Seriously, Stop Sabotaging Your 2012 Goals

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First of all, if you don't have any New Year resolutions yet, then **STOP** and make some. Why? Setting goals in January is better than setting them later, because you will **get an edge**: extra motivational boost of the New Year. Everything is fresh and the opportunities of the New Year are ripe to be harvested! Exploit this little life hack. Do it now. I will wait.

Ready? Got some?

If you now do have some New Year resolutions, then you are probably already failing. Or know that you will eventually probably fail. In the end, most people do. I know I fail. What's worse, we are, in fact, sabotaging our resolutions and we don't even know it.

Whether you appreciate my twisted sense of humor or not, you might ask: How can I be already failing and sabotaging my resolutions if I have only set them a minute ago? Well, good question.

Ladies and gentleman, prepare to be shocked, but…

It's not about putting the effort into your resolutions!

Holly schmolly bejeezus, if it's not about putting the effort into your resolutions, then what is it all about?

Well, here comes the $64.000 answer:

It is about **making sure that you *will keep putting* the effort into your resolutions.**

Big difference.

In my experience, I am either making damn sure that I will keep putting effort into my main goals, or I am inevitably failing – it's just a matter of time, really. It works the other way around too though – done properly, the success can be *inevitable*.

Don't let the fate of your resolutions be doomed before you equip them with the right weaponry necessary to succeed in the Age of Distraction. **Oh look, a butterfly!** It's so pretty! It's flying onto twitter! No, it's Facebook. No wait, it's reddit! Actually, sorry, it was StumbleUpon! (… 3 hours later…) What was I talking about? Oh, right. Distractions. They are getting worse every year. Are *you* getting better at making sure they don't control your life? I will show you how I personally do this nearly Sisyphean task.

But first, I will have to disagree with Mr. Albert Einstein. Just for fun. Because that's the way I roll. Actually, not for fun, I'm trying to make a point here. Seriously now – I believe it was this particular gentleman who said:

"Compound interest is the greatest invention in human history".

Hear hear, but how about **compound effort?** Now we are talking!

Compound effort

There are two main ways of making sure that you finish something: Using someone else to make sure that you will keep putting effort into it (the **[Mad Klingon way](#)**), or making sure you will keep putting effort in yourself.

I'm going to talk about the latter, as it is much more powerful and flexible, and can be combined with the first way anyway.

No working complex system that exists was built at once. All such systems gradually evolved. It is the same with non-trivial goals (or resolutions). **The only way to ensure that you will fulfill your goals is to keep putting in effort over time and not stop doing that.**

However, even if you use **tricks to fool yourself into working**, there is no guarantee you will keep doing that consistently. Year is a long time, and there are a lot of butterflies flying around, if you catch my drift.

How I don't sabotage myself

I don't know what the perfect solution is for you, but after many years of trial-and-error, I've finally discovered mine. Some credit is to **Sebastian Marshall** who has written about time tracking on his blog extensively. However, what I do is not really time tracking. I've crafted the following technique for my purposes.

This is what I do –

After I am done for the day, I print a checklist template for the next day and fill my 3 main objectives for the next day into it. Then I go happily to sleep. (Added bonus: As I fall asleep, my sub-consciousness is already working on these 3 objectives.) After I wake up, I check things off the checklist as the day progresses, either marking that I've done them or not. Loop this for 365 days in a row.

Timeless truth: What gets measured gets done.

What to put on the checklist depends on your goals. You should start simple. The essence of what I have there is roughly this:

- **Y / N**   Get up before 8 AM
- **Y / N**   Stretch after waking up
- **Y / N**   Drink water after stretching
- **Y / N**   Work on 1 main goal first thing on my PC, even before email or starting the browser or IM (5 min is enough)
- **Y / N**   Work on 3 main goals (specific tasks were chosen yesterday):
    - _____
    - _____
    - _____
- **Y / N**   Work on blog post or article (5 min is enough)
- **Y / N**   Prepare checklist for the next day and write the main goals into it
- **Y / N**   Send a report of what I've accomplished today to my friend
- **Y / N**   Go to bed before 11 PM

My real checklist is like 4 times longer, because I want to keep track of at least 15 different areas/projects. I have no intentions of working on all of them on any particular day, but just having them as suggestions on my checklist, which always lies beside my computer, is extremely powerful. I maintain the template in my own Windows software **Swift To-Do List** as I like pretty print-outs, but you can use almost about anything – even notepad will do.

At first, it might seem a lot of hassle and paper, but **the effort is absurdly low for the enormous benefits**. I also file the old checklists into a binder. I simply can't miss a day, there is no excuse. If, God forbid, something like that were to happen, I would print 2 checklists and fill in the missing info.

If you have daily checklist, the only way you can fail is not to fill the checklist. Even if you don't do anything else and just fill the checklist, the day is a success.

Why it must be printed? First, I don't want to begin my morning routine on the computer. I would much rather stretch, drink some water, and review the checklist first. Second, I want to be able to end the day with the computer turned off. Plus it's more fun and you can't overlook the paper. That white paper sheet is just glowing there. (Unless, of course, you have a pile of trash on your desk. In that case I can't help you; I guess you should just burn the desk down and go home.)

For me, it is actually easier to work on my main goals *every single freaking day*, instead of just 3 days in a week or now and then or some other complex or random pattern – that just never works for me. I like it simple and consistent.

Endless power

Just imagine the raw sheer power of my daily checklist. Whatever I put into it, I'm 100% sure I will think about it, *every day*, for a *year*. And I will actually usually do it too, on most days.

I'm sure you can relate to this: If you are working on an internet project or have a business, you are juggling 7253 balls (or so). Sometimes, you forget that some of the balls are even there and let them silently drop on the ground. And sometimes you notice some of these balls got dropped and you feel bad about not juggling them for so long. Solution? Daily checklist.

What I am describing here is **the most powerful productivity technique I've ever encountered in my life.** I already have a lot of experience both with other methods and this one. For example, 2 years ago, I've used this technique for my personal life (habits, exercise, diet, not going insane) and stuff like that. And I've actually really filled over 340 check list in a row, not missing a day, before stopping. The effects have sunk in and the habit changes are permanent. I've also learned quite a lot about myself. My life is better forever.

Believe me – it's not that important to work on your goals every day. What is important is to make sure that you will keep working on your goals and that you won't forget about them.

Press "F5" in your brain to refresh your goals

… and push them back up in the endless list of thoughts, where everything quickly falls down and drops out of view. And do it often.

I personally fanatically adhere to the checklist routine – as long as I am printing and filling my daily checklist, the year can't be bad. It's just not possible. This ensures I will keep putting effort into my main 2012 goals.

I don't care how you do this, but **do it!** Tattoo it on your forehead, carve it out of dead pixels into your screen, rearrange the keys on your keyboard so they read like the name of your goal, if you must. But do it!

However, there are certainly other ways of making sure you won't forget about your goals and eventually finish them – please leave a comment: **What has worked for you? What do you think *could* work for you?**