It is not difficult to have resolutions

With the arrival of the new year, we also make resoutions to change our behavior. We often try to achieve goals with regard to a healthier life: less snacking, less smoking, using less alcohol, eating less meat, less sugar and salt, less hanging on the couch. We want to become healthier, lose weight, take good care of our body. But we can, of course, also want to make changes in other areas: organize more free time, maintain contacts better or differently, etc.

I also have resolutions this year. I want to eat healthier and exercise more. I know from experience that such a plan will also fail again. I start in a good spirit and after a few weeks, days or even hours I fall back into my old behavior. That is why I thought it would be better to reflect more consciously on what is needed to achieve sustainable change.

The first step is awareness. Earlier I wrote a blog about it. Awareness of what you want and no longer want, what the advantages and disadvantages are of staying with the old or going for the new. Awareness of what you have to deal with in order to change and whether or not you really care about that. We call that willingness within ACT.

Willingness depends on our values. If we see what values ​​are attached to our goals, we can do more. I want to grow old, so that I can continue to enjoy the contacts with the people around me and to remain independent for as long as possible.

Furthermore, it is important to formulate our goals in a positive way. Less snacking is negatively formulated, I have to stop doing something. It works better, according to research, to make resolutions about something that you can actually do. Eating healthy snacks and training for half an hour three times a week.

Then it is important to distill feasible steps from this. Changing becomes difficult if we do not take into account our starting point. I now usually eat three healthy meals. It goes 'wrong' with the snacks. Especially when I am alone at home. And if there are nice, sweet things in the house. I train two or three times a week on a device, 15 minutes. Ideally I would train an hour three times a week and only take healthy snacks. But that is too big a step. If I intend to do that, then it certainly will not work.

I can make sure there are healthy, tasty, snacks in the house and I can extend my training to 20 minutes. I can resist the temptation in the store to buy unhealthy things. For that it is important to know how exactly the temptation works and what I can do differently. I am inclined if something is on sale to buy more than I need. As a result, I have a lot of tasty things at home. I can help myself to remember that I buy as much as I need, instead of taking the offer.

To change ingrained behavior, you need to be creative in coming up with small, feasible steps towards your goal. Aisling and Trish Leonard-Curtin wrote a book on this subject: The Power of Small. Making Tiny but Powerful Changes when Everything Feels too Much.

And then it is important to celebrate successes. If I plan a step and I do that, then I am on the right track. When I have healthy snacks in the house but do not eat them, I have achieved my goal of getting healthy snacks in the house. And that is the starting point for a next step: also eat those snacks. It is especially with difficult changes that it is important to set the bar at the right height. Our minds generally do not agree with that. It anticipates our goals and steps and we get unpleasant evaluations: “you are so weak, why do not you eat those healthy snacks right now? What a failure! You won’t succeed anyway.” If we believe our mind, we give up again. While we are on our way.

Being on the road also means paying attention to the journey. What is happening, while you take steps? What happens in yourself, in your environment? Be curious, as an explorer or scientist. That makes your experience richer and the road more interesting.

Change is a process of trial and error. The fact that I have already ate healthier snacks in the past and that I have been training three times half an hour a week for a while does not mean that something is wrong now. I do not do it anymore, I want to change that and that means that I have to take steps that are feasible. That I took a big step yesterday and only manage to get a little one today is part of the road. That it does not work today, this week, this month, is also part of the process and no reason to give up.

Research shows that it helps to express your intention to take a step to someone. We are more inclined to do what we say when we say it out loud and someone hears it.

Finally: be kind to yourself, be your own coach, who wants nothing more than that you progress at your own pace. Encourage yourself, comfort yourself if you did not succeed and allow yourself to be happy with results, no matter how small that may seem.

In summary:

- be aware of what behavior you want to change and what is attached to it

- take a good look at the question of whether you are willing to take on all the difficulties you are going to encounter.

- connect your goals to your values: what is it about, that you want to change your behavior?

- formulate positive goals

- realize what your starting point is and formulate feasible steps from there.

- celebrate successes, even if your mind disagrees with it

- pay attention to the road and the process you are in

- realize that this is a process of trial and error, that you can, if necessary, keep doing for a lifetime. The goal is not the end point.

- declare your steps towards others

- be kind to yourself.

It helped me to write this down and to share this with you. I now see where I stand and what it takes to change my behavior. Thank you for your willingness to read this blog! I hope that you profit from reading this, to make your goals come true.