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Pure Sex, Pure Love

A New Approach to New Year's Resolutions

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Did you make some New Year's resolutions this year?

If so, you're in the minority: A 2005 study found that only 45% of Americans make New Year's resolutions.

Did you make New Year's resolutions last year—and did you keep them?

If so, you are really in the minority. Only 8 percent of Americans achieve their resolution goals, according to "Living on the Up Beat," a publisher of self-help books. What's more discouraging is that 22% of all New Year's resolutions are broken in the first week, according to the Journal of Clinical Psychology.

With that in mind, here's a new twist on the New Year's resolution racket:

1. Start small: This year, a friend told me his resolution was to lose 50 pounds in five months. I suggested trying to lose five pounds by the end of January, instead. Smaller, incremental gains are easier to achieve than big, seemingly impossible goals that can always be put off until "later." Another single friend told me that 2008 was the year she was going to get married. While I admire her positive attitude, I suggested that 2008 could be the year she would sign up for an online dating site, join some new groups and organizations and make an effort to meet new people—both men and women—to increase her circle of contacts.

2. Write down your New Year's resolutions: List them, and be specific. What do you want to accomplish, and by what date? What are the steps that you're going to take to achieve these goals? Which resolution is the most important? As you're making the list,

add a few resolutions that you know you can easily accomplish, so you'll feel like you're making progress immediately. By writing things down, being specific and setting up a plan to accomplish the goals, you take a wishy-washy dream and turn it into a step-by-step plan.

3. Think big: Most of us focus our New Year's resolutions on all the little things about ourselves that we want to change: Go to the gym every day, lose weight, eat better. This year, rather than focusing exclusively on personal goals, consider adding an item to that resolutions list that's bigger than you: Volunteering for a specific charity. Serving as a reader at your local parish. Anything that will take you out of yourself for a little while. Self sacrifice is a cornerstone and fundamental challenge for all people of faith—and one that we too often neglect—make a resolution this year to challenge yourself in this area.

4. Check up on yourself in March: I know a successful businessman who sets the alarm on his digital watch for 10 a.m. every morning. When the alarm goes off, he asks himself if he's started working yet. He knows himself well: On most mornings he'll come into the office around 8:30, wade through his email, talk to his colleagues, get some coffee, talk to some more colleagues, and suddenly, his watch starts beeping to remind him that it's 10 a.m. and he'd better get cracking on some real work. Put a note in your planner on March 1: How are those New Year's resolutions going? Did you accomplish your first few goals? Did you take the first steps toward change? If not, catch yourself in March—and hopefully you won't be making the same resolutions again next year.

5. Write a letter to the Jan. 1, 2009 you: On New Year's Day each year I write a letter to myself, to be opened the following New Years. I've been doing it since I was a teenager. Some years I'll include my resolutions, other times I'll write my predictions for the coming year. Each letter includes my hopes, prayers and a bit about what I'm thinking about and struggling with at that specific point in time. This year's letter begins, "Dear Christine of 2009, Happy New Year." And it ends, "Love, Christine of 2008." The letters don't have to be long, but they are a nice reminder of where you've come from - and get you to think about where you are headed in the coming year.

I hope your 2008 is off to a great start. Thanks for reading Pure Sex, Pure Love—and here's to another great year!