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# put the **Y-O-U** in **G-O-A-L**

## THE PRESSURE.

It's the New Year. You know everyone is going to ask what your New Year's Resolution is and you know what you want it to be: Get healthier. Lose weight. Fit into those jeans. Your half-hearted promise to yourself will be bandied about for a few days and die a slow death as you march towards Mardi Gras.

## STOP RIGHT THERE.

This is the year to meet a goal for 2009. This is the year you will stop saying, "Why is it so hard for me to stick with a workout, eat cleaner and drop these pounds?" This is the year you will find motivation that works because you'll be creating it for yourself.

## WHY TRADITIONAL MOTIVATIONAL TECHNIQUES MAY NOT WORK

Get a buddy. Find something you like to do. You have heard all the tricks of the trade to get you off the couch. For some people, they work wonderfully; however, for many, our buddies will cheerfully accept our exercise date cancellations in favor of going for coffee.

You also know the benefits of exercise: less stress, more energy, less risk of heart disease and, of course, weight loss. So why have America's obesity rates tripled in the past decade? Most likely, your reluctance comes from not personalizing your motivation.

Personalizing your motivation will put it higher on your priority list and make a fitness routine easier to stick to. By setting realistic and personal goals, you are more apt to stick to a life-changing routine.

## USING GOAL SETTING TECHNIQUES TO ENSURE LASTING CHANGE

Setting personal goals gives you a clear target at which to aim your energies. Research has shown that goals provide motivation, establish personal priorities and provide you a map to get from Point A (the present) to Point B (where you wish to be). As you see yourself meeting your goals and measuring your achievements, you see what you are capable of and how far you have come. There is no better motivator than proof positive.

The conventional goal setting theory called **SMART** is a logical process that stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-Oriented.

*The **Specific** portion clearly answers the "What, Why and How" of your goal setting. What exactly is your goal? Why do you want to meet it? And how are you going to get there?*

**M**easurable goals allow you to watch the change as it occurs. “I want to lose three pounds over the next two weeks.” This is a measurable goal that allows you to track your progress.

**A**chievable goals are reasonable, while still challenging your focus. Losing 30 pounds in one week? Unattainable. 3 pounds in 2 weeks? Attainable and motivational.

**R**ealistic goals are doable, with effort. Not eating an entire chocolate cake might be a reasonable goal, but if you want progress, it’s not a realistic one towards significant change.

A **T**imely goal is one that can be met within a certain time target. “I’m going to exercise five times this week” is a timely, measurable, realistic and specific goal.

A creative form of goal setting is the **SAFE** method. The “**S**” stands for Seeing your goal vividly. You visualize what your goal is, then see it being met. “How will you look? Why? What will others think? Visualize your end result,” says Greg Mumm, author of *Lose Weight, Gain Energy: How To Enjoy Exercise*.

Fitness expert Cathy Lang has a unique way to help you achieve this portion of your goal. Her website, WeightView.com, was created so that anyone can see him or herself as an “after”. Upload a current photo and the magic elves on the other end send you back an image of yourself at your target weight. “When your results are revealed, it’s the beginning of believing you will become the person in your results photo. The photo is a reminder of your destination so that you will stay the course of your journey,” explains Lang.

Then, **A**cept that your goal can be achieved. Often people sabotage themselves from the beginning by believing that a goal will never be achieved. Have no doubts you will meet it.

The **F** in SAFE means Feel. Imagine you have met your goal. How does it feel? Feel the excitement of those skinny jeans and remember it on your journey. Mumm says to lock that feel-good feeling in your mind so that you can call it up when you have a setback or feel discouraged.

Finally, the **E** in SAFE is to Express every aspect of your life as if you had achieved that goal. Mumm suggests writing a journal entry as if it is the day you met your goal.

But how do you know you’ve set a goal that can be SMART or SAFE?

## GOAL-SETTING 101

You might know you want a lot of things. Size 4 jeans, being able to bench press 100 pounds – these are all goals. But how can you tell which goal is really the one you should go for?

First identify what you don’t want. You don’t want to keep on the unhealthy path you currently tread. You don’t want to gain weight. Then, identify what you do want. Knowing your goal provides the opportunity to feel fulfilled at the end of the day when you stuck to your guns and passed up that cheesecake.

“There are no wrong underlying motivations. Our bodies are brilliant, but they have no way of differentiating between 30 minutes of activity done to lower your cholesterol or to fit into your skinny jeans,” says Lang. “You get the same benefit no matter ‘why’ you hop on the treadmill.”

Sit with your goal. Is this truly your personal objective or is it someone else’s? Taking on someone else’s goals for you only sets you up for failure. Lang says, “A support system is a necessity, but don’t tie your success to another person’s. This is your journey.”

Make sure you’ve chosen a suitable goal. For instance, your BMI says you are obese and the scale says you are 45 pounds overweight. Visualizing yourself 45 pounds lighter might be too hard. Start with something more attainable, 15 pounds, and see if it is easier to visualize yourself reaching that goal. Once that goal is met, set another until you’ve reached 45 pounds.

Thea Lobell, Ph.D, instructor at LSU HSC in New Orleans, suggests creating a goal through a three-pronged approach.

“Develop an overarching goal, intermediate goal and then mini-goals,” she says. “An overarching goal may be to run a half-marathon this year.

Intermediate goals may be several weekend runs of 10-12 (miles) prior to the race. Mini-goals would be daily and weekly running goals of three runs of five miles each,” Lobell explains.

Celebrating meeting each goal would garner a motivating reward. Maybe you are motivated by the idea of earning a massage or a new outfit would do the motivating trick. Whatever your idea of a reward, be sure to give it to yourself.

What happens after a behavior will determine how likely you are to continue the behavior, Lobell says. “For exercise, goals and their rewards are positive consequences. This creates a positive environment creating more motivation to exercise.”

## SETBACKS

Unfortunately, setbacks occur. In fact, people are often at the helm of their setbacks subconsciously. Let’s say you meet a mini-goal, and the mental wheels start spinning. What if you can’t meet the next goal? What will he/she/they think when you get to your intermediate goal? Trying to achieve a goal and resist it at the same time is a recipe for spontaneous combustion. Getting others involved is a good way to manage and even avoid setbacks. Take stock of the people around you and surround yourself with the most supportive ones to help you. If necessary, great friends will get you out of bed to workout with them at 5 a.m. Good friends will call you to make sure you are exercising. Okay friends will ask you later if you remembered to exercise.

It all comes down to one thing: people are not cats and do not have nine lives. It is up to you whether you want to live life happily, healthfully and energetically. Getting into a fitness regime pretty much guarantees you those three things. A little attitude and a lot of fat loss are added bonuses to exercise.