



Newsletter - January 2026

The January 15th Cliff: Why Your 2026 Plan Just Died (And How to Resurrect It)

So, today is the day.

If the data holds true, January 15th is the day most resolutions die.

They don't die with a bang. There is no catastrophic failure or massive explosion. They die with a whimper. You skip the morning strategy session because an "urgent" email came in. You skip the gym because you slept poorly. You step in to fix a problem you swore you would delegate because "it's just faster *this one time*."

And just like that, the new you is gone.

They don't die because they were bad ideas or motivated with bad intentions. They die because of a fundamental misunderstanding of human biology.

A lot of leaders try to rely on their motivation, their drive, and their willpower to change their behaviour. Essentially, they are relying on their amygdala and emotional brain.

But motivation is weather. It's unpredictable, temporary, and entirely out of your control.

Identity is climate. It is the prevailing, long-term environment that dictates what grows and what dies.

If you want to survive Q1, stop building your strategy on the weather (how you feel). Start building it on the climate (who you are).

So what does a successful approach to behaviour change look like? It looks like an Operating System.

The Biology of "The Cliff"

Whether your resolutions were for your personal life, for work, or - most likely - both, you can't rely just on willpower to deliver them.

Here is the hard truth: Willpower is a battery. It depletes. Every decision you make, every impulse you suppress, and every email you write drains glucose from the brain. By 2:00 PM, your battery is in the red.

Willpower sustains your behaviour change typically for days, or at best a few weeks. This is why we hit the "cliff" around mid-January. The initial dopamine hit of the "New Year" wears off, and the battery runs flat.

A person's primitive brain is simply not strong enough to sustain the new behaviour, so soon it falls away.

This isn't a character flaw; it's a feature, it's a safety mechanism.

Your brain is an energy-conserving machine. The **Basal Ganglia** - the ancient part of your brain responsible for habits - is incredibly energy-efficient. It wants you to do what you've always done because it's "cheap" fuel-wise.

The **Prefrontal Cortex** - the part responsible for new strategies and complex change - is an energy hog.

When you get tired or stressed, your brain attempts to save you by shutting down the expensive Prefrontal Cortex and defaulting back to the cheap Basal Ganglia. This is why, under stress, you revert to micromanaging (the old habit) even though you *know* you should be leading (the new behaviour).

Science shows that to really lock in a new behaviour, you need a runway of about **three months**.

Specifically, a landmark study by Phillippa Lally at University College London found that it takes an **average of 66 days** for a new behaviour to become automatic. But for complex leadership habits - like you're dealing with - it often takes longer.

That means you have a massive gap to bridge: from **Day 15** (when motivation dies) to **Day 90** (when the habit finally sticks).

You cannot cross that bridge on willpower alone. You need a system.

The "External" Prefrontal Cortex

While designing a system can sometimes be done independently, the science shows that working with an expert, a coach, is often a better route.

Think about the gym analogy. Even if you know the exercises, the workouts, and the programming, using a professional coach takes it up a notch.

Why? It's not because you don't know *how* to lift the weight. It's because when you are on your 9th rep and your muscles are screaming, your brain screams "STOP." A professional coach holds you accountable, makes adjustments to lock in the behaviour, and ensures you don't cheat on the form.

He or she also acts as a psychological accountability force... just knowing that you have to tell your coach when you opted for the doughnut instead of eggs for breakfast, pushes you to stay on track. The coach is part of your accountability operating system.

Now, apply this to leadership.

In business, "cheating on form" is subtle.

- It's sending the Slack message yourself instead of coaching your report to solve the problem.
- It's canceling your "Deep Work" block because a client called.
- It's avoiding the difficult feedback conversation because you want to be "nice."

These are the "reps" of leadership. And just like in the gym, when you are tired / stressed / busy, your form breaks down. You revert to the "**Doer**" identity because it feels safer than the "**Leader**" identity.

This is where a coach becomes your **External Prefrontal Cortex**, your accountability system.

When your own executive function is depleted by the chaos of the day, or the moment,, the coach provides the external regulation required to stay the course.

Coaches don't just "chat." They:

1. **Spot the Pattern:** Identify the specific triggers that cause you to revert to old habits.
2. **Force the Pause:** Create the psychological space to choose a different response.

3. **Audit the "Reps":** Review your actual calendar and decisions to ensure they match your desired identity.
4. **Hold you accountable.** Probably one of the most important and impactful roles, even though it is often passive.

Coaches provide the "Constraint" that forces the "Change."

Stop Trusting Your "Future Self"

The biggest lie we tell ourselves is, "I'll do it better tomorrow."

We believe that our "Future Self" will be less tired, more disciplined, and less stressed than our "Current Self." But in a high-growth environment, that day never comes.

If you are serious about your 2026 goals, stop relying on the January version of yourself to carry you through to December. That version of you is already fading.

You need to move from "Goal Setting" (Amateur) to "Behavioural Engineering" (Professional).

You need to design a system that makes your desired leadership behaviour inevitable, not optional. Whether that is a strict calendar protocol, a peer accountability circle, or a professional coach - you must install a failsafe.

The Challenge for this week: Look at the resolutions you set two weeks ago. Be honest: Which ones are already starting to wobble? Don't do the "try harder" approach. Ask yourself: "What system can I put in place today that ensures I do this action even on my worst, most exhausted day?"

If you want to build that system together - and bridge the gap between the leader you are and the leader you need to be - let's talk.

Because your leadership in 2026 won't be defined by what you intended to do in January. It will be defined by what you actually did in March.