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Rethinking New Year's resolutions: a case for short-term goals

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As we enter 2026, many of us feel a strong urge to start fresh—a familiar feeling that returns at the beginning of every new year. We often reflect on the mistakes that have limited our growth and think about how we can overcome them in the year ahead.

Personally, over the past few years, I have found myself making promises to be more disciplined in life, finish my studies on time, not overspend, and so on. However, rarely do I translate my New Year's resolutions into reality, and I mostly find myself crumbling.

My experience says I am not the only one; rather, it is quite a common conundrum. Research from the University of Scranton suggests that only eight percent of people realise their New Year's goals. Hence, isn't it time we rethink our approach to New Year's resolutions? And, instead of trying to reinvent our lives entirely whenever we enter a new year, can we not try to set short-term goals as our New Year's resolutions—goals that are achievable in a limited time?

One important, and perhaps the most vital, reason behind taking our New Year resolution based on short-term-achievements is that our brain is more receptive toward short-term goals. Psychological studies show that our brain is wired to prioritise short-term tasks over long-term ones due to the release of dopamine, a crucial neurotransmitter that controls motivation for immediate wins.

This phenomenon has evolved through the early human experience of immediate survival. In the case of our ancestors who lived in unpredictable environments, this short-term achievement came in the form of dealing with natural calamity. For them, focusing on a quick gain, such as securing food or ensuring their safety for the present, was a more reliable option than long-term future planning.

Humans tend to favour immediate rewards. So, when you're asked to choose between the healthy dinner you promised yourself and your favourite junk food—loaded with oil, sugar, and salt for instant pleasure—you are far

more likely to choose the latter and give in to short-term gratification.

Therefore, it is often more effective to set goals that allow you to see results immediately, giving you a clear sense of achievement. Instead of promising yourself that you will eat healthy for the entire year, you could set a smaller, more manageable goal, such as eating healthy two days a week with a gap between those days. This approach creates a feeling of success twice a week without requiring a drastic lifestyle change.

In addition, failing to keep a promise you made to yourself rarely produces positive emotions. More often, it leads to feelings of self-defeat and creates a lingering sense of guilt. Rather than motivating you to improve, this emotional response can quietly undermine your confidence and willingness to try again.

We feel disappointed because we could not honour a commitment we knowingly made for our own benefit. During this process, we begin to question our self-discipline and our ability to improve or make better choices in the future. Over time, this self-doubt can become a larger obstacle than the habit we were trying to change in the first place.

Over time, this self-doubt can become deeply ingrained, with guilt resurfacing each time we give in to the pleasure we once promised to avoid. It is important to recognise that our habits have been formulated over months, if not years, of practice. One decision and one promise will not undo that magically. Thus, it is important to work on new habit formation rather than altering an existing habit. That new habit might look as trivial as eating healthy once a week or reducing one hour of daily screen time. But remember: each step matters.

References:

- BBC (December 26 1, 2016). *Why your New Year's resolutions often fail*.
- University of Nevada, Las Vegas: News Center (January 6, 2025). *Study: The Evolutionary Origins of Poor Long-Term Decision Making*.

Admission Fair Spring 2026 underway at Stamford University Bangladesh

Stamford University Bangladesh has launched its Admission Fair Spring 2026 on January 3, offering prospective students admission to 29 undergraduate and postgraduate programmes across 14 departments under five faculties.

The fair was inaugurated by the Acting Vice-Chancellor of Stamford University Bangladesh, Prof. Dr Md Younus Mia. Among others present at the inauguration were Academic Advisor Prof. Dr Aka Firoz Ahmed; Treasurer Prof. Dr Mohammad Jeaul Hasan; Dean of the Faculty of Science Prof. Dr Ahmad Kamruzzaman Majumder; Proctor and Associate Prof. Dr Mrityunjoy Acharjee; Registrar Muhammad Abdul Matin; Convener of the Admission Fair and Chairman of the Department of Economics Prof. Dr Abdus Sattar; Head of the Public Relations Division Prodeepo Mobarok; and Acting Head of the Admission Department Md Ashik Mahmud. Deans of various faculties, chairmen of departments, university officials, and staff members were also in attendance.

At the fair, prospective students are being offered a 50 percent discount on admission fees along with a 10 percent tuition fee waiver for the first semester.

Students interested in admission may visit the admission office at Stamford University Bangladesh's 51 Siddeshwari Road, Ramna, Dhaka campus. Admission details and online application facilities are available on the university's official website. Further information can be obtained by calling the university's helpline.

With a strong emphasis on research-oriented and career-focused education, Stamford University Bangladesh continues to attract both local and international students. The institution features modern and digitised classrooms, free internet access, advanced laboratories, student zones, playgrounds, and a well-equipped library. A permanent campus is currently under construction, with academic activities already underway on a limited scale.

