

New Year's Resolutions

'Incredible, January arrives and again it's about hell !' Susan sounded serious when addressing her husband, as usual deep in thought. He looked up, not surprised by his wife taking the news at face value. 'Journalists seem to doubt the good outcome of our resolutions, every year the same!' Jürgen burst out laughing, a German designer softly teasing his American wife. 'Think darling of all the good intentions you have, I'm confident this time!' Nothing could be further from the truth as far as his own resolutions were concerned.

Eager to give them a laundry list of resolutions, Susan loved to chat with her friends about fitness, losing weight and learning Italian. Forgotten about her last attempt to learn German that had been quite a disaster. Jürgen had never forced her to adopt his language, particularly in Berlin where nearly everyone spoke English. Not like nowadays in Rome, where she often seemed at a bit of a loss. Unfortunately learning languages was not exactly an American strength.

One may actually wonder if there's a link between New Year's resolutions and cultural values ? The answer is a dual yes and no. Values are ideas a society has about good and bad. Like so many other Americans, Susan believes in bodily self-improvement, making her return to the gym, if only for a few weeks ! When Susan resolves to learn Italian, this conforms to achievement and success, a typical core American value.

Jürgen would love to spend more time with his wife and kids. His career was important but a self-confessed workaholic, he was all too often inclined to take on too much. He is surprised to see his friend Paolo spending plenty of time with his mother in the countryside. But what does Jürgen know about the *famiglia*, that happens to be the core Italian value and his mother the most important woman in Paolo's life ?

Regardless of culture, only 12% of all the people will be able to stick to their New Year's resolutions. For the remaining 88%, the road to hell is paved with good intentions, meaning that these resolutions will fail. One might ask why ? Whether it is about fitness, language courses or spending more time with the family, we all need motivation and social support. Often our goals are too ambitious. In January people start all over the world to deprive their body by eating and drinking less, adding stress to their lives instead of removing it.

The day Susan will realize that speaking Italian will expand her circle of friends, she will have the strength and energy to pursue her language courses. Just as her husband will become aware that because he is spending more time at home, some of his staff at the office will eventually be able to work more independently, his growing wish for quite a while.

Willpower is important but goals are even more. Both Susan and Jürgen do have to realize that in order to become successful, their goals need to be well-defined, an essential element for all of us!

*By Micky Keeren
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