

12 ways to finally achieve your most elusive goals

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It's that time of year to muse on what you hope to accomplish over the next 12 months.

The best advice when making resolutions is to set [goals](#) that are "SMART"—specific, measurable, achievable, relevant (to you) and time-bound.

Once you've set your goals, what can help you achieve them? Based on our [research](#), we've distilled 12 goal-enablers. These cover four broad principles you can use to keep yourself on track.

You don't have to do all 12. Just focusing on the most relevant three to five can make a big difference.

Set relevant supporting goals

An outcome goal isn't enough. Set clear supporting goals that equip you to attain that outcome.

1. Behavioral goals stipulate the actions required to reach your outcome goal. If you want to change jobs, for example, behavioral goals could include working out what job you want, networking with relevant people, getting advice on your resume, and submitting at least three job applications each month.

2. Learning goals are the knowledge and skills you need to achieve your goal. Ways to identify your highest-priority learning goals, and how to attain them, include seeking advice from others who have mastered the skill you aim to learn, working with a coach, or watching instructional videos.

3. Sub-goals are small milestones on the way to your goal. They indicate your rate of progress towards attaining your ultimate goal. They can also provide a motivating sense of momentum.

Build your internal motivation

This is the inner energy and focus that fuels, directs and sustains your efforts to reach your goals.

4. Connect goals to passions. If you like feeling like you're on a mission, try framing your goals as reflecting a novice, apprentice or master level of development. If competition gets you going, perhaps frame your learning or sub-goals as indicating a bronze, silver, gold or platinum level of performance.

5. Engage in mental contrasting. This involves toggling between focusing on a vivid written or visual depiction of your present state with your desired future state. Mental contrasting increases goal achievement in areas such as [eating more healthily](#), [exercising more](#), [improving grades](#) and [cutting down on alcohol consumption](#).

6. Build self-efficacy. Your [self-efficacy](#) is your belief in your capacity to succeed at a particular task. Set modest initial goals you are likely to achieve (see point 3). Ensure you have adequate resources and support (see point 8). If you find yourself thinking defeatist thoughts—"I don't think I can do this" or "I'm too old for this"—then stop and think more encouraging thoughts instead.

Craft an enabling context

An enabling context helps keep your goals front of mind and sustains you in working to achieve them.

7. Implementation intentions stipulate when to pursue behavioral goals. These intentions [increase the odds](#) of attaining any goal. Two types are:

- When-then intentions (for example: "When I am tempted to eat a snack, then I will drink a glass of water and wait 10 minutes to see if I still feel I need that snack")
- After-then intentions (for example: "After I eat lunch each day, then I'll walk for at least 15 minutes somewhere green with my phone off").

8. Ensure adequate resources. These could include adequate materials, technology, support of others, time and energy (enabled by an effective recovery routine).

9. Seek useful feedback to help gauge your progress and correct errors. Try asking the following questions: What happened? What went right? What went not so well and why? What can be learned? What are one or two things I can now do differently?

Anticipate and manage obstacles

As boxer Mike Tyson once said, "Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the mouth." You need to be realistic about competing priorities and distractions bound to get in the way.

10. Identify and plan to manage points of choice, where other temptations may divert you from pursuing your goal. Points of choice may arise from within yourself (such as feeling tired, distracted or uninspired) or your surroundings (such as work pressures or family responsibilities). Plan ahead as to what you will do when these points of choice arise.

11. Remind yourself it's OK to make mistakes. Repeating "error management training" mantras has been shown to improve learning and

performance, particularly on [complex tasks where people need to learn their way to a solution](#). Try these:

Errors are a natural part of the learning process.

I have made an error. Great! That gives me something to learn from.

12. Keep building your commitment. Lose that and all bets are off! All the above steps will help. It can also help to share your goals and progress with others, but [choose carefully](#). Share your journey with people you respect, whose opinion of you matters, and whom you know won't be a wet blanket.

Good luck. You've got this!

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