

Fear of failure hinders goals

[Psychology](#), [Success](#)



\n[[Table of Contents](#)]\n

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1. [The Surprising Statistics](#) \n \t
2. [Dream or Safety](#) \n \t
3. [Atychiphobia](#) \n \t
4. [Conclusion](#) \n

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The Surprising Statistics

Research conducted by the University of Scranton, completed January 1, 2017, studied the percentage of people that maintain their New Year's resolutions, long-term goals, through the year. The study's results concluded that 58% of Americans make New Year's resolutions, and out of that 58%, only 9 out of every 100 people felt successful in maintaining their goal. This staggering statistic is startling since influencers of society such as, but not limited to, social media, government leaders, teachers, parents, writers, etc. advertise the pursuit of dreams avidly. The world's population is wired to set and achieve goals in order to build greater societies and better futures, so why the failure?

Dream or Safety

The science of fear can help answer this unknown: individual insecurities and fears can discourage the pursuit of goals by forcing the selection of safety rather than uncertainty. According to the source *The Positive Psychology People*, fear is a basic human response that occurs in the brain and affects individuals during "life-or-death" situations for protection. However, with the

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evolution of human civilization and the reduction of “ life-or-death” situations, fear signals are triggered in non-threatening conditions; in this case, when determining to pursue a goal. During these confrontations, the brain chooses safety or risk– fight or flight. The risk option in goal situations is to take a chance and pursue the dream; the safety option in goal situations is to not risk failure and give up on the dream. In long-term goals, it is often, as shown by the New Year’s resolutions statistics, that fear drives the brain to choose safety and causes the pursuit to cease.

Atychiphobia

With this in mind, there are various fears that can trigger this safety response. Paulo Coelho provides an example in his book “ The Alchemist” by quoting that “ People are afraid to pursue their most important dreams because they feel... that they’ll be unable to achieve them” (p. 134): the fear of being unable to complete a goal because of the uncertainty of success. From personal experience, fear of failure is an often culprit for hindering goals (so common in fact, that it has its own name: atychiphobia). The fear of failure can affect people in two ways: it either stops a person from pursuing a dream altogether or modifies goals to avoid loss rather than attain benefit. For example, an “ A” student might set a goal of keeping their A honor roll instead of setting a goal to improve their grades from what they are already. Since improving grades takes more effort than maintaining a range of grades, it is safer to keep the existing grades than risking failure to raise a grade. In both cases, the original intention or goal is disrupted and therefore prevented due to fear and preference of safety.

Another common fear that can prevent the pursuit of a goal is also represented in the student example: fear of working towards a goal of much work and effort. Every goal takes work to achieve, some more than others, and in those types of goals, people can be put off due to an unwillingness to put in the work required. The student in the example could have attended tutoring to get extra help from their instructor or could have studied their notes to reinforce their understanding of the topic. However, if they pursued their goal without being afraid of failing and of the extra work, they would have been able to raise their grade and ended up with a better result of what they could have done otherwise. Their goal was downgraded by fear of failure in addition to restricted by fear of extra effort and their goal was not completed to its original and fullest potential.

Conclusion

In retrospect, the results of the research done on New Year's resolutions seem more feasible when fear is taken into account due to its effect on people's judgment. Fear is a basic part of human psychology and getting past logic and safety is not an easy task. Prevalent fears that impede the completion of goals are fear of failure and intimidation of working towards a goal by implementing more effort. These fears either lessen the rigor of goals to prevent loss or block their completion altogether. People's choice to surpass their fears will determine if society betters or remains unchanged.