

● Ask America's Ultimate Experts

# “Help me keep my New Year's resolution!”

Research proves you're 10 times more likely to accomplish a goal if you turn it into an official New Year's resolution! Here, our change mavens share the foolproof ways to make 2013 your “I can” year!

## 1 Make your “I can!” plan!

Set SMART goals!

SMART is an acronym that spells out the ingredients for successful change, explains researcher John C. Norcross, Ph.D. First up, “S”: “Keep resolutions specific,” he says. “Instead of saying, ‘I want to get healthier,’ say, ‘I’ll do 10 minutes of yoga a day.’” Next: “M” stands for measurable; whether you tick off the pounds you lose or the number of days you hit the treadmill, make sure you can gauge your progress. “A” equals attainable. Make realistic goals—instead of resolving to lose 25 pounds at once, break it up into five-pound mini-goals; which brings us to “R” for relevant. “Ask yourself ‘Why is it important to me? How will life be better if I achieve it?’” urges professional coach Caroline Adams Miller. “Your answers ignite your resolve.” Finally, “T” is for time-specific. Give yourself, say, 12 weeks to lose nine pounds; a timeline focuses you.

### Take it two at a time!

Researchers used to advise sticking to a single resolution to keep you focused. Now the newest studies show you're just as likely to succeed if you focus on two related resolutions, “When resolutions are complementary—like eating healthfully and exercising—they work synergistically to keep motivation high,” says Norcross.



### Recruit support!

Simply telling friends about your resolution boosts your chances of success, notes Norcross. “‘Public’ commitments are more successful than private decisions.” Friends who know about your goal can help you reach it, adds change expert Mary Jane Ryan. “When I resolved to eat less chocolate, I told my friend to say ‘yellow submarine’ every time she saw that I was tempted,” she smiles. “It’s our code for ‘don’t eat that piece of cake.’” Why the code? “It’s a neutral statement that isn’t emotionally charging—it made me laugh instead of feeling nagged.”

## 2 Keep your motivation revved!

### Draw up a reward contract!

“There are three keys to making rewards work,” says expert David Maxfield. “First, reward small steps—don’t wait for the finish line. Second, make the rewards frequent. Acknowledge weekly progress; don’t wait until the end of the month. Third, use a variety of rewards so they don’t get stale.” Or make a “reward contract” with a friend who’s also made a resolution, says Norcross. When she hits a milestone, agree to treat her to a manicure and vice versa!



**Did you know?**  
The top three resolutions are: Losing weight, exercising and quitting smoking!

### Surf craving waves!

Instead of trying to stand up to cravings like a wall, surf them like a wave, urges Norcross. “Most cravings dissipate within a couple of minutes,” he says. “But trying to ignore them only magnifies them. Instead, say, ‘I’m having a craving but it’ll pass,’ then take a deep breath and watch as it washes over you like a wave.”

### Turn setbacks into success tips!

“You want to turn bad days into good data,” says Maxfield. Translation? “Instead of judging yourself, examine a setback by asking yourself, ‘What specifically tripped me up?’ Track back to that moment when your progress got derailed, then change your plan so you’ll be on guard next time.”



### Don't beat yourself up!

“In one study, 71% of successful resolvers said their first slip *strengthened* their efforts over the long-term!” notes Norcross. How? By spurring them to recommit themselves. “Just tell yourself that it happens to everyone and don’t beat yourself up. Frequent self-blame is a key predictor of who will give up on their resolutions.”

—Kristina Mastrocola

## Our expert panel



Speaker, educator and professional coach **Caroline Adams Miller, MAPP** is the author of *Creating Your Best Life*. Visit her at [CarolineMiller.com](http://CarolineMiller.com).



Leading researcher, **John C. Norcross, Ph.D.**, is professor of psychology at the University of Scranton and author of the new book *Changeology*.



**David Maxfield**—vice president of research at VitalSmarts, a corporate training company—is coauthor of *Change Anything: The New Science of Personal Success*.



Executive coach **Mary Jane Ryan** is the author of *This Year I Will . . . : How to Finally Change a Habit, Keep a Resolution, or Make a Dream Come True*.

Photos: Media Bakery; iStockPhoto (3); Mark A. Philbrick;