

Change expert's guide helps make resolutions come true

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Just Change It!

By Peggy Grall

Art Bookbindery, 183 pages, \$19.95

Many Canadians begin the new year with resolutions for improvement in their life, but few have prepared them as carefully as change expert and psychotherapist Peggy Grall.

Every year between Christmas and New Year's Day, she sets aside a full day to establish goals for the year ahead. She locks the door, takes the phone off the hook and puts on her favourite music.

She begins by reviewing the previous year's goals, looking at successes and shortfalls. She considers the effort she put into them and tries to figure out why she was successful at reaching some goals and not others.

She then turns to some material she has gathered for the occasion: old magazines, newspaper articles, pictures of family and events, and keepsakes. She thumbs through them, cutting out anything that seems to jump out at her and pasting it on a large piece of poster board, along with any single words, phrases and freehand drawings that also seem appropriate.

"This left brain activity never ceases to amaze me. Often I will have cut something out that didn't appear to have any significance in the cutting, only to discover its meaning when placed on the board," she writes in *Just Change It!*

"A piece of costume jewellery might symbolize playfulness or a renewed commitment to financial freedom. A discarded Lego piece brings to mind my desire to spend time with my children and grandchildren."

After the poster is complete -- and she takes a break for lunch and a walk -- she captures her goals on paper. She limits herself to four, making sure each one attracts and excites her, and is the best she can tackle for the coming year.

The poster then goes up on the wall -- and remains there all year, as a daily reminder of her goals.

Her final step is to develop what she calls "an operational description" of her goals, using the following questions:

- Describe your goal in detail.
- Specifically, what needs to be different?
- What will you feel like when you've accomplished this?
- Exactly what will you be doing differently?
- How will others be reacting to you differently?
- How will you see yourself differently when you've accomplished this?
- What opportunities will open up to you as a result of this change?
- Describing how life will be after you have completed your goal gives you a glimpse of the future and helps to cement commitment to the path ahead.

It's one of the many techniques she describes in her book to overcome our tendency to fail at changes in behaviour -- a problem that hits its zenith, of course, at the turn of the year as we make resolutions we fail to keep.

She reminds us that it takes about 21 days to change a habit - and that transformation can be very difficult. Often people fail because they simply aren't willing to stick it out and do the hard work required, because the process doesn't feel right.

"Often the next step in your change process won't feel right. . . even when it is right. In fact, sometimes it may be painful, boring or costly to take that next step."

But avoid the temptation to skip that stage, she advises. Indeed, making change involves going through what she calls the "change lane" -- the transitional phase when you aren't solid yet in your new behaviour or way of thinking. You will experience anxiety and lapses in motivation, disorientation and self-doubt; the re-emergence of old, unresolved issues; and feelings of personal and professional vulnerability.

But that's a sign you are making progress -- and if you hang on, you just might make that New Year's resolution or other desired change come true.

Her book is an easy-to-read guide to personal change, with explanations drawn from the psychological literature and her own experiences.

It doesn't take long to finish but she encourages readers to take 21 days with the book to improve their ability to change.