

A person is shown from the back, performing a yoga pose (Urdhva Dhanurasana) on a dark, textured mat. They have extensive, detailed tattoos on their back and buttocks, including a large floral design at the top and two large fish-like designs on the buttocks. Their hands are clasped together in front of their buttocks. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the contours of the body and the texture of the tattoos.

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THE YEAR OF THE YOGI
from mind to manifestation

manifest your intentions

by doug miller

create new habits and your habits create a new you



The turn of each new year brings the opportunity to pause, reflect and reconnect with the depth of our life's purpose. It is as if together, we take a moment, sigh a collective sigh, reignite our hopes and dreams, and reinvigorate our passions. Let's face it, the new year creates an urge to take action, and even though we may resolve ourselves to having no resolve, the truth is, we're all looking for ways to improve. Many people are on the verge of making a commitment to change—they deeply want to change, they know that change is possible, but they are unclear about how to make those changes happen.

For some, major life transitions are calling. For others, life's daily habits become the focus of their resolve. We're either trying to find ways to achieve a more consistent exercise routine, devise a better savings plan, change our eating habits, or figure out how we can spend more time with our loved ones. But what is it that separates us from having the life we truly want and deserve? English Poet John Dryden summed it up perfectly by saying, "We first make our habits, then our habits make us."

Our habits form the very fabric that makes up the essence of who we truly are. Habits are the parts of our spiritual selves that spill out off the mat and into the rest of the world.

When we talk about forming "intentions" for the new year, it's "habit" that will either help us or hinder us from actually achieving success in the creation and implementation of the future we dream of manifesting.

Because the creation of a habit is a spiritual process that involves breaking free from old conditioning and programming and consciously choosing the things with which we want to fill our lives, in order to reinforce our intentions for the new year, we've got to change our habits.

Highlighted here are four simple strategies that you can put into action today. Imagine what it would feel like to have the life you dream of. What you truly want is waiting; the question is, are you ready?

"we first make our habits,
then our habits make us"

—John Dryden

strategy 1 start microscopically small

If a friend with no existing exercise routine whatsoever told you, "My intention for the new year is to go to the gym every day for an hour," would you believe them? Would it be more believable if they told you they were going to walk around the block for ten minutes every day? It would indeed.

The key to achieving great results lies in the way you take your very first step. You want to start with a resolution so microscopically small that you will guarantee yourself success. And when you win one day, you wake up more excited to get out on the field and play again the next day. You'll start building momentum. The hardest part of any behavioral change is beginning something and that is why starting microscopically small is so important.

The rationale for this strategy comes from psychologist Albert Bandura's self-efficacy theory. This cognitive theory states that every success you have creates more belief in your ability. The more you believe in your ability, the more energy, commitment and determination you will exert to achieve success. Bandura's theory states that, "Self-efficacy beliefs provide the foundation for human motivation, well-being and personal accomplishment. Unless people believe that their actions can produce the outcomes they desire, they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties."



To learn more about Bandura's self-efficacy theory, visit yogitimes.com

put it into action

In order to get started, reduce your intention to a microscopic size. If the new habit you wish to create means committing to a meditation routine of thirty minutes a day, then start with five minutes. If your intention for the new year is to save ten percent of your earnings, start by saving one percent. If your resolution is to practice yoga every day for one hour, then start by doing just one pose a day.

practice

strategy 2 create a good constraint

A good constraint is a rule or a standard related to the new habit you are forming. Most good constraints relate to time of day, the day of the week, the duration or the quantity.

In order to understand why creating a good constraint is such a powerful tool in sustaining our intentions for the new year, all we have to do is look at how people feel about making choices. The truth of the matter is, we hate to make choices. In fact, we despise it. As author Barry Schwartz explains in his latest book, *The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less*, when people are faced with too many decisions to make they can feel stress, choice paralysis and even regret.

We hate making choices so much that we actually make most choices automatically. Daniel Kahneman won the 2002 Nobel Prize when his studies revealed that most people often make irrational, illogical, incorrect choices because they tend to think first with their automatic, easy-to-access thoughts and only later use their deliberate, rational thinking.

By creating a good constraint, you can use your best thinking to make the best choice before the moment of temptation even arises.

Let's say you intend to change your eating habits. You may decide to start by first reducing your dessert consumption. A good constraint related to this might

be, "I will only eat dessert on weekends." Now what is the only question you will have to ask yourself when the server hands you the dessert menu? "Is this the weekend?" And the answer will be a simple "yes" or "no." You won't have to decide which desert would mean the least damage to your intention and you won't have to choose whether you're even going to cheat on your intention. In this case, you are making only one decision (i.e. is it the weekend or not?) and you will only have to make it one time. With a good constraint, you no longer

have to rely on your thinking to make a good decision in the heat of the moment.



examples of good constraints include:

Eating dessert only on the weekends (time of week)

Going to the yoga studio on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays (time of week)

Meditating from 6 to 6:30 each morning (time of day and duration)

Organizing the desk before leaving work (time of day)

Saving ten percent of each paycheck (quantity)

put it into action

Start by determining what type of good constraint best fits your intention(s) for the new year. Next, determine the time or quantity based on Strategy 1. Write out your good constraint and share it with a trusted friend, mentor or expert for input.

strategy 3 focus on the behavior, not the result

Most people wait to feel successful until they have achieved "the result." All this does is create a long wait, depending on the goal you set for yourself. The results from a new exercise routine may take weeks or even months to manifest. Without noticeable results, we tend to get discouraged and this leads us to abandon the new intention before we've even had a chance to get started. This is why focusing on our behavior is crucial.

"people who regard themselves as highly efficacious act, think and feel differently from those who perceive themselves as ineffectual"
—Albert Bandura

By focusing on the behavior instead of the result, we can easily associate success with the behavior. We do not have to wait for results to manifest because we feel success each time we complete the behavior. Take exercise for example; it is predictable that if I create a regular routine of yoga, I will feel more energetic, more flexible, more centered and calm as a result. It is also predictable that it may take some time to actually feel these results. In fact, when I first start out, I might even feel some discomfort as my body and muscles adjust to this new activity. Rather than feeling success as measured by energy, flexibility, centeredness and calm, I may feel pain and discomfort, and this certainly is not the result I wanted. On the other hand, if I focus my attention on my behavior, I will feel successful every time I practice yoga. I will no longer be waiting for the result. The trick is to enjoy the journey!

The fastest and easiest way to draw attention to the behavior is to measure and track your activity. By creating a simple tracking sheet, you can mark off the completion of the activity each time you completed it. You can do this by posting a tracking sheet near the space where you do the actual exercise itself or nearby where you complete the actual task. This way, you'll see the tracking sheet every time and you'll be more likely to use it. The inside of the medicine cabinet is a great spot for tracking dental or skin care resolutions. And the neck of a guitar



people often make irrational choices
because they think with their automatic,
easy-to-access thoughts and only later
use their deliberate, rational thinking



the cold, harsh truth
is that willpower alone
does not work.
if you want to sustain results,
the answer is in your environment

for example is a great spot to tie a pen to a string and mark off your tracking sheet each time you practice.

put it into action

First, be sure to make the tracking sheet simple and easy to fill out. Second, the tracking sheet should be used to measure whatever activity is associated with the intention. Lastly, be sure to place the tracking sheet in or near the area where you do the activity.



to download the YT tracking sheet, visit yogitimes.com

strategy 4 rely on your environment

Most people who set intentions for the new year rely on willpower alone to sustain the achievement of the intention. The problem with willpower is that it is only “on” when we are thinking about it. In order for people to be successful in changing unhealthy behavior, people need specific behavioral skills and an environment conducive to healthy choices. The cold harsh truth is that willpower does not work. If you want to achieve and sustain results, the answer is in your environment.

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, your environment surrounds you. However, your willpower is only on if you remember to turn it on. It’s like the old adage says, “You are what you eat.” In this case, “You are your environment.” Success lies in choosing an environment that will best develop you and enforce your new habits as you move toward your objective. One of the leading schools for training coaches (coachville.com) created a brilliant model to help us make sense of this notion of environment. They call it “The Nine Environments of You.” With this model, they lay out nine distinct environments that surround us.

Relationships are one of the nine environments. “Surrounding oneself with like-minded souls is key,” Stanford psychologist Keith Humphreys says. “The behavior and opinions of the people

around us are important. Most people who drink too much hang out with other people who drink too much.”

You become who you spend the most time around. The best athletes in the world play at a higher level when they are around other world-class athletes. The same is true of your intention for the new year. It is essential that you find other people who already have the intention or “thing” you are committing to this year. Go hang out with them, go play in their sandbox. It will make it easier to sustain your new habit.

The physical environment is another one of the nine environments. Experts in this field recommend manipulating this environment to limit the number of possible bad choices and increase the number of good choices available to you. Brian Wansink, a behavioral nutritionist at Cornell University, suggests using smaller plates if your intention is related to nutrition and eating habits. “The best diet,” Wansink says, “is the diet you don’t know you’re on.”

The idea is to create an environment that inspires you and holds you accountable for the intentions you set. Your success is largely attributed to the environment you create, and by crafting one where you no longer have to spend any time actually thinking about your intention, you’ll be better poised to make a good decision for yourself, making you more likely to succeed.

put it into action

For each of the environments that support your intentions for the new year, create a list of alterations or changes that you can make to that environment. Choose one change you can make in the next hour and go do it. Create momentum now.

If we are but a sum of our habits, then we are creating our lives with each new intention we successfully implement. French author André Maurois sums it up by saying, “If you create an act, you create a habit. If you create a habit, you create a character. If you create a character, you create a destiny.” Happy New You! ●

Doug Miller creates an environment of accountability and fun with his ninety-day coaching program, “The Happy Healthy Wealthy Game.” You can obtain feedback from Doug by visiting the YT Blog or by connecting with him at doug@coachdoug.com.

*I live my life in
widening rings
which spread over
earth and sky.
I may not ever
complete the last one,
but that is what I
will try.*

~ RAINER MARIA RILKE

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