

Sticking to the plan

A few tips to achieving resolutions made this year

THE first of January, when stripped down to its very core, is just another ordinary day.

Many of us attach a sense of importance and significance to this date. After all, it's the start of a new year, filled with promises and hopes of a fresh beginning — a chance to renew, and even possibly redeem ourselves.

This year, we tell ourselves, will be different. It will be THE year. And to underscore this notion, we set goals, and make resolutions.

It could mean losing weight, spending more time with the family, or getting fit and healthy.

But who came up with the whole idea of making resolutions in the first place?

It all started with the Babylonians who celebrated their version of the New Year some 4,000 years ago — not on the first of January as we know it, but on a particular day in March — one that presented an equal amount of both sunlight and darkness.

The festivities began on this date and lasted for 11 days, in which people paid off debts and returned borrowed goods.

The celebrations also had religious and political connotations attached to it.

First, it signified the victory of the Babylonian sky god, Marduk, over the sea goddess, Tiamat, and second, marked the crowning of a new king of Babylon, or the continuation of the current rule.

It was only when Julius Caesar introduced an extra 90 days into the calendar to make it aligned with the sun, did Jan 1 officially become New Year's Day.

January, in particular, was a sig-



Although these figures may seem disheartening, here are a few tips that I've found which helps to ensure that we actually meet our resolutions... this time around:

Write it down

Studies by Stanford University has shown that the chances of meeting one's goal increases by a whopping 70% if written down.

It's not just limited to writing it down on sticky notes, it's also penning related, inspirational words, phrases and desires — as cheesy as it sounds. It's a constant reminder of the commitment that was made at the start of the year.

Be specific

Loose goals only leaves room for error and failure. So, instead of saying "I want to lose weight", the aim should be "I want to lose 5kg in three months".

Make sure it's achievable

This may sound blatantly obvious, it's surprising how we underestimate the time and effort it may take to carry out certain resolutions.

For example, I was once given Stephen King's entire *Dark Tower* series as a gift which I had vowed to read in a year — an unachievable task which resulted the books being covered with a layer of dust.

nificant month as it was named after the Roman god of beginnings, Janus, whose two faces enabled him to look forward into the future, as well as back to the past.

Sacrifices were made to Janus, in which gifts were exchanged, and parties were thrown.

However, the revelry had underlying good intentions, as with the Babylonians, it was about being good to one's neighbour, along with learning from the past and forging on, focusing on better times ahead.

The custom of making resolutions has carried on to this very day — invariably, its nature has changed significantly — it's become more about us than it is about others (according to the University of Scranton, last year's top 10 New Year's resolutions included losing weight, getting organised, quitting smoking and falling in love), but its very essence remains the same.

It's about moving forward with life, and onward to a brand new year. That being said, though, it may be easy enough to make resolutions — the difficulty lies in keeping them.

As a case in point, the University of Washington notes that nearly half of 100 million Americans gave up on fulfilling their resolutions back in 1997.

However, research by the University of Minnesota stated that this figure has since risen to 80% in the last decade.

Make sure others know

Never underestimate the power of peer pressure. If friends and family know what your resolutions are, they'll care enough to support you and goad you into getting it done.

Embrace technology

You have to love technology. Apps such as Way of Life or Fig not only allows you to keep track of your goals, it also provides statistical data as to how far you are to achieving your target.

On top of that, these apps also provide the option to connect with friends and family via Facebook, who can view your progress and even cheer you on at the sidelines.

There are also apps out there that are tailored to fit a specific goal. For instance, if you like to run, the Nike + Running app allows you to keep track of your distance and the number of calories lost, while the Calorie Counter features an entire repository of commonly consumed foods and the amount of calories or kilojoules that go along with it.

■ Joyce Au-Yong is a Malaysian currently pursuing her Masters at the University of Sydney, and revels in the many joys (and even idiosyncrasies) that the city has to offer. She is also looking forward to starting off the New Year with a bang — and to achieving her list of resolutions.