

Don't give up...

The reason that so many of us fail to keep our New Year's resolutions is that we approach them in a negative way. To succeed, we have to think positive, life coach Ann Kelly tells **Kate O'Flaherty**

THE end of this year is in sight. The turkey has been gnawed to the bone, and you've a bit of breathing space before the sales begin. It's time for a little reflection. For looking back on the year that's been, but mostly for looking ahead to 2005. And that naturally involves drawing up a list of New Year's resolutions. "This is the year," you vow, as you give yourself the annual pep talk about how every aspect of your life will be radically improved by this time next year.

Not that we want to rain on your resolutions' parade, but if you remember back to this time last year, you were probably having exactly the same conversation with yourself, and it's entirely possible that your life, and list, haven't hugely changed since then.

Even more depressing is the fact that some of your resolutions first made it on to the annual list sometime during the last century, and are still waiting to be ticked.

So why do we have such difficulties fulfilling our New Year's resolutions? Why do good intentions go bad before we've even taken down all the tinsel?

"One of the main reasons for not achieving goals is that people are doing it for the wrong reasons," says life coach Ann Kelly. "So the first thing to ask yourself is why have you set the goal in the first place. If you consider the most common resolutions, losing weight or quitting smoking, it's often a knee-jerk reaction to overdoing it at Christmas. But that's setting a negative goal, you are depriving yourself and immediately setting yourself up for failure. Your list probably starts with 'I should', 'I need to' or 'I must'.

"To borrow a phrase from *Sex and the City*, you've got to stop 'shoulding' all over yourself. If your goal comes from these sources you won't enjoy the process and you'll give up and give in and have that cigarette, that cake, or whatever. That's because your goal or vision isn't big enough or attractive enough."

The trick then is to think about the bigger picture and figure out what your bigger goals are.

"You need to rephrase your goal so that the process doesn't become the focus," says Kelly. "You want to lose weight, but if you



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think about it, your bigger, more attractive goal is that you want to go shopping in New York and you want to be your perfect size for that trip. Or you plan to travel and you want to get fit so you can really enjoy it. Once you get past the shoulding to the bigger goal, then it's a much more attractive proposition."

The bigger picture may look better, but there's still a lot of work to do and the first consideration is the practicalities of turning your dream to reality.

"The next thing to ask is what will be the impact on your life," says Kelly. "So you need to plan for those changes, and then ask yourself is it still what you want."

Once you've decided what you want to achieve, and why, the next step is to pull together the supports you need to make it happen.

"Often it can be helpful to make a collage of your goal," says Kelly. "This can be as simple as cutting out pictures from magazines that remind you of your dream so you have a visual reminder every day. Get family, friends, whoever, involved in helping you. If you're trying to get fit, rope in others to join you in the gym so that even on days

you don't feel like going, they'll be there for you. Or you wish you could eat more healthy, home-cooked meals but don't have the time. Maybe all you need is some good recipes, or even better, someone to cook them for you. It's also useful to keep a resistance log, so you become aware of where you're resisting the process.

If you know your pitfalls then you can devise creative ways of getting around them. And you need to stay flexible and give yourself some leeway too."

A common reason for giving up on a goal is that the end prize seems very far away.

"It's important to give yourself an early win," says Kelly. "Have a small success every week and you'll be building up the evidence to say 'this is working'. But the most important thing is to have fun. Make it an adventure. So get rid of those 'to do' lists and make yourself a 'love to do' list."

Ann Kelly can be contacted via her website www.yourworldyourway.com for details on upcoming workshops and retreats, to subscribe to her newsletter or for a complimentary initial life-coaching session