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## **A BRAND NEW YEAR – OR IS IT?**

**By Dr. Larry W. Waterman, Registered Psychologist**

Welcome to 2006! This is going to be a great year and I know most of you have high hopes and expectations for the coming year. Others have probably decided that it's not worth setting goals or making New Year's resolutions because they have never worked in the past. I would like to give you some ideas, hints and tips about how you can be more successful in achieving your goals and resolutions in the coming year.

To me, there are three steps involved in being successful in any endeavor that you may pursue. The first has to do with being extremely clear with yourself about what exactly it is you want to accomplish. If you make a resolution that you want to be "happier; more relaxed; richer; find a better job; lose weight; drink less"; or any other worthwhile goal, you need to quantify and clarify exactly what you mean by that statement. For example, let me use losing weight as one such resolution. The first step involves being brutally honest with yourself. Exactly how much do you weigh and what is your proposed goal weight? Once you have determined these two factors, it would be helpful to have a serious talk with your physician to determine if there is any health risks involved. Once that's been eliminated, you can set up a realistic program involving decreased intake, increased activity (yes, I mean exercise) and an increased awareness of the nutritional value of the food that you are putting in your body. It's extremely important to also set realistic goals for yourself.

The second step will be to determine realistically how you are going to go about losing your weight. Can you really lose five pounds a week on a consistent basis? Probably a half-pound done consistently over several months would be more in line with the research. Remember, the overall goal is to be successful in achieving small steps that lead to your ultimate success. Unfortunately, too many people set unrealistic expectations for themselves that are impossible to achieve. When that happens, they get discouraged, perhaps get somewhat depressed and upset, and often begin eating more than they did prior to starting on their weight-loss program. Having worked with hundreds of people over the years on this topic, the hardest concept for most people to grasp is the need for relatively consistent small achievements over a long period of time. Unfortunately, many of us tend to be impatient and want everything to happen immediately. It took you quite some time to gain the weight that you have and it's going to take some time to get back to the more physically fit person that you would like to be.

The third step and perhaps the hardest of all is to implement and maintain your program on a consistent basis. I know it's not fun to get up early in the morning to do you exercise before you start the rest of your daily activities. However, for many people that is the best time to implement a regular program of exercise. It is also important to keep

track of how much food you are actually putting in your body (including liquid beverages). Unless you document as you go along, in my experience you are almost doomed to failure. Most of the successful weight-loss programs that I'm aware of all have a very strong component of accountability.

I chose losing weight for my example because it's something that is becoming an increasingly serious problem in North America. However, the steps that I laid out can be used for achieving almost any goal that you set for yourself. Let's suppose you want to improve your working conditions and get a better job. Once again, you first need to be extremely honest with yourself in terms of the skills and abilities that you currently possess. You can then look at what is required for the kind of position that you would like to achieve. The difference between what you can do now and what you will need to do will determine the improvements that you will need to implement. Remember, it's important to reinforce yourself along the way and give yourself a reward for positive consistent behaviour. We are all human and we all like to be recognized when we are being successful.

I hope these hints, tips and suggestions will help you to be more successful in achieving your goals in the coming year. I personally believe it's unfortunate that more people don't set higher standards for themselves, although I certainly understand why. Unfortunately, most of us are never taught how to be successful in achieving our goals. Finally, if you try to implement what I suggested and are still not successful in making consistent gains in achieving your goals, you may want to consider getting professional help. Sometimes just a few sessions to help you clarify your goals, set up a realistic program, and learn how to build in worthwhile rewards can mean the difference between success and failure. Whatever you decide, we at Waterman & Associates want to wish you the very best in the New Year and success at achieving you goals. To paraphrase a famous saying, a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

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