

### **New Year Resolutions – Start Tiny**

Happy belated New Year to everyone! I saw this on an electronic sign during the holidays:

“Resolutions:  
In one year  
And out the other”

New year, new beginnings. “This year, I will lose weight, exercise more, get more sleep, etc.” These are all good habits with known benefits, and yet, more than half of these great resolutions don’t survive January.

There are three reasons why:

Reason #1: we start too big and get overwhelmed by how much effort it takes.

Reason #2: we don’t celebrate our efforts, which make those efforts seem like drudgery.

Reason #3: we don’t connect our efforts to something in our daily routine to remind us to practice them.

To turn resolutions into good habits you don’t need motivation. You don’t need discipline. *You need a plan*, a plan for how to start and maintain good habits. And the easiest way to remember your plan is with these 3 letters: **TEC**.

**T** - Start tiny

**E** - Make it easy

**C** - Celebrate every victory 😊

I had an early experience early that introduced me to the TEC plan. Here’s what happened:

I made it into my early twenties with a really poor vocabulary (who needs to finish high school anyway?) I knew that I sometimes stumbled in conversation, searching for the right word, but who doesn’t? The incident that motivated me to do better was a conversation I had with one of my first bosses. I got hung up searching for a way to say what I wanted to say, and I stalled by mumbling, “...uh... you know... it’s like...you know what I’m trying to say.”

My boss said, “No, I don’t know what you’re trying to say and neither do you. You need a better vocabulary.” He reached behind his desk and pulled a book of the bookshelf. He handed it to me; it was a dictionary.

He said, “Here’s what I want you to do. Keep this close at hand. Whenever you hear a word that you don’t understand, look it up. Then pat yourself on the back, because now you know a new word. Look for opportunities to use your new word in conversation, but in an appropriate way, not like a show-off. Every time you use it, and it helps you communicate, give yourself another little pat on the back.

Before I even had a name for it, I had a plan: **T** - start small, one word at a time; **E** - make any word I don’t understand a prompt that tells me to go to the dictionary and look it up. And **C** - celebrate small victories, because every new word means a better vocabulary.

The first time I did this, I got a little ping of, “Wow. So that’s what that word means!” I was hooked. It became a game, and every word I looked up made me feel like a winner.

### **How Could This Plan Work with Resolutions?**

Let’s say one of your new year’s resolutions is to exercise regularly. First of all, delay the new gym membership, because that would be starting big. You’d have to locate a gym, sign up, and make time to go there. You’d have to find the time to make “going to the gym” a part of your already full schedule. All this is hard. When it comes to starting and maintaining a new habit, Easy = Good, Hard = Bad.

In order to start easy, start small. How could you “start small” with your resolution to exercise regularly?

The next time you’re in a general purpose department store, go to the Sports section and buy a small hand-held workout weight, probably one or two pounds. Take it to work. Any time that you leave your office, put the weight on your chair before you go. When you return, pick up the weight and curl it up to your shoulder and slowly lower it. Repeat and then put the weight down next to your chair. Congratulations! You just did two reps (repetitions) of the curl, a basic arm exercise. You have a new habit. “High-five” yourself. Celebrate!

Second, every time you get up out of your chair, you have done a “Squat”, a basic leg exercise. If you get up and then sit down and get up again, you have done a second rep. Celebrate again.

Do you see what you did there? You did two curls and two squats. Who said you can’t exercise?

### **Make It a Real Celebration**

When I say, “Celebrate,” I really mean it. Corny as it sounds, when you celebrate, even if it is only in your head, your brain gives you a little squirt of happy-juice that makes you feel good. That little emotional jolt of feeling good is what solidifies your habit. We tend to do things that make us feel good, so celebrating each of your exercise efforts is the glue that will hold your exercise habit together.

WARNING: Don’t rush it. Do not go out after the second day and buy a heavier weight. Doing so is almost guaranteed to crush your new habit. Instead, after a week or so, when your habit is firmly established, you can move up to the next highest weight. If you started with a two-pound weight, you can move up to a three-pounder but not to a five-pounder. The goal is to keep your new habit easy so that doing it continues to feel good. Make your new habit hard and it will go away. “Easy” is fun, fun is rewarding, and rewarding a habit means it will become a part of your life.

“Make Chains of habit too weak to be felt  
Until they are too strong to be broken.”  
(With thanks and apologies to Samuel Johnson)

Happy belated New Year again!

P.S. I still have that dictionary on a shelf, dog-eared and coming apart, close at hand.