

How to set realistic goals using micro-goal setting

By Michelle Mudge-Riley, DO, MHA, RDN

The hope and glimmer of a new year rings in with fireworks and lofty visions of self-improvement. We love to set new goals in conjunction with turning the calendar to a new year, but many of us ([nearly 80%](#)) abandon our New Year's resolutions by February.

This new year, I implore you to change those large goals into smaller, more achievable goals by utilizing micro-goal setting.



External Circumstances

Being flexible and adaptable is not about changing your goals or giving up on them, but allowing yourself to adapt to an ever-evolving climate. Whether at home or work, there are ways the world can change overnight and often, without warning. Physicians know this well: some days are pleasant and you're reminded of the rewarding nature of practicing medicine; other days bring long hours, unpredictable cases and losing patients.

When our goals become unachievable due to external events or own our shortcomings, we feel disappointment, failure and that we should just give up. All of these feelings can be a negative cloud looming over our well-being.

Micro-Goal Setting

[Banner Health](#) distinguishes micro-goals as:

"Micro-goals are like [...] single steps. They move you toward your larger goals. With micro-goals, you set realistic expectations. Your micro-goals are easier to meet, and when you achieve them, you build confidence and momentum."

It's fine to start with your usual, big goal—but breaking that goal up into 5 to 10 small milestones gives you micro-goals to celebrate during your journey.

Harvard Business Review [researchers](#) found that making small strides toward big progress can actually increase a person's happiness. They detailed that the more often you can feel that positive sense of progress, the more likely you are to keep at those milestones to reach your overarching goal.

Establish Goals

Find your "why". Choose micro-goals that lead up to a larger goal. For example, if you want to lose 50 pounds, a micro-goal might be to take a short, lunchtime walk three times a week. Making incremental micro-goals will help you see that you are on your way—in turn, helping you succeed.

Timelines

Consider *not* adding a timeline to your goal—the added pressure of a time constraint can add unnecessary stress. If you do set a timeline, be sure to set a realistic one! Be gracious to yourself and use the micro-goals as guideposts to keep you on track.

Eliminate Fear

Having goals shouldn't be a process doomed to fail—but often our fantastical views of what we can actually accomplish can interfere with making meaningful steps to a healthier life. By having micro-goals, you can learn to enjoy your growth process and well-being journey.

During the course of the year, I encourage you to celebrate each micro-goal and to reflect on how it's helping you reach the larger goals you want to achieve.

We Can Help

[Contact us online](#), at **952.230.5109**, or through the **VITAL WorkLife App** to utilize a Physician Peer Coach to help you look to the future to develop stronger, more attainable goals. [VITAL WorkLife](#) is also here to support you in whatever stressors may be impacting you at home or work.