

5 Ways to Make 2014 Fabulous!

There is something exciting about the New Year! At the end of each year, I sit down with loved ones and reflect on the year behind us, remembering all the things that were accomplished, the successes and the challenges that were experienced. As much as I love to reminisce, it is more productive to look forward, knowing that the past is behind us and the present is here and now, making it a great opportunity to just 'be'. It is also an exciting time to explore all the things that we would still like to try, to challenge ourselves so that we can grow and enhance our self-worth. As a counselor and coach, I often notice how my clients blossom and enhance their well-being when they commit to continuing their journey by challenging themselves and making changes to improve their lives. Here are some popular ones that have been very effective for me and my clients.

Make your goals SMART: People often feel deflated when they don't achieve (or maintain) their New Year's resolutions, and probably because they don't make their goals realistic and achievable. Keep in mind that it takes anywhere from 1-3 months to feel comfortable with a new habit. It is also a gradual process for the new habit to feel routine. SMART goals are goals that are specific, measurable/meaningful, achievable, realistic/relevant, and timely. So, if you have never exercised on a regular basis, it may be unrealistic to think that you can get to the gym 7 days a week for an hour. A SMART goal may be: "I will walk 15 minutes 3 days a week starting tomorrow." You can always add to your goal later. It is important to continue creating goals for yourself so you have something to strive for, a chance to grow and hopefully let go of some self-defeating behaviors or thoughts.

Complete something on your bucket list: To keep your life interesting and to avoid regrets, it is helpful to think about what specific event or action you want to achieve by the end of the year and then plan to take action steps to complete it. So, if you have always wanted to learn a new language, you can begin the journey by researching how to register, what options you have (live or on-line), the cost, how realistic it is for you with your current commitments, etc. Then, you can adjust it as needed, knowing that you have made the commitment to achieve something you always wanted to do, instead of continuing to say, "I wish I would have learned another language."

Challenge yourself: In order to grow personally, professionally, or spiritually, it is imperative that you are able to challenge yourself. You need to push yourself past your comfort zone in order to grow, and you can do it gradually. For example, if you desire to run a half marathon, you can start out with walking, then jogging, maybe even joining a running group later. By taking steps to get to the next level, you are challenging yourself. Remember to keep your goals SMART throughout this process.

De clutter: Schedule bouts of time in your week to delve into unneeded paperwork, decide what clothes you can donate, or use organizers (whether it is an app to de-clutter or organize your emails or a clear and labeled container to keep items in). Organization is a huge time saver and de-stressor when you can find something easily. It's frustrating when you can't find something you know you have only to have to buy it again. De-cluttering is also good for your mood as it feels cleansing and takes up less 'brain space' when you know where things are or when you don't have to keep looking at a pile of old paperwork anymore. Get things off your checklist!

Let go of hurt and begin the healing process. Whether it means making amends to others, forgiving yourself so you can move forward, or just calling someone you have been thinking of, it is healing to make time each week or month to complete something that will make you feel better, heal your spirit and make someone else feel good as well. If someone has hurt you and it's not realistic to have direct contact with someone, you can write a letter to that person and then discard it if you'd like. The point here is to let go of past hurts that are weighing on you and burdening you, and to turn a new page in your life that allows you to heal and feel lighter. Give yourself permission to make mistakes and to forgive yourself, knowing that we are all in this journey together, and each of us deserves to feel worthy and valued.

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