## **No. 3: Plan how to integrate the change into your life**

Give some real consideration to how you're going to integrate your resolution into your life. If you make a resolution to exercise for an hour a day, then where are you going to get that hour? It's not like very many of us have a lot of free hours in the day, so you have to think it through. How are you going to be able to carry through on this?

## **No. 4: Manage the environment**

What are the obstacles you are likely to face? Be proactive in terms of managing the possible obstacles. For instance, if you

are planning to eat healthier foods, don't have a bunch of unhealthy snacks around the house, because it's going to be just too tempting, and it's going to take too much to try and keep your resolution. So manage the environment in ways that support you rather than ways that interfere with your goals.

## **No. 5: Take slip-ups in stride**

Most people who make resolutions are going to fail at times. There will be a day when you were going to exercise, and you just didn't do it. When you find that you failed, don't blame yourself. Don't beat yourself up for it. Acknowledge that you failed, and then recommit. Don't get into the place of thinking of yourself as a bad person. Then you can just move through the little slip-ups. **R**

*Susan Hagen writes about the social sciences for University Communications.*