

SMART Goals for a Successful New Year

Introduction and Podcast Promotion

Don Drew: Welcome to Peaceful Life Radio. Today David and I are going to be exploring a timely topic, which if it's not on your mind today, it soon will be, and that is the issue of New Year's resolutions.

David Lowry: Don, some people even ask if we should make them, and if you do, how do you make them? But before we get started, we want to ask all of our listeners to download, like, and share our podcast with others. Please invite your friends to listen and contact us with topics you'd like to hear about. Or if you've had an event in your life that you would like to share on the podcast, know that we'd love to hear from you. You can contact us through our website, Peaceful Life Radio dot com.

Should We Make New Year's Resolutions?

David Lowry: Okay, Don, are New Year's resolutions something we should be thinking about?

Don Drew: David, I think that we probably all think about them at some point, so whether or not we should think about them is probably irrelevant. The idea is whether or not we should make them, right?

David Lowry: Yeah, Don, just so you'll know, I've been thinking I'm going to wait till the first of the year to go on my health program. I don't know why I'm not doing it right now. I know I should. For some reason I'm thinking, *Oh, let's just wait till the first of the year.*

Don Drew: One of the reasons why that's probably the case, David, is you've probably made resolutions and they don't work out so well. So, I did some research into what makes effective resolutions and I want to start with five reasons why we should not make New Year's resolutions.

David Lowry: Okay, I will admit to being a resolution failure, some more successful than others, but generally speaking, my ideas of what to do are much better than my willpower to carry them out for an extended period of time.

Don Drew: As a good friend of mine once said I've got lots of willpower, not a whole lot of won't power. So, let's talk about these five reasons here.

Common Reasons Resolutions Fail

Don Drew: For number one is simply the high failure rate. A large percentage of New Year's resolutions fail and this can lead to disappointment and demotivation and hinder our future attempts at self improvement. So, our history of not following through is problematic.

David Lowry: Sure, there are things that we know we are supposed to be doing, but doggone it. It's hard to stop. If you've been stopping for a donut every day for five years, you're going to miss it if you stop it. Or if you really enjoy eating a hot dog, and you can tell yourself there's nothing good in a hot dog except the taste maybe you're going to have a hard time following through on that.

Don Drew: Right. And often our resolutions are unrealistic. Okay, let's face the fact they're overly ambitious and lack a realistic plan for actually achieving them.

David Lowry: Well, this is my year for enlightenment, Don. I've decided I'm going to become enlightened. Wait a minute. That's the unrealistic expectation, right? On so many levels! But some people say I'm going to lose a hundred pounds this year. Or that's really probably not even a very healthy goal for you to do, even if you do need to lose a hundred pounds. You really ought to think this through a little more than saying, okay, this is going to happen and creating this crazy goal. We'll tell you more about that later in the podcast.

Don Drew: So, one of our reasons also for failing at following through on our resolutions is simply that There's a lot of social pressure to make resolutions in the first place. And the very process of making resolutions can be rather overwhelming by focusing on external expectations rather than our personal goals and our behaviors. That can lead to resentment and burnout. The whole idea, the pressure of making a resolution, following through, being successful, can also be problematic.

David Lowry: There's people who want you to make resolutions too, Don. And that's a form of external pressure that we're talking about. Like, quite honestly, maybe you need to start working on an addictive problem that you have or something like that. And, as long as your partner wants you to do it, but you don't want to, really have the deep down desire to do it, it's probably not going

to happen. Right? We have to want it ourselves instead of other people or those around us wanting it for us.

Don Drew: Yeah. Another problem with making resolutions is that all too often we make them all or nothing issues, right? So, we don't frame a resolution as *I want to get in better shape or be more fit*. Instead we say things like *I'm going to lose a hundred pounds*.

And when we make it to a hundred pounds, we're successful, or we don't, in which case we fail. And by setting our goals too difficult, too tough, we set ourselves up.

The last one I want to talk about is setting a focus on date. Sometimes if we set a specific date and in our case, New Year's Day, we have to come up with a set of resolutions, but because if you don't set them up by New Year's Day, right now, you got to wait the whole another year.

David Lowry: Oh something that related to something you said earlier about this all or nothing mentality. I taught yoga for 10 years and I would meet people who would say, *Oh, I don't want to take yoga, because I'm not flexible*. That's the whole point of why you take it, to gradually build into this flexible body that you need to have. People have this idea that they're going to have to be this kind of person in order to do a certain thing or achieve a certain thing. But that clouds the mind as well. It's crazy to think in those terms rather than in gradual processes to move us closer to where we need to be.

Don Drew: Yeah, you're really talking about a *new year, new me paradox*. So, you have vowed to be a completely different person overnight, right? On December 31st, you're this one person. On January 1st, you've got these resolutions. They're in place. You're supposed to be a completely different person. And guess what? You're not.

David Lowry: And we live in a culture that teaches us that you can be anything you want to be. And, within reason, you can be anything you want to be. But reason means that it may take you a while to get there. If you want to improve your basketball game, that doesn't mean you're going to be an NBA star. If you take up the piano, that doesn't mean you're ready for Carnegie Hall in a year. You've got to be reasonable with the expectations you set for yourself. It always takes a little bit longer than you think, but it's always good to get started.

Don Drew: Absolutely. And you know what? It's interesting. You were talking about athletic things, right? Okay. So, according to the 2024 Statista survey, the

most common new year's resolutions among Americans are related to health and fitness. Most specifically, these two things, remember these two, okay.

Exercising more, this consistently ranks high on the list. And number two, eating healthier. This often involves weight loss goals or improved dietary habits and so on. All of that leads to what oftentimes happens, which is called the gym rush. Or it goes by several other names, right?

David Lowry: Like, forget the gym in January. It's going to be silly. It's going to be like Black Friday in there.

Don Drew: Yeah. I mean, if you're already regularly going to the gym then you can imagine it'd be pretty tough. My wife does jazzercise it seems like 365 days a year. And her group now is talking about how they will plan to accept and frankly lose the influx of resolutions. that will show up in January.

A lot of us start with great intentions and what we really want to do today is we want to end by talking about how you can, if you're going to make resolutions, how you can make them and have a better chance at achieving them.

Personal Resolutions for 2025

Don Drew: But before we get there, David, let's talk a little bit about our own resolutions. Do you have one for 2025?

David Lowry: I very much do have some resolutions for 2025, and I'm going to start with one that has to do with building closer relationships with my family and friends. I really want to work on developing closer relationships with my family and friends.

Don Drew: Tell me more about what do you, when you say closer relationships, what do you mean by that?

David Lowry: I have a very close family. We all love each other but we're scattered all over the country. I want to find a way of being a better presence in their lives and they, in my life. And I'm going to have to think more about how we can be more supportive for each other and build closer and stronger relationships rather than just letting Christmas or Thanksgiving be the only times we see or reach out to one another. I think there's some work that I can do on my end to make that better.

I wanna be a better husband this year. I think I need to think more about being a better person to those that I work with. I want to be a better friend, Don, like to you. I don't think those things happen just because we have friends or loved ones or families. I think we have to put some intentionality into them. And So, that's some of mine. What about you?

Don Drew: It takes more than a resolution, doesn't it? Let me say before I get to mine, let me say for our listeners David his kids are scattered from East Coast, West Coast, and Gulf Coast. So, they're spread pretty wide. We're sitting right in the Middle of all of it here in Oklahoma. So, you've got quite a challenge.

I have one daughter who is married to an air force lieutenant colonel and they've been stationed in many different places over the years. And I have to say that I really miss it when they were in Hawaii. I didn't see him as much, but when I went, I sure spent a lot of time there.

David Lowry: I know that had to be great. So, maybe your resolution is to find a way to get them to Hawaii.

Don Drew: Okay. So, I have 6 resolutions. I'm going to combine my first 2 because they're going to sound really familiar to you. Exercise more and eat healthier. And as part of eating healthier, lose weight. Okay. That probably has been the top of my resolution list, those two, forever. Those two seem to show up every year. Sometimes I'm successful at it and sometimes I'm not. And the older I get, the more I'm able to understand when they're successful and why they're successful, even if they don't last the way I would like them to.

David Lowry: And there's nothing wrong with those resolutions at all. In fact, if Don and I left the impression that we're skeptical of people who make those kind of resolutions, we're not. Healthy life is a happy life, a flourishing life. It's very hard to have a happy, peaceful life like this program is advocating if you're not taking care of yourself, Don.

Don Drew: Oh, yeah that's actually I think...

David Lowry: More power to you!

Don Drew: Yeah it's really hard to pay attention to relationships and so forth when you're having a lot of health issues yourself and so on and preventative health is almost always better than the consequences of failed health, right? Or not Taking care of yourself.

So, I, I understand it's really important and I don't intend to take it off my list. I wanna keep it at the front and forefront and but there are things that I know that I can do that will help me. And we're gonna be talking about this.

So, David, give us another one of your resolutions.

David Lowry: Another of my resolutions is to read more books on peacemaking and peacebuilding. This is an area of professional interest and study. And I don't talk about it much on the show, but, I do mediation work. I work with people who have interpersonal difficulties. I give lectures and presentations on the subject and things like that. And I've learned a lot over the years, but I really want to deepen. There's a rich literature out there that I really need to dig into and learn more about. I find it personally rewarding when I do that.

Don Drew: David I may be setting you up here 'cause we haven't discussed this in advance, but is there a. a particular book that you think is valuable for people to read that are really interested in peacemaking.

David Lowry: Oh, sure. Peacemaking 101 by David N. Lowry.

Don Drew: So, Okay, number on the list and the author is not Lowry.

David Lowry: There's a lot of wonderful books. My interest is more in peace building which goes into the systemic things in society that we need to fix in order to create a more just and helpful society. But I will say this, any of the books written by Dr. Martin Luther King and some of his biographers are really wonderful things to read. There's the book called The Peacemaker by Ken Sande which if you're a religious person, you might find that book very helpful. And by the way, as part of Peaceful Life Productions, we have Peacemaking 101, which I think has like some 40 something videos on it. It has all kinds of articles. You can learn a lot by going over there. So, go over there and find something that helps you.

Don Drew: So, my next resolution is going to be more calm and patient. Now I have to admit that this is something that I have put on my list also probably every year in some form. And it's because I know when I was a young man, my impatience got the better of me way too often.

It led to making bad decisions and regrets and things of that nature. So, I have been working for a long time to become more calm and more patient. I think

I've made huge, advances in that area and yet I know that it's still something that from time to time gives me trouble So, that's gonna be on my list

David Lowry: I think everybody should have a virtue they're working on. And I have to say Don that I'm working on becoming more calm too. I'm doing it probably in a different way than you would, but when I really get down to the reason of why I want to do it, it's so I don't feel attached or distracted as often. A calm person can wade into a chaotic situation, find the center of that storm, where the calm is, and be a helpful person, whereas a person who gets caught up into the anger or the reactivity of the situation kind of loses it and loses themselves in the moment.

Don Drew: Okay, David has a little Sign here says *I am still learning* and I worded mine *keep learning*, okay? I love to learn. I love to learn new things. I'm not afraid to re evaluate or read or learn new things about what I think I already know.

And one of the things about all those things I already know is I realize quite often there's always more to know more information, more ways of viewing the world and so forth. So, I find that really valuable. I want to keep learning. As I get older, I don't want to fall into this trap of thinking that I have arrived.

David Lowry: I have a couple of more, Don, that I'm going to throw out there and maybe my audience can help me become a little more accountable. Don and I have collected a lot of things that we want to put together in a book and I think it's time to do that, and I'm hopeful that we can at least if not get the book mostly written we could even get it written.

So, I'd like to see that. Don and I want to put our podcast onto video. And while we do have a YouTube presence we want to turn it into a video YouTube presence so that it's not just an audio only.

How to Make Effective Resolutions

Don Drew: Okay, David, let's shift gears here and let's start talking about how to make resolutions, that will work. Okay.

What we want to talk about is what are sometimes referred to as SMART goals and SMART is an acronym or an acrostic, I guess would be more accurate and each one of the letters. SMART stand for different things. The SMART acrostic is designed to remind us about how to set effective goals. Number one is specific, two measurable, three, achievable, four relevant, and five time bound.

David Lowry: A good friend of mine taught me about the SMART goals, probably a good 20 years into my career, and I'm thinking how much more effective I could have been in my job and other areas of my life had I Known about this plan.

The first one, being specific. Knowing what you really want to do is nine tenths of the goal that you're making. You really need to know what specifically am I trying to do here? Like, What am I trying to do? Why am I trying to do it? And how am I trying to do it? So, instead of saying, like I want to be fit. You need to know what that means to you. So, to me, to be fit, Don, I need to have a decent heart rate and be flexible. But somebody else needs to be able to bench press 300 pounds. That's their term for fitness is. So, you've got to know what it is you're talking about rather than speaking in generalities.

Don Drew: Yeah, I think one of the reasons why being specific really works is it moves us from this broad generic goal to more specific behaviors.

The Denver Broncos running back or former running back Reggie Rivers who is a motivational speaker these days suggests focusing on changing our behaviors rather than achieving end goals. He's done a really great Ted talk on that. I'd recommend you listen to that if you have time. He points out how important it is to set the specific behaviors we want in order to achieve the goal. Specificity really matters in effective goal setting.

The second one we have on our list, the M stands for measurable. There's an old saying I've heard used over the years, *if you can't measure it, you can't improve it*. Right. If you're going to go out on a trip, and you know where you want to end up, but you don't have any way of measuring the time or the distance, or you don't know where you're at on that journey, you can get lost. And the same thing happens with our goals.

If we don't set goals that are measurable, it becomes too soft, so to speak. It's a hard or difficult target to hit. So, measuring becomes really critically important. It allows us as individuals to track our advancement and determine when a goal has been achieved.

David Lowry: I was telling you earlier that I want to be a better husband, improve relationships in my family, with my children and so forth. How can we make that more measurable?

Don Drew: Okay. So, let's say, this is a little bit of a stretch perhaps, but let's say that you want to spend more time talking with Cary. And so it's something

as simple as saying I want to improve my communication with my spouse. We're going to have this time set aside whenever, however you want to do it. And we're going to do that at least, I don't know, four times a week, right? Right? And we're going to make that a priority.

And well, for give you an example, in Christy and I's case, every morning our usual thing is we get a cup of coffee and we'll have a conversation in the morning about what we're going to do that day and so on. And it gives us some time. We've set aside or blocked that time, right?

David Lowry: So, block the time.

Don Drew: That's a very specific thing, right? It's finding a specific time. The second part in terms of measurable is we do that almost every day. But when we don't for a few days, it becomes intuitively obvious that we're not communicating, right? In that sense, it is measurable.

David Lowry: So, there are ways of quantifying things that you might think you couldn't. For instance, Don one of your goals is to become a more calm person. Maybe one of the things that you could do, and I'm just throwing this out there is you could keep a journal, and rank yourself on how calm you were today, and what you think might have contributed to your state of being calm, versus days when you weren't calm.

Don Drew: An excellent idea.

David Lowry: What Don and I are trying to say here is that just because something is a little bit soft and fluffy doesn't mean that you can't trust the process of trying to do some things that you measure to help you be more mindful of the thing you're trying to do.

Don Drew: So, our third letter in SMART is achievable.

David Lowry: You want something you have to stretch a bit on, right? But they do need to be obtainable I was joking with Don earlier and said, *this year is my year to become enlightened*. Yes, great. That's a great goal. This is my year to become an NBA star. This is my year to be on WrestleMania. I could be doing a lot of those things, right? No, I can't. It's not obtainable at my age, at my level of fitness, at my level of expectation of improvement. I have to have something more attainable. So, I have to find something that's realistic yet a stretch for me too.

Don Drew: Yeah. Okay. So, I think this is one of the most important actually in many ways. They're all important in their own way. But this idea of being achievable or attainable becomes really important, especially if we're thinking about how we're setting goals that relate to others. Okay. We're trying to motivate others. We're trying to get others to work with us at work or in our family to achieve a goal. When we set a goal that is obviously too difficult, nobody sees as attainable, they become demotivated. There's an entire science actually behind this. It has to do with expectancy and expectancy theory. And I'm not going to go into all of that, except to say that when we perceive that we can't achieve something. We may go through the motions, but our heart's not in it, so to speak. If we perceive that it's not achievable, that's one thing. Now, the other, there is another side of this. Okay.

And that is if we set goals that are too soft, too easy, then they are not taken seriously. And so people aren't motivated to work very hard at them. So, really there's a little bit of an art and science here in selecting a goal and ensuring it is attainable.

David Lowry: Sure. Now we move on to our fourth one, which is relevant. The SMART go, S M A R, Relevant. Don, why don't you tell us about that?

Don Drew: Relevance means is it meaningful in so many ways? Okay. Does it contribute meaningfully to our vision or our goal or our mission? If our long term aim is a career advancement, for instance, in our field, a relevant goal might be to complete a particular certification or educational landmark or take a certain job or an extra duty at work or something like that.

The relevance is tied to the meaning, which also is tied very heavily to our motivation for success. Really, all this, when we're talking about goals, setting goals, achieving goals, it's all about motivation, right? When we don't perceive something to be relevant or important or meaningful, then we are not generally speaking, very motivated to try, to even try to work very hard at it.

David Lowry: Sure. And also with relevance is you want to make sure that the actions you're going to take actually help you achieve the things you talked about earlier. So, if you are going to get stronger, you probably ought to spend time with the weights instead of all of your time running at track and field.

You've got to have the works that lead to the outcome that you desire. Well, I think we've got one more on here.

Don Drew: We do. And that's the T in SMART. That stands for the term time bound/ what that means is setting a deadline or a time frame within which to complete something. I know David I know you've experienced this too as a professor. It doesn't really matter when we set a particular paper or something due, right? I mean, the students generally speaking, wait until a week or maybe sometimes...

David Lowry: The night before.

Don Drew: An hour before it's due to get started on it. And if we set that somewhere else, we set that time somewhere else in the semester, which, by the way, is a trick I learned. I started having my papers do at various times during the semester in order to break up the work so they wouldn't allow things to pile up on themselves because all their other classes are piling up and so on. So, setting dates for ourselves, setting due dates and things of that nature help motivate us in some very specific ways. It helps us prioritize our tasks, manage time effectively, or at least more effectively. We are more motivated to complete a task which we understand has a due date, has that pressure.

David Lowry: Yeah, absolutely. For instance, Don I've taken three online classes this year. My goal was to learn more about things I was interested in, right? So, I took these online classes. The classes had built in due dates for every week. That was great for me because that put pressure on me to complete them, do the work and get it in by the time it had to be done.

Don Drew: Yeah.

Conclusion and New Year Wishes

Don Drew: So, we started today with me saying that New Year's resolutions may not be a good idea because of a number of things that keep us from being successful at them. There are at least five elements that we can employ in setting those goals, those resolutions that will help us have a better chance of being successful. David, why don't you review those really quick.

David Lowry: Okay here .We go So, we said it was SMART goals. And S stands for specific. M.

Don Drew: Measurable.

David Lowry: A, Achievable. R,

Don Drew: Relevant,

David Lowry: And the last one, T for Timebound.

Don Drew: Put them together. And the bottom line on this, David, is when we set our goals, we set our resolutions, okay we can do that, and maybe we should do it, but we should also take the time to pay attention to make them SMART goals, and it'll give us a better chance at achieving them.

So, as 2024 comes to a close, David and I want to wish you the very best in 2025, and thank you for making Peaceful Life Radio a part of your life, and for allowing us to be your place on the internet, dedicated to helping people live happier and more peaceful lives. Happy New Year!

David Lowry: Happy New Year!