

## New Year, New Plan

Any day is a good day to implement a plan for improvement. It may be safe to say that most of us have made attempts to begin something new at the beginning of a new year and found our well-intentioned attempts to be ill fated. Why do we wind up in this cycle of defeat? It's likely due to the fact that we recognize our need for improvement in one or more areas of our lives, but the truth is, change is hard.

There are two primary strategies used for making change. Often, the agents for change create innovative goals and a plan for rapid achievement. Synonyms for innovation read like this: alteration; revolution; upheaval. Words such as these and the concepts they represent can easily evoke the "fight or flight" response in us. Big goals tend to trigger big fear. The nature of humans is to stay in their own personal comfort zone, even if it's an unpleasant one. We naturally long for the comfort that comes with familiarity.

The method that more often produces success and long lasting reward is one where small, incremental change is employed. John Wooden, one of the most successful coaches in the history of college basketball, had this to say about making improvement, "When you improve a little each day, eventually big things occur . . . Don't look for the big, quick improvement. Seek the small improvement, one day at a time. That's the only way it happens and when it happens, it lasts."

General Douglas MacArthur used this same philosophy of small steps for incremental improvement in the post-war rebuilding of Japan. The Japanese refer to this tried and true method for change as "kaizen". They found the kaizen method made a daunting task seem doable.

You've probably heard this quote from Desmond Tutu, "there is only one way to eat an elephant: one bite at a time." Whether it's one bite at a time or one step at a time, small changes are easier to make and generally lead to lasting change.

Lifestyle changes help us reverse diabetes, lose excess weight, and learn new skills. To begin, ask yourself one small question related to the situation you would like changed. "How can I reduce my sugar intake today?" Your answer may sound like this, "I'll omit one teaspoon of sugar from my coffee." Then implement that simple plan until it becomes easy for you. Your brain is now ready for the next step. Ask yourself what the next step may be. Follow through on the second step until it becomes more comfortable and proceed in like manner. Before you know it, you'll happily discover change is happening!

By taking small steps toward improvement, you effectively:

- melt away a mental, creative block,
- circumvent the fight or flight response and
- create new neural pathways in your brain which means you'll begin thinking, feeling, and acting according to the evolving change.

What one, small step can you take today that will put you on a new trajectory?

