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Be Smart About Making Your Resolutions Stick

Carla Kimbrough
University of Nebraska - Lincoln, ckimbrough2@Unl.edu

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MASTERING THE ART
CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Be smart about making your resolutions stick

It's the new year, and you might have resolved to change some things in 2005. By March, you may have given up on the whole thing. Just like every other year.

Why is that we always start off with the best of intentions, but soon forget our resolve? The truth is, we're not very SMART about setting goals. This column aims to change that.

CARLA KIMBROUGH-ROBINSON

First, let's define "goal." You may have heard a goal is a dream with a deadline. I define goals as "golden opportunities at living sensationally." A goal is simply a lost opportunity if you don't pursue it; it's not a guarantee. The key is to be SMART about setting goals you can win.

Goals can and should be set for all parts of your life: work, play, family, friends, money, health and personal growth. Take a few minutes and grade yourself in those areas. How are you doing now?

Consider where you would like to be in each area this time next year. Don't just think of something because the progress sounds good and noble; make sure it's meaningful to you. Are these goals you would be willing to expend time and energy in achieving? If not, forget about them and find something that holds your passion.

Now, a formula for being SMART about your goals:

- Specific: Specificity gives you a destination. Don't think in general terms, such as "I want to lose weight." That's not specific enough. Instead, "I want to lose 10 pounds by June 2005." General: "I want to become a better reporter." Specific: "I want to double the number of stories I break by expanding my source list to include local, regional and national sources."
- Measurable: Your goal should be measurable as a way of determining whether you've met your standard. In the health-related goal, note that the specific amount also provides you a way to measure your progress.
- Attainable: The goal you pursue should be attainable. It may be pretty unlikely that you'll win a Pulitzer next year if you haven't won any recognition for current work or cracked Page 1 in the past few years. Deciding to identify and then enter into contests a well-written, thoroughly reported story that's meaningful to your community is attainable and within your control.
- Realistic: Don't set the bar so low that you can achieve the goal while sleeping. And don't set the bar too high that you'll give up before you have started the race. A dose of realism is good, even when you're shooting for the stars. It just isn't realistic to proclaim you'll win three back-to-back Pulitzers for commentary and you've yet to be hired on an editorial board or as a columnist. If your goals are too lofty, discouragement will set in like a footprint in wet cement.
- Time: A goal is a dream with a deadline. Include dates with your goal. You should have some long-term goals and short-term goals. Define what short- and long-term goals are to you. There's one more element to this portion of the formula: Be prepared to spend time on your goals. For example, you might commit to dedicating two hours a week to your goal.

There are a couple of important things to practice if you want to achieve your goals: Write them down and keep them near and dear to your heart. A goal that is simply pondered is not really a goal at all. Instead, record your goals in a place that can be revisited often so that your goals are at the forefront of your mind. If your goals are being reviewed regularly, you will continue to work toward them. Again, be sure to choose an area that you're passionate about and have been SMART about crafting.

Having trouble coming up with any goals for your career? Here are a few suggestions:

- Read four books that expand your knowledge or refresh your memory by the end of the year. That's only one book a quarter. There are millions of books to choose from that would do a little bit of both. Look at The New York Times best sellers list if you're struggling to find a book to read.
- Join a professional organization that is related to your position or would improve your skills. For example, if you cover workplace issues, you might seek membership in a local chapter of human resource professionals. If you don't want to join, perhaps you can resolve to attend one meeting quarterly. Want to boost your skills in some way? Toastmasters, for example, might help you become a more confident person in the newsroom or prepare you for bigger leadership roles.
- Improve your workplace relationships all around you. Identify someone in a different department and chat over a cup of coffee. If your newsroom has an internship program, volunteer to mentor a summer intern. Make a point of talking to your boss twice as often as you did last year.

If you're SMART about your goals, write them down and decide to review them regularly, you'll find that resolving to keep your resolve is easier than ever before.

Carla Kimbrough-Robinson, the journalist's coach, has spent nearly 20 years in newsrooms and is a trained life coach with Inspire Higher International, LLC, a Denver-based personal development company. Send her questions at coaching@inspirehigher.net

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