



Making Changes Stick

By Vicki Pounders – 2.23.09

Spring is traditionally seen as a time of rebirth, when life is breathed into a landscape that seemed to be a lost cause.

It gives us the yearning to throw open the curtains and rid our homes of cobwebs and dust, dig in the dirt and watch seeds spring to life.

But experts say it's a good time to take stock of one's life, too.

"Culturally and socially, we can all appreciate the changes that the season of spring brings right before our eyes," said Alan Bragwell, a local counselor. "The more pleasant temperatures draw us out of the indoors and get us moving again. For those whose personalities are geared toward their senses, spring is a great time for making changes and trying new strategies in life."

And if that doesn't describe your personality, take heart.

"For those who aren't externally so stimulated by warmer weather, blooming trees and plants and the longer days, they can take advantage of the seasonal changes to reflect and meditate on personal goals and wishes."

So, if you're one of those folks whose New Year's resolutions bit the dust by Jan. 15, spring offers a second opportunity to take a look and see what improvements need to be made.

In fact, some changes are actually easier to make now than during dreary winter days.

"Spring is an excellent time for change because it's a natural time of renewal," said Barbara Myers, of inedmoretime.com. "It's definitely an easier time to lose weight because of the weather and outdoor activities."

Regardless of the time of year, though, making major changes in your life can be difficult without a plan. That's true whether your goal is to quit smoking, lose 10 pounds, get your finances in order or organize your home.

"Many people repeat resolutions because they don't set specific, realistic goals for themselves," Myers said. "Goals fail because they are too general and don't include a plan."

“For example, who do you think will be more likely to reach her goal — someone who says, ‘I want to lose 10 pounds next year,’ or someone who says ‘I’m going to lose five pounds in six months and here are the steps I’m going to take: eat five fruits and vegetables daily, walk 30 minutes daily and drink 64 ounces of water daily?’ ”

Dave Saunders, of the-time-management-guy.com, suggests using what he calls the SMART method.

Ask yourself whether your goal is specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-based.

And, Saunders said, if you miss your goal, move on.

“You accept it and then set a new goal,” he said. “Failure is good. If you weren’t willing to fail, you would never have learned to walk, talk, feed yourself or ride a bike. Failure is nothing more than a data point.”

Saunders likes “Getting Things Done” by David Allen as a model for accomplishing things.

“Put your goal at the top of a sheet of paper,” he said. “On the next line, write the very next possible thing you can do to move forward on that goal.”

That, he says, could be as simple as finding the phone number for the gym down the street.

“If you can, take action immediately,” he said. “If you can’t, you at least know the very next thing you can do for that goal. Continue this process and, before you know it, you’re sprinting to the finish line.”

Certified professional organizer Laura Leist said organization can help in accomplishing any goal.

“Organization is about creating and maintaining systems for how you interact every day of your life, whether at work or at home,” said Leist, incoming president of the National Association of Professional Organizers and founder of eliminatechaos.com. “It’s great to say that I want to get organized, but if you don’t make the time to get organized, it won’t happen. It has to be a priority in your life if you’re going to be successful.”

Instead of looking at a long-term goal such as organizing your house, Leist suggests breaking up tasks into bite-sized pieces.

“They should either start with a small project that they know they can easily complete and have that feeling of accomplishment, or start with a project that has really been bothering them,” said Leist, author of “Eliminate Chaos: The 10-Step Process to Organize Your Home & Life.”

“If they’re able to accomplish that, they will feel so much better and that will give them the motivation to accomplish other projects.”

Whatever the goal, Leist suggests finding an accountability partner to check in with once or twice a month.

“Maybe it’s someone who wants to tackle a project in their home,” she said. “Maybe you help each other. It’s always easier to organize someone else’s stuff than it is your own. It’s great to be able to hire someone to do this, but if the budget doesn’t dictate that, there are other ways

to get it done.”

Bragwell said making a major life change is a mix of determination and courage.

“I would say it comes down to consistency,” he said. “You could also say, ‘steadiness, patience, determination.’ It is a heart and mindset of hanging in there day in and day out in spite of the stuff that could get me sidetracked in my challenge. If I’m trying to lose weight and I drop three pounds this week, and then next week the needle doesn’t move, I’m still going to keep on doing what I know to do to stay on a steady path.”