

3

GETTING OUT OF YOUR OWN WAY

We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.

—ARISTOTLE

When you look at those people whom you admire—maybe they're skinny, glamorous, seem to have it all—do you say to yourself, “They are better than me and I will never be able to look that way or feel the way they seem to feel. I guess I'll never have what they have; I've seen myself try and fail too many times.” You may still feign excitement or get temporarily pumped up about some quick-fix fad diet, but deep down, do you really believe you can do it? If not, you won't do it.

If, on the other hand, you look at your role models and think, “Now it's my turn,” then this is your chance to make it so. Listen, if you continue to do what you've always done, you will continue to have what you've always had. If you do different, you will have different. If you begin to require more of yourself, that in and of itself is *different*.

It starts by adjusting your thinking. You've got to abandon all your negative beliefs about yourself and replace them with positive ones. You have to identify and embrace what it is that you are good at, as well as the qualities, traits, and characteristics that make you a worthwhile human being.

I'll give you an example from my life. When I was a kid, my personal truth was severely damaged. My family was dirt poor, my father was a bad alcoholic, and there were even times growing up when I was hungry and homeless. I had to rally just to feel like a second-class citizen! But

eventually, and with a lot of help from some coaches, I found something I could be proud of. As it turned out, I was a good athlete.

Now, obviously I was no Michael Jordan or Tom Brady, but on the football field, I could run pretty darn fast and jump pretty darn high and seemed to be able to catch and hang onto the ball better than most. Once that whistle blew, my team didn't care where I lived or who my family was; they cared that I could play football. And when I looked around to find that all of my teammates who I held in high esteem were suddenly deferential to *me*, they believed *I* was superior, I thought, "There must be something good about me because they're choosing team captain, and they choose me." So I focused on that one, isolated area, and that was enough for my self-worth to begin to grow.

Finding value in that one area gave me enough traction to stop putting myself down for what I *wasn't* blessed with and focus instead on what I *was* blessed with and worked hard doing. I was giving myself a fact-based attribution to my self-image.

You can do the same. There are four steps to get you started:

1. **Decide what you are good at or what is good about you.**
2. **Observe yourself exhibiting those qualities or characteristics or mastering a given function or activity.**
3. **Acknowledge that you are, in fact, living to your potential and having some mastery in your life.**
4. **Make an attribution to yourself regarding that competency.**

Now we need to apply this approach to how you feel about your body and losing weight. You've got to decide, and really believe, that you can be good at losing weight. As you learn to eat healthy and incorporate exercise into your daily routine, you will observe yourself mastering weight loss because the scale and the measuring tape will reflect that fact. You will change your personal truth to reflect the new reality you've created. And as your personal truth begins to change, you will stop beating yourself up for all the mistakes you've made in the past. Then you behave your way to success because once you've changed your thoughts and beliefs about yourself, your behavior follows.

Out with the Old

You need to begin this program with an open mind and a clean slate, not just about who you are but also about diet and exercise. Whatever you *think* you know about how to fuel your body and help it release the weight clearly hasn't worked for you so far, so we're going to introduce you to some new theories and tips that could help you succeed this time.

Perhaps you haven't been applying information you learned in the past correctly. For example, you heard once that a low-fat diet was the answer. So you bought every candy labeled "low-fat," ate the whole damn box, and then couldn't figure out why the pounds weren't melting away! You thought, "Hey, the packaging says it's a 'low-fat food' so I can eat the whole damn box!"

Well, guess what? Refined sugar, which is what that candy is made of, doesn't have any fat in it, but do you really think you could eat four pounds of it a day and not gain an ounce? Of course not! We now know that the excess sugar, or what's referred to as "simple carbohydrates," gets converted to fat once it's in your body, which translates to more pounds on the scale. You have to be armed with both the right information and the correct way to apply that information. Now we know better in so many areas that impact your body.

Right now, I want you to spend 30 seconds writing down all the ways you've tried to lose weight in the past. If you've tried fasting all week and then pigging out on the weekend, write that down. If you believe that the only way to get thin is to starve yourself, get that down on paper. If you've tried existing purely on sliced turkey and hamburger patties, add that to the list. Think of every diet, exercise program, system, cleanse, product, and procedure that you've tried and put them all down on paper.

Once they're in black and white, go through the list and cross out each one that has failed you. As you cross them out, I want you to acknowledge that these ideas did not work for you, but that you can still succeed in reaching your weight loss goals. Now, crumple up the paper and throw it away. Be as dramatic as you wish to drive the symbolism

home; I don't care if you light it on fire (as long as you don't burn your house down!). The idea is that you're using your 20/20 hindsight to let go of the past, start fresh, and open your mind to the new information you're going to learn and master.

Your Mind/Body Connection

A powerful tool you should have in your weight loss arsenal is called guided imagery. Psychologists use this when working with cancer patients. They ask them to think of their disease as ants attacking them, or to picture their own immune cells as Pac-Man characters gobbling up all the cancer cells. This gives patients a sense of power and control over what can be a terrifying diagnosis. It also lowers stress and anxiety, alters brain waves, and has even been shown to increase the body's natural immunity. It helps patients dealing with serious illness, and it can also help you lose weight.

First, create a visual symbol for the extra fat on your body. It could be prison bars that are figuratively encasing and restricting you, or a black cloak with the hood pulled up, hiding you from others, or a massive python wrapped around your body, squeezing the life out of you. Then ask yourself: Why have you allowed this to happen? Why have you imprisoned yourself? Why are you hiding? Why have you given yourself a death sentence?

Your weight problem has likely been a gradual process, probably without conscious intent, but in most cases, arriving at this weight was *your* decision, even if it was a subconscious one, because there was some kind of payoff. You wouldn't have continued the behaviors that caused you to gain weight if there wasn't any payoff.

For example, victims of molestation sometimes make a subconscious choice to gain weight so they can feel sexually irrelevant and thus thwart all interest from the opposite sex, even healthy interest. Other people turn to food for pleasure, companionship, a sense of calm, a deep-seated need for immediate gratification, or an irrational form of reward. Your payoffs could be any or a combination of these factors, but the point is that you need to first recognize them and then learn how to generate the very same payoffs, except with healthy behaviors this time. I'll help you do just that as we continue working in the chapters ahead.

Now, go back to the symbol you've associated with your extra weight. Imagine yourself losing weight and as you do, see yourself overpowering, for example, that constricting snake so it's forced to loosen its grip on you, or watch as you bend those prison bars with superhuman strength, or as you peel off that heavy, black cloak. *You're* in control now. As you begin to lose weight in real life, return to this symbol over and over, until finally, the visual no longer applies at all.

Why Willpower Doesn't Work

A huge part of getting your thinking right is to understand the fundamental difference between “control” and “willpower.” In our survey, we asked why people typically quit or gave up on weight loss programs. We gave a list of common reasons, including hunger, cravings, unsupportive friends and family, plateaus, and lack of willpower and asked respondents to rate the extent to which each issue affected their decision to throw in the towel.

Before I reveal the intriguing results, I want you to answer this question truthfully: If you've ever quit a diet or fallen off the weight loss wagon in the past, how much did your “lack of willpower” factor into your decision to quit? Use a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means it did not play a role at all and 10 means it played an extreme role. If you answered “10,” you are in good company. In our survey, 37.6 percent of people said “lack of willpower” was the top cause of their past weight loss failures. They gave it a score of 10 out of 10.

I've been saying it for years: willpower doesn't work long term. It's a temporary fix. You think, “This is it! I'm going to do it this time! I'm going to bulldoze my way through this and finally get skinny.” Come on. You know how that story ends. You might manage to starve yourself for a few days, and maybe you even drop a couple pounds. But then what happens? All you think about are the foods you aren't allowed to eat until finally those thoughts give way to actions, that dam breaks, and you find yourself devouring a large pepperoni pizza without coming up for air. And then you blame yourself and decide you'll just have to muster up *more* willpower and it'll work the next time. And so the ugly, self-defeating cycle starts all over again.

I want you to wipe the concept of willpower from your vernacular and replace it with words and concepts like “control” and “programming.”

Willpower has no staying power. Control and programming can last a lifetime because when you set up your world and your relationships to support your weight loss goal, you set yourself up for success that lasts. As you start implementing this plan in your life, you’ll begin to take back control over your thoughts, your relationship with and understanding of food and nutrition, important aspects of your lifestyle and environment, and your commitment to exercise. And ultimately, I believe you’ll win back control over your weight.

What’s Your Excuse?

Let’s talk about your typical, go-to excuse when you’re trying to justify your bad behavior. When you’ve given yourself permission to eat a large pizza, the whole plate of fried mozzarella sticks, a ginormous

The Obesity Disease

The American Medical Association recently changed its definition of obesity from a “complex disorder” or a “chronic condition” to that of “disease requiring a range of medical interventions to advance obesity treatment and prevention.” The medical experts are taking this threat to public health extremely seriously, and so should you.

While I’m at it, I’d like to give you a quick rundown of the top health conditions that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists as caused or aggravated by obesity: coronary heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, cancers such as breast and colon, liver and gallbladder disease, sleep apnea, respiratory problems, degeneration of cartilage and bone (osteoporosis), reproductive health complications such as infertility, and mental health conditions.

Use your 20/20 foresight to think of your future self as you make this decision to take your health seriously.

soda, or any other variety of unhealthy food, how have you been justifying that self-defeating behavior?

I asked about people’s justifications for overeating or indulging in unhealthy foods in the survey, and I’d like you to answer honestly too:

Rate the following justifications for overeating or indulging in unhealthy foods in terms of how frequently, commonly, or intensely you do it (where 1 = the least common/intense, and 10 = the most common/intense method). For example, if you constantly tell yourself you will burn off the extra calories, you might rate that justification as a 9 or 10, whereas if you only occasionally use that justification, you might give it a 2 or 3. Choose N/A for any options that do not apply to you.

I tell myself . . .	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	N/A
that I will burn off the extra calories	<input type="radio"/>										
that if others around me can do it, so can I	<input type="radio"/>										
that it was peer pressure	<input type="radio"/>										
that it’s worth it because it tastes good	<input type="radio"/>										
to live in the moment; I’ll do better tomorrow	<input type="radio"/>										
that I’m hungry or that I physically need the food	<input type="radio"/>										
that I can’t afford healthier, fresh foods	<input type="radio"/>										

The top three excuses people from our survey identified with the most were:

1. I tell myself to live in the moment; I’ll do better tomorrow.
2. I tell myself it’s worth it because it tastes good.
3. I tell myself I’m hungry and I physically need the food.

Take a moment to think about all the lies you've told yourself in the past, all the ways you gave yourself permission to engage in bad behavior. Isn't it amazing how easily you can cheat yourself out of the *right* choices by convincing yourself that you "deserve" the *wrong* ones? It's highly illogical when you think about it. You deserve a better life, you deserve better health, and you deserve to lose weight. But in the moment, you're reacting to a trigger, so you convince yourself that you "deserve" the pizza and beer. In your mind, you're calling it a reward when, in actuality, it is a punishment. You'll tell yourself something, *anything*, in order to make it OK for you to have momentary pleasure.

It's time to stop these self-defeating patterns. The next time you find yourself drooling over some ridiculously inappropriate food choice, take control of your thoughts. Replace the excuse to indulge with a rational thought from this list or one of your own so you have a clear-cut strategy when you have a moment of weakness:

- Choices I make now will impact my future. I will turn down this temptation now so that I don't regret my decision later.
- The payoff of instant gratification isn't enough for me anymore. I care too much about reaching my goals to sacrifice them for something that tastes good in a fleeting moment.
- If I'm genuinely experiencing physical hunger, I will eat something from this plan to hold me over until the next mealtime.

What's Your Routine?

If I asked you about your food routine, what would you say? Do you even have one? Or is eating more like a haphazard, "grab 'n' go," stuff something in your face when it's convenient scenario most days of the week?

Many of the overweight patients I've worked with and counseled over the years report that they pretty much eat whatever is around, whenever they can. But the *lack* of a purposeful routine is still a routine. It's not a healthy one and it's not one that lends itself to weight loss, but it's a routine nonetheless. And it actually could be a huge factor in your current weight problem, because the latest theories indicates that *when* (or how often) we eat is just as important as *what* we eat.

For one full day, write down everything that goes in your mouth. From the coffee with cream and sugar in the car to the handful of chocolate candies at work, the chicken nuggets you grabbed at the drive-thru to the bag of chips you inhaled while watching a sitcom; write it *all* down. You can record it in a food journal, in your phone, a spiral notebook, or a collection of Post-it notes. You should eat like you normally do on an average day; the only thing that's different is that you'll record it and keep that record.

To make this even more useful, you're also going to write down the time that you ate the foods and a little information about what you were thinking about when you ate them. If you weren't thinking at all, you can just write "nothing"—that's fine. Or if you ate as a response to hunger and all you were thinking about was that you were absolutely famished, write "famished." Alternatively, if you're thinking about how stressed out, pissed off, or exhausted you are, say so. All of it is very useful data.

This exercise is going to provide you with a world of information. It will reveal to you what kind of *value* you are assigning to your food currently. I'll get into that more later, but for right now, make a pact with yourself that, starting when you wake up tomorrow, you will record everything that you consume.

When the chart is filled in, look at your results. Do you notice a pattern? Are you coming to realize that more of your food choices are based on an emotion, a trigger, or just pure habit rather than a physical need to eat? Or did you let yourself get so hungry that by the time you finally ate, you severely overate?

<i>My One-Day Food Journal</i>		
Time of Day	Food or Drink	What I'm Thinking About

We're going to look at these habits and trends in more depth a little later, but for now, this is a great starting point for acknowledging your routine—one that we will change together.

Are You Ready? (Or Just Pretending?)

Do you want to be thinner but aren't willing to give up your favorite foods? You'd love to be healthier but exercise is out of the question? Are you still thinking, "I suppose I'll get around to losing weight at some point down the road"? If those thoughts ring true, then you are not ready and there is little or nothing that I can say to convince you to get ready at this point.

If, however, you have hit rock bottom and you know there is no option anymore, you are ready to throw out your old ways that weren't working and make immediate, necessary changes to achieve your goal.

Life rewards action. Stop thinking about losing weight and take action. Now is the time to get out of your chair and into the game, because life won't wait around for you to make up your mind.

In the next chapter, you will make a plan for achieving your goals and then, watch out world, you're on a mission and no one can stop you!