

# This Year I Will...

## How to Finally Change a Habit, Keep a Resolution, or Make a Dream Come True

(240 pages by M.J. Ryan, publishing company CEO; She has coached high level execs from Frito Lay, Microsoft, Royal Dutch Shell, the U.S. military, Boys and Girls Club, & many others)

Notes by Richard Dennis

### People can change. But it's not easy.

Brain likes same things. Change = mental, emotional, spiritual stretch.

**3 parts to mental, emotional, or physical change:** desire, intent & persistence. What do you *really* want?

Specific, measurable, achievable goals focus intention. Good planning can avoid pitfalls that sap desire & intent. Persist despite setbacks. Build new positive habits.

### Why do you do what you do now?

What emotions → real transformation? What change do you care enough about to work *really* hard for?

**Change efforts fail when we don't spot the need served by current bad behavior.** Recognize that need & meet it some other way.

### Yr 3 brains are connected, but independent, & they often conflict.

1. The "reptilian" or instinctive brain, in charge of breathing, heartbeat, body functions. Never adapts, never learns.

2. The emotional brain, concerned w/ feelings, instincts, eating, fighting, sexual behavior. Sends you to pleasure, away from pain. Muscles tighten, blood vessels constrict, & stress hormones activate to fight, freeze, or run.

3. Thinking brain can reason. But our emotional brain may rebel. So we often "sabotage" self. Emotional brain overrides thinking brain decisions to favor pleasure or perceived safety.

**Ambivalence is normal.** You want to change, but don't. You can't know what it'll be like when you get there. You always give something up to get something else.

**Price of not changing?** Consequences must be worse than pain of change. List bad effects of current behavior.

**Run toward, not away from:** If you have a powerful positive motivation to

change, you can succeed. Why spend all that energy? List success benefits. Positive motivation gets emotional brain to work for change, not against.

**Create a vision of who you want to be**, like it's already true. Believe it's possible, even if you don't know how.

**No time is perfect to start.**

**Imagine a future positive self.** Yr story about self & yr life influences all you think & do. Different results need a new positive life story about future self. Change to live into new story.

**Paralysis by analysis** is when you're so focused on the whys of current behavior that you can't start toward a different result. Ask "what could be possible?" Ask "what" questions, not "why" questions: "What can I do to have more balance in my life today?"

Stay in questions for more insight. The answer may be a song that sticks in yr head, or a gut feeling, or a compelling visual image. Trust the answer.

**Believe you can do it.** Self-confidence keeps emotional brain out of fight-or-flight fear. Inventory yr strengths & skills. Use that list in a crisis of confidence.

**You'll never be back where you started.** You have useful info & experience. You know where you got stuck. Successful individuals:

- love learning
- seek challenges & value effort
- persist against reasonable obstacles

**Don't take failure personally.** It's just an opportunity to learn new things. You only bring something new into being thru action. Read & talk to others for insight, support, & reflection on what works & what doesn't. Women often get stuck in thinking r/t action.

**Action Focus:** Pick 1 thing, not 6. Constantly focus on the new habit until you no longer have to consciously think about it. Tip: name the year or month or week. (eg, The Year of my Body).

Main focus first, then the steps. One small step. Then another. Repeat until you're where you want. Tiny, continuous improvements. Small steps to success, momentum to keep going. **Past successes help create new successes.** Know yr formula to figure out

best steps to take & pitfalls to avoid. What motivates you to learn? How did you do it? What else? See a pattern?

**Intention is determination to do something, no matter the obstacles.**

Create a simple ritual to mark commitment. Write down what you let go of & then burn the paper.

### Create a SMART goal:

**Specific:** pin down the goal

**Measurable:** make progress visible

**Achievable:** what is really possible?

**Relevant:** matters to you

**Time-bound:** when you will be done

**Put yrself under contract:** A written contract for change helps you stick to it. Have a witness sign. State success formula & strategies to meet goals.

**Track yr results.** Start when you're ready to track all measurements. Mine the data for successful new directions.

**Outside support** helps you hold self accountable & create deadlines. Who or what helped in past? Any pattern of the kind of support you need?

**It's awkward at 1<sup>st</sup>:** U have zones of comfort, stretch, & stress. *Stretch* (very awkward) is where U change.

**Make the time:** Sacrifice. Even just 15 minutes/day = 91 hours a year.

**See thru another's eyes yr hidden inner resources.** Who's the happiest person you know? Do what they'd do.

**Awareness = potential for freedom from old habits.** Widen impulse/ action gap. Jog awareness (stickies on fridge). Temptation-proof yr life.

Avoid places and/or people tied to indulging. Use notes, screen savers, automatic e-mail reminders.

### Excuses fall into 2 categories:

- "All my fault"
  - "Totally beyond my control"
- Contingency plan for it to go wrong.
- Vividly imagine success.** See, hear, feel, so brain makes new pathways.

### 3 stages of learning

1. *post hoc*: after the fact you see you wanted to do it different. Before, you didn't know what was going on.

2. *ad hoc*: while it's happening you're aware you want to do it differently.

3. *pre hoc*: you learned it so well you got it in place before anything happens. You do exactly what you want, w/ more successes than mistakes.

Recognizing you've blown it is progress! "Great. I'm learning. Otherwise I wouldn't notice I screwed up."

**Changing habits is hard.** Commit mentally, emotionally & spiritually.

**Review:** Reflection speeds learning. Review after every event. Evaluate results & course-correct. **Questions:**

1. What worked?
2. How could I do it even better?

**Forever is too long. Never is too hard.** Do what you can do today.

Change too fast, U swing in the opposite direction. Do one gentle daily step.

**Self-appreciate.** Easier to thank others than self. Self-appreciation reinforces desired behavior. Gratitude is magnetic. The more you appreciate something, the more it increases in yr life.

**Keep Going.** Focus over time.

**How to keep up the momentum?** Yr most effective momentum creator?

How to keep it alive over time?

**What's in yr way?** You may commit to change, but more to s/g else you're not conscious of that stops momentum.

**Recognize core assumption:**

1. It's dire: no one will love you, you'll be abandoned, you'll kill someone, everyone will shun you.
2. In yr logical mind, you know it's not true. But you believe it anyway.
3. It's familiar. You've seen it before.

**Get to yr core assumption:**

1. State yr commitment.
2. What are you doing/not doing that keeps you from yr commitment?
3. What are you afraid would happen if you changed this behavior?
4. What do you want more than (yr commitment)? (How do you protect yrself by actions or inactions in #3?)
5. State #4 as a counter-commitment: "I am more committed to x than to y."

**What will truly make you happy?** Think beyond momentary temptation.

**Yr growth threatens those around you.** Insecurity, envy. When part of family system changes, it shakes up the rest. System tries to stop change. Family & friends may not support you.

The more you accept responsibility for choices, the easier it gets. Don't explain, defend, or justify. Try, "Thanks for yr opinion. I'm going to stick to it." When offered temptations,

say, "No thanks." Prepare in advance for challenging circumstances.

**Use ABCDEs on nasty voices in yr head:** Bad thinking creates negative feelings, stress hormones. Change gets harder. Try ABCDE:

1. Activating event. What made you feel guilty or self-doubting?
2. Beliefs. Thoughts about the event?
3. Consequences. How do you feel because of yr beliefs?
4. Dispute. Challenge negative beliefs. Valid? Reasonable? Rational?
5. Effect. How do you feel now?

**Change is never perfect.** It's practice. Do it more, get better. Focus on what you learned to improve success rate.

**You can't change what you already did.** Apologize to self for going off-path, learn from mistake, restore trust:

1. Acknowledge commitment not kept.
2. Describe consequences.
3. Remember yr context not as an excuse but as a way of learning.
4. What will restore trust?

**When you want to give up:** Scientists say cravings attack 4-7 times a day for just seconds. Thoughts & feeling rise & pass. You don't have to act on them.

SIFT is a 3-minute process: Sensation, Image, Feelings, Thought. Differentiate thoughts, images, feelings, sensations. Thought: "I want cookies." Feeling: desperation. Image: picture of you, deprived. Explore sensations.

Recognize what you experience w/o trying to change it. Feelings & thoughts change like clouds. U don't have to act. Sit & pay attention a few minutes, sensations quiet. SIFT often.

**Make new habit fun,** so you stick to it. Yr emotional brain wants fun!

**U don't have to understand or believe.** How or why it works is a mystery. Accept any help that turns up!

**You don't have to eat the whole box just because you ate 1 cookie:** To punish self, we abandon all control.

Holding to a rigid standard, = abisomg yrself w/ the thing you outlawed when you fail. Relapse is an inevitable part of change. Plan for it.

**Look at yr new character strengths!** They're transferable. Change is powerful. Write down yr improved qualities to ack yr efforts & inspire follow-thru.

**A new habit is yrs for life.** Automatic, no effort. You succeed more often & don't work as hard. Appreciate self. Ack progress. Celebrate success.

**The old pathway's still there, so beware stressors.** Something happens & old behavior kicks in. Why? Pathway to old behavior is still in yr brain, w/ new pathway. Self-regulation muscle gets depleted. Studies show it's harder to stick to intention when you just self-controlled another area. Understand failure under stress. Treat self kindly, so you don't make matter worse.

**When thrown off course, 4 A's:**

1. Assess current situation.
2. Adjust what needs to be done.
3. Admire yr strength to start again
4. Act fast to implement new actions.

Admiring self helps us stay positive. Act quickly to maintain energy of commitment, or else slide backwards.

You're doing yr thing. Keep this awareness in face of setbacks. Become expert at starting over to make dreams come true & increase self-esteem, self-respect & self-confidence.

**12 tips for keeping promise to self:**

1. Make it nonnegotiable. No backsliding after initial enthusiasm fades.
2. Know what actions you'll take.
3. Write down excuses & rationalizations. Strategies to deal w/ them?
4. Set a real, outside (not self-created) deadline to help get into motion.
5. Treat it as appointment w/ client.
6. Make it a daily routine, so you won't even have to think about it.
7. Monitor yr behavior.
8. Focus on how far you've come, not how much you have left to do.
9. Unconscious choice = reaction. Conscious choice = response. Daily positive choices create the new habit.
10. Find someone who's doing what you want. Model them.
11. Teach it to someone else. To cement a new habit, become a mentor.
12. Treat self w/ kindness. Don't go to shame or guilt when you falter. Start again with greater wisdom.