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## BEING GENTLE (WITH YOURSELF)

Happy New Year! Let 2006 be a year filled with happiness, good health, fun and peace. May it also be the year where you make your dreams come true!

Nice sentiments, but am I being glib? No, I actually really want that for you. I believe that everyone reading this is capable of being more than they are now, do more than they do, and have more than they have. But too often people are enmeshed in the life they lead. They want to break free, but frequently they don't. There are many reasons why – but surprisingly one of the biggest stumbling blocks people have is not the lack of belief in themselves or difficulties they have to overcome, but that they beat themselves up over everything they haven't done, haven't said, or haven't achieved. By looking back, they stay stuck in a negative spiral. People forget the past is past (even yesterday is the past!) and no matter how much you'd like to turn the clock back – you can't. Today is a new day, better still, today is the beginning of a new year, an excellent time to start being a new you, a new you that is gentle with yourself!

### New Year's Resolutions

It's traditional to start the New Year with a resolution. Loose weight, quit smoking, get fit, find a new job and save more money – most of us will thinking about doing one of these things. And they're all good resolutions – they are all about caring for yourself which is key to any self development.

So, on New Years Eve did you proclaim to your family and friends your resolutions for the New Year? And now are you already depriving yourself BIG time? Have you banned cigarettes? Are you eating just salads? Is your local gym a subscription better off? How long will this last before something makes you snap (your family, kids, or boss, or a stressful event) and you buy a pack of cigarettes, or bar of chocolate or throw away the scales? And when that happens, will you just give up? If yes, that's such a shame, because actually you started on the path of change and along the path, **not making it happen** is part of the learning process that needs to be gone through to make a change permanent. Let me tell you about the stages of change.

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## Stages of Change

To change a behaviour or action (to create a new habit), you will go through various stages of change – even if you aren't aware of it! These are the 4 main stages.

**Stage 1** – A desire or a realisation that something has to change. Examples might be: to lose weight, stop smoking, be nice to colleagues, learn to drive, be more attentive to partner, earn more money, and so on. No matter what it is you want to change, it starts with a desire to change, but this awareness stage can last for years. It's not *de facto* that when you become aware of this desire, that you are ready to start taking action.

**Stage 2** – Starting to take actions that are necessary for the change to begin happening. This is the stage that most people get to with their New Years resolutions. The most important thing to know is that during Stage 2, you will most likely slip back into your old ways. But this should not be seen as a failure! We are creatures of habit: changing to new ways does not come easily! When you revert back to an old habit, simply acknowledge this and pick-up the new action again. It is the understanding of this stage and being gentle with yourself that will get you through to the next stage. Stage 2 usually lasts for many weeks, sometimes months.

**Stage 3** – Seeing results from your new actions. In this stage, your success helps motivate you. In a typical New Years resolution, this stage might be reached when suddenly your clothes become noticeably loose and people start commenting on your weight loss, or you find you can run up the stairs without being out of breath. This is the stage you feel really good about your achievements, but because they aren't yet woven into the fabric of your life, it is still easy to slip back to Stage 2. If you do, be gentle with yourself. You have come a long way already, simply pick up again from where you were, and have another bash at it.

**Stage 4** – Becoming unconsciously competent. When you have reached this stage, your new actions have become firm habits. It's like driving your car. You no longer consciously have to think about when to press the clutch or when to check your mirror – you do it automatically. So too is your new habit – it's become part of who you are.



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## Tips for Being Gentle

Being gentle with yourself allows you to see the good things that you have done. Being gentle with yourself starts a spiral of positivity. Sometimes it's easier to see the flip side – so let's take dieting as an example. You hate the way you look, so you start a strict diet. Your body feels like you've cut your throat and you're bad tempered and miserable. Inevitably you will soon give in and eat something nice (because not doing so is simply being mean to yourself). But if you then berate yourself with things like: "I'm useless!", "I'll always be fat (sigh)", "I have no will power" then you are starting a downward spiral of negativity where you feel bad about yourself. At the same time your subconscious takes on board powerful negative messages about your capabilities too. If instead you take a gentle approach, and praise yourself for each small step you take, a positive spiral begins. Let's look at three common resolutions and see how you can make them work this year.

### *Losing weight*

If you have more than a few pounds to lose, remember this extra weight did not materialise overnight. More than likely accumulated over months or even years, so losing it will also take time. Starvation diets or diets that forbid you to eat your favourite foods DO NOT WORK and are bad for your morale and health. Just be sensible. Cut back on fatty, high sugar and processed foods, increase your complex carbohydrates (oats, rye, millet, bulgar and try out quinoa it's really good!) eat LOTS of vegetables and cook more fresh foods. If you love chocolate (or any other high fat/sugar food), don't forbid yourself from ever having it. Once or twice a week have a small portion and really enjoy it. And if you have a really bad day (on the food front) don't give up! It's not what you eat in one day that matters, it's what you eat over a period of time.

### *Quit Smoking*

Every smoker knows the health risks of smoking, but this alone is not enough to get people to quit. Strange as it may seem, people get a benefit from smoking. People often light up when they are stressed, frustrated, angry, lonely, or sad. Smoking offers a method of feeling better, so taking it away without replacing it with something healthier is going to be hard. So get help to quit. Most doctor's surgeries offer *Quit-Smoking* support groups. Patches and other medications can help wean you off nicotine. Going

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'cold turkey' without any support is really hard. If you suddenly find yourself with a cigarette in your hand again, please don't beat yourself up about it. Just because one day it went pear-shaped, it doesn't mean you don't have the will power to do it. YOU DO! Start again. Every day you don't smoke, means you're a day closer to having clean lungs, a renewed sense of smell, clothes and hair that don't smell of cigarettes, and more money in your pocket.

### *Getting Fit*

If this is your resolution, PLEASE don't go and join a gym on impulse. Don't get me wrong, gyms and health clubs offer a great service, but they are not for everyone. First of all think about what type of exercise you enjoy the most. Do you like exercising alone or do you want a social side to it too? What time of day suits you most for exercising? How much time can you realistically give to exercising? What will motivate you to keep doing it? For those of you who aren't sports mad, brisk walking for 20–30 minutes 4–5 days a week will give your body a good level of fitness. Choose a fitness regime that you enjoy. This is the most important bit of getting fit: ENJOYING IT! If you haven't exercised for sometime, be gentle with yourself. It will be shock to your system if you go from nothing to 3 hours of exercise a week in one fell swoop. You're also more likely to injure yourself. Gently increase the amount of time and energy you spend exercising each week and, particularly if you were once fitter than you are now, don't expect to regain your former level of fitness overnight. It takes time – just be patient and persistent and you will get back your fitness once more.

### *...and finally*

As always if you need help in taking steps forward in your self development, I'd be delighted to coach you to make it happen. Earlier tips might also be worth revisiting:

- Extreme selfcare: Getting started
- Exercise
- Losing weight healthily
- Steps to make your dreams come true

Let me know how you get on – I love to hearing from you.

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