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Resolutions may be best left unmade

Experts say people unrealistic in their goals for new year

VANESSA VERA • DAILY RECORD • DECEMBER 31, 2008

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The advent of a brand new year brings reflections on the year past, speculations about what is next and, for many, the onset of New Year's resolutions.

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But resolutions often don't make it past the end of January, so the advice of some experts is: don't make 'em.

"I'm wondering why people keep making the same old New Year's resolutions that often fail within a month," said Hueina Su, certified life coach, author and president of Denville-based Beyond Horizon Coaching.

New Year's resolutions are overrated, Su said, putting too much expectation on just one day.

"People often have this unrealistic expectation when they make their New Year's resolutions," Su said. "Either the goals are too big, or they don't have the right action plan to back it up. As a result, they lose momentum and give up quickly. In a way, they are setting themselves up for failure," Su said. "If you're ready to make changes, you can start any day of the year - not just the New Year's Day."

To help people have the right intentions for the New Year, Su suggests five "master keys": be clear about what you want, find your big "why," have a plan of attack to achieve goals, hold yourself accountable, and get support.

Psychologist William Babula, administrator for Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health Services at St. Clare's Hospital, said this is the time of year when diet and exercise resolutions come out, but usually die within three months.

"Sometimes the intentions are good, but a lot of folks make the demands on themselves way too high. If you're going to undertake some of the standard (resolutions) -- such as weight control, smoking cessation, exercise -- you want to keep it simple and, above all, very reasonable," Babula said.

"You don't have to vow to enter a triathlon or run a marathon," Babula advised. Rather, starting simple and making something more of a permanent lifestyle change than a short-term goal should be the focus, he said.

Also, it might not be necessary to give up something -- such a particular type of food -- completely, but simply to limit it, he added.

Other more rewarding resolutions also come up this time of year, Babula said, such as spending more time with family and refocusing on a career. Goals, he said, don't have to be "Guinness Book of World Record-kinds of resolutions."



Hueina Su, certified life coach, author and president of Denville-based Beyond Horizon Coaching.

(Special to the Daily Record)

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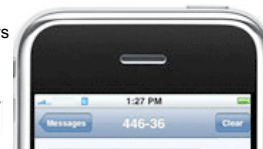
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Regardless of the resolution, Babula said, it must be meaningful to the person undertaking it in order for it to be successful.

People often set resolutions, he explained, because of the theory that "it's a new year, new start, new beginning and that's kind of inbred in the culture ... it's always kind of that restart on Jan. 1." However, he said, "You can think about these things anytime. You don't have to wait until the last week in December."

If, however, people choose to take on New Year's resolutions, Babula suggests they first set reasonable, realistic goals and then understand that change is a slow process. Babula suggests allowing at least 30 days to retrain and reprogram one's habits before saying something is not working. Hopefully, over time, he said, the change will become automatic.

The United Way of Morris County offers on its Web site an alternative to more traditional New Year's resolutions -- it encourages people to take up volunteering and make a difference in 2009.

"When individuals and organizations work together, we can make a huge difference," said John Franklin, CEO at United Way of Morris County. "Living United means being a part of the change."

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