

How do you successfully implement good intentions - and is there potentially even a more effective approach to more good feelings in 2023?

Reading time 10 minutes

Every year, most of us make some New Year's resolutions to improve ourselves. And over 92% fail with their new, good and really serious resolutions. This is mainly because we make our resolutions consciously, i.e. in System 2. But implementation only works if the new behaviour is established as a routine in System 1. With [BrainCandy No. 63](#) I had introduced James Clear's clever book, 'The 1% Method', the book and its tips are still considered the best brain-friendly approach to increase the likelihood of success for new resolutions quite unexcitingly. For your convenience, I have added the link to BrainCandy 63 again.

However, I hope that the many new faces in the gym who are now blocking the machines won't read my tips and immediately lose the battle with their inner enemy.



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However, there are fundamental discussions about whether it is at all worthwhile to make (too) many changes every year? And to regularly experience oneself as a loser if the change in behaviour is not successful. There is something to that, at least in part. When I read about the many goals that some people set for themselves, I often get the feeling that people with too little self-love are at work here. Even if some behavioural changes are successful, the goal of higher self-efficacy is unlikely to materialise. The psychological deficit is not so easy to overcome.

A justified criticism of the New Year's resolution wave comes from another corner: we are notoriously bad at asking ourselves before what will really make us happy in the future. This is not only true for buying desired products such as cars, real estate, tech gadgets, jewellery or new furniture. We get used to the new state too quickly and the nice mood is gone.

But there is a better way to reliably increase your happiness experience in the new year: The **Last Year Review** as a stimulus for the New Year. This idea goes back to the well-known American author, entrepreneur, podcaster and lifestyle guru Tim [Ferriss](#).



The basic principle is nothing short of brilliant. If we consciously review the past year, we will remember which situations and contexts triggered strong positive emotions in us and which triggered strong negative emotions. This has the great advantage that we don't waste our energy on potentially unrealistic expectations for the future, but recognise what really worked. Tim says: "our days here are too precious not to fill them with the people and activities that nourish us most".

A 'Last Year Review' (LYR) takes 30-60 minutes and runs like this:

1. *Grab a notepad and create two columns: POSITIVE and NEGATIVE.*
2. *Go through your calendar from the last year, looking at every week.*
3. *For each week, jot down on the pad any **people** or **activities** or **commitments** that triggered peak positive or negative emotions for that month. Put them in their respective columns.*
4. *Once you've gone through the past year, look at your notepad list and ask, "What 20% of each column produced the most reliable or powerful peaks?"*
5. *Based on the answers, take your "positive" leaders and schedule more of them in the new year. Get them on the calendar now! Book things with friends and prepay for activities/events/commitments that you know work. It's not real until it's in the calendar. That's step one. Step two is to take your "negative" leaders, put "NOT-TO-DO LIST" at the top, and put them somewhere you can see them each morning for the first few weeks of 2022. These are the people and things you *know* make you miserable, so don't put them on your calendar out of obligation, guilt, FOMO, or other nonsense.*

And just remember: it's not enough to remove the negative. That simply creates a void. Get the positive things on the calendar ASAP, lest they get crowded out by the bullshit and noise that will otherwise fill your days.

So much for Tim Ferriss. I've rarely seen such an incredibly short guide to something as effective from him as this. Otherwise he fills entire books with his lifestyle hacks.



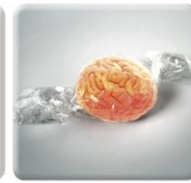
Photo credit: AndreyPopov/istock.com

I am fascinated by his idea, which is as seemingly simple as it is very brain-friendly. The therapist and coach Chris Cordry started with Tim's LYR five years ago and reports on his most important [experiences](#) - a few of which I reproduce here as motivation. It is touching how close the counsellor lets us get to his person:

1. learning

Online courses can be amazing or inadequate, but taking more than one at a time is a recipe for failure.

Personal courses, trainings and conferences always captivate me and become positive, intellectually and socially stimulating experiences.



2. work and career

The "Not to Do" part of the Year in Review is really important - don't sleep on it. I ended up doing several of the things on my not to do list for 2020 within the first two months of the year, with predictable consequences.

Having too much free time is just as bad as being busy and stressed out. All that time tends to get filled with low-quality activities like internet browsing, binge-watching, and overthinking.

3. relationships

Relationships with close friends and family are among the most important things in my life. A handful of people are responsible for 80% or more of all my positive feelings and experiences. I need to schedule more outings, activities and even zoom calls with these people.

Spending time with my daughter is one of the most meaningful things in my life. Even seemingly mundane things like attending her parent-teacher conferences have been surprisingly impactful.

Your romantic partner may have the single greatest positive or negative impact on your emotional wellbeing, so choose wisely. Find a relationship where you, naturally being you, makes the other person happy. And the other person, naturally being the other person, makes you happy.

4. mental health

In the morning I need to get out of the house, get sunlight and fresh air, and interact with people. That's why I love going to coffee shops in the morning - it's not just the caffeine that's a major mood booster.

My last depressive episode was in fall 2019. I went to therapy, meditated and took supplements. But of all the things I did that helped, lifting weights seems to have made the biggest difference, with the deadlift having the biggest impact on my mood and energy levels of any single exercise.

Meditation had a big impact on my wellbeing, but it wasn't long retreats that made the biggest difference. It was shorter, more frequent meditations and practice in daily life.

I can relate to Cordry's experience, please read his linked post with all 22 Learnings.

For myself, I will use both methods this year. For the LYR, I will set up an additional private calendar. The private things have no place in the calendar that all employees can access. Therefore, I am certainly missing some sources of positive emotions from 2022. From the LYR I know, among other things, about the great importance of social experiences and how much I like to nudge you with new BrainCandies.

I will participate in Dry January again and gain experience with new non-alcoholic drinks and wines in the meantime. A carton of Mumm alcohol-free sparkling wine bottles is already cold.

Speaking of cold: I have been motivated by the neurologist Huberman to start every day with an ice-cold shower. The promised effect on dopamine and thus a sense of well-being and mental focus is the lure - and for that I am prepared to endure the one-minute pain (with a timer, of course, so that the inner enemy doesn't find a shortcut).

Whatever you do in the New Year, make it effective.



Book recommendation

By Ralph Ohnemus, Uwe H. Lebok, Florian Klaus:

Context marketing

The key to consumer behaviour to [order](#)



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