

How is 2016 shaping up for you?



Are you back at your desk and determined that this year will be less hectic than last? That you will make time for that walk at lunchtime every day? That you will prioritise tasks and work on the hardest one first each day, before checking emails? Or maybe that you will make more time to really talk to your colleagues and make good use of the team?

Each of us brings a fresh perspective when we come back to work, hopefully refreshed after a holiday and connection time with family and friends. But somehow, come February, that perspective has faded and we fall back on old habits.

Here are a couple of tips from neuroscience for setting brain friendly intentions and then harnessing the power of your neurology to turn those intentions into reality, all year long.

Firstly, set the goals in 2 ways: the big WHY – why the goal or intention is important to you and what you will gain (or avoid) by achieving this. Robert Spunt from Caltech researched the difference between WHY and HOW goals, from a brain perspective. He found that setting WHY goals is energy intensive for the brain, so takes more effort, while chunking a goal into bite sized HOW pieces is much easier for the brain to focus on. Once you have determined your motivation or WHY break the goal down into concrete steps that you can begin working with **now**.

Second step comes from the work of one of the leading thinkers in the world of behaviour change, Peter Gollwitzer. Gollwitzer recommends setting “if-then” intentions alongside your goal. This means setting a plan in place to take alternative action whenever the old habit starts up. For example, if you find yourself eating your lunch while working and not going for that walk, you could agree with a colleague or a friend that you will go and find them and they will join you for a walk around the block. Setting the intention **beforehand** primes your brain to remind you to take a different action, and creates stronger neural pathways for the new behaviour.

To summarise:

1. Set a goal or intention and write it down, stating what it is and why it is important to you.
2. Chunk that goal or intention into achievable concrete steps you can take now.
3. Decide what you will do if you slip back into old habits, using the if-then framework
4. Go ahead and make your goals a reality – and remember to celebrate – the dopamine system in the brain loves to be rewarded.....

I suspect Oscar Wilde didn't know much about neuroscience when he said

“Good resolutions are useless attempts to interfere with scientific laws. Their origin is pure vanity. Their result is absolutely nil.”

But neuroscience now shows us how to use those scientific laws.