



*Stepping Stones for the Good Life*  
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**New Year's Resolutions: A Radical Suggestion**  
From the Desk of Glenda Haskell, *Life Coach*

Below is a fictitious but fairly typical list of New Year's Resolutions:

- Exercise seven days a week (well, okay, maybe *six*)
- Stop buying stuff I don't need (*after* I buy the latest iPad)
- Save more money
- Lose the extra [enter a # here] pounds
- Put together a budget and stick to it
- Call my parents at least once a week
- Be more patient about my partner's habits that drive me crazy
- Organize my desk (or better yet my whole house)
- Learn a new language
- Spend more quality time with the kids
- Leave work earlier
- Spend less time texting/on email
- Start the book I want to write

So what's wrong with this list--other than the fact that you feel exhausted just reading it?

According to Roy Baumeister and John Tierney, the authors of *Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength*, this 13-item list is far too long. Specifically, it's 12 items too long. How many items do they suggest including in a New Year's Resolution list. One. Yes, just *one*.

Why just one? In their book, drawing from numerous studies, Baumeister and Tierney offer a set of reasons why long lists of resolutions such as the one above, are self-defeating. The main reason, they suggest, is that we are all prone to what Baumeister has coined *ego depletion*, which he defines as "diminished capacity to regulate our thoughts, feelings, and actions."

Willpower, then, is our capacity to regulate ourselves. The authors claim that we spend our willpower on thoughts, emotions, impulses, and performance. They also claim that we each have a limited amount of willpower available over the course of the day. Also, we don't have different supplies of willpower for different types of activities. Rather, we draw on a single willpower bank account, and when the account balance is really low, all hell can (and often does) break loose (my choice of words, not theirs).

For example, we yell at our partner or the kids, we buy things we don't need and/or can't afford, we drive past the gym yet another day, we spend another night in front of the television, or we cut ourselves an especially large piece of chocolate cake. (Later in the book, the authors do suggest ways we can add to our willpower bank accounts, which I'll delve into in a future issue of Stepping Stones for the Good Life.)

This is why, then, it's so exhausting to read the above list of goals, let alone actually try to tackle them, and why most New Year's Resolutions lists lie on the cutting room floor by mid-January. This set of activities calls for far more willpower than even the more disciplined of us has available to spend.

So this year, do yourself a favor and pick just *one* goal for the new year. Oh, and make it one that requires an adjustment in lifestyle rather than the complete makeover we sometimes envision for ourselves (e.g., by that reunion in June, I'm going to be as thin and fit as I was in high school).

But this takes us to a future topic—the importance of setting modest goals for ourselves, one after another, rather than shooting for the moon all at once (even if that is your final destination), which is one of the beauties of having a life coach, who helps people to do just that. So watch for more to come.

And Happy New Year!