

## Ep #46: Micro Resolutions



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With Your Host

**Natalie Brown**

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This is *Weight Loss Success* with Natalie Brown, episode 46.

Welcome to *Weight Loss Success* with Natalie Brown. If you're a successful woman who is ready to stop struggling with your weight, you're in the right place. You'll learn everything you need to know to lose weight for the last time in bitesize pieces. Here's your host, certified life and weight coach Natalie Brown.

Hello everybody. So we are nearing the most important day of the year for all of us who are in the weight loss game. Our almost sacred holiday, New Year's. This is the day we look forward to all year, where we will sit down and pledge once again to be altogether different tomorrow than we are today.

We promise to eat healthier, to lose weight, start exercising daily, to begin a consistent meditation practice, to no longer consume refined sugar, or caffeine, or alcohol, or fried foods, to run a 5K, or a 10K, or a marathon, for those overachievers among us.

To get up earlier, get eight hours of sleep every night, read more, scroll less, keep screens out of the bedroom, journal daily, organize the house, save more money, spend less money, take up a new hobby, and be less stressed. You know, simple changes, just abandon life as we know it and become an entirely different person. No big deal.

We all know in our rational adult brains, this is ridiculous and impossible. But on January 1st, it sounds like such a good idea. Why is that? Well, we love a fresh start. The beginning of a goal, because we allow ourselves for a moment to feel hope, to see the possibilities, rather than feel the regrets.

We let go of the past and we look to the future. It's so much fun to dream about how different life will be when we accomplish a goal and change our lives. This is awesome. We want to keep this part. It's not the dreaming that's the problem. It is the execution. The way we go about or mostly don't go about actually making the changes that need some help.

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And so that's what I want to do today, to give you a different way of making and achieving New Year's resolutions that will actually work, that will allow you to keep going and keep changing throughout the year, rather than see you quit on approximately January 17th.

So what typically gets in the way of us getting to our goals? Why do we quit before we get there? Usually, it's some form of perfectionism. Now, you may be thinking, I'm not a perfectionist so this isn't true for me, but just hear me out.

We are setting a goal to try to improve ourselves and improve our lives in some way because we have the thought things will be better if I blank, or I will be better if I blank. We have a lot of feeling-better-about-ourselves emotion tied to these goals. With so much riding on it, our expectations soar sky high. We have to do these things 100% in order to feel and become better.

As Jon Acuff, author of *Finish* puts it, "Perfectionism magnifies your mistakes and minimizes your progress. It does not believe in incremental success. Perfectionism portrays your goal as a house of cards. If one thing doesn't go perfectly, the whole thing falls apart. We want to be better, but then better turns into best. We don't want small growth. We want massive overnight success."

Just a side note here, *Finish* is one of my favorite books. Jon Acuff is hilarious and wise and has such a down to earth take on goals, so I highly recommend that one.

So what gets in our way is not necessarily always the size or scope of the goal. You know I'm all about aspirations of greatness. I encourage you to dream big about your future self and to work toward believing that she is possible. But aspirations or outcomes are just destinations. They don't give us directions. They don't clarify the behaviors that will help you get there.

We don't just say I want to go to Hawaii, and then get mad when it doesn't just happen. Now of course this reference is to a pre or post-COVID world

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where we have agency to travel where we wish. We decide we want to go to Hawaii and then we figure out what needs to happen in order to make that a reality.

We figure out how much it will cost, and we make a plan to save until we get to that amount. We decide when we will go, how we will get there, how long the flight is, what the weather will be like, what we should pack, what time we need to leave to get to the airport. Every detail, all the way down to the sunscreen we will need when we get there.

We decide and then we break it down into a tinier and tinier to-do list that is realistic, necessary, accomplishable, and guarantees our success at getting to Hawaii. We know that there might be hiccups. Flights delayed, us forgetting our phone charger or flip-flops, but we don't make a delayed flight or anything else that comes up mean we will never get to Hawaii.

I want to mention here as well or remind you of the physiology of quitting that I talked a little about in episode 38. Change involves and is driven by agitation. That's why it feels so uncomfortable. Norepinephrine is released, one of the neurotransmitters involved in our fight or flight response and our efforting processes.

And so we feel a sense of agitation. This gets us moving and going. This is what had us running from predators and also seeking food and mates, et cetera. But it's not meant to be ongoing or sustained without reward. Our body has a failsafe in this system that keeps track of the amount of norepinephrine released and if it goes on too long without a dopamine reward, it cuts off our norepinephrine and we quit.

The feel-good dopamine reward is what keeps us going. This is another design flaw of our resolutions, in addition to them being perfectionist fantasies with no roadmap for execution. The fact that we don't consider or value the importance of reward along the way to keep us going.

In the book *Tiny Habits*, by BJ Fogg, which is also a favorite of mine, one of his most foundational concepts is that people change best by feeling good,

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not by feeling bad. Pretty revolutionary idea, right? Especially when it comes to weight loss.

Since most of us are driven to setting weight loss goals because of how bad we feel about ourselves and our bodies, and we typically experience it as miserable and painful to lose weight, and to change our habits. Now of course, there is discomfort involved. No question. But misery without reward is what has us quitting. Not the discomfort itself.

We can handle discomfort, but we need some reward along the way to tell us we are on the right track and are doing a good job. Here's the rub. That dopamine reward comes from inside your brain. Not the outside world. No one can give it to you. Your brain has to create it.

So as part of your New Year's resolution process, I want you to plan not just for what you will do, which we'll talk about in a minute, but how you will celebrate it along the way. And this isn't just for fun. This is a critical part of the process of changing your brain.

As Dr. Fogg teaches, there is a direct connection between what you feel when you do a behavior and the likelihood that you will repeat the behavior in the future. When you celebrate effectively, you tap into the reward circuitry of your brain.

By feeling good at the right moment, you cause your brain to recognize and encode the sequence of behaviors you just performed. In other words, you can hack your brain to create a habit by celebrating and self-reinforcing. Awesome, right?

Now, this idea of internal celebration may be new to you. It certainly isn't natural to most of us. My 11-year-old, for some reason, came programmed this way. She often tells me how she encourages herself by saying, "Good job Allie," in her head when she does something new, or she remembers something she really wanted to remember, or improves in some area that she was working on. It's kind of adorable.

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My brain does not just go around saying, “Good job Natalie,” on its own. For most of us, the opposite is happening instead, right? There are a lot of not nice, opposite celebrations happening in most of our heads. That super critical voice that loves to point out all the things we’ve done wrong, all the mistakes we make, and what it means about us and our worth and value.

So celebrating wins will be something you have to plan and incorporate into this process on purpose. Doesn’t have to be anything over the top or super involved. It can be as simple as you saying the phrase, “Good job,” in your head and smiling to yourself a little. That can be enough to give a little hit of dopamine and signal to your brain that this is a habit we want to keep.

The goal is to produce what Dr. Fogg calls the positive feeling we get from experiencing success. He named this feeling shine, which I love so much. If you aren’t sure what that feels like for you, then try this exercise to see how you might react. This will give you an idea of what kind of celebration might feel natural to you.

So imagine you applied for your dream job. You make it all the way through the process to the final interview and they tell you they’ll send you an email with their decision in a few days. The next morning, the manager’s email is waiting for you. You open it up and the first word you read is congratulations. What do you do at that moment?

You can also imagine other moments in time where something happened, big or small, that you celebrated. Your favorite team winning a championship, you wadding up a ball of paper and throwing it across your office into the recycling bin and making it, getting into the college you wanted to, anything.

Maybe you clap your hands excitedly. Maybe you do a little dance. Maybe you say yes and a fist pump. Maybe you say you got this, or you did it, or you nailed it. Maybe you draw a happy face and feel it. Maybe you give yourself a high-five. Maybe you jump up and down.

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Sometimes I close my eyes and I put my hand on my heart. I take a deep breath and I think, "I'm so proud of you." Dr. Fogg likes to smile at himself and say one word, "Victory." Come up with some ideas of what celebrations will help create the feeling of shine, that feeling of being successful, and allow you to keep going as you create and work toward your new resolutions.

You may be thinking that these rewards seem too tiny to make a difference, that we need bigger rewards, like massages and vacation sand jewelry or money in order to be motivated. But those after-the-moment things are not real rewards in terms of what we're talking about here.

They are incentives. They are fun and they give us something to look forward to, but they don't reinforce anything in the moment. Research shows that the timing of the reward matters. So we're going to make celebrating a new important part of our resolution process.

But that's not all that we're going to do differently. Usually, we make a list of many resolutions, right? Top 10, top 20. This seems like a good idea because we want to change many things. But when we look at that list, what we usually then feel is overwhelm.

It seems to shine a light on all that we lack, and what happened last year, and the year before. And it usually leads to giving up. One of the lies of perfectionism is that we can do it all. But we can't do it all at once. We can't change everything we don't like at the same time.

When we try and we don't succeed, we then give up on it all real quick. So we have two options, according to Jon Acuff. Attempt more than is humanly possible and fail, or choose what to bomb and succeed at the goal that matters. You can choose shame or strategy.

Our strategy is going to be to think smaller. I know that sounds counterintuitive to what you usually do, but trust me. And by all means, if you have had success in the past with tackling many big goals at once, you can totally keep that strategy. If not, let's narrow it down.

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Just pick one target to shoot for and clarify it. Ask yourself, what do you want? What is your dream? What result do you want to achieve? And then ask why.

If it's that we want to eat healthier or lose weight, we want to know why. So you can feel more comfortable in your clothes, or get off your medications, we want to make sure our aspiration connects to what really matters to us. And then we need to explore what specific behaviors will get us there. Ask yourself what specific behavior would I need to do to get to a place where I feel more comfortable in my clothes?

Keep asking what else until you have a bunch of possible options of behaviors. A big list. Maybe it's things like eat eggs instead of waffles at breakfast, or drink 64 ounces of water during the day, or skip the sugar in my coffee in my morning, among many, many other things.

I want you to notice how we are zooming in here over and over to get to a super tiny change we want to make. The objective is to get to a micro resolution. The more small and specific, the more likely it is that you will be able to accomplish it.

The more times you accomplish this micro resolution, and you micro celebrate it, the more often you will experience the feeling of success, and the more likely it is to become a new habit as a result. An actual and real change that you can then build on.

The more you experience success, even on a micro level, your brain will start looking for evidence that you can, instead of evidence that you can't. It's like the children's book, if you give a mouse a muffin, but with success instead of pastries.

Once you have your list of new behaviors, you want to filter them based on these criteria. The impact. How effective is this behavior in realizing your aspiration? Motivation. Do you want to do this behavior? We're talking about the real you, right now you. Not the fantasy you. Please keep this in mind when you're thinking about do you want to do this.

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And then ability. Can you do this behavior? Like are you capable? Is it feasible for you? The behaviors that match all of these criteria is where we want to focus. What you want to do and what you can do will converge into what you most likely will do, according to Fogg, and that is when change happens.

And then we put a plan in place to execute this one specific micro resolution at a time. Just one. So let's look at the three behaviors I previously mentioned in service of the goal of being more comfortable in your clothes.

Maybe drinking 64 ounces of water would make a big impact because you are currently drinking zero and are drinking Diet Coke instead. But you hate the taste of water, so you don't want to do it. The likelihood that you are going to execute that is low because it doesn't meet the criteria of motivation, and so it may not be the best choice to start with.

Whereas skipping the sugar in your coffee might have a slightly smaller impact, but you are totally willing to give it up. Therefore, the likelihood of you actually following through is much higher, which means the incidence of celebrating and feeling of success will be more frequent, and the formation of a habit that is going to get you closer to being comfortable in your clothes is much higher.

That is what we are looking for. Micro ways to feel successful over and over and then we build on it from there. Through this process of micronizing our resolution, we meet ourselves where we are so that we can move forward, experience success in a sustainable way that allows us to keep going, and guarantees that we get there.

Taking on such a seemingly small change may have your brain thinking things like it's not enough, but if the alternative is taking on 1700 gigantic changes and quitting two weeks in, and actually accomplishing nothing, maybe a small change can be enough. Doesn't a series of micro

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resolutions that lead to a series of micro successes sound better than a big pile of quitting?

Just try it on. It can't hurt but it might help you get to where you actually want to be on New Year's Eve of 2021. Okay everyone, as we near the New Year, we also near the opening of applications for my first weight loss group of 2021.

If you are ready to tackle your weight loss for good this year, you'll want to be a part of my small group weight loss program. My clients learn to lose weight and change their habits, one step at a time, starting with their brains, in powerful, sustainable ways.

They are getting rid of food chatter and they are learning to love themselves all the way to their goals. You can join the waitlist at [itbeginswithathought.com/waitlist](http://itbeginswithathought.com/waitlist). Just so you know, my waitlist gets first dibs when applications open, so take advantage. I'll see you soon.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of *Weight Loss Success* with Natalie Brown. If you want to learn more about how to lose weight for the last time, come on over to [itbeginswithathought.com](http://itbeginswithathought.com). We'll see you here next week.