

## 5 Steps to Keeping Your PD Resolutions

by Amy Pascucci

Turn over a new leaf, clean slate, change one's ways, fresh start, square one. These are just some of the ways we express the concept of our ability to start over anew, and erase the mistakes we've made, and commit—or maybe even recommit—to achieving something of which we can be proud. January first has become a natural time to let go of what has happened in the past year and look to the future. For educators, there are many professional resolutions we can make in the new year. One of the most fruitful is that of professional development.

A resolution is the act of answering or solving a problem or conflict. The definition of this word is important because it empowers us to take control of our actions; you, not your boss, are responsible for your professional development. This is a kind of “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” mentality, but that's what we need, sometimes.

Making resolutions is just the first step. Maintaining those resolutions is arguably more difficult. One of the best pieces of advice when incorporating change into your life is to start small. Think about changes that are sustainable. Think about things that are within your control. I often use Matt Cutts' TED Talk entitled “Try Something New for 30 Days” (2001) with my students. He discusses how he removed sugar from his diet for 30 days. His diet on day 31 was a pile of candy. He was demonstrating how removing all sugar from his diet was simply unsustainable for him long term, just as requiring yourself to follow a rigorous professional development regimen over a long period of time is not likely sustainable for any of us.

Sustained professional development is a lifestyle change for some educators. It's not just about attending a workshop once in a while, or attending a number of conferences in a short period of time. It's about making a commitment to continually grow and develop. You have to desire a change, and have the curiosity, willpower, and support to see it through.

Here are some steps to help you keep your professional development resolutions in 2016.

### 1. Reflect

This word gets used a great deal, and possibly overused in teaching, but it's so beneficial when done well. Dedicate just 10 to 15 minutes to think about the past year. Write down at least one success and one failure that you had in the classroom. Make things personal. Don't make changes because other people want you to make changes; think about what interests *you*. Maybe you have been using a certain author in your class a lot, and you want to do something different. Maybe you have had a great success teaching pronunciation, and you want to build on that momentum to try new approaches. Maybe your classroom management hasn't been as successful as you would like, and you're curious about new or different techniques to help maintain control while providing space for student autonomy.

The list may be endless, so you need to tailor-make your professional development. With that said, if you're looking at your reflection and find that your failures are related to things that you are not interested in, then you might have to add a resolution that is a necessary evil. Sometimes

you just have to eat your vegetables. Surprisingly, you might find out that you like vegetables, or at least you don't mind them as much as you thought you did.

In an article on maintaining resolutions, [Hinda Dubin, MD](#), a clinical assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of Maryland School of Medicine and psychiatrist at the University of Maryland Medical Center, states, "Action precedes motivation, not the other way around" (as cited in Teseo, 2012) In other words, you can't wait until the perfect moment comes. There is no perfect moment; you have to put in the work.

## 2. Have a Vision

Find a teacher (or two) who you think has the qualities you want to emulate. Observe how he or she interacts with students and colleagues. See if this teacher will talk with you for a few minutes about how he or she plans lessons and assessments. Then create a vision board.

People use [vision boards](#) to help them achieve anything from getting their dream job to maintaining better relationships. Creating a vision board of your optimal teaching or exemplary classroom is a physical manifestation of your goals. You can't obtain or attain something that you can't imagine. There are many websites available to help with the process and logistics of making a vision board. Here are some of my favorites:

- [How to Make a Vision Board](#), by Christine Kane
- [How to Create an Empowering Vision Board](#), by Jack Canfield
- [Creating a Teacher Vision Board](#), by Rhonda Stewart

Once your board is complete, put it somewhere that you will see it every day. This could be a private place, like your room, or a public place, like your office or classroom. Let it be a daily reminder of your goals, both concrete and abstract. If you are a really private person, you might consider a vision journal. However, you have to be dedicated to looking at and writing in it frequently.

## 3. Determine Your Sweet Spot

This is one of the most important steps. This is where you determine the sustainability of your resolutions. You need to go beyond where you are now in order to see change, but you can't go too far without risking burnout, or making your goals unachievable. My colleagues just started using a phrase, "trust the try; forgive the fail," which is a great litmus test for your resolutions. If you trust yourself to try it, but are able to forgive yourself if it doesn't work, then you are in the sweet spot.

## 4. Recruit Allies

TED speaker Jane McGonigal promotes this in her talk, "[The Game That Can Give You 10 Extra Years of Life](#)" (2012). Making your professional development a game could be another approach entirely, but for now, let's just adopt this one strategy. I like Jane's term *ally*, but you could think of this person as an accountability partner. Find someone in your [professional learning](#)

community or network (PLC/PLN) who you think would either participate in the same professional development resolutions, or at the very least be supportive by checking in and hearing about your process.

Think about how many of your friends post pictures of their dinners or their postworkout selfies on social media. This is built-in accountability—they want their friends to see that they are putting in the work to develop a healthy lifestyle. Then look to see the comments on their pictures: “Wow, that looks tasty. Can you send me the recipe?” “Looking good. Keep up the good work!” Very rarely do you see a negative comment. Imagine if you did the same with your professional development. I’m sure your colleagues will be asking for the activity or rubric you created. It feels great when people want to emulate your success.

## 5. Reward Yourself

This may sound silly or juvenile, but it works. Keep it meaningful; keep it related to professional development. Maybe this means buying a book on methodology that you’ve been wanting to read. Maybe it means going out for coffee with a colleague to discuss some new ideas. Maybe it means allowing yourself time to create another vision board or work in your vision journal. Hopefully, the more professional development you do, the more validated you feel, and therefore the more you crave the collaboration and self-study that it requires.

We tend to be our own worst critics. Whatever you’re doing with regards to professional development in the new year is likely to be more than you did last year, so pat yourself on the back and take the win. If you get off track, no one is going to judge you. Read over the steps above, pick up where you left off, or come at things from a different approach. If something is not successful, think about where things went wrong, and use it as an opportunity to learn and grow. As always, when you are participating in professional development, share what you are doing. You will motivate your colleagues to become involved, and it will fuel your own motivation to continue the work and reap the benefits.

## References

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