



A Better Life

Description

By Ling Sing Lin

New Year Resolutions

Most of us know our weaknesses. We all have weaknesses.

Some of us try to change them. Thinking the start of a year is a good time, some make new year resolutions. But we know that those who faithfully keep these resolutions are in the minority. A survey in 2007 by British psychologist Richard Wiseman on 3000 people revealed that only 12% achieved what they had resolved to do.

Self-help Books

Some people also resort to self-help books or on-line videos to upgrade themselves or overcome their deficiencies. These efforts require perseverance. Unfortunately, many of us are impatient, myself included, and shortcuts do not make for success. Procrastination and laziness are our greatest enemies.

Instant Gratification

We spend our time instead on instant gratification (eg social media, Netflix) rather than long term more rewarding but less enjoyable activities like practicing a musical instrument, exercising, learning to cook, studying, etc.

Linking with Enjoyable Activity

Rather than forcing ourselves to do the less pleasurable but more beneficial tasks, if we could link these tasks to an activity we enjoy, we may achieve greater success. This is how some of us motivate our children to do their homework.

Some examples are:

- Exercise whilst listening to music or podcasts, etc. However, this is more safely done in a gym than in the open, as one may be unaware of dangers without auditory environmental warnings
- Exercise with a friend/group of friends/dog
- Give yourself a reward after you complete your desired activity

You sweeten the deal to make achieving the goal more enjoyable.

Because I prefer to sing rather than practice the harp, I sometimes choose pieces that I can play and sing at the same time, to make it more pleasurable.

Piano Stairs*

An interesting and novel approach to get people to take the stairs rather than the escalator in Stockholm's Odenplan Metro Station involved converting stairs to be giant piano keys. They literally produce tunes when they take the stairs. This strategy resulted in 66% choosing stairs over the escalator vs a very small number before the piano key approach.

Force of Circumstances*

Force of circumstances sometimes result in behavior change. In the London Underground strike in February 2014, hundreds of thousands of commuters were forced to experiment with new travel routes, and some people discovered new and more efficient travel options.

Results of Changes

Small changes can in the long term give rise to big results. Regular exercise, better eating habits, weight loss, adequate sleep, more creative cooking, better reading habits, being able to swim, higher level of savings, stopping smoking, reduced alcohol intake, speaking another language, etc, etc are just some of the new year resolutions made. If these resolutions are successfully kept, better quality of life results.

*From How to Change by Katy Milkman