

# How to Make a Promise to Yourself

- 1. Be realistic.** Make sure you are making a promise that you believe can happen. So, for example, promising you are going to win the lottery today might not be the best of promises. Promising to quit smoking cigarettes cold turkey tomorrow when you have smoked for the past thirty years, though awesome, is not so realistic. Promising to incrementally cut down the amount you smoke, given how addictive of a habit it is, and plot the inevitable cease-fire, would make much more sense.
- 2. Stretch yourself.** Make sure your promises are a stretch for you. Promising to floss daily (unless you normally don't) is more sleaze than stretch. Right? But, promising to drink X number of glasses of water, make your mammogram appointment, call your brother whom you've been avoiding, finally go and see the apartment your parents just (over a year ago!) bought, etc., are good promises. Do what you've been putting off. Do the thing that immediately came to mind the minute I started talking about promises. Oh, you know the one (or twelve).
- 3. Be Specific.** Your promises need to be wiggle-proof. Make sure that when you make a promise, you answer the following questions: How often? How long? By when? How much? Promises, for example, like *I will be nicer to my assistant, hate my commute less, track my spending more*, all have great intent, though what do they really mean? Your promises need to be loophole-free. *I will call my brother by Sunday and speak to him for at least twenty minutes. I will send out five resumes a week, and tell three new people a day about my career dream. I will reach out nightly to three potential dating prospects online that I'm excited about*, etc. You see how slightly different those promises are? They leave very little room for wondering if you kept the promise or not. It's either yes or no.
- 4. Use powerful language.** Using sincere but ever so slippery verbs like "hope," "try," and "wish" will not cut it when it comes to making promises that are conducive to keeping. Making a promise like *I will play one entire game of Apples to Apples (or the board game of choice) with my daughter once a week, for example, is a way different promise from I'm gonna try to bond with my daughter.*
- 5. Manage the external world.** How many of us have blamed the airport or the airlines (back in the day when they fed you) for not keeping to our diet while traveling? Think ahead. If, for example, you know there is a party on Saturday and you have a promise to only eat one dessert a week, wisely save it for the party. We are not a naive species. Stop playing dumb.
- 6. Get the joke.** The more you resent having to make and keep a particular promise, the more you need that very promise.