



ARTICLE: **Making This Your Best Year Ever**

By Dr. Jennifer Howard

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Have you ever said to yourself, “This year I’m going to lose those extra, stubborn pounds once and for all?” And then what happened? Did you end up dropping a couple, and adding several back on? We’ve all had times when we’ve committed to an exercise plan, a meditation practice, or other reasonable goals and, in spite of our initial enthusiasm, had no success. Our resistance triumphed over our resilience. It can feel contradictory, like internal forces are pulling you in opposite directions. Part of you truly wants to change, and another part resists that change. There are a number of subtle and not so subtle strategies, both conscious and unconscious, that keep us stuck, even though we think we’re giving it our best shot.

Those opposing inner forces have a variety of origins. If instead of stepping on the treadmill, you reach for the cheese puffs, a younger part of you or your inner child might be distracting you in a misguided attempt to “soothe” you. Sometimes our conflicted feelings indicate something deeper. A discomfort with an idea or decision may be a signal that you’re not on the right track, or you’re on the right track but are afraid to move forward. Whatever their origin, these contradictory impulses can feel discouraging, yet they contain valuable information. As children they helped us survive our upbringing and were designed to protect us in our early lives

Following are five common strategies we use to divert us from our goals. As you recognize your participation in any of them, you can begin to heal old patterns and redirect your energy into more productive results:

Hidden Payoffs. It might surprise you that our stubborn issues have a hidden value, or secondary gain. Sometimes, unbeknownst to us, we hang on to our childhood perceptions to avoid experiencing loss or pain. If we struggle with unhappy relationships, perhaps we’ve not explored our feelings enough and could be avoiding fear of abandonment, being smothered, or hurt in some way. Indecisiveness, for example, might feel comfortable because we don’t

want to be responsible for making a “wrong” choice. As you begin to examine what might be a hidden payoff for you, it will lose its power, and you’ll grow stronger.

Hunger for Drama. Often, as people begin their inner exploration for healing or their spiritual journey, they hope for a dramatic experience to prove there’s more to life beyond the five senses. We want proof of God, the spiritual realm, and the possibility of healing. We may seek out the most inspiring guru, the most profound intuitive reading, or amazing encounters with loved ones who have passed. All of these can certainly inspire us at times, but outside of a larger context, they can sometimes distract us from healing our long-held issues, and reaching our full potential.

The Quick Fix. Of course we want transformation to be easy, instantaneous, and to happen magically. But while we might be moved by a weekend workshop or an inspiring book, and gain powerful insights and a shift in our perception, the problem with the quick fix is that it isn’t usually sustained over time. “Slow and steady” sounds like a lot of work. Real awareness and change takes time and effort. When you invest yourself in finding and healing the root cause of your suffering, you’ll create lasting change. You’ll learn to navigate any emotional weather, stormy or clear.

Spiritual Bypass. It’s sometimes tempting to side-step difficult thoughts and feelings. We’re afraid we’ll be overwhelmed, the pain will be endless, or we’ll judge our feelings as petty or somehow shameful, so we push them away. These actions create a strong internal conflict. If we don’t recognize and name our emotions, they operate behind the scenes. If we try to separate our human thoughts and feelings from our spiritual nature, then our personal shadow and our unexpressed pain from our unconscious mind will eventually rear its head. When we embrace our difficult feelings and thoughts, we loosen the grip of our challenges.

Remaining Shortsighted. Many cultures and traditions value the longer view of finding happiness and fulfillment. You might focus on one path or modality until another calls to you, but if you find yourself prematurely jumping from class to class, or book to book, you might be avoiding important emotional work. Perhaps you’re expecting immediate results, and if that doesn’t happen or the results don’t stick, then you give up too soon and move on to another method, teacher, or philosophy. While exploring different modalities is helpful, the long view sees our path as a life-long, or lives-long journey. It fosters psychological and spiritual maturity, so we can accept all of reality and live fully.

As you begin to recognize your old, outmoded coping strategies, and see how they had value for you in the past, you can begin to dismantle and reconcile the opposing, internal forces. You’ll gain the clarity you need to reach your goals. You’ll take steps more effectively without those hidden obstacles stopping you. You’ll see your journey as a great adventure, become curious about what’s next, and be willing to stay the course.



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