

New Year's Resolutions

Although I am not a big fan of New Year resolutions, I am a big fan of setting some new goals every now and then. Many people say they are going to lose weight, run a marathon, swim Cook Straight, and so on, but they are very time consuming and big things to think about, and as you know many people never achieve those types of goals. There are many reasons why, but the biggest one is they pick a huge goal and don't plan to achieve it in small steps.

There are two main things you must write down when planning to implement a new goal, or many goals. The first one is the reason "Why" you want to achieve this. For example, if you want to practice more – why do you want to practice more? To get more gigs? To learn a new style?

Once you have the Why, the "How" to do it becomes much easier. The how you achieve whatever you want to do must be broken down into small achievable steps and written down, just like your "why" needs to be written down. One reason many people don't achieve goals is because they are not written down, looked at every day, and recited loudly, which you should do if you want to achieve anything that is worthy of your time and effort.

Below I have outlined nine ways you can easily improve at least one area of your playing this year by just doing something small, and in doing that you are more likely to stick to it and enjoy it.

Practice a bit more

If you only pick up your guitar twice a week and play for 30 minutes, see if you can pick it up three times a week and play for 30 minutes. Once that becomes the new norm, then see if you can do four times a week.

The best way to practice more is not to put your guitar away in its case, but rather have a stand that you leave it on while at home. Only use the case when you take it away from home. That way you will see your guitar in the stand and will be more inclined to pick it up and play.

Get some lessons

One of the reasons why a lot of people own guitars but never play them much is they are stuck in a rut and not sure how to get out of it. They go to YouTube, but that doesn't work either because a lot of the stuff is too difficult, not learning things in the right order, and generally is very frustrating when you are not sure what to do. A good teacher can help you overcome all that frustration and get you out of that rut and learning some new things quickly.

For most people having regular lessons with a good teacher is very motivating, and also helps solve the practice and play a bit more we talked about in the last paragraph.

Listen and learn a new style

Many guitar players tend to get stuck in a rut because they only play in one style. There are many different genres in music and you should try and discover some new ones you haven't heard before.

Most top guitar players can play a few, if not a lot of different styles of music, which in turn allows them to get more gigs, play at more jam sessions, etc. Quite often you don't even have to learn any new techniques, but just listen to the language and dialect of the music.

Finger-picking

If you have never studied fingerpicking before, then now might be a good time to get into it. There are many different finger-picking techniques and this style of playing was one of the first on the planet so there is a lot of history behind it.

To do something different, I studied classical guitar for many years and really enjoyed it. You might to.

Acoustic or electric

If you are a totally electric player, then maybe picking up an acoustic guitar and playing some fingerpicking things will excite you. Or if you are an acoustic player, then picking up an electric guitar might excite you to.

Make it a habit to swap between the two every half hour, or each day. You might surprise yourself at what comes out of it.

Upgrade your equipment

Maybe it is time to upgrade a guitar, pedal, amplifier, etc. Quite often a new bit of equipment can light the spark that allows us to improve our guitar skills quickly.

It is a lot more fun to practice with some effects, say chorus on some rhythm part, or overdrive on a lead solo or riff you are practicing. Even trying out some new bit of equipment is very motivating for a lot of people.

Get out and jam

If you know some friends who play, you might want to ask them to get together on the weekend or at night to jam. Playing music is not a solitary thing, it is a social thing to participate in, and you should make the most of it. You don't have to be a great player to get out and jam, but you should be able to keep in time and know a few chords, then you will be fine.

Form a band

If you already have a lot of skills jamming, then you might want to form a regular band with friends and see what happens. Quite often people who form bands like to write their own songs, etc., which is also a lot of fun.

Although forming a band is a more serious type of pastime, if you get the right combination of people together things can really start to happen with offers to play at friend's parties, weddings, pubs, etc. If you are going to form a band, then make sure to read all of Thomas Goss's Building Blocks articles in this and past magazines.

Record your music

The next logical step is to record your own music if you have written anything. In fact, you don't even have to have written anything yourself, but just go into a studio and record someone else's song and have fun in the studio. Being in a good studio with a good producer and engineer can be one of the best creative things you can do, and you will also learn a lot.

To sum up, if you can pick just one of these areas to work on over the next few months, write down on paper a plan to achieve it, and increase your time doing it, you will have achieved a lot. A lot more than the many guitar owners out there who do very little each year.

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