And then it was January

It’s a new year and for days ads have been running on TV encouraging people to set goals … lose weight, quit smoking spend more time with family, stop drinking, join a gym, eliminate carbs, meditate, take up a new sport, reduce debt and the list goes on. So, the question is why are New Year’s Resolutions so important when research indicates they tend to fail. Gym memberships increase, lists are made … we have goals and resolve in mind but are they realistic and why now?

Often resolutions are unrealistic. For instance, someone may set a goal of going to the gym four times a week. Things happen. Flu season shows up, overtime at work, blizzards appear, the car breaks down, exhaustion sets in and going to the gym now becomes one more chore to add to the ever growing list. Our inner voices start to complain and say I don’t know if I can do this or will there be time to do this. The should statements start entering our thoughts. I should go to the gym four times a week. I should be a better parent and spend more time with the family. I should stop using my credit card for gifts. Then the shame of not being able to achieve your expectations of self creates feelings of low self-esteem, depressive symptoms, stress, guilt and fear of failure for self and/or others.

SMART is an acronym for setting goals in a realistic way. S stands for a specific goal which requires the answers to six “W” questions - who, what, where, which and why. M stands for measurable - establish consistent criteria. A stands for attainable - plan steps. R stands for realistic - goal must represent an objective. T stands for timely and represents setting a time frame. SMART applied to going to the gym might clearly define what you want to accomplish and how you reach your target dates in a timely manner and within a self-affirming way. Write them down by keeping a journal or seek a group to join for peer support. One goal cannot contradict another goal i.e. going to the gym and spending more time with the family. You have to find a balance.

Human nature at times tends to internalize the failure of one step backwards instead of celebrating the two steps forward. Ask the question of yourself - is this what I do? Michelle Obama stated “I like to talk about my obsession with French fries because I don’t want people to think that ‘Let’s Move’ is about complete, utter deprivation. It’s about moderation and real-life changes and ideas that really work for families.”

Internet - quotes.

Just for fun imagine if you had started with a new activity/goal such as extra time with the family or meditation at the beginning of November or the middle of September. By now you would be up and running and better equipped to handle the dark days of January. It is hard to establish goals of change when dealing with what seem like endless winter days.
The term Seasonal Affective Disorder is well known to most Canadians. It occurs year round but the symptoms are usually more intense in the late fall and winter months. SAD symptoms include low energy, sleeplessness, difficulty concentrating, changes in appetite, weight gain and less interest in activities usually enjoyed. SAD further complicates New Year’s resolutions because it is harder to be motivated or sustain changes when we are often feeling more like Eeyore than Tigger. However, it is important to understand that we should not brush off the symptoms of SAD as simply a case of winter blues because it is more complicated. Depression is real and needs the care of others including professionals.

In closing, here are some helpful hints ...

Seek professional help when needed, make time for a friend or family member, go for a walk or find a walking partner to provide support for each other, stay away from alcohol and unhealthy dietary choices, reduce stress where you can, go to the movie, share a good book with a friend, join a class at the gym as a means of meeting others with the same goal, talk to your doctor about giving up tobacco, take care of yourself in whatever way is meaningful to you. Essentially you are looking for a greater balance in your life.

Rene Descartes a French philosopher and mathematician stated simply…”Divide each difficulty into as many parts as is feasible and necessary to resolve it.”

Happy New Year!

Our society has two natural rest buttons on our calendars, one being September the other the New Year. It is a natural time to reflect and refocus on life in general but here we want to reflect on finances and a few things that can be done to start off on a financially good direction.

1. Set a budget
There are all kinds of tools and help to not only build a budget but to stay on track too.

2. Pay down debt
December for many is a large expenditure month; one where many turn to credit. Develop a plan to pay down and eliminate debt. Need help give your local not for profit Credit Counsellor a call to help build a plan or if you are in over your head to look at your options.

3. Plan
Every year set a spending plan; save for the little fun things in life. Reminders are pushed our way to save for retirement or a home, how about a vacation, renovation or next December’s holiday spending?

4. Save
Even if you are paying down debt saving for emergencies should be a priority, even if it is a little each pay. Your bank may even offer an automatic transfer or a round up account on debit purchases to force savings.

5. Review
Accomplishing any of the items above may seem daunting if you perceive there is no available money. A spending review can be a big help and is a good step in starting a manageable budget. Also take time to review insurance costs, cell phone, home phone, and internet and cable packages: can savings be found? Remember a little added to a little can equal a lot over time.

If you would like to schedule an appointment with a Credit Counsellor contact us at 519-433-0159 x 8497.