



Keeping the New Year's Resolutions That You Make!

Remember what you know about keeping promises.

by Christine Thomas

The pure openness, the freshness, of a new year presents itself. The blank canvas of this year awaits the painting of our heart's desire. This is the year, we tell ourselves. This is the year, we know it is, for us to write that book, run that marathon, lose that weight, get organized, create it, make it, do it, have it, be it. With resolve, with firmness of purpose, we make the **promises** to ourselves called **New Year's Resolutions** that we intend to keep. Or do we?

Slow down a minute and think about the promises you have made in your life that you have kept. Marriage vows, completing school, saving for and going on that dream vacation, paying on a mortgage or credit card, raising children - all of these started as promises you made to yourself or to others. Think about these or other **promises you have made and stuck with**. What got you to keep these promises?

Usually the promises we keep have some of these components:

- They are based on what we desire, on something we really, really want. The key words here are what we desire. The promises we keep are the ones that have meaning for us, not for others. Pleasing others is not usually a strong enough motivator for seeing our resolve through hard times.
- They come out of our **core values**. We keep those promises that are in alignment with that which has meaning for us at a deep level. What is deeply rooted will hold on in the face of the constant challenges of daily life.
- There is a structure that supports us in keeping them. We don't say we'll pay for this new car sometime. We create a month by month, clearly defined payment plan with built in penalties for not following this plan. This supportive structure includes someone to hold us accountable or to act as our witness.
- They are clearly focused and well defined. Promising to get in shape does not focus my desire as successfully as when I commit to going to yoga class 2 times a

week and practicing at home 2 more times a week for the next 3 months does.

With **focus** and definition I eliminate the wiggle room. Focus implies narrowing. Promising to change multiple things about myself all at once diffuses my energy too much, weakening my power.

- There is often ceremony or ritual involved, something that ups the ante of the action, something that reminds us this is to be taken seriously. Ritual connects our promises to us with the support of our community and of what we consider sacred.
- They involve some sort of a stretch for us. Those things that come too easily or require too little of us don't **engage our inner strength** to have or to get or to keep. And, as the saying goes, easy come, easy go. A stretch does not mean they are unrealistic or unattainable either. They are within our reach if we stretch.
- The time frame is understood. To death or until graduating or for 30 years or until the promotion - all let us know what we're getting into and how long we will stick with it. The time frame can change, and often there is a built in mechanism for dealing with changes, but the duration is specified. This allows us to come up with the resources needed to be successful for that length of time and to **celebrate** the completion of the promise.
- Long term promises frequently have bench marks or celebration points along the way so that we can sustain the effort.

None of what I've listed above is probably a surprise to you. What other things do you remember about the promises you have made and kept? How were you able to keep them? What combination of factors contributed to your success? What are your words of wisdom regarding the keeping of promises?

I think we all know how to make and keep promises, but it could be that calling these promises New Year's Resolutions somehow trivializes them. Despite the opportunity that the freshness of the new year offers us, repeated failures of unsupported and unrealistic promises dilute our power and diminish the likelihood of our success. Many of us we know we're so bad at keeping our resolutions that it's as if we're making these promise with our fingers crossed. They're only New Year's Resolutions, right? I don't

really expect myself to keep them, do I?

If this really is the year for you to write that book, run that marathon, lose that weight, get organized, create it, make it, do it, have it, be it, then remember what you already know about how you keep your promises. Make the **commitments** and create the plans to achieve them in the ways that work for you. Up the ante yourself this time. Uncross your fingers and go for it!

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