

# Six Great Ways to Make Your Goals Stick

*Adapted from Today's Christian Woman*

- I will go on a diet.*
- I will get my spending habits under control.*
- I will be more patient with my kids.*
- I will be a better wife, daughter, sister, friend.*
- I will exercise regularly.*
- I will pray more.*



**S**ound Familiar? If so, you're one among millions who made New Year's resolutions this year, have done and will continue to do so. By about March, if you're like most, you've either given up on your resolutions or you're about ready to quit. How do I know? I've been a New Year's resolution dropout myself.

It certainly wasn't because of a lack of desire; I wanted to change. Motivation wasn't the issue, either; I was highly motivated (at least in January), I couldn't identify the problem until I stumbled upon some old training objectives I'd set 20 years earlier while working in student ministry. I was amazed at how similar my ministry goals were

to New Year's resolutions. As I read through my files, I realized my difficulty in keeping resolutions was less a matter of desire, discipline, or motivation, and more a misunderstanding of how to set goals effectively.



New Year's resolutions are nothing more than goals in disguise. Our problem is we often treat resolutions as desires (I want to get in shape) or promises (I will be a better friend), whereas goals give us a plan.

## **Try These Six Steps For More Effective Resolutions:**

### **Be Specific**

In my work as a teacher-coordinator, I meet

with Bible study teachers to help them set personal and ministry goals. At one such meeting, a teacher mentioned her personal goal for the year was to “grow in Bible knowledge.” While her desire was admirable, I had to ask a number of questions: “How will you know when you’ve grown?” “What does growth in Bible knowledge look like?” “What steps will you take to foster this growth?” Her goal needed to be more specific. As I worked with this teacher, we were able to revise her goal from the vague—“I’ll grow in Bible knowledge”—to the specific—“I’ll spend 30 minutes a day in personal Bible study, 5 days a week.” Her goal now expressed not only her desire, but the means to accomplish it.



### **Be Realistic**

During my college years I wanted to pray more. So I decided to rise every morning at 5 a.m. and pray for an hour before breakfast. But I also worked as the closing cook for Pizza Hut at that time, and rarely made it back to my dorm room before 2 a.m. How long did my prayer endeavor last? About two days. And in those two days I spent more time sleeping than praying.

In a recent interview, I spoke with a Christian counselor who said, “If our goals or resolutions begin to overwhelm us ... perhaps that is a sign ... we are not living within the limits and boundaries ... God has created for us. We are human beings. We all need to eat, sleep, and relax. Yet, at times we push ourselves in [ways] that [ignore] these realities at least temporarily. Then, when we can’t do it anymore ... we give up. Instead, we should reassess our goal. Perhaps it was totally unrealistic.”

My goal of early morning prayer was unrealistic in light of my work schedule, my class schedule, and my need for sleep. When I realized that, I replaced my original goal with a plan more suited to my schedule: I’d pray during my 15-minute breaks between afternoon classes 3 days a week. During my afternoon break I sat on a park bench near my classrooms and prayed. Unlike my first attempt, this “three-afternoons-a-week” prayer endeavor lasted the entire semester. My prayer life grew because my goal was realistic.

### **Include A Way To Measure Your Success**

A good goal will answer the questions of what, how, and when; it’s measurable.

Jean, a working wife and mother, decided to simplify her life by getting rid of the excess clutter she and her family had accumulated over the years. In January, she set the goal to clean out one drawer, cupboard, or closet each week. It was a specific, realistic, measurable goal; at the end of each week either she’d cleaned out something or she hadn’t. She had a means to track her progress.

By April, Jean was still going strong on her “de-cluttering” routine. She explains, “The sense of accomplishment I felt as I measured my weekly progress kept me motivated to start the next week’s clean-up. Today, my

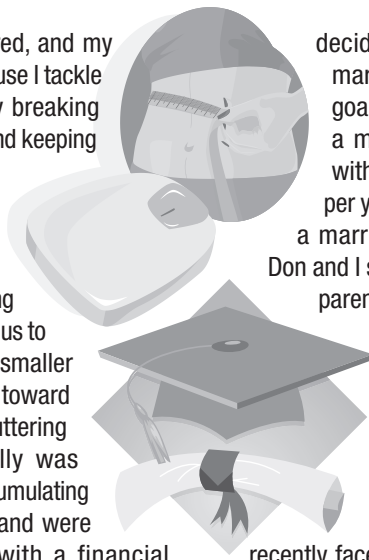
house feels less cluttered, and my life seems simpler because I tackle overwhelming tasks by breaking them into smaller jobs and keeping track of my progress.”

### **Think Short-Term and Long-Term**

Short-term goals (cleaning one closet a week) allow us to experience success at smaller intervals while working toward long-term goals (de-cluttering an entire house). Sally was overwhelmed by the accumulating debt she and her husband were facing, so they met with a financial advisor who counseled them to develop both short-term and long-term financial objectives by using weekly, monthly, and yearly goals. “I never thought I’d like being on a budget,” Sally recalls. “But it was freeing. When I looked at our debt as a whole, it was too big to deal with, but by working on it in smaller bites, it seemed okay.” After three years of sticking to their short and long-term goals, Sally and her husband are now debt free.

Finances and organizing things aren’t the only areas in which to set short and long-term goals. You can use them in virtually any area of life: education, child-rearing, family life, athletics, community service, church service, personal and spiritual growth, marriage.

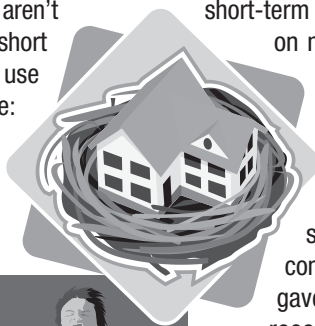
When our three children were small, my husband, Don, and I discovered how easily parenting could cause us to grow apart. We



decided to guard the health of our marriage by setting the following goals: We’ll go out on a date once a month; we’ll go away together without the kids for one overnight per year; every five years we’ll attend a marriage seminar. Over the years, Don and I stuck to our goals, and today, as parents of three teens, we’re still best friends. The short-term and long-term worked together to build and maintain a healthy marriage.

### **Be Flexible**

Linda, who’s self-employed, recently faced this challenge: “I’m trying to expand my home business, so I set some fairly aggressive goals. Little did I know my family would become victims of the flu. Now, healthy once again, I’m struggling to make up for lost time. I hope to get back on track, but I never considered that life might get in the way.” Life can, indeed, get in the way. Two years ago, I planned to jog 500 miles over the course of a year. That worked out to be 2 miles a day, 5 days per week, and 50 weeks out of the year. It was a specific, realistic, measurable, short-term and long-term goal. I was well on my way to achieving that goal when I hurt my knee. Did I quit? No. I wanted to stay in shape, so I learned to be content walking. I had to become flexible, which allowed me to stay on course, and ultimately contributed to my healing; walking gave my injured knee a chance to recover. After my knee healed, I started running again.



### **Review Periodically**

Regular review allows us to stay on course, track our progress, and adjust course as

necessary. Each year I record my goals in my date-book/planner so they're accessible wherever I go. In a section marked "goals," I list specific objectives by category: personal/spiritual; marriage/family; professional; ministry; house/projects.

Then I set aside one Sunday every three months for reviewing my goals. On those "review dates," I check off the items I've accomplished. (What satisfaction!) Next, I look at what remains, and prayerfully ask the following questions:

- How am I doing? Am I still on course?
- Which goals am I encouraged about?
- Which are frustrating me? Can I be more flexible?
- Have circumstances changed since I set this goal?
- Is my goal realistic? Specific? Measurable?
- If not, what could I change to make it more so?
- Is this the right season of life to work on this?
- Have I prayed about this goal?

Based on my answers, I make any necessary changes, sometimes crossing off objectives that are too ambitious or impossible to fulfill because of changing circumstances. I finish my review time by prayerfully committing my remaining goals to God. Regular review helps me not only to stay on track, but to guard against over-commitment and burnout.

I find it helpful to review my goals not only on my own, but also with someone else. Often, another set of eyes can catch what I fail to see. Earlier this year, I set several work goals, and then sat down to review them with a co-worker who quickly noted they seemed a bit

ambitious. I'd stated I'd take each teacher out to lunch once this semester when, in fact, I meant to say I'd take each one out this academic year. My co-worker's review helped catch my error. I'm thankful I didn't commit to 16 teacher lunches in 14 weeks!

If you're a resolution dropout like me, take heart! Goal setting's a liberating alternative. It helps you realize objectives are simply tools, not promises or laws, and tools are something we can implement anytime. Take these words



of advice "Don't let falling off track keep you from your goals. Dust yourself off and get right back on track." Leave yesterday's failures behind, and treat today as a brand new beginning. You'll be glad you did.

### **Need Some Goal Setting Help? (Here are 10 easy tips)**

- Write down your goals.
- Then cut them in half.
- Tell someone your goal.
- Keep track of your progress.
- Reward yourself with each success.
- Be optimistic.
- Be prepared for difficulty and failure.
- Adjust course as needed.
- Measure growth by months and years not days.
- Treat each day as a brand new beginning.