

# ***Please Try This at Home***

## ***Monthly Tips for Increasing the Joy in Your Life***

### **Troubleshooting Resolutions**

Why do so many New Year's resolutions fail? Is it simply because they are hard and we have funny ways of thinking about things that are hard?

Consider compliments, for example. When a guest tells the party host that he's made a wonderful meal, what's he more likely to say? "Oh it was nothing," or, "Yeah, I had to work on it for several days and try the recipe several times"? Students who hear that they've passed an exam are more likely to brag to each other, "I only had an hour to study and I had to take it hung over," than to confess, "I worked extremely hard for that grade and did absolutely the best that I could." It's like we are ashamed of things that are difficult for us.

Now certainly, there are areas where hard work gets some good press. We encourage athletes to "leave it all on the field," we give bonuses to our employees to try to get them to work wholeheartedly, and we enjoy movies like *Rudy* where folks without natural talent succeed through sheer grunt work. But the opposite message also comes through from our culture and our reluctant nature: that somehow we are more impressive if we succeed without effort than if we have to work hard for what we achieve.

So I'm wondering whether our success in following through with our more challenging resolutions is related to which of the following messages we have taken to heart:

- 1) It's more impressive to be naturally gifted or cunning enough to do well without much effort,  
or
- 2) Expect life to be challenging and meet difficulties head on with everything you've got.

### **Beliefs that Make or Break Resolutions**

I'll show you what I mean. Let's start with Mr. Gifted, an intuitive and cunning man who has accomplished things quite well without much effort for most of his life. On top of the praise he receives for his achievements, he receives bonus points for the ease with which he achieves his tasks, plus the envy of coworkers who know the task would have taken them twice as long. Because receiving this kind of praise from bosses, girlfriends, parents, friends, schools, and his own internal "self talk" is a lifelong pattern, Mr. Gifted feels like being praised for getting things to go his way with ease is the norm. He has taken the first message to heart.

At some point, he encounters a task that he can't ease his way through. He could do it alright, but it would take a lot of work and his "fan club" is probably not going to be impressed with the time it would take for him to succeed at this one. To do this task, he'd have to risk looking normal, rather than gifted and outstanding. And he's equated being praised with being fundamentally okay for so long that he's not sure whether he'd still be a worthwhile person if he descended into normalcy.

Without consciously realizing it, he begins to dodge tasks that would require him to put in a normal level of grunt work. All he knows is that he suddenly seems to “lose interest” in his latest project, latest career attempt, latest friendship or romantic relationship, moving onto the next one because that last one “just didn't feel like it was using his full potential.” Pretty soon, he has a pattern of quitting. It's his new response whenever something doesn't feel “rewarding.” His fear about what working hard would mean about his worth as a person sabotages his ability to achieve difficult goals and resolutions.

Now, Ms. Worker has taken to heart the second message. Early on, things didn't go so easily for her. It seemed like everything worth accomplishing took *a lot* of work. Certainly, folks noticed when she succeeded at something, but she never got awards like the gifted kids did. But she decided that even if she couldn't be the best, at least she could work towards getting what she wanted. More motivated by achieving her goals than by being praised for the ease with which she achieved them, she's not particularly worried when things turn out to be difficult. If a task proves challenging, that doesn't mean anything bad about her. After all, life is difficult. It just is. So if she decides something is worth achieving, that means it's worth whatever amount of effort it takes to get there. Her belief that life requires hard work allows her to accomplish whatever she sets her mind to do.

## Discovering Your Resolution Busters

If you feel plagued by a pattern of being unable to follow through with goals and resolutions, the following questions might give you some clues as to what you believe about hard things and what might be getting in your way:

- If achieving your resolution required twice or five times the amount of planning, determination, and effort that you expected it to, what would that mean about who you are? Would that be okay with you?
- What is it in life that would be worth giving everything you've got to attain? How is your resolution related to those things?
- What would you lose if you became the kind of person who was capable of achieving your resolution? Are there hidden costs to becoming that kind of person that are getting in the way of your desire to achieve your goal?
- Who do you know and respect who has achieved the kinds of things that you hope to achieve? What can you learn from that person about successfully attaining your goal?

If you or someone you know would like some help in determining what gets in the way of your goals, *call me at 303-931-4284 for a free 20-minute consultation or email [info@jenniferdiebel.com](mailto:info@jenniferdiebel.com).*

Thanks for reading!

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