



The key to
success
with your
new goals is
your habits

5 ways you sabotage success
and what to do instead

Jen Taylor

The key to success with your new goals is your habits: 5 ways you sabotage success and what to do instead

When you are creating New Year's resolutions, starting a new program or identifying new goals, one of the first things to consider is how to create the habits that create successful results. Unfortunately, most people start out by thinking about ONLY about outcomes and that is usually a recipe for failure.

James Clear, author of [Atomic Habits](#), explains why focusing on goals or results is actually the least effective way to ensure success: *because identifying a goal doesn't actually get you any closer to achieving it.* He also says "winners and losers have the same goals."

For example, you can very clearly set a goal to lose 30 pounds and then weigh yourself every morning. Neither the goal nor the behavior of measuring your weight will get you any closer to losing 30 pounds though!

You will need to spend time envisioning your successful outcome! Martha Beck says "if you can't dream it, you can't do it."

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Visualize yourself obtaining the goal and get really clear on what you want success to look and feel like. This will create some energy to help pull you towards the outcome like a magnet.

Also, focus on framing your goals and habits in positive terms (what you want to see more of) rather than as deficits (things you need to stop or get rid of).

Here are 5 of the most common ways that I see people sabotage their goals from the start and 5 solutions that I have implemented from studying James Clear's book, Atomic Habits that will set you up for success.

5 WAYS THAT YOU SABOTAGE YOUR GOALS

Problem 1: The goal is too far into the future!

Whether your goal is to lose weight or to add 10,000 subscribers to your YouTube channel, many people have lofty goals that can not be achieved in one day. Because your progress will feel so incredibly slow and tedious, you might be tempted to give up because you won't see the results you are looking for quickly enough.

New behaviors don't stick without some instant rewards and when the outcome is too far away, you have to create short-term rewards.

Solution:

Use the **Seinfeld chain method** and measure something really SMALL.

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Jerry Seinfeld (before he was famous), committed to writing a joke every day. He would mark an X on his calendar when he completed the joke for the day and the goal was "don't break the chain." The X's became the daily reward on the path to the long-term goal of becoming a famous comedian.

(Note: the joke did not have to be funny...it just had to be written).

James Clear's book is called Atomic Habits for a reason.

He teaches us that VERY SMALL things done often have compound results.

James Clear says: "Never miss twice."

The key is that the habit you get the X for is something so small that you can't NOT do it. Floss one tooth, do one push-up, etc. The initial goal is just to create a new habit and to start getting a row of X's to build some incentive to continue.

Problem 2: One new behavior isn't usually enough.

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People have a hard time with the Atomic Habits model because "flossing one tooth" or "doing one push-up" might start that very tiny habit, but I think we are smart enough to realize that one new behavior (even a very consistent one) isn't enough to make substantial changes in our lives.

As a result, people are tempted to change everything at once: radical new diet + intense exercise plan + new vitamin regimen + sleep measurement tools, etc. We go all-out for a few days and then can not sustain the changes and fall right back into our default mode.

Solution:

Create a menu of behaviors to choose from that all align with your goal.

After establishing a chain with your one TINY habit, then add a menu of other complementary behaviors that you can choose from on any given day to add evidence to your belief system that *"I am a healthy person."*

Each day, ANY additional behavior from the menu helps get you closer to your goal. These may be things like grocery shopping for fruits/vegetables, researching (and then cooking) a new healthy recipe, taking the stairs instead of the elevator, etc. You don't have to do all of them every day, but you can choose any one of them to build up your belief system that you are the type of person with this quality.

James Clear says: "You should be far more concerned with your current trajectory than with your current results."

Problem 3: Your goal is linked to an external source

If you are trying to lose weight to make your ex jealous or you're gathering YouTube subscribers to try to impress your friends, you will struggle to maintain the new habit! This focus on how other people will see you might motivate you in the short-term, but [research shows that external motivators](#) actually reduce our desire to achieve goals.

Solution:

Think about how you want to feel

Instead, think about how you want to feel when you have established this habit. Do you want to feel strong? Do you want to feel proud of your hard work and dedication? Thinking about how you will feel AFTER your workout might help motivate you to get started. I feel better when I have finished my workout first thing in the morning. I feel strong and focused throughout the day.

Notice how you feel about yourself when you are working on this new goal and try to intensify your connection to that feeling instead of worrying about what other people will say about it.

James Clear says "Every action you take is casting a vote for the type of person that you wish to become."

Problem 4: You've told too many people about your goal

This one is tricky because it also feels like a positive step towards accountability. However, by making a public statement about your goal, you actually get premature positive feedback about it. People will say "That's awesome, way to go!" before you've actually been to the gym or lost a pound. [Research has shown](#) that this public declaration can actually make you feel like you have already accomplished the goal and then you become LESS invested in doing the work required.

Solution:

Create a "square squad" and use it wisely.

Brene Brown talks about having a "square squad" of people whose opinions matter to you. There are people that you can really trust with your vulnerabilities and feelings. These are people that would fit on a 1 inch x 1 inch square card.

When you are starting a new goal, it is critical to have an accountability partner (or two).

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A coach, personal trainer or a mentor will check in with you, be a cheerleader and also a trusted voice for real feedback throughout your change process.

You need some of these people in your life....but what you don't need is 3000 of them giving you attaboys on social media before you've done anything new.

Share and celebrate your small victories with your small group and then share widely as you feel the habit becoming part of your identity.

Just focus on making small improvements all the time. Check in with your square squad to make sure you are moving in the right direction.

James Clear says: "Aim for 1% better. If you can get 1% better every day, you'll end up 37 times better by the time you're done."

Problem 5: You think your goal has an end date.

Anything worth doing well is worth doing for life.

Creating a healthy lifestyle is not something that you do in 2022 and then stop doing next year. You might be able to lose 30 pounds in six months but that is not the end-point.

When you think about your goal as something that gets completed with a big checkmark, then you are selling yourself short!

Solution:

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Consider your goal part of your new identity.

These new habits become part of who you are, forever! You will be surprised at what your body can accomplish when you stop focusing on your weight and start building muscles, or agility, or speed. You will be amazed at how many people you can help when you stop focusing on subscribers or likes and start creating interesting content.

James Clear says: "New goals don't deliver results, new lifestyles do."

Don't think about your goals or resolutions as a one-and-done activity. Yes, celebrate your victories, rest when needed, give yourself permission to flounder a bit as you learn new things.

But, consider your habits as a lifelong identity and you will accomplish so much more than you ever thought possible with your initial goal.

Here's a quick summary of my favorite James Clear quotes about habits - pick your favorite and post it on your fridge, make it your screensaver, or hang it from your bathroom mirror.

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ALL OF YOUR ENERGY SHOULD GO INTO BUILDING BETTER HABITS, NOT CHASING BETTER RESULTS.

James Clear, author of Atomic habits -

1. **Never miss twice.**
2. **Every action you take is casting a vote for the type of person that you wish to become.**
3. **Aim for 1% better. If you can get 1% better every day, you'll end up 37 times better by the time you're done.**
4. **You should be far more concerned with your current trajectory than with your current results.**
5. **New goals don't deliver results, new lifestyles do.**

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If you found this helpful, subscribe to my mailing list for tips and strategies to help make the unmanageable or seemingly impossible feel a little more do-able! My focus is on actionable ways to thrive emotionally, excel professionally, and energize your own creativity.

Don't just wish for things, let's work for them (together). [Join Our Mailing list!](#)

Warning: The strategies and information I send often encourage people to read more books, take more classes, and live a more intentionally joyful life. But I only send you things I REALLY believe in.

Jen Taylor, LCSW-C, RPT-S

Jen Taylor is a social worker, therapist, teacher and writer in Baltimore, Maryland.

As a therapist, Jen helps people organize traumatic and difficult experiences so that people can experience more joy in their lives and relationships. As a teacher, she helps other therapists find steady theoretical footing so that they can creatively amplify healing across the globe. She helps teach all people how to use their journal to harness their own inner wisdom. And as a writer...well, she writes daily in her journal, occasionally in blogs and whenever possible in growing collection of professional books.

Jen is a military spouse licensed in multiple states. She is a mother of a three (a daughter and then twin boys born just thirteen months later). She is an avid reader, an adventurous thrill-seeker, a travel enthusiast, and a girl who lifts weights and runs for fun.