Tiny Resolutions

Your Brain Can’t Handle New Year’s Resolutions
Science tells us that willpower is not enough. Your pre-frontal cortex handles willpower. It is like a muscle that needs to be trained. If you decide to train that muscle at the start of the new year with a resolution to quit smoking, start going to the gym, or lose lots of weight, that’s the equivalent of a 300 pound barbell you want to lift without any previous training. So, you must start small…with habits.

Resolutions vs Habits—vague aspirations don’t work
Resolutions rely on motivation and willpower. However, your brain cannot sustain multiple unfamiliar behaviors for very long on sheer willpower and good intention. The problem is clear: any abstract goal you have that is not tied to a specific behavior is nearly impossible for your brain to focus on. That’s why New Year’s resolutions (and diets) fail to endure. Instead, the key is to make any goal a habit first. And most importantly, make it a tiny one.

Resolution: Quit smoking vs. Habit: Stop smoking that 1 cigarette you have every morning after breakfast.
Resolution: Eat healthy food vs. Habit: Start substituting that 1 daily morning pastry for a banana.
Resolution: Lose weight vs. Habit: Every evening after work, go for a 2-3 minute run or walk around the block.
Resolution: Manage stress vs. Habit: Meditate for 2-3 minutes every morning after you wake up.

By immediately breaking down each resolution and seeing what the smallest habit could be, your chances of succeeding will be 50% higher.

Tiny Habits by BJ Fogg
This is where Stanford researcher BJ Fogg’s “tiny habit” approach is effective. His method to changing behavior is simple and rewards small victories along the way. To accomplish our goals, he says we need motivation, ability and a trigger (a call to action).

Fogg’s format:
“After I (existing behavior), I will (new habit).”

Here’s an example for someone trying to, say, add a little spark to his or her marriage:
“After I enter the house at the end of the day, I will kiss my partner for 10 seconds.”

And here’s another example for someone trying to stress less at work:
“After I sit at my desk, I will take three deep breaths.”

Sounds easy enough, but “old habits are hard to break.” Start with a plan. Think big, but act by taking baby steps and making small adjustments. Be kind to yourself. Celebrate the little wins along the way. Spend some time watching his 17 minute lecture [link] to learn how to embrace tiny habits that can lead to real change. You can even join a free 5-day session of a Tiny Habits workshop. The next one starts January 4 but you must register by January 2 on Eventbrite.