



## NEW YEAR, NEW HAPPIER YOU

The pressure to commit to a full life overhaul in January is real, but who says you're not good enough as you are? Perhaps it's time to let go of perfection and make 2019 the year we all resolve to be a little kinder to ourselves, argues professional coach Kirsty McWilliam...

What I absolutely love about January is the sense of new beginnings, and the notion of the resolution is a big part of that. We all make them, don't we? We decide, after many days of gin-induced frivolity and chocolate comas, that this is definitely going to be the year we lose weight, nail down that promotion or give up our every nasty habit, with the ultimate, laudable, aim being to turn our lives around for the better. In fact, much of our over-indulgence comes backed by the promise (the excuse?) that we'll all be much better 'mes' in January!

But, what if the December you was amazing enough already? What if you need no major life overhaul? I mean, there's nothing wrong with ambition. But keeping in mind that, according to Forbes, only eight per cent of new year's resolutions actually work, perhaps it's time to take a new approach to this new year malarkey?

My suggestion? How about, rather than give things up or restrict ourselves, we make a resolution to celebrate our achievements and focus on what makes us amazing right now?

In coaching, we often ask clients to list their top ten achievements. What are they proud of? What memorable achievements make them smile inside when they recall them? What makes them, them? Thinking this way can help shift the focus from the disappointment of a failed goal, of endless unaccomplished 'to do' lists and a feeling that one will only be happy when they achieve X,Y or Z, and instead enables a change in attitude that promotes confidence and an ability to tackle the changes that coaching will bring.

At the top of my list, clearly, are my kids and my marriage. After all, we all know the challenges being a mother and wife can bring – just making it to the end of some days can feel like a real achievement. But what about the successes that are just about me? I do wonder if I can fairly claim stopping smoking as one of my top ten given I achieved it 18 years ago. But, hey, listing ten achievements can feel a lot, so it's staying right in there.

In truth, celebrating our own successes is uncomfortable and can make us feel very exposed. But we need to ask where this is coming from. Personally, I think many of us were raised to not be boastful, but this has led to us being a generation of women who find it too difficult to articulate our strengths. It's so much easier to focus instead on what we don't do well.

Sure, taking out a billboard to announce your amazing achievements would be a step too far, but we ought to be able to internally recognise what makes us admirable and to be able to talk openly with close friends and family about the aspects of ourselves that we are pleased about. We should all be able to say: "I am not perfect, but I am proud of me and I am over the moon that I achieved X, Y or Z because I, and no one else, did a lot of work to get there." That would be a great start.

Want to get there? You'll need to put aside any awkwardness you feel about putting yourself first. Grab a cup of tea and spend ten minutes remembering how



amazing you are, because when you embrace your own successes, it's easier to encourage others to do so too. What common themes do you see running through your thoughts when you do this? Are there themes to your achievements that jump out at you? Crucially, what sort of feeling is created when you think this way? Imagine if the only 'resolution' you made this year was to embrace and replicate that feeling all year long, to use it to check in with any changes you want to make this year...

When I stopped smoking I felt immensely proud. I fall back on this feeling at times when I know the road ahead could be rocky, because the desire to be proud is greater than any fear could be. Similarly, think about the way you set your goals. If we commit to 'lose' something, our brain associates it with a negative – what do you want to gain?

Connecting a goal with a positive feeling, rather than an objective, will increase your motivation and, consequently, your chances of success with any further changes you wish to make. Keep up the good work you start in January and month by month, you will see the impact – imagine how you could be feeling by this end of 2019. Let this year be the one in which you escape the negativity of failed resolutions and instead rejoice in your amazing achievements while keeping on being uniquely you!

*Kirsty is the founder and CEO of Coaching Direct UK, an Edinburgh based centre for emotional intelligence, coaching and training, established in 2008. She'll be writing a monthly column for Hood from February, tackling everything to do with self-improvement, confidence and self-care.*