



New Year's resolutions

Highlights

- Only a tiny fraction of us achieve our New Year's goals.
- Simply setting a goal raises your chances of succeeding.
- Choosing an internal control related resolution as a work goal for 2016 can make your agency stronger.

All of us, at one time or another, have resolved to do something different in the new year. It may be spending less or budgeting better, eating healthier foods, exercising more, or spending quality time with friends and family.

Despite good intentions, only a tiny fraction of us keep our resolutions. Forbes magazine reports that, while more than 40% of us make New Year's resolutions, just 8% of people achieve their New Year's goals. The magazine suggests that, to have a better chance of succeeding, keep your resolutions simple, tangible, and obvious. Most importantly, however, keep believing you can do it!

Simply setting a goal raises your chances of success. As a result, here are some internal control related resolutions to consider for 2016.

Resolve to maintain open communication. A strong control environment includes open and clear communication channels, where employee comments, opinions, and contributions are welcomed, valued, and recognized. Supervisors should listen and follow-up on employee comments about potential problems and weaknesses in their processes and programs. Employees should not be afraid to question any unclear or unusual items.

Resolve to improve written policies and procedures. Up-to-date and clearly written policies and procedures help ensure compliance, promote strong internal controls, and give employees a safe harbor for performance.

Resolve to support risk assessment efforts in your agency. Risk assessment verifies the effectiveness of an agency's internal control structure. As an employee, participate in risk assessment activities if requested and, as a supervisor, support your employees' involvement. Performing risk assessments helps us stay ahead of potential waste, fraud, and abuse in our key business processes.

Resolve to improve your detection of emerging risks. Agencies need to anticipate and monitor for changes that could create risk. These might include changes in state legislation or federal requirements, changes in personnel, economic changes, or new technology. These changes can cause new risks to arise, requiring updated or different control activities.

Resolve to be a cyber security-conscious employee. According to a recent Associated Press report, employees were to blame for over 50% of all federal government security incidents analyzed. Bogus phishing emails, opening attachments or malware websites, and mishandling electronic or printed data are all ways for bad actors to take advantage of careless employees.

Resolve to promote a diverse and inclusive workplace. A work environment that promotes and celebrates diversity among its employees is also more likely to successfully resolve problems as they arise, generate new ideas, and be a fun and rewarding place to work!

Suggested action steps: Consider these New Year's resolutions. Can you pick one of these as a work goal for the upcoming year?

If you have questions, please contact Jeanine Kuwik at Jeanine.Kuwik@state.mn.us or (651) 201-8148.