

Ep #98: A New Take on Resolutions



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With Your Host

Natalie Brown

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This is *Weight Loss Success* with Natalie Brown, episode 98.

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, amazing humans! A new year is upon us, which means the time has come to tell yourself that you're going to become an altogether different person tomorrow because the calendar changed from 2021 to 2022, right? Nope, not this year. Because instead of setting up some crazy arbitrary, unrealistic rules for ourselves for the entire year starting January first, we're going to change it up.

First of all, look back at you and your life in January 2021. Think about what your family, life, job, friends, the world looked like 12 months ago. Is everything the same as it was then? Let me answer for you without even knowing, no, it is not. So, why is it that we always set a specific resolution to be carried out for a whole year as if a year is the amount of time we can predictively account for in the future? I mean, the reality is we can't reliably predict how things will unfold in any given amount of time, really. Still, I can guarantee it will be much easier to predict if we shorten the timeline from 12 months to 12 days or 12 hours or 12 minutes.

I love goals, objectives, and resolutions. I am not anti-this practice. I actually love it. I love looking forward to and imagining all of my possibilities. I think it can be healthy, exciting, and life-affirming in many ways. So, this New Year's podcast is dedicated to less but better when it comes to our resolutions. I think our biggest pitfalls when it comes to resolutions are that we make too many. We make them too big, and we make them too vague. And we try to make our achievement match our excitement at starting something, right? Like, we think, I'm so excited to make this change and so this thing that I am doing, the many, many things I am doing over this year need to match that excitement.

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The result is a super intense few weeks of January and then a big sigh of quitting relief around the beginning of February. So, I am going to give you some steps today to combat this and to make success with your resolutions inevitable. Just for reference, some of my favorite resources that I will reference here on this topic are, *Finish* by Jon Acuff, these are books, *Essentialism* by Greg McKeown, and *Tiny Habits* by BJ Fogg. I focus pretty heavily on Dr. Fogg's book last year in episode 46, *Micro Resolutions* if you would like to revisit that as well.

Here's a favorite quote from *Essentialism* to kick things off today. Only once you give yourself permission to stop trying to do it all, to stop saying yes to everyone, I would change that to everything here. Can you make your highest contribution towards the things that really matter? Resolution options are not A. change all the things I don't like about me. B. Start 53 new habits. C. Embark on six new hobbies I've wanted to try. Or D. all of the above. Those are not your only options.

The definition of a resolution is a firm decision to do or not do something. I will do blank; I will stop doing blank. That's it, simple, straightforward, firm, and a choice. A firm decision made and executed relieves us of decision fatigue. Should I, shouldn't I, will I, won't I, do I, don't I? We make a firm decision. According to McKeown, we stick to it because the more choices we're forced to make, the more the quality of our decisions deteriorates. A decision is a choice. McKeown says this about choices as well. The ability to choose cannot be taken away or even given away. It can only be forgotten. When we forget our ability to choose, we learn to be helpless.

Now, I know what you're thinking. Well, Natalie, I choose every year. I decide on my resolutions, and then I don't stick to them. I don't execute. So, being a firm decision or a choice doesn't mean I do it. I get that. And to that, I say, the fault does not lie in the decision itself, but likely what you have decided to do or not do. We are taking on too much for too long for the wrong reasons without consideration of where we are, what we are capable of, what is realistic, what we actually want, or like, and why we want it in the first place.

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So, the steps I am going to outline for you here, largely taken from the book *Finish*, are going to address these obstacles so you can make a firm decision, execute, and celebrate your success. We want to start with the goal or resolution we are thinking about setting in the first place and do some pre-investigation before we even begin to work on it. Step one is to find your secret rules or the core belief that this resolution is attempting to address. The real why behind it. For many of us with weight-related resolutions, we believe things like successful people are disciplined. Evidence by their fitness, controlled eating, morning routines, etc., right? Or people who are thin, skin, healthy weight, average BMI, whatever label you use to categorize people's body size are more valuable. Or some opposite rule like, people who are overweight, fat, obese, whatever label you use here are lazy, less valuable, not worthy of love, success, happiness, etc.

So, look at your resolution and ask, why do I want this? What do I get to think about myself if I achieve it? Do I even like doing blank, whatever it is I set out to do? What's my real goal? Does the method I am using match who I am? And then, ask of each answer, what does that mean, and who says? Start by investigating and understanding what's driving this resolution and if you like that reason. If you don't, it doesn't mean you don't do it. It just may mean that you restructure it, and you rewrite your rules so that they are aligned with who you are. Write yourself a new rule that is flexible, reasonable, healthy, and based on the truth.

From *Finish*, our heads are often not aware of our heart's secret rules, rules that perfectionism has etched into us. If we don't examine ourselves mindfully and gently, we may think that our failures to meet our goals are due to our laziness or bad strategy. When in reality, they're caused by the secret rules that make our finishes impossible. Once you feel like you like your reasons, step two is to make it doable and desirable and inject some fun. Doable means it's something you are currently capable of. You can afford it, it's accessible to you, you are physically capable, etc. Climbing Mount Everest might not be doable for you right now. Working out at the gym for two hours a day might not be doable. Meditating for an hour every

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morning might not be doable. Desirable means it's something you actually want to do right now. It matches your current desires. You have a desire to do it or stop doing it. It might even sound a little fun. So, maybe it's learning to knit or get seven to eight hours of sleep, or get ten minutes of fresh air every day, or listen to more music and fewer podcasts or stop scrolling social media first thing in the morning and read something instead.

Look at the thing you are wanting to do or not do. Let's say you decide it's to stop eating sugar and flour. This may be doable because there are other foods available to you and your body doesn't need sugar and flour, but not desirable at all because you own a bakery and you want to be able to taste what you're smelling, or you love Oreos, and you eat some every day to relax, and you don't know how else to relieve your stress. This isn't to say that you should keep eating the amount of Oreos you currently do with the same frequency and that you can never become someone who doesn't eat Oreos. It's just a pretty sure sign that you won't actually execute this long term. You'll stop doing it for a minute until the conflicting desire runs out.

So, make it desirable to limit sugar and flour to a certain amount per day or to tasting only on weekdays and one dessert on the weekends or to every other day. Brainstorm some other ways to relieve stress outside of Oreo's or eat some carrot sticks and a specific number of Oreo's and stop when you're full. Maybe it's the opposite issue; it's highly desirable but not doable. Like you really want to take an evening yoga class at the beautiful new studio down the street, but it's outside of your monthly budget, and you really want to pay down some debt. Or you have a new baby, and leaving every night at bedtime doesn't work right now. If you want to do it, but it isn't realistically possible, it's not going to last. You can work around some of these. Of course, you can find ways to make them doable if it's super important to you, yes. But does that actually make things more difficult? This Segway's us nicely to step three.

Identify your hiding places and your noble obstacles. A noble obstacle is a virtuous-sounding reason for not working toward a finish. Sometimes this sounds like I can't until, or if I do blank then, whatever, or it's too hard.

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Telling yourself you want to start going to yoga down the street, but you can't until you build up enough supply of milk so that your partner can feed your baby while you're gone. And in order to make that happen, you need a better pump and an adequate milk storage solution. You have to figure out which bottles and nipples your baby likes, and make sure all the options are BPA free. You have to coordinate schedules with your partner so that you make sure the handoff is smooth, and not rushed, and on, and on, and on. Sounds noble, I mean, it's taking care of your child for heaven's sake.

The reality is it adds twenty steps in order to make your resolution happen, and it basically guarantees you put it off and don't do it. If you notice this is happening, ask yourself how could things be easier? How could they be simpler? A hiding place is an activity you focus on instead of your resolution. It's a safe place to hide from your fear of messing up. Usually, it's a task that lets you get your perfectionism fixed by making you feel successful. For me, this is doing my mom stuff, household chores, laundry, dishes, cleaning up my kitchen, all things that have a start and a finish and a visible result that is so satisfying. There are also things I don't really have to think about or focus on; I can listen to music. I can think. I can watch a show. They are all pretty mindless activities for my brain.

Another hiding place for me is cleaning out my email inbox. That may sound funny, but I can sit and sort and archive and delete and answer emails all the way until it's empty while I am supposed to be creating podcasts or setting up auto-pay for my new car loan or meditating or whatever else. If you're not sure what your hiding places are, ask where do you find yourself going accidentally, or instead, what's the app you open on your phone automatically? That's a good one.

Step four is, choose what to bomb. Meaning you can't do everything, so what are you going to sit down and not do well to focus on your goal? Going back to the Essentialism quote from the beginning, what can you say no to or stop doing so that you can make your highest contribution towards this thing that really matters? What is critical? What can wait? Does this serve my success at this goal, or does it hinder it? Do I want to make room

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for this, or get rid of it now, or just for now? One of my favorites and the most counterintuitive steps is step five, cut your goal in half. We often set goals and make resolutions based on the concept of going big or going home, right? But in that spirit, we aren't usually considering what is actually realistic, and we end up being overwhelmed and just staying home in the first place. We don't even get started.

This is called the planning fallacy, and it's based on a concept study by Kahneman and Tversky. They describe this as a phenomenon in which predictions about how much time will be needed to complete future tasks display an optimism bias and underestimate the time needed. Sound familiar? The author of *Finish*, John Acuff, has my favorite snarky sense of humor. He is so funny. It's part of the reason why I love this book so much because he just doesn't take himself or goals too seriously. So much fun. He says, at the beginning, when our excitement is through the roof, we think our achievement must be as well. This is why people who have never run 100 yards will tell me they're going to run a marathon.

I will gently ask them, have you ever run a half marathon? Have you ever run a 5K? What about a K? Have you ever run a single K? This sort of circles back to doable and desirable. If we consider where we currently are, how could we take our marathon goal and cut it in half or even lengthen the timeline to achieving it? If you cut your goal in half, what's the worst that could happen?

Step six is to create a contingency plan for how you handle missteps, skipped steps, fails, bumps, bruises, imperfections along the way. That's often our undoing when it comes to resolutions. Acuff calls this the day after perfect. He describes what often happens when we forget our resolution. We don't do it one day, or we eat fries when we're resolved to not eat them. I might as well kicks in. Might as well, he says, is one of the most dangerous phrases in the English language. Might as well, is never applied to good things. It's never might as well help all these orphans, or might as well plant something healthy in this community garden. It's usually the white flag of surrender. I've had a single French fry might as well eat a

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thousand, right? This journey to change will not be perfect. Plan on that, and plan for it.

Last but not least is step seven, use data to celebrate imperfect progress. When you are making your resolutions take care to make it something with a measurable result rather than eat healthier define what healthy eating looks like for you specifically. So, you know when you are doing it and not doing it. Or if it's move daily or get better at tennis, or read more, make sure you know exactly what that means for you. The minimum baseline and the maximum effort or ideal. And then, use multiple data points to help you see progress and celebrate it along the way.

Acuff says, if you don't review the progress, you can't make adjustments. You can't learn from mistakes. You can't get better, and ultimately you can't finish. If you were 40% of the way to your goal and you look at 100%, the finish line only, you will feel like a failure and want to quit. That 60% is going to seem like a lot. But if you look back at zero, you will recognize that 40% is a long way from the start. And it will motivate you to keep going. That's what we want throughout all of these steps. Things that will help us stay motivated and keep going. Cutting your goal in half often does that because it allows you to get there a little bit quicker. Underestimate what you're capable of doing so that you can find some success and celebrate it.

Here's a list of 20 things to keep track of if you're setting health and weight goals. Just to give you an example of what a data point might be. Think about your own resolution and what data points you might want to use for you. Then, choose no more than one to three data points to measure. Let's just pause here to say I personally think one to three resolutions is as much as you should take on in the first place. And when we're talking about measuring data points of each of them, I think a useful, realistic timeline for assessment is daily or weekly. So, one to three resolutions, check in daily or weekly, set one to three data points to kind of measure it by for your check in's.

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So, as I share these 20 data points, think this much in the last day or in the last week. That's what we're kind of looking at.

- How many half pounds lost in the last day or last week? I would say last week for that one, for sure.
- Number of meals planned.
- Number of meals executed as planned
- Movement minutes
- Water intake
- Sleep hours/the time you went to bed
- Number of urges for foods outside of your plan allowed, not answered.
- Number of minutes spent allowing urges
- Number of self-care activities
- The duration of the self-care.
- Number of times you processed discomfort without eating
- Number of minutes you spent consciously feeling your feelings
- Number of minutes of conscious rest and presence
- Number of times you've focused on gratitude
- Number of times you've made the choice to eat food that your body likes.
- Number of minutes of fresh air/outside time

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- You can also create data points around things you are limiting. So let's say you're wanting to limit how many servings of dessert you're eating from endless amounts to maybe one a day. So, you may measure the number of servings of dessert. Maybe you're wanting to cut down on time on your phone. So, you may track the number of minutes of scrolling social media compared to your previous number.
- Ounces of soda
- Number of times pushing snooze

We want to build evidence of success and motivation to keep going over and over. Understanding clearly why you are doing it, making it doable and desirable, finding your hiding places and your noble obstacles, choosing what to set down to focus on your goal, making a plan for the day after perfect, and using data to celebrate your imperfect success on the way will allow this building of evidence and ensure that you keep going and finish.

Have the happiest of New Year's, everybody. I will 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. We'll see you here next week.