

## How to make your New Year's resolutions materialize

by Dragan Milicevic on January 16, 2023

*"Change comes about when you become what you are, not when you try to become what you are not."*

-Arnold Beisser

The New Year is here - yay! You celebrated throughout the festive season - spent time with loved ones, feasted on food and drink and perhaps overindulged a bit. You got the break you needed and are ready to take on the New Year – especially, you're ready to put your New Year's resolutions into practice. At the start of each year, motivation is at its highest. You can't wait to make your first New Year's resolution happen and show the world the new "you". But then, a couple of weeks into the year, old habits kick in. You are suddenly "so busy" with other things like meetings, courses, training. As much as you still like the sound of your New Year's resolutions and think they are the right thing to do, you always find "good" reasons not to engage. You notice something is holding you back. The mere thought, for example, of signing up for the gym, gives you such a pain in the gut – that in the end it doesn't materialize. Why is that?



### The power of your limbic system

Various factors can contribute to you not following through with your New Year's resolutions. You might have opted for an expensive hobby that is beyond your budget. You might find yourself faced with an unexpected job move, which gets in the way of your original plans. Or perhaps social pressure simply pushed you into making one – and you weren't really committed from the start. In these cases it's understandable when you deprioritize your New Year's resolutions. But while there might be some rational excuses, in most other cases, something else is happening to you.

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New Year's resolutions are created by your pre-frontal cortex, the rational part of the brain. That's why losing weight, going to the gym to build those muscles, doing yoga to destress makes so much sense. However, you reckoned without your host – your limbic system. Its main responsibility is to protect you from danger. If a change appears on the horizon, the limbic system sounds alarm because that threatens its comfort zone. In a nutshell, any change creates an irritation and destabilization of the limbic system. Depending on how big the potential change is – represented by your New Year's resolution – the bigger the destabilization. According to Sebastian Herbst from the Roth Institute in Bremen, it's not your rational side that determines your behavior, (as much as we would like to believe that), but your limbic system that holds the real power. Therefore, rational arguments fail at making us embrace change – regardless of how (rationally) useful that change might be.

But why does the limbic system regard such helpful things like losing weight or going to the gym as a danger? According to Thomas Weil, the founder of the coaching technique FREE THE LIMBIC®, there is a benefit to be had when you stick to the old grind – regardless of disadvantages you currently experience (better-the-devil-you-know-phenomenon). Your limbic system is acutely aware of it. But for you, it's mostly subconscious (unless you talk to a therapist or coach about it and uncover it). Consequently, giving up the old grind poses a danger. An example could be: "If I go to the gym and don't manage to do all exercises, I will be a loser." The (subconscious) theoretical danger is very individual and depends on the past experiences the person had made.

### **The power of cortisol**

In addition to this dynamic, New Year's resolutions can make so much sense to you that you start putting yourself under more and more pressure. You wage a war against yourself: "I have to do it. I cannot give up now. I promised to everyone I would see it through." Whereas this last argument – known as public commitment – can sometimes work, putting pressure onto yourself actually causes your body to produce the stress hormone cortisol. Cortisol, however, promotes the flight-fight-freeze response, but does not promote learning and change. Hence, cortisol ensures that everything stays the way it is.

### **Self-acceptance – the key to change**

When it comes to overcoming our weaker inner self, I use one particular concept in my FREE THE LIMBIC® coachings with my clients: Self-acceptance. We know from Gestalt-Therapy that change can only take place when I accept my current situation. Self-acceptance helps address your subconscious and acknowledges the fears that are associated with the change. It helps create a psychologically safe space that is needed to embark on change.

To help you to achieve self-acceptance, there are practical steps that you can take:  
This is what you need to do:

**Step 1** - Rub the area below your collar-bone lightly and in circle while repeating the phrase: "I fully and completely accept myself even though I am sticking to my comfort zone, although I know better." Repeat 3 times.



**Step 2** - Tap your thymus while repeating the following phrases:

1. "I give myself permission to move forward whenever I am ready."
2. "I will move forward whenever I am ready."
3. "I will enjoy moving forward whenever I am ready."



Furthermore, any touch helps the body to produce the hormone oxytocin which is the antidote to cortisol. Reducing cortisol levels allows your brain to get out of the blockage, start learning and embracing change.

Do the two steps in the morning and evening for about 4 weeks and see some of your New Year's resolutions materialize. Have fun trying this out.