

# Have you quit your New Year's resolution by Quitter's Day?

*Many people make New Year's resolutions, but by mid-January most resolutions will have been left aside. Workouts are skipped in favour of Netflix. Salads are shunned in favour of pasta. And across the UK Dry January is replaced with a dry martini. **Grace Jordan** discusses just why most resolutions are best made at other times in the year.*

---

Friday 14 January was Quitter's Day: a day when the majority of people who had made New Year's resolutions had thrown in the towel. Workouts were skipped in favour of Netflix. Salads were shunned in favour of pasta. And across the UK Dry January was replaced with a dry martini.

If this describes your behaviour, don't despair. You can always try again later in the year. In fact, you may set yourself up for a higher likelihood of success if you do just that.

WHY do any of us create New Year's resolutions in January? It is because doing so is a social norm. As humans we like to follow what other people are doing around us. However, Quitters Day is also an established norm. And this is a time when many people ditch their best laid plans. Quitters Day is simply a negative social norm that most people fall into if they have made a resolution.

It stands to reason that it is much easier to quit your new year's resolutions around Quitter's Day. Even if you have told your parents, friends and some random strangers about the big challenge you have set yourself for 2022, doing so is a weakened commitment device. Why would anyone hold you to account when they are busy quitting their own resolutions?

Overall, there are three types of New Year's resolutions. The first involves resolutions that require high intensity over short periods only. Think decluttering your wardrobe, painting your bathroom, short periods of low personal spending to pay the dreaded post holiday's credit card bills or a gut detox to offset all the rich food and drink you consumed. All of these require a short burst of resolve. You are finished by Quitter's Day. This implies that high intensity resolutions are the best resolutions to ring in the New Year with.

Now think about all other types resolutions you might make. Overall, they, by and large, require consistency over long time periods. On the one hand you have resolutions where you are increasing something with the vision of reaching a goal: a 10k run, learning a new skill, eating healthier. These are goal-based resolutions. Or you are quitting something – smoking, sugar or alcohol. These are quitting based resolutions.

You are far better off starting a goal-based resolution or a quitting-based resolution at any other time of the year, aside from January. If you do so you can leverage telling your friends and family as a much-needed commitment device. And because they are not quitting their own resolutions in response to social norms they will get on your back if you fail, and be the hype buddy you need to make you more likely to go the distance.

If I have convinced you to start spring with a new goal, how else can you set yourself up for success?

Goal-based resolutions, like 10k runs, are best undertaken as small steps that are embedded in your daily life. You should build up slowly to be where you want to be. Instead of committing to a couch-to-10k, commit to going from the couch to walking a mile vigorously within two weeks. Then make another goal. Every time you engage in this process, you are writing a new line in your narrative. Overall, smaller goals allow you reprogram your brain that you are a completer, making you more likely to build on your success. At some point, you will have written a whole new chapter into your story. You will continue writing the story, all the way to running a marathon should you so wish. Committing to regular small goals that build on each other is also the perfect way to learn a new skill, write a book or develop your professional network.

Quitting based resolutions are different. They are best undertaken by focussing clearly on three things:

1. Costs
2. Benefits
3. Substitutes

Quitting something that gives you great daily benefits like smoking when the costs are far in the future is very hard. Acknowledge the challenge. You can make it much easier on yourself by bundling something that is unrelated that is life enhancing, which you enjoy, with continuing to quit after a week or even a day. This brings the benefits of quitting into the present. The bundle might include a massage, walk in the park, a timeout to meditate, a freshly brewed cup of an exotic herbal tea, or an episode of your favourite TV show. Having an arsenal of treats to 'bundle' at your disposal is better than relying on just one thing so you can leverage the novelty. You should also minimise the costs as much as you can. This might mean clearing your diary of all 'triggers' for the thing you are trying to quit, in addition to engaging recognised substitutes like nicotine patches or vaping for smoking.

Whether you choose to start February with a resolution, or not, I would also encourage you to increase your pro-social tendencies in 2022. In other words, be kinder and more giving to others in 2022. Not only will such actions cause others greater happiness, there is now ample evidence from experiments and observational studies to show it will be happiness-inducing for you too.

Whatever resolutions you decide to pursue I wish you great success!



Notes:

- *This blog post expresses the views of its author(s), not the position of LSE Business Review or the London School of Economics.*
- *Featured [image](#) by [Tim Mossholder](#) on [Unsplash](#)*
- *When you leave a comment, you're agreeing to our [Comment Policy](#).*