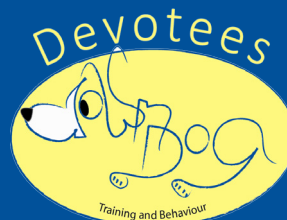


Down Dog Digest

No. 7



In this packed issue

Main feature: New Year, New Habits: are you going to change this year?
Education feature: Fascinating facts about New Year traditions
Carol's Challenge: What's your new habit going to be?

New year, New habits

What are you going to change this year?

We've entered a new decade. I can't believe we're now well into the year 2020 and that we're over a fifth of the way through this century. It's staggering to think that we're now the same time since the millennium as 1980 was before that year.

In 1980 I was still young, footloose and fancy free (though permanently knackered from being a junior doctor) and having children was not even on the horizon. Now I'm retired from medicine, enjoying being The Doggy Doctor, have been married for over 36 years and my two children are now in their 30s.

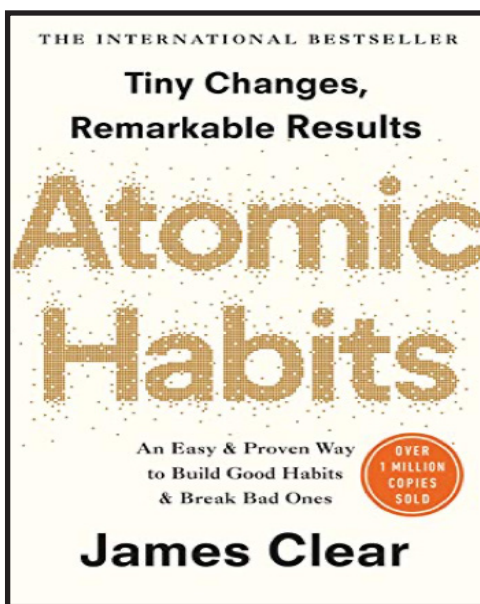
The beginning of January marks a new start - a time for reflection, a time to make changes for the better in your personal life. It's good to have an idea of where you want to go in all areas of your life. If you run a business you're encouraged to have long, medium and short term goals and increasingly you're encouraged to have goals for your own personal life too.

Have you set any goals this year? Around 40% of people make resolutions or goals - common ones are to get fitter, to lose weight, to gain promotion, or simply to meet up with friends more often. Figures show that 12% of gym users join in January - but most people quit or stop going by 24 weeks into the year. Losing weight is a common goal - but 9 out of 10 people will have broken their diet by the middle of January. Oh, and did you know,

Divorce Day (yes, there is such a thing) is on January 6th?

Having goals is laudable, but focusing on them is not.

As James Clear notes in his marvellous book, Atomic Habits, (which is really worth getting hold of) there are several problems with goals:



- Winners and losers have the same goals

- Achieving your goal is a momentary change - going to the gym once will not make you fitter

- Goals limit happiness and hamper long-term progress,

For example, when you reach your goal weight you stop your diet and the weight piles back on.

The problem when you focus on the goal is that you forget the journey. I'm not saying you shouldn't have goals - it's important to know where you want to get to, so you know if you've reached your destination. But once you've set your goals, you should forget them.

What are you going to change this year?

I know this sounds mad, but bear with me. The results will take care of themselves; you and I have no control over them. The only things we have any control over are the actions we take to help us get there.

In other words, actions speak louder than goals...

Goals set a direction but it is what we do each day that determines whether we make progress. Success is the product of daily habits. James Clear reminds us that tiny 1% shifts in the right direction each day will lead to a meaningful move over time. (Equally tiny errors of less than 1% will compound into toxic results.)

F. M. Alexander said "People do not decide their futures, they decide their habits and their habits decide their futures." James Clear says "Every action you take is a vote for the type of person you wish to become." In other words, you become your habits.



Rather than declaring bold "new year, new me" goals and following the crowd into the depths of failure-filled doom, I want to suggest something different. Ask yourself – how can I take the present me and improve? What would a (thin/successful/non-drinking/fit/marathon runner – choose your own idol here) person do?

You can apply this thought to all the areas of your life – including how you relate to and behave with your dog.

Perhaps your goal is for your dog to come back when called so that he can have more freedom at the park or the beach. Or for him to walk nicely on lead and not pull. Whatever your goal is, that sets the direction. What's your training goal?

Decided on your goal? Now focus on what you need to do each day in order to achieve success. What should your new habits be?

James Clear to our aid again – he outlines four laws of creating good habits:

1) Make it obvious. Set up cues to prompt you in your new habit and make what you want the obvious choice. For example, you could keep your dog's lead and a treat bag with your shoes instead of hiding them away in a drawer or behind a door.

2) Make it attractive. Pair an action or habit you need with one you want. If you love walking on the beach, you can include a short recall training session into that walk that also gives you the exercise you want. Reframe your thoughts to help. Instead of saying "I have to go out and train my dog to come back", try saying "I get to go out and train my dog to come back." Anticipation of a reward is what drives us to take action.

3) Make it easy. Action delivers outcomes. Work out the easiest thing to do and do it. Break down what you want into tiny steps. Starting with repetition of something easy starts to build a habit. Use the Two Minute Rule – practice one of our recall games with your dog for 2 minutes each day then stop.

Gradually you'll find you'll happily do more than just 2 minutes – but even if you don't, that tiny change will get you where you want to be over time.

It's important too, to aim for Goldilocks tasks - "just right" tasks: things that are not too easy but also not too hard. Perhaps you'll start by teaching recall in your house; then in the garden; then on a quiet beach; then with more distractions present. And so on.

What are you going to change this year?

Use our 95% rule to decide where you should start – where your dog will come back first time you call, 19 times out of 20.



4) Make it satisfying. What you find rewarding you'll repeat. Visual markers are very powerful. I'm writing more regularly because I have a calendar on my desk on which I put a big red cross on the days I've done some writing. Any gap on a day where I haven't written is so glaring I don't want it to happen – so I'm keeping up my habit.

You could try setting up a wall chart or calendar in a prominent place, on your fridge, or by your desk, or on your coat cupboard,

and mark off every day you play recall games with your dog by putting a big red cross there. Or put £1 in a jar towards a special treat (for you, not your dog) after every training session. Whatever works for you. The key is not to break the chain of red crosses. As James Clear says – missing once is an accident. Missing twice is the start of a new habit.

I'm adding a fifth law:

5) Make it interesting and fun. The greatest threat to success is boredom. Some people like and gain strength from doing the same thing day after day. If that's you, great. But I feel frustrated and am easily bored if I get into a rut of same old, same old. I like to find new challenges and new things to explore and do.

For most of us it's a balance. To keep your recall training fun for you and for your dog, try playing different games on different days. Visit different places to play your games and do your training. Invite friends or family to help out.

Remember that tiny 1% shifts will add up to a significant change in direction. Decide what your new habits are going to be to achieve a better future for you and your dog.

Let me know when reach your goal and we'll celebrate together.

Fascinating Facts

Did you know the New Year is associated with all sorts of traditions around the world?

- In Scotland's Hogmanay, "first-footing" is common - the first person who crosses a threshold of a home in the New Year should carry a gift for luck.

- Common traditions in the USA include singing "Auld Lang Syne" to greet the New Year, and eating black-eyed peas for good luck.

- In Spain, the custom is to eat 12 grapes – one at each stroke of the clock at midnight on New Year's Eve. Each grape represents good luck for one month of the coming year. Columbians

Fascinating Facts

carry suitcases around the block in the hope of a travel-filled year.

- In Finland, people cast molten tin into a container of water, then interpret the shape the metal takes after hardening. A heart or ring means a wedding, a ship predicts travel and a pig declares there will be plenty of food.

- In Greece, parents wake their children by tapping them on the head with an onion. I know what response I'd have had if I'd ever done that!

Carol's Challenge

Each month I'm going to set you a challenge. This month your challenge, should you wish to accept it, is:

Decide on a new habit you want to build for yourself and your dog and plan how you are going to make that change

- Perhaps you want your dog to walk nicely on lead.
- Perhaps you want a better recall.
- Maybe you want your dog to greet people nicely instead of jumping up.
- Or perhaps you want your dog to stop barking at everything that goes past your window and instead lie down quietly at your side.

Once you've decided what new habit you want, read back through pages 2 and 3 of this issue and use the four laws of good habits to develop your plan. Write down:

- what cues you're going to use to make your



- new habit the obvious choice
- how you'll make it more likely you'll stick to your new habit
- decide what you can do in two minutes to build your new habit. (*Hint: all the games from our Perfect Pet course can be played in two minutes*)
- decide how you'll measure how you're doing. A chart on your fridge?
- Finally, decide how you can make this new habit interesting and fun for you and for your dog

And please let me know how you get on!

We hope you've enjoyed this Down Dog Digest. Please feel free to share it with any friends, neighbours or family members you think might find it interesting,

Sign up for Carol's regular emails, giving you all sorts of free information on training, behaviour and other doggy-related topics here: <https://www.downdog.co.uk/signup>

If you'd like more information, tips, and advice about owning, training, caring for and enjoying your dog more, check out our website www.downdog.co.uk. Visit the blog and download our free helpsheets on a wide range of topics. Get it right from the start with your new pup, book group or one to one training, and check out our Down Dog Devotee membership programme to have fun with like minded owners.

If you've got a Problem Pooch, why not visit the Doggy Doctor's Surgery for help, in person or online www.doggydoctor.co.uk.