

Daily Union Article

Title: Set Goals Not Resolutions

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My 11-year-old son recently asked me if what my New Year's Resolution for 2018 was. In reply, I shared that I don't make resolutions, I set goals instead. So how are resolutions different than goals?

A New Year's Resolution is usually designed to make a change in a person's life. One of the most common resolutions made each year relates to health and wellness, i.e. "getting in shape." Much like a goal, in order to be successful, a person must take action to make the resolution become reality.

Goals identify what a person wishes to achieve – it is a target that a person keeps in sight over a period of time.

I choose to set goals throughout the year, so making a New Year's Resolution is not necessary for me. I am already working toward a variety of goals I have set for myself throughout the year.

Setting goals is a life skill I have relied on as early as the age of 10. Perhaps I didn't recognize what I was doing as "goal setting" when I was a preteen such as my son, but I have learned a variety of methods for setting both personal and professional goals that have guided me over the years.

Goals have a more defined purpose than many resolutions have. They can be short-term or long-term. Short-term goals require less time to achieve and often require less personal or professional investment to achieve. As a general rule, short-term goals can realistically be achieved within a few months.

For example, one of my short term goals is to clean out my email "inbox" folder and maintain no more than 50 emails in the folder at any given time. This is an area I REALLY struggle with – I'm embarrassed to ever share how many emails I have left lurking in my inbox. However, once I get the number down to the desired limit, it becomes a daily goal making it a very short-term goal.

Long-term goals are those that require more than a year to achieve and often create life-altering changes. These types of goals require more resources to achieve, as well. Time, energy, effort, research, money, and/or acquiring new skills or knowledge are common resources needed for long-term goals.

An example of a long-term goal might be building a new home. Most of us don't have the financial resources, or knowledge and skill set to start building a new home tomorrow. However, many young adults desire to own their home at some point in their lives.

If you find that you have a goal that falls somewhere between a short-term or long-term definition, you have found yourself in the realm of intermediate goals. Goals of this nature are typically achieved in 3 to 6 months. They require more effort and resources than short term goals but not as much as long-term goals require.

I prefer to set goals and determine the steps needed in order to achieve them. It seems a resolution is a statement one makes to make a life change, but offers no additional direction for accomplishing the resolution. Often times, resolutions are vague while goals are defined targets.

In an online article titled "SMART Financial Goal-Setting", the following metaphor is shared about goals: "Goals are the signposts on the highway to the future. They serve as your road map to personal, career, and financial success."

<http://articles.extension.org/pages/11099/smart-financial-goal-setting>

The key to successfully setting and attaining goals is with writing goals down! One of the common strategies for goal-setting is to use SMART goals. This approach to goal setting is widely adopted across many professional areas as well as for personal goals. When defining a SMART goal, you need to ask yourself these five important questions:

S – Is the goal specific?

M – Is the goal measurable?

A – Is the goal attainable?

R – Is the goal realistic and relevant?

T – What is the time-line for the goal and what trade-offs are required to attain this goal?

Perhaps you and your family are wanting to take a mini-vacation during spring break in March. Your goal might be stated like this: Save \$500 during January and February to go to the zoo in Omaha.

This goal easily checks off the first two questions. It is both specific and measurable. Do you have enough time to save the money for this trip? It would require saving \$250 each month or \$50.00 each week for 10 weeks to accomplish this amount. If you have the capacity to make enough trade-offs in the allotted time, then the goal becomes attainable. If you have reliable transportation and enjoy zoos, it becomes realistic and relevant. That leaves the last question about time and trade-offs

How can you save \$50 each week for 10 weeks or \$250 each month to achieve the goal? Here are some suggestions:

- 1) Reduce eating meals out by half or more.
- 2) Reduce lunch expenses – pack a lunch.

3) Reduce entertainment expenses by staying home and playing games.

To make this goal a reality, you have to put energy, thought, and resourcefulness in to your effort. The reward in doing so is that you achieve your goal and model goal setting to the rest of your family.

Think about what you want from 2018 and determine what goals you need to set to get it. By using SMART goals, writing them down, and keeping them in your sites, you will find that every day can be a step forward.

For more goal-setting resources and tools, contact me at the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office at 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!