

Four facts about resolutions and what they mean for your dental practice

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Just as you may wait until the new week to start a fresh hobby or put off until the next quarter to embark on a new initiative or project for your practice, resolutions at the start of the year are naturally incredibly popular. However, resolution failures are also a highly publicized subject of study that you may know intimately via past personal disappointments.

That said, do not forgo resolutions entirely. Leveraging the key concept that underpins resolutions (goal setting) can yield substantial benefits. These benefits range from honing in on intentional objectives, strengths, and areas for improvement to breathing fresh life into your day-to-day and workplace, serving as both a motivating force and a force to push you out of your comfort zone. Below, we have highlighted some of the key findings about New Year's resolutions and what they can mean for your practice.

No. 1: Canadians resolve to get their bodies and budgets in shape.

In a recent study focused just on Canadians and not our neighbours to the south, our fellow countrymen did not surprise by naming improved personal nutrition and fitness as their top New Year's resolution. [Nearly 30%](#) of survey respondents chose this perennial favourite; however, focusing on financial goals was a relatively close second – with ~22% wanting to get their finances rather than their physical selves in shape. In fact, a more recent [BMO poll](#) conducted by Ipsos found that 42% of Canadians are shifting their financial goals in light of persistently high inflation and cost of living challenges. Thirty percent have resolved to cut back on spending, while 17% are developing formal plans and budgets.

Takeaways for your practice:

Take a page from your fellow Canadians' book regarding their personal goals, and try to incorporate more mindfulness and morale-boosting efforts into your office. These efforts need not be costly or resource-intensive. Something as simple as setting aside time each week for a group break or “social” can be incredibly meaningful and go far to boost your team members' emotional well-being and connectedness to your organization. Likewise, more formal and less abstract efforts might include regrouping with your employee benefits partner to revisit those “perks” that support your associates' and staff members' physical and mental health. After all, your talent cannot support your patients' health when they are struggling with health challenges, be it frequently calling in sick or not bringing their best to work each day.

Lastly, while there has been some easing in [cost of living indicators](#), finances largely remain tight. Like the BMO survey respondents mentioned above, the start of 2025 is just the significant [temporal milestone needed](#) to smartly shift or regroup on the financial front, perhaps releasing the brakes in areas that have relaxed a bit in pricing while remaining vigilant about supplies and other costs that remain historically high. Now, maybe when some expenses could be freed up to focus on growth-oriented aspects of your operations, such as analytical tools to track patient preferences and tailor better/personalized marketing content.

No. 2: Approach-oriented versus avoidance-oriented goals for success

[Researchers](#) have found that goals characterized as “approach-oriented” are far more likely to result in sustained success than those goals framed as “avoidance-oriented.” In fact, a year following embarking on a specific goal, 58.9% of study subjects who took an approach orientation were still on track. In comparison, 47.1% of their avoidance-oriented counterparts

remained successful in their pursuits. As the terminology suggests, the latter goals emphasize the item to avoid, while the former objectives instead focus on the item to aim high for or the path to positive change.

Takeaways for your practice:

So, these findings really underscore that your team's methodology in goal-setting matters. When crafting resolutions, resist the temptation to highlight or wallow in the weaknesses or past sticking points you wish to avoid. Instead, intentional statements related to your goals should emphasize ways to reach them and the positive aspects or impacts of such goal-setting. In turn, this latter take on resolutions is highly engaging, inspiring, and exciting and does not overly fixate on the bad or negative that you wish to change. An example of these methods in action for your practice might include:

- " We want to avoid long wait times when patients call."
- "We want to make sure everyone is equipped to answer and forward the call as needed right away."

The approach-oriented version of the above scenario is both more productive and offers more detailed pathways to improving this important measure of patient satisfaction.

No. 3: Just 13% of resolutions were alive and well in April.

A Forbes/OneHealth [joint study](#) found that only 8% of individuals who made a resolution kept it a month later, with 22% of resolutions persisting for two or three months and just 13% sticking to it for four months. Some [researchers](#) paint an even gloomier picture, suggesting that 23% of all resolvers have quit on their New Year's goals within a week! Key themes behind these failures are frequently summed up as merely setting the goal due to "tradition" and not due to a meaningful need or innate desire to really change. Additionally, study authors often refer to a failure to identify obstacles and, in turn, a lack of planning to overcome them. They also noted how resolution failures tend to lack accountability partners, those individuals or systems in place to hold the person making the resolution to it.

Takeaways for your practice:

Understanding why resolutions fail is important, as you can learn from others' mistakes! For starters, take a good hard look at what you and your team are isolating as goals for 2025. Ensure they align with your mission and long-term vision. Second, no obstacle will be too great when you know how to overcome these barriers once they present themselves. Have an action plan in place, and ensure these steps are challenging and push your team but are also achievable and measurable. By biting off more than you can chew, it can be demotivating and even demoralizing. Lastly, take the time to build accountability. Ensure that certain staff members are tasked with specific steps in the process and can be counted on to hold their colleagues accountable for their progress toward your goals. As needed, use the technology around you to ensure no deadlines are missed and that specific efforts toward your goals remain on track.

No. 4: On average, it takes 66 days to form a habit.

By nature, goal-setting and New Year's resolutions are about positive habit formation and reinforcement. The [traditional thinking](#) was that it takes 21 days to make a behaviour a habit; however, this process is a whole lot more nuanced than this trope suggests. A hallmark study on the process found that it took respondents as few as 18 days and as long as 254 days to predictably incorporate one of three new activities into their day-to-day lives (the average time was 66 days).

Takeaways for your practice:

The above findings reinforce that habit formation can be highly personal, and related timeframes are not universal. So, it is important to exercise *patience*. Also, be aware that it can take longer for changes to really “stick” when they involve completely new tasks, skills, or processes. Consistently practicing the new behaviour or task each day is the single best predictor for it becoming “second nature” and for your resolution actually beating the dire odds. Finally, many of these takeaways harken back to [“SMART” goals](#). So, always think in terms of your goal being “specific,” “measurable,” “achievable,” “relevant,” and “time-bound” when setting your practice up for successes that persist well after 2025.

About the author

Naren Arulrajah, President and CEO of [Ekwa Marketing](#), has been a leader in medical marketing for over a decade. Ekwa provides comprehensive marketing solutions for busy



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