

FIVE STEPS

STEP1

Aim low. It goes without saying that most New Year's resolutions are easier announced (or written) than done—but if you set the bar too high, you're doomed from the start. Instead of a sweeping declaration like "I will lose 30 pounds by April and finally fit into that dress," **Target a Goal that's More Attainable**, like losing 10 or 15 pounds.

STEP2

Don't overload yourself. It's difficult enough for the average person to follow through on one ambitious New Year's resolution; why on earth would you saddle yourself with three or four? Choose the most pressing issue at hand—losing weight, finding a girlfriend, improving your relationship with your parents—and concentrate on that. **Trying to do everything simultaneously practically guarantees failure across the board.**

STEP3

Tell everyone you know. One school of thought says that New Year's resolutions are best kept to oneself, but look at it this way: the more people to whom you announce your resolution (say, to get out of your dead-end job by spring), the more people there'll be to prod you along if you fall behind. **There's no shame in seeking help if you can't accomplish your resolution on your own.**

STEP4

Reward yourself. Following through on a new year's resolution is rarely easy, so a little pavlovian conditioning goes a long way. If you've resolved to shop less, stroke yourself for not buying those shoes by springing for a steaming hot cappuccino at the mall. If you've resolved to be nicer to people, buy yourself a nice jacket after enduring that tedious cocktail party without delivering any insults.

STEP5

Wait until spring. Sometimes the best way to accomplish a new year's resolution is to make it at a time of year of your choosing, rather than the one dictated by the calendar. May 1 is a good alternate date, since the change of season will neatly coincide with the change you're hoping to accomplish in yourself.