

Why do New Year Resolutions fail to deliver change?

Usually New Year Resolutions aren't kept and, unfortunately, as a result of the 'failure' people frequently feel bad about themselves and often judge themselves harshly as, for example, lacking in 'willpower'.



By now many will be saying "January is gone and I haven't cut out sugar from my diet"; 'I promised to read more, but February is here and I haven't gone past the first Chapter'; 'The year has barely begun and I am already bringing work home every evening'; and so forth.

January-February is that time of the year when people use social media to share short pieces about why resolutions fail to bring about change, how to overcome this, and about letting go unnecessary recriminations about oneself. Barbara Rapaport, of [Real-time Perspectives](#), has recently offered some useful tips in her [blog](#) and it is a worthwhile read.

In this post, Barbara reminds us that "Studies show that a quarter of us have already thrown in the towel, and **only eight percent of resolvers will actually follow through on their resolutions successfully**".

Also, self-criticism doesn't do anybody any good and it is too easy, as well as wrong, unnecessary and unhelpful, to be judgmental about ourselves. **Misplaced guilt is a destructive power for our well-being. There's no need for it. The problem lies elsewhere.**

The Real Problem with New Year Resolutions

When we make commitments to reflect, reboot and move towards a better version of ourselves in the form of New Year Resolutions our behavior is unlikely to change by virtue of *just* making a resolution.

The important question is why?

Making New Year Resolutions is too superficial an approach to change: to change our behavior we must change our minds and change how we think and how we make meaning of our lives.

Such resolutions are ineffective for changing behaviours because there is a 'Hidden Commitment' **competing** with the 'Visible Commitment' of the New Year Resolution.

This idea has been proposed by Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey, of Harvard University. In their [research](#), they found that the 'Hidden/Competing Commitment' is underpinned by a 'Big Assumption', which maintains a balance between Hidden Commitment and the Visible Commitment. The result is unchanged minds and, therefore, unchanged behaviours.

Heading to the Mental Gym: The Good Reading Resolution



While many New Year Resolutions are focused on issues such as weight loss, we at The Keynes Centre suggest that Change Resolutions should also be focused on **improving mental fitness** – that is, growing our minds through effectively transforming *how we think* about ourselves, personally and professionally.

Reading, for instance, is a great mental fitness exercise. It improves vocabulary and knowledge and offers a way to relax and reduce stress, and, helps enlarge people's mentalities. It also builds confidence, capabilities and self-esteem.

The 'Good Reading' Resolution is another common one that frequently falls by the wayside. The Kegan-Lahey idea can be used to work out the real reasons (Competing Commitments and Big Assumptions) rather than pseudo-reasons, e.g. that 'I lack

willpower/time/opportunity/mental capability', for which we frequently settle. This is how it would like:



How can we move forward?

Kegan and Lahey provide a highly effective framework for understanding and overcoming resistance to change in the systematic way by which people prevent the very change they hope for. However, surfacing the (Hidden) Competing Commitment(s) and the Big Assumption(s) is not as easy as it may look in the example above since we are dealing with some things deeply lodged inside of us.

We have two suggestions to offer: *Change Coaching* and *Reading for Change*.

Change Coaching

As we move towards March, you may want to find out what Competing Commitment(s) and underlying Big Assumption(s) held you back from fulfilling your Resolution/Commitment? How are you going to uncover them? And how are you going to release yourself from them?

While it is quite feasible to work through the Kegan-Lahey process on one's own, a helping hand in the form of a Coach with training and experience in the use of the Kegan-Lahey methodology is more likely to be effective.

An experienced coach such as [Barbara Rapaport](#), who has extensive experience at individual and group coaching through both face-to-face, telephone, and virtual, can make all the difference for success. (Disclosure: Barbara is a member of [The Keynes Centre Advisory Board](#)).

Reading for Change

As noted, changing behavior requires changing mind, in other words, changing how we think and make meaning of our world – especially changing the ideas by which we orientate ourselves in the world and guide our conduct in human affairs.

Why read for change?



The well-known Cultural Historian Jacques Barzun talks about there being an “...**immense value in being able to find a Self: that is to say, a solid entity you can trust, because you have made it yourself, and made it well.**”

Speaking about this task, of creating ‘a well-made self’ by which he meant “an ordered set of reflections, conclusions and convictions”, Barzun observes that it is necessary to get outside one’s routine and fill “the mind with vicarious experiences”. According to him, “**This is best done through reading**”.

[The Keynes Centre Book Club](#) provides the challenge and support for change and is aimed at people who want to move towards well-constructed minds. Through a programme of carefully selected, thought-provoking books and guided discussion sessions, participants explore the wider implications of the ideas in the readings for their personal professional development. Click [here](#) for more details on this programme.

Good Luck with your New Year Resolution – don’t give up, it’s only February and you can start again!