Twas the season to be jolly and now it's time to reboot for 2014, which is all shiny, bright and waiting for us to make something of it. Lisa O’Neill shows you a fail-safe way to kickstart the year by following through with your resolutions.
Did you declare some resolutions over a hefty piece of Christmas pud, your third glass of wine, or last minute during the countdown to midnight? In the harsh light of January, they may be somewhat of a blur or even crystal clear because you make the same resolutions every year, and surprisingly have faded away by Australia Day. If you really want to make your resolutions stick this year and live your dream life, it’s time to roll up your sleeves, grab a pen and paper and get to work.

Follow your heart
Before you set about making your resolutions into concrete goals for the year, make sure your heart is in it.

Marathon swimmer Ceinwen Roberts recently completed the ‘triple crown’ of long-distance swimming, which took an enormous amount of time, effort and funds. In 2012 she completed the English Channel Swim (52km), in 2013 she swam the Manhattan Island Swim (46km), and the final jewel in her crown, the Catalina Island Swim (35km). Before plunging headfirst into various oceans, Roberts’ first step was to ask herself how much she wanted to achieve each swim and associated goals.

“You’ve got to really, really want it and be passionate about that feeling of success when you achieve the goal,” Roberts says. “When new year comes around, people are feeling fat, lazy and full of alcohol and think they’d like to be hot, trim and terrific, but unfortunately it doesn’t just happen by casually saying to a friend ‘oh yeah, I wanna do that or look like that’.”

It’s easy to jump on the New Year’s resolution bandwagon, but before you blithely choose a few of your own, making them goals you’re passionate about is the first step to achieving them. Ask yourself why you want to achieve each goal and how you will feel in a year’s time if you haven’t achieved them. If the reasons aren’t strong enough and it won’t be a big deal if you don’t make it, you don’t want it enough to make your goal into a reality. However, if your reasons are compelling and you can visualise a much better you in 12 months time, it’s time to get serious.

Get specific
One of the key errors people make at resolution time is avoiding specifics. How many of your goals are filled with vague words such as ‘some’, ‘less’ or ‘more’? Consider the SMART principle, where each goal is specific (have a target), measurable (a way to track progress), attainable (make sure your goal is realistic), relevant (does your goal matter to you?) and time-bound (a deadline...
establishes a sense of urgency and is a strategy to avoid putting your goal on the backburner). Business coach Suzanne Laidlaw says to be committed to your goal, you need to have a game plan.

“A common resolution is to lose 10 kilograms in the new year and over the festive season you eat and drink whatever you want,” Laidlaw says. “Have you worked out how long it takes to lose 10 kilos? So, you know what your diet will be like? Have you set aside time to exercise in your calendar? Make sure the right food is in the house and that you have a strategy for not drinking when you go out.”

Write them down

Once you have the specifics straight, write it all down and make your goals visible. Owner of Peachy Clean Organic Beauty Boutique, Haley Thompson, stepped away from a successful career in the media because her heart wasn’t in it anymore. She had a burning desire to make organic skincare more accessible, and educate people on the toxic products circulating in the beauty market.

“I would buy toxic beauty products off my friends and go shopping for a replacement for them,” Thompson says. “I couldn’t bear the thought of my loved ones using toxic products!”

Now, 18 months into a booming online business, Thompson regularly sets herself three, six, 12-month and five-year goals as she strives to make herself and her business better. She writes these goals down and, after sleeping with them under her pillow for a few nights, she puts them somewhere she will easily see them every day.

“I sometimes leave the really personal ones in my underwear drawer, so I get reminded of them every morning!” Thompson says, laughing.

Go one step further and create a dream or vision board (for an online version, check out www.pinterest.com). Get crafty and cut images or quotes from your favourite magazines that reflect how you see yourself or how you want to be. Whip out the glue stick and paste them on a large piece of card with your written goals alongside them. Put the finished product up somewhere you will see it every day (such as behind the toilet door, behind your work computer, inside your wardrobe door) for a reminder of who you are and where you’re headed.

Stepping stones

Once you have the details nutted out and your vision is clear, break down your goal for the year into a series of smaller goals. Having a huge goal for the year can be overwhelming and people regularly quit early when they expect too much of themselves straight away. The preparation for Roberts’ first marathon swim was a year, which she acknowledged was a long time to spend training for one thing.

“It was so important for me to have milestones along the way to keep me on track and motivated,” she says. “I made a series of little goals, like stepping stones to reach the top of the mountain, that I could tick off, so I raced the Rottnest Channel...”
Swim and lots of ocean challenges that would feel like rewards, as you get the satisfaction of completing each event.”

Breaking your goal down into smaller goals not only provides a spike of motivation, it can help point to any warning signs that indicate you might fall short at your final destination.

“After each swim, I had a look at how I was going; did I do well and if not, what went wrong?” Roberts says. “Why this was happening, address it and change it for the next little goal so you’re still on track to this massive accomplishment at the end.”

**Check-in regularly**

Another way to stay on track throughout the year is to frequently schedule time in your calendar to go over your resolutions. Consistently revisiting your goals and the reasons behind them will keep them fresh in your mind and easier to stick to.

“The one link that most people forget is that you must put time into working on the goal, not just in it,” says Laidlaw. “Whether your goal is related to fitness, business or home renovation, check you’re on schedule every week. Once you’ve determined where you’re at, you can keep moving forward or change direction if you need to to get you where you want to be.”

Resist getting despondent if you come across hurdles. Sometimes goals need to be adjusted because, well…life. Things come up and perhaps a plan B needs to be installed to go further. While Thompson has poured her heart and soul into Peachy Clean, she’s made mistakes and believes failing is part and parcel of being “out there trying”.

“Sometimes goals change and that’s ok. Simply having the intention and striving for a goal can often make other wonderful things happen that you hadn’t even thought of,” she says. “Be kind to yourself with your goals, they’re intended to motivate you, not discourage you.”

Revisiting your goals on a weekly basis provides a good opportunity to reflect on how far you’ve come and whether you need to change tactics or the goal posts.

**Visualisation**

If you find the bad habits that have prevented you achieving your goals in the past are proving hard to break yet again, it’s important to remember the big picture. Motivation will wane and in tough times, bad habits are often recalled because they’re easy and provide short-term benefits. When you feel yourself swaying from the path to achieving your goal, visualisation can be a powerful tool to employ. Close your eyes and visualise every detail of what it looks like to have achieved your goal. When the going got tough for Laidlaw, visualisation was what got her into icy-cold water for training when motivation was lacking.

“Everyone goes through slumps and thinks ‘I’m too tired’, ‘I can’t be bothered’ or ‘I’m not feeling 100 per cent’, and when I was training for Catalina I thought, ‘Do I really have to get in that cold river for training again?’” she says. “I’d make myself go through the thought process and think of myself on the shore at Catalina and the feeling of satisfaction and pride in myself I would have, and how

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happy all my support crew will be to see me achieve my goal.”

Make your visualisation as detailed as possible, so as you work towards your goal you know exactly what you’re striving towards.

**Cheer squad**

There are some goals you desperately want to achieve but you wouldn’t dare tell anyone, because what if you fail? You need to transform your thinking as involving a special friend, a partner or even a coach in your goal-setting process will prove to be a great asset.

“Telling people – yes, out loud – really helps to make you accountable, especially if friends ask you how a particular goal is coming along,” Thompson says.

If you have a friend with similar interests, you might find they are pursuing a similar goal and you can go for it together. When someone else is invested in your success, giving up is just that little bit harder to do.

“Tell someone who is emotionally interested, don’t just tell the cat, but someone you have a relationship with who wants you to succeed almost as much as you do,” Laidlaw says. “Then commit to a regular catch-up to see how you’re both going. It’s such a bonus to have someone else’s energy to helping you towards your goal.”

And when you’re visualising yourself reaching your goal, factor in an image of your friend clinking your champagne glass or the pair of you out for a celebratory lunch or shopping expedition.

Don’t wait for December 31 to roll around again, or even the elusive ‘right time’ for your New Year’s resolutions. Get busy creating an even better you because with some exciting goals that are backed up with great planning, vision, commitment and support, you can’t lose. **NH**