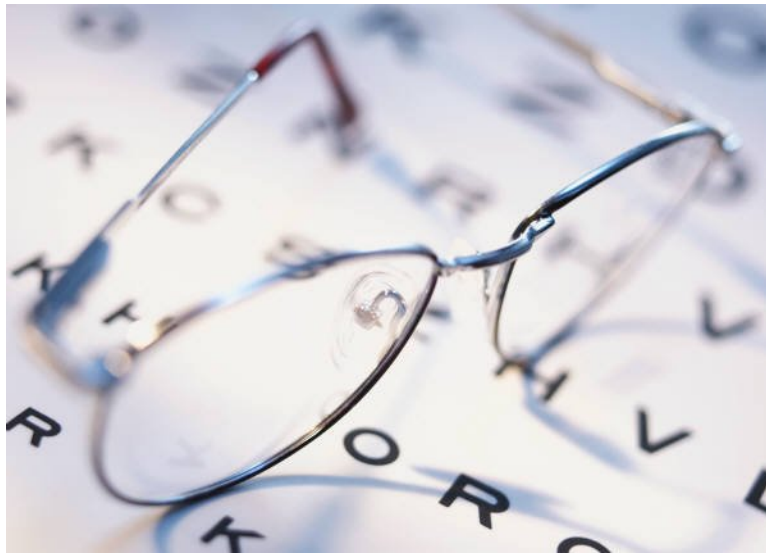


# **RESOLUTION SOLUTION**

A Guide to Keeping  
New Year's Resolutions

Kristie K. Abruzzo



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## Introduction

**A**s an entrepreneur, Personal Mastery Program coach, author and active volunteer, I have a daily routine that is like many of yours – very full. Add to that a great family, friends, and two horses, and its pretty much organized chaos. I love my life and I'm just like the next guy/gal: an everyday person with a long to-do list.

I developed the Resolution Solution over many years of juggling balls, spinning plates, and trying to become a better person. I tried and failed more times than I can count, so when I found something that worked, it felt like a breakthrough.

2009 brings many challenges. The news reports seem to be shouting at us. **ECONOMY IN SHAMBLES!! THIS GUY IS CORRUPT!! THAT GUY IS A THIEF!!** There are times I think we should shout back, **THE GOOD GUYS ARE OVER HERE!!!**

The best way for everyday people to respond this year and beyond is to throw our shoulders back, make personal and greater-good resolutions, and become great examples to everyone around us. Our personal resolutions are all the possible improvements we want to make in our own life and greater-good resolutions are the commitments and promises we make to something beyond ourselves. The top three personal ones involve healthy weight/fitness, financial goals, and getting organized. I have not found ratings for greater-good resolutions but my intuition tells me our environment and improving our communities would rank at the top.

In our resolution zeal, we can't ignore the dreaded statistics. According to a British study of more than 3000 adults, only 17 percent of people who make New Year's resolutions actually keep them. If millions of us are making resolutions every year and 83 percent fail, you have to wonder why we keep making them and why we keep failing.



My personal experience with this over the last, say, 30 years or so indicates that many of us do not take the whole New Year's resolution thing very seriously. It's the only time of the year the party "pick-up" line is actually an in-depth question about personal goals for an entire year. However, with drink in hand, neither the person asking nor the one answering the question really thinks about it.

Keeping our resolutions becomes a more complicated and serious matter than we give it credit for. The reasons we don't keep them are numerous and full of nuance. In Leif Enger's "Peace Like a River," Reuben says, "worry died, as usual, at the hands of routine." Most of our New Year's resolutions also meet their demise at the hands of routine.

Explore this summary of my discoveries on being productive each day while hanging my hat on my resolutions. I admit to its elusiveness; that perfect blend of daily productivity with just the right amount of inspiration and personal growth. Chalk it up to life-long learning. I hope you will find this approach unique enough and practical enough to make it lesson number one.

**Best Wishes**

**Kristie K. Abruzzo**

## Why do we Make New Year's Resolutions?

**W**hen I think about why we do what we do, my first instinct tells me to look at history. The ancient Babylonians started off the year with a clean slate by returning borrowed items. A mythical king of early Rome named Janus had two faces and could look back at past events and forward to the future at the same time. Romans looked to Janus for their resolutions, one of which was always to look back at the enemies they had made and forgive.

Not much has changed in the intervening 2000 years: our resolutions tend to look back at our mistakes and look forward to correcting them. One reason we make New Year's resolutions is that it is the one time of year it's considered normal – even expected – to share our personal growth or “greater-good” goals with other people. Not only are we encouraged to establish these goals, but it's the only time of year that we are regularly invited to talk about them. (Who in your circle of friends or family asks in August about your goals for the upcoming fall season?)



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We make  
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The idea that we can talk openly about these things once a year to friends and comparative strangers alike is compelling. I take advantage of the New Year to have a conversation about my goals with anyone willing to listen. Choosing to share our resolutions with others is a way to hold ourselves accountable, and sometimes this works to get the resolution out of our head.

*One of the reasons for making New Year's resolutions is so we can share them.*

We also make New Year's resolutions because we don't want to be left out. The idea that we might miss out on something everyone else is benefiting from will get us to participate in any number of things. Having a specific time of the year for making resolutions brings out our "me too" tendency. However, when we join in just because it seems like the thing to do, we miss out on the benefit of real commitment. A friend of mine explained to me that one way to move someone from comfortable on to something new and less comfortable is to secure his or her commitment; when we make a New Year's resolution, chances are meeting that goal will take us out of our comfort zone for some period of time, which requires a firm and solid commitment. However, coming up with resolutions while out partying seldom feels like an actual commitment. We say it to go along with the group, we don't really mean it (and neither does the rest of the group), and 10 to 30 days later we can't even remember what it was (and they can't either).

*We make New Year's Resolutions so we don't feel left out, but this contributes to their mortality rate.*

That fact that an entire year lies ahead sets up another reason for the popularity of this tradition. As January 1st approaches, we can't help but look back at the previous year and assess or muse, and our analysis of the past year quickly gives way to a look at the year ahead. We make New Year's resolutions because, in the entire year ahead, the months, seasons, and annual milestones seem to stretch out before us forever and possibilities abound! We are more likely to set our sites on new resolutions or goals when we seem to have an endless supply of days in which to accomplish them. December 31 seems like the incarnation of "Tomorrow is the first day of the rest of your life."

*We make New Year's resolutions because inspiration lives in the symbolism and freshness of the first day of an entire new year.*

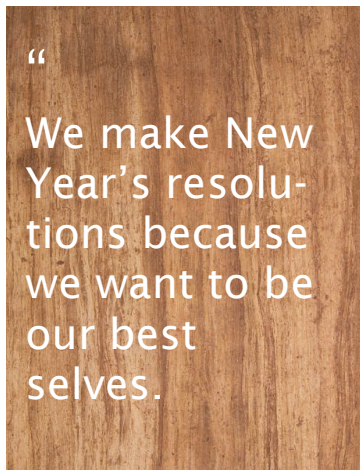
Finally, we make New Year's resolutions because it's natural to want to improve ourselves. We want to be in better physical condition. We want to learn something new. We want to have more joy in our lives. We want to heal something that has been hurting us, emotionally or physically. We want to break a detrimental addiction.

*We make New Year's resolutions because we want to be our best selves.*

All of these and thousands more make up the reasons for the resolution season.

My reasons for making resolutions each year, as I carefully insert a new calendar and planner into my worn fake-leather cover, are pretty much all of the above. I anticipate the new year stretching out before me, I don't want to be left out and I genuinely want to live a more rewarding life while I keep all the plates spinning and all the balls from hitting the ground.

Why do you make New Year's resolutions?  
(I would really like to know. See my contact information at the end of the guide and zip me an email.)



# Why do we Fail to Keep Them?

## **B** *ecause of How We Make Them*

The bulk of the advice I've researched suggests that the key to keeping resolutions is linked to making the right resolutions in the first place. I tend to focus more on techniques and solutions for keeping my resolutions, but it's true that giving thought to the resolution itself can give you a running start on your ability to keep it. So here are a few of the best tips and suggestions for making the resolution itself.

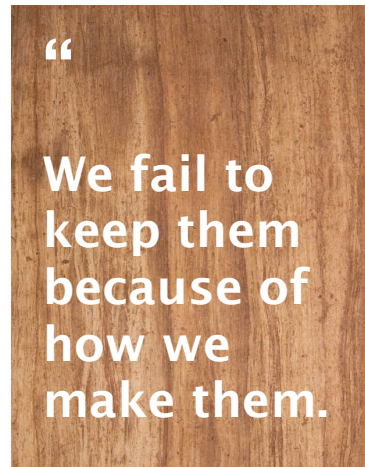
Set SMART goals, ones that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely. When you are thinking about or making your resolutions, put them through the SMART test and fill in the areas that might be missing or make changes to vague areas.

Break a long-term resolution down into small pieces so the pieces are attainable in shorter time frames. This has the added benefit of getting you started because you already have a step-by-step action plan.

Know when you have met your goal. Then you can take a moment to celebrate and say "All right!! Good job! Pat me on the back!" Then move on to the next one.

Set goals that can be friendly competitions with another person.

Set goals that include having another person or another living thing count on you to do them like a walking partner or helping out at the local animal shelter.



*Because of Our Comfortable and Familiar Routine*

Even if we use care in making our resolutions, we fail to keep them because we underestimate the power of our familiar and comfortable routines.

Resolutions involve a desire to do something we are not currently doing or to stop doing something. In other words, we are pledging either to add to our current daily routine or to modify what we normally do in some meaningful way.

Take seriously the power of your routine as a worthy opponent to your success. Believing we can simply add to our routines or change them in some meaningful way will find us back in the comfort zone of familiarity before we can say “Rumpelstiltskin.” Tough opponents require us to be cunning and smart when we go up against them. The Resolution Solution allows you to think about your familiar, comfortable routine with a heightened awareness so it loses some of its power to derail your resolutions.

*Because of How We Treat Them*

When it comes to our daily routines, imagine the number of practical tools designed to help us manage our to-do lists. We invent, market and utilize a variety of devices to help us be more productive, organized, and better at multi-tasking than anyone else. After all, that's how we get better at what we do. What we don't have on the shelf at the local retailer are practical tools to help us keep our resolutions, so we simply let them reside in our heads.

But the first key to keeping our resolutions is to write them down. Let me say this again: WRITE THEM DOWN. I also recommend adding graphics since color and pictures make your resolutions more visual, interesting and real.

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treat them

Once you have them written and they are in a physical form, they do not belong in your planner or on the to-do list, digital device, fridge, or post-it notes stuck somewhere. They deserve better than that. Your New Year's resolutions need their own place. They must reside in a tangible, memorable, and treasured place. They belong in a special box.

Think about things we consider valuable. Most of us can immediately visualize where we keep our birth certificate, marriage license, deed to our home, life insurance policy, jewelry, and so on. We recognize that valuable things need to be kept safe, or at least kept somewhere. How valuable is your New Year's resolution? Success has everything to do with how you answer that question and what you do about your answer.

We'll talk more about the box in the next section.



## The Resolution Solution


There are four important aspects of the Resolution Solution :

- Be wise when making your resolutions. Put time and effort into making them and use all the advice available for making the right resolution in the first place. Be detailed. Don't just write "lose weight" or "stop smoking." Remember to make your resolutions SMART.
- Write them down. Add graphics, color, a picture or representation so they seem more alive. Write down or graphically represent the details involved in accomplishing your goals.

And the two that we still have to discuss in some detail:

- Put them in a special box to declare them as valuable.
- Read or review them every day.

Reading your resolutions every day is important: It doesn't matter what you initially do, successfully or not, about your resolutions. Your first step is to read or review your resolutions everyday, regardless of what you are doing about the resolution and your current routine. Simply reading them is an easy thing to add to your routine.



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Read or  
review them  
every day.”

The Resolution Solution helps you acquire a heightened awareness of your routine and its ability to derail your good intentions. You decide when is the best time to read or review your resolutions; it may be in the morning with your coffee, during the day at your desk, at night just before you go to sleep—whatever works. Even this simple and enjoyable activity may take some time to become comfortable and familiar. As you continue, the content becomes **very** familiar and with it the motivation to do, or continue to do, something about it.

What if that motivation just doesn't come? Go back to the resolution itself and ask these questions: Is it too big? Does it meet the SMART test? Is this truly valuable to me?

## *About the Box*

Why the box? The box is symbolic, but the symbolism is powerful enough to be the reason you keep your resolutions. The box you choose may be basic and simple or an artistic creation of quality hardwoods and craftsmanship, but it symbolizes that it contains something valuable and it is a reflection of you.

A wooden box is unlike any other place—paper, digital, electronic, or otherwise—that you could keep your resolutions. Wood, along with fire, water, metal and earth, make up the five basic elements.

So many of us live in cities, work in offices, and have an intimate relationship with virtual and digital reality, but we lack connections to the basics of nature and the earth itself. We know that the use of wood in any environment brings a sense of warmth and polished or rustic beauty. We depend on the trees around us for oxygen and have a historical dependence on the use of wood for our survival. We have an innate love for the material. That is why I recommend a wooden box.

While a wooden box is visible and has substance, it also, chameleon-like, blends in well with almost any environment. You could add it to your office, home office, night stand, or kitchen counter and, while you'll know it's there, it won't draw much attention from anyone else. Some of us want to keep our resolutions to ourselves at first, especially if we have failed in the past. Our resolutions, if they are well devised, are personal and we don't want a curious co-worker asking questions. Placing a small wooden box on your desk, even out in the open, won't be likely to draw much attention. After some period of time, when you are more comfortable with your success, you may welcome the curious family member or co-worker.

I suggest that, in addition to your resolutions, you add "Do one good, simple thing for someone today" to your box. I have found this helps create one real and tangible task that is beyond myself and gives me a boost each day.

The phrase “think outside the box” is used to help spark innovation in individuals or groups. It suggests that the current environment, products and/or processes are part of a confining enclosure that we tend to accept as the norm and makes it difficult to think about new ideas outside the parameters of “the box.” Good leadership requires the ability to think outside the box.

However, your wooden box has a totally different purpose: that of helping you regularly think inside the box. When you have a tangible place to hold your New Year’s resolutions, they become more valuable and you can envision them more easily. Jewelry boxes hold precious gems or simply your favorite costume bling. If a beautiful box holds merely material items, a beautiful box should hold something much more precious – your vision of your best self.

# Stories

Stories help us better understand a concept or new idea.

One story is about the popular example of weight loss. A need to lose weight is difficult to forget since we see ourselves in the mirror every day as an inevitable reminder. To write down “Lose Weight” and read it every day seems silly. However, you benefit when you write down all the details of your intention to lose weight, as they are not so easy to remember, and I guarantee your routine will do its best to derail them.

So here is the story: A wife and mother of two who works outside the home wants to lose weight. Around January 1, she decides on a few small, simple things she will do to change her current routine to lose weight. Her best one involves taking a healthy, satisfying lunch to work each day instead of grabbing something from the nearby deli, restaurant or, worse, snack machine.

Each morning, her routine has her focused on the children, what needs to be done at work, and what needs to be ready when she gets home. Her hunger does not show up first thing in the morning, so she’s not really thinking about food. Every day for a week, she forgets to get the healthy food out of the refrigerator. One night, she remembers to think about the next day’s lunch, packs up a healthy meal, and puts it in a bag for an “easy grab” in the morning. She sees the bag while getting the kids’ breakfast, but she doesn’t give it another thought as she runs the kids out to the bus, answers her cell phone and jumps into her car. By the third week, she doesn’t remember this particular detail of her resolution at all.

If this mom had written down her small, simple details about losing weight, put them into her beautiful box, along with a picture of herself at her ideal weight, put the box by the coffee maker every morning, and read it while the coffee was brewing, by the third or fourth week, the healthy lunch would be part of her normal and familiar routine.

After hearing this story, some people say she should just write “GET LUNCH” in big letters on a piece of paper and slap it on the fridge door. I confess I have tried this over and over in various forms: I put post-its on the computer screen, BIG NOTES in my planner, even a nicely written index card taped to the bathroom mirror. All of these options make resolutions simply part of the to-do list, and that doesn’t work because of the innate “mundane-ness” of it all. This mom needs inspiration, not just another thing to do.

Another story comes from the inevitable issue of money and spending resolutions. Many of the questions I am seeing out there in cyberspace and in print media have to do with how to handle money issues with family in order to make sticking to a budget feel more positive and empowering than negative and deprived.

The typical approach to this resolution is for one adult in the family to decide or demand new behaviors around money and to set new goals. The person is likely to document this in some way – a spreadsheet or a list – that usually involves writing down numbers in the form of a crude budget or dollar amounts for certain types of spending.

However, because our money goes out via checks and credit cards, which are more difficult to keep track of than cash – the real challenge isn’t really the “number,” but tracking the amount that has been spent. So when it comes to remembering this goal, simply writing down the dollar amount doesn’t really help. Trying to make spending and behavior decisions on the fly can send the budget and the resolution out the window and create a lot of negative stress. When one family member wants something or wants to do something that requires money, the conversation goes like this:

“We don’t have money for **this**.”

“Well, we had money when you wanted **that**.”

“That’s different.”

“Why? Because **you** wanted it?”

With the budget or other dollar amounts buried in a pile of papers on a desk somewhere, and the actual amount of money available for the thing or activity completely uncertain, this all-too-familiar exchange goes tumbling down the familiar path of anger, frustration and conflict.

The Resolution Solution suggests that the family write down all the details around this resolution, including the good and healthy reasons why the resolution is important and valuable. If there is a safe place to keep it, I would include the cash that has been allocated to these resolutions. When the resolution is read and reviewed every day, and the cash is counted, there is no room for error as to what the resolution is, why it's valuable to everyone in the family, and its current status. Using cash is an important part of budgeting suggested by many financial gurus. Putting a certain amount of cash in the box for each week's or month's financial resolution is a foolproof way to keep track of what's going out and what's left to spend.

With this story, I can picture the smallest one in the family running down the hall to get the "special box" as soon as he or she hears an older sibling start whining about going to the mall.

Using this solution will not stop all the feelings of frustration when money is tight, but it will help everyone have a better understanding of this resolution and remember its value.

There are so many stories, what is yours?  
(I would really like to know. See my contact information at the end of the guide and zip me an email.)



## Conclusion

With this guide I hope to convey my belief in the human spirit and the power of every-day people. The statistics seem to point to our weakness and inability to make the changes we desire. Reality tells me most of us are working very hard everyday and accomplishing amazing levels of productivity.

In the introduction, I admitted the perfect blend of daily productivity and inspired personal growth is a life long quest and, unfortunately all the practical tools and technology are devoted to the productivity side.

The other issue simply surrounds our ability to remember. Last spring I attended a one-day seminar simulcast with eight world renowned speakers on the topic of leadership. I left that day totally filled up and inspired by what I heard. A couple days later I found myself trying to recall specifics from that day. I could remember one thing from one speaker. From that day forward I vowed to make sure that when I speak to an audience, I also provide the tools to remember my message.

The Resolution Solution provides practical tools and ensures you will remember your resolutions.

2009 is shaping up to be a challenging year. One of my “greater good” resolutions is to provide a consultation session or keynote address once a month to a non-profit free of charge. I believe that every-day people will pull us through this year and beyond so I’m curious about other greater good resolutions we are making. Please tell me about yours.

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Kristie also has a variety of wood boxes available on her website:  
[www.thebackplace.com](http://www.thebackplace.com)