

New Year's Nudge Word

Well, here we are in 2024. With apologies to Santa, the most wonderful time of the year is, in fact, early January. The new year brings a fresh start—a do-over that's imbued with hope that this is the year I'll finally get it right. For a few glorious days, *Auld Lang Syne* and bottle rockets drown out that little voice inside my head that says, *you can't*. Anything is possible.

It starts with the clean out. The day after Christmas, I crisscross the living room, stooping over to pick up bits of wrapping paper, boxes, and bows. It feels so good to tidy up, I just keep going, rifling through closets and drawers, filling bag after bag with things destined for donation bins. Mike and the kids love this annual [KonMari](#) frenzy about as much as rolling in poison ivy. They huddle in the hallway, hatching a plan to hide things from me, but I disrupt this rebellion by chasing them from room to room waving an old soccer jersey or unraveled yoyo bellowing, *Does this spark joy?* Then, after several car trips to Goodwill, we settle in to watch the ball drop and craft our lists of goals for the coming year.

44% of Americans make New Year's resolutions each year. In one [study](#), only 77% of these hopefuls made it past the first week; after a month, nearly half had given up. By the end of June, only 40% were still hanging on. Researchers noted that “self-efficacy, skills necessary to change, and readiness to change all predicted positive outcomes for resolvers.” But I believe there's more to it than that. It's not that my friends and I who suffer from chronic resolution insufficiency don't possess those qualities. The authors needed to dig deeper. They failed to factor in shift work, middle school algebra homework, and proximity to Krispy Kreme Hot Now doughnuts.

This paper did offer some useful advice, however: consider setting an approach-oriented goal rather than an avoidance-oriented goal. In other words, instead of vowing to quit something, resolve to start something new. You might even choose to swap a list of specific goals for a [nudge word](#)—a theme word for the year that will nudge you toward the changes you'd like to make. I tried this for 2023. I had spent the previous three years extricating myself from professional commitments that had left me with an enormous sleep debt and little time to spend with my kids and family members who had developed serious health problems. As 2023 arrived, I finally felt rested and restored. So, I chose the word *engage*.

Though I admittedly felt a little silly choosing a theme word, the desire to *engage* stuck with me, guiding my decisions all year. My childhood best friend and I set a standing monthly lunch date; we found a perfect bakery at the halfway point on the drive between our cities. I committed fully to my writing accountability group and made it to most meetings. I flew to Rhode Island for my first writers' retreat and started the days on a rocky beach learning Qigong yoga in the frigid wind. I snuggled on the couch with my teenage daughter and binge-watched reality TV while eating buckets and buckets of popcorn. I even remembered to water my house plants and fill my bird feeders, though I suspect there is some switch in your brain that flips on when you approach 50 that automates these geriatric skills.

I didn't achieve all the things I wanted. I refer you back to the notion of proximity to Krispy Kreme, plus my daughter's insistence that we spend my birthday month driving around eating all the things on the list of free [birthday treats](#) that she found on TikTok (you're welcome). But here we are in

January again, and I am thrilled to have another fresh start and the chance to choose a new word. I'm not ready to let go of *engage*, so I'll just tuck in my new word beside it.

This year, I choose *delight*.