

Why I'm ditching New Year's resolutions

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Be honest, how many of you hit the ground running on January 1 with your New Year's resolutions? I'd planned to be a whole new human, but as my friend gently pointed out, the date change on the calendar doesn't reprogram our entire being. You're the same flawed person on the 1st as you were on the 31st. And I think the system needs reorganizing.

For me, January has been spent eating leftover Christmas cheese and thinking about joining the gym. Hardly an overhaul. As I often do in times of crisis or want of reassurance, I turned to X (Twitter) — something I'd vowed to spend less time on in 2024. It turns out, there are plenty of us not doing what we said we'd do. Why? How hard is it not to drink alcohol? How unthinkable is a Body Combat class? How painful is a social media detox?

In 1981, Narcotics Anonymous published a quote that read: "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results." New Year's resolutions are like that. They are insane. Sure, you might



Photo by Hu Jun

go for a jog or do five minutes on Duolingo for a few days, but six months down the line you're likely back where you started. Sorry, but it's true. So why do we keep setting ourselves up for failure by setting New Year's resolutions? As I said, it's insane. That's why

many people don't believe in the tradition at all.

When we subscribe to the idea of "new year, new me," what we're saying is "I'm not good enough." That's a spiky pill to swallow. And we choke on it every 12 months. Commercialism watches. That's why you'll find a bunch of gym membership offers and discounts on healthy meal packages around January. I don't think I've once successfully stuck to a body blitz or juice diet, nor am I fluent in Chinese despite making it one of my many vows.

Well, I quit. And I think you should too.

What promise did you make to yourself this year? Did it come from a place of self-deprecation or loving kindness? My bet being it leads far quicker to the former. We all want to win at life and self-improvement matters. But is there a kinder and smarter way to do it?

On X, I came across the idea of setting a New Year's theme.

Unlike resolutions, themes get to the root of our philosophies and what we really want out of life. The person who posted said their theme was "frequency" because there were some things he needs to do more of, and some things he needs to do less. Another person themed their year "bridging" because they hoped to bridge language barriers and relationships.

I instantly liked the idea of theming my year rather than setting demands on it. But what's the difference? Are themes a fad or is this new approach a better way to achieve our goals? To find out, I spoke to my close friend, life coach and stress counselor Ans Hooft. She's wonderful and never afraid to compassionately hold me to account. I adore her, as would you. Here's what she said:

"I don't believe in New Year's resolutions because I think you can start changing your life any day of the year. When we fall short of a resolution, we

tend to think everything is lost and give up altogether. I like the idea of themes, especially if you think one through that aligns with your values. You can focus on rewarding yourself each time you've worked toward your theme rather than beating yourself up when you fail to meet set targets."

I agree. And I landed on the theme "self-care." It's something my 2023 saw very little of and something I desperately need. For me, my theme encompasses kindness, exercise, inspiring work and friendship. Looking after myself in ways that are useful while also being forgiving. My husband helpfully pointed out that themes are less actionable than resolutions in terms of motivating change. He could be right. But given the average resolution lasts 3.74 months, I'll take my chances and let you know how he gets on with his.

Perhaps the frustrating fact is, we're screwed either way. Change doesn't happen overnight. Whether it's a resolution, theme or a pact with the devil, change takes time and effort. In a society that wants it all and wants it now, that's hard to handle.

We're two weeks into the new year, and I'm still me. You're likely still you. Whether your resolutions are going strong or not at all, think about a theme. It's not a bad idea for life in general. When you look back on your time, what theme would you want to represent it and why? It could be adventure, balance, consistency or love. There are so many words to choose from. Each with its ups and downs that are worth the ride because you chose them. Surely that's a better place to begin than rigid rules and torturous routines.

So, go kindly on yourself this January, progress not perfection is the aim. If you're taking steps, you're making strides. And that makes you a winner in my book.



Life coach and stress counselor Ans Hooft