Setting Intentions that Work for a Mindful Life in the New Year

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The fresh new year is upon us – a time when many resolutions are made, but far fewer carried out and accomplished. Ever noticed how full the gym is in January but tapers off within a few months? Or made a resolution to start a regular meditation practice, only to end up feeling guilty that you haven’t even practiced twice the first week. Or perhaps you planned to embrace a non-diet healthy lifestyle approach, only to return to diet mentality and the familiar yo yoing. Perhaps it’s your ‘big dream’ home project or non-profit that you want to start, that gets lost in the wish list only to be relegated to the bottom for next year.



Resolutions are important. They give us hope and a direction, but they usually lack support to carry them through. The good news is that research and experience offers a mindful approach that works to carry through and manifest in our lives what is truly most important to us. When we mindfully pause and set resolutions that connect to our intentions and values, we give our resolutions the necessary booster to step into living in alignment with the changes we want to see.

Take a mindful moment to be intentional as you set your resolutions. And even if you’ve already set your resolutions for 2018, you can still benefit from going through the steps below to bolster them with mindful intention.

1. Stop Before You Start– Take a mindful pause to declutter your mind of last year’s unmet resolutions and the busyness of the start of the year. By settling and calming your mind, you’ll be in the right state of mind to set the tone for this year.
2. Clarify And Prioritize – What are the changes you would like to make in this New Year? Pick one or two that are the most important to you, the ones you feel energized about. It’s important that these are truly what you want and not someone else’s idea of what you *should*This intention can be a broad sweep, not specific, such as “I want to have a better sense of well-being and energy this year”.
3. Name Your Values – Reflect upon your most important values at this time in your life. What are they? Is it having health, energy to do the things you love, well-being, a healthy lifestyle, creativity, self-expression, social connection, making a difference in the world or…? Reflect why these are important to you.  Consider what would be more possible in your life as you live your values more fully.
4. Power Your Intentions With Your Values – Your intention becomes your compass, pointing you in the direction of where you want to be, how you want to feel in your life.  You can connect your intentions to your values to power them up, or boost your motivation to take the steps to reach them. Research actually tells us that when intentions are connected to values we are more apt to be successful. An intention may include more than one value. For example, “I want to be more present and connected with my family and colleagues to deepen these relationships.”  “I want to be rested and energized so that I can most positively contribute at home and to my work.”
5. Action – The next step is to set some very specific actions to help you reach your broader intention. You can think of these action steps as the day-to-day steps you will take to keep your intentions moving forward. Examples of action steps might be to practice mindfulness meditation for 1% of your day, that’s just 14 minutes a day. Others might be to practice eating at least one meal or snack mindfully a day, or to schedule in specific blocks of uninterrupted times to work on that dream project.
6. Staying On Course – It can be easy though to keep working, do errands or procrastinate with TV or screen surfing instead of taking the steps of self-care. Practice *Pause-Reflect*–*Power Up*. Pause and take a few mindful breaths. Reflect on what might be in the way of doing these action steps if it’s not coming easily. Power Up as you reconnect to your original intentions and values fueling what you’re wanting to make happen or inspire in your life.
7. Practice Self-Compassion Rather than Judgment. We can get tripped up when we judge ourselves for not following our intentions or reaching our goals. Sometimes we might even turn the other way or give up. But you can let go of all or nothing thinking, You don’t have to be perfect, just do your best and recommit in the next moment, the next day.

This year *Power Up* your resolutions with mindful intention. Experience how initiating change by taking a mindful pause, and connecting with your values and intentions, can make all the difference in creating the life you truly want – and finding yourself freed up to set fresh new resolutions next year!

A version of this blog by Andrea Lieberstein is on eMindful.org, Jan. 16, 2018.