



Improve your life

Need to make some changes in the New Year? We picked four common dilemmas and got expert advice on how you can permanently tick them off your to-do list.

By **Sarah Bruning**

DECLUTTER YOUR APARTMENT

Despite living in tiny quarters, New Yorkers accumulate a lot of junk. And while it's easy to justify holding on to plastic bags or old magazines (you'll totally need them someday, right?), Jolie Kerr—cleaning columnist for *Jezebel* and *Deadspin*, and author of *My Boyfriend Barfed in My Handbag ... and Other Things You Can't Ask Martha* (Plume, out Feb 25)—notes that hoarding stuff won't help you in the long run. "If an item isn't being used, it's not actually useful," she says. "In fact, it's detracting from your happiness by making your living situation unpleasant or stressful."

Make it happen: Optimizing every inch of storage space isn't as difficult as you might think, assuming you have the proper tools. Invest in a few flat, under-the-bed plastic boxes and multipronged door or wall hooks; find both at organizational mecca the Container Store (various locations; containerstore.com). You can also upgrade your college-era Ikea bookcases with better-quality pieces from A&G Merch (111 North 6th St at Berry St, Williamsburg, Brooklyn; 718-388-1779, aandgmerch.com). Once you've stored your essential items, tackle the rest of the clutter by pretending you're styling a room for a photo shoot. "I ask myself what things I'd remove to make it look picture-perfect, and then start taking those things out," Kerr says. "I can always decide to put them back if I really

can't part with them, but more often than not I'm so pleased with the way my newly 'staged' room looks, I'm happy to put the stuff out to pasture permanently."

GET A NEW JOB

Whether you're unemployed, underemployed or just plain pissed off by your work situation, a new year means a chance to break out of whatever professional quicksand you've been stuck in. LinkedIn career expert Nicole Williams recommends first figuring out what you're actually looking for. "You need to have a good grasp on what is the best fit for your life, and then match opportunities with that," she says. "Your boss also plays a critical role in your career development, and not enough people define the kind of person they want to work with and for." Williams encourages asking yourself the following questions: What topics do you have strong feelings or opinions about? What are you talking about or doing when you feel most alive and energetic? Then look for opportunities that meld those areas with the type of life you want to cultivate.

Make it happen: Brush up on your interviewing skills or résumé writing at the New York Public Library (locations throughout city; visit nypl.org), which hosts career-focused seminars and talks, covering everything from self-

assessment to networking. Entrepreneurs can seek out fellow indie spirits at CoFoundersLab meet-ups (cofounderslab.com), while creative souls can take part in Emerging Leaders of New York Arts events (elnya.org); both groups typically gather a couple times per month.

OVERHAUL YOUR LOVE LIFE

It's easy to nitpick the relationship foibles of others—how else has *The Bachelor* remained so popular?—but applying the same analysis to your own romantic troubles is more difficult. "People go after the same type of person, but with a different face, and expect a better outcome," says Sophie Keller, author of *How to Get Over a Breakup in 30 Days*. Start by honestly addressing the characteristics that continually draw you in (e.g., emotional unavailability) and look for a partner whose traits are on the other end of the spectrum. But this doesn't mean you have to start overanalyzing potential partners or living in a state of FOMO. "Running on fear doesn't work," says Keller. "You have to relax to open yourself to new possibilities."

Make it happen: Married author-consultants Ariel and Shya Kane (transformationmadeeasy.com) run regular seminars on making positive life changes (next seminar: Mon 13 7–9:30pm; \$20), as well as workshops covering specific topics, such as improving your relationships. When you're ready to find the One (or even just the Next One), there are plenty of other methods that don't involve filling out ridiculous profiles or flicking through a mobile app: A perennial favorite is I Like Your Glasses, a semiregular literary speed-dating shindig at Housing Works Bookstore (126 Crosby St between E Houston and Prince Sts; 347-473-7400, housingworks.org; Feb 13 at 7pm; sold out).

CHANGE YOUR OUTLOOK

New York is famously a city of cynics, and though that attitude might serve you well in day-to-day life—see: apartment hunting, not stopping for those "free stress tests" on 42nd Street—it can also lead to a more pervasive pessimism. But according to Kathryn M. Salisbury, Ed. D. Ph.D., vice president of programs at the Mental Health Association of New York City, a sunnier disposition isn't out of reach for Gothamites. The trick is to proactively work toward being happy, rather than immediately thinking negative thoughts. "Our emotional well-being is reinforced or undermined by the things we tell ourselves on a daily basis," Salisbury explains. "Stay solution-focused and maintain a positive attitude when faced with problems."

Make it happen: In addition to its asana-based exercise classes, Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Center (243 W 24th St between Seventh and Eighth Aves; 212-255-4560, sivananda.org) hosts a positive-thinking program, in two- and four-week sessions (members \$60, nonmembers \$80). In the 90-minute beginners' level classes, individuals start by considering the nature of their thoughts, and then learn how to steer their minds away from negativity. It may not immediately squelch your desire to elbow the next pole-hugger you meet on the subway, but it's a start.