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## What's Possible in Your Life?

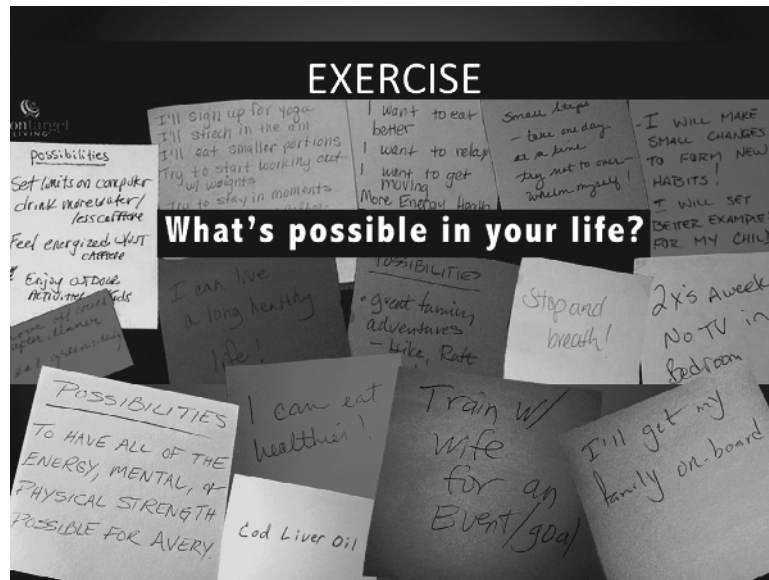
*Our life is what our thoughts make it.*

—Marcus Aurelius

The question, “What’s possible in your life?” can be fascinating and yet a little scary. Have you ever taken the time to dream, step back, and truly contemplate “what is possible in your life”? Is it possible to be medication-free for the rest of your life? Climb the Grand Canyon rim to rim? Ski with your great-grandkids? How about owning your own business? Lose 100 pounds and keep it off for the rest of your life? Have a great night’s sleep? Get into the best shape of your life? Have greater stamina in your professional and personal lives? And live life with greater balance?

During some of my experiential events, I have the audience participate in this new way of thinking. I set up two walls: the Wall of Possibilities and the Wall of Doom. I have the audience write on separate sticky notes what they believe is possible, this is the Wall of Possibilities, and also what may be holding them back, Wall of Doom. They start thinking about their possibilities and their fears at the beginning of the event and add to the wall throughout the day.

At first, both walls usually receive an equal number of sticky notes, but as the event goes on, the Wall of Possibilities continues to grow and grow and grow! (See Figure 1.1.) This exercise is fun, thought provoking, and creates lots of powerful energy in the room. I believe most of us need that little nudge to uncover what may be possible, and then the curious questions begin. What wall are you filling up on a daily basis?



**FIGURE 1.1** Wall of Possibilities

“Real responses from people participating in a new way of thinking at my seminars!”

I believe lifelong learning and growth are key factors for a healthy and happy life.

With growth comes change, and for most people, change only occurs when you let yourself get uncomfortable. If you stay in your comfort zone, seldom will change occur. In over 25 years in the health and fitness industry and more than 17,000 one-on-one personal training sessions, one thing I have learned is how challenging change can be!

Developing new lifestyle habits that are sustainable can be difficult for almost anyone. Too often attempts to change start with New Year’s resolutions, goals to lose weight and increase exercise, and you say “this is my year to get healthier and into better shape,” but the next thing you know your good intentions are a thing of the past. For sustainable change to take hold, let’s begin with five basic steps.

## Step 1: Self-Awareness That Change Must Occur

Nothing will change until you recognize the need for change. Have you ever been on a long car or plane ride and at the end of the trip you can hardly

sit still? No matter how many times you readjust your position in the seat, it is just not working; you need to make a change. How many times have you heard about the person who has a heart attack or is put on oxygen and after all this still does not believe it's necessary to quit smoking? Or what about the person with type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and acid reflux, is 100 pounds overweight—and continues to eat fast food and drink diet soda? Self-awareness that you must change is step one in your pursuit to being your best!

## Step 2: What Do You Want?

What do you truly want? Is it to get off some of your medications or decrease the dosage? Run or walk your first 5K? Play with your great-grandkids? Lose 25 pounds? Run for political office? Do you want to perform like a professional athlete? Have more energy, greater stamina, or life balance? What about greater health? Being your best? Once you have decided what you want, get laser beam specific and write it down!

## Step 3: Finding Your WHY

The longer I am in the health and fitness industry, the more I realize the importance of finding your “WHY.” Your “WHY” is your desire, your need; it is your fuel for change to take place. Finding your WHY can occur as a result of a major event in your life, such as the death of a family member, divorce, a poor report from your doctor, some major trigger that gets you to decide *now* is the time, your moment of truth, that you must change and change now!

Finding your WHY can also be an ongoing process including goals for your future like taking a hiking trip to Mt. Kilimanjaro, skiing with your grandkids, competing in a senior bodybuilding competition, having a small wager with your co-worker to lose a few pounds (and keep it off!), or lowering your blood glucose or blood pressure. Your WHY is something that gets you excited, something or someone to focus on.

As I travel around the world, speaking to thousands of people each year, I continually challenge my audiences to find their WHY. Every time I hear from someone who has made changes I always ask the same questions, “What was your WHY?” and “What steps did you take along the way?” I always get the same answer; they had one major WHY or many smaller WHYS.

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A few years ago, I received a phone call from one of my longtime colleagues and good friend, Mike Combes. Mike is the Executive Director of three large health clubs with the Mercy Health System in Cincinnati, Ohio. I had presented my On Target Living seminar there in the past, and I had the privilege to meet Joan Barber, one of their shining stars. Joan is 68 years young, has lost over 150 pounds, and decreased her prescription medications from 16 to 3 all over a three-year time period (WOW)! Joan told me how she came to one of my events, read my book, and received wonderful help from the Mercy Health System team. She told me how she took “baby steps” and kept making small improvements and never gave up. I was thinking the entire time she was telling me her story that her WHY must have been powerful for her to start on this journey at age 65, and it was!

Joan has been married to her husband Clarence for over 40 years, and they are still very much in love. Clarence has two major loves in his life, first for his wife Joan and second for motorcycles, but because of Joan’s poor health, Clarence and Joan had stopped riding motorcycles. Listening to Joan, I could feel her love for Clarence. She knew how much he loved riding his motorcycle with his wife at his side. Joan decided it was time to start riding again, and today Clarence and Joan are in a motorcycle club and ride together on a regular basis. Joan’s story is a great reminder that your “WHY” must be bigger than your “BUT” in order to make change happen!

### Step 4: One Small Step at a Time

We all know making change can be challenging and even extremely difficult at times, especially when making healthier lifestyle changes. Most sustainable change occurs by taking **One Step at a Time**! This success model works because:

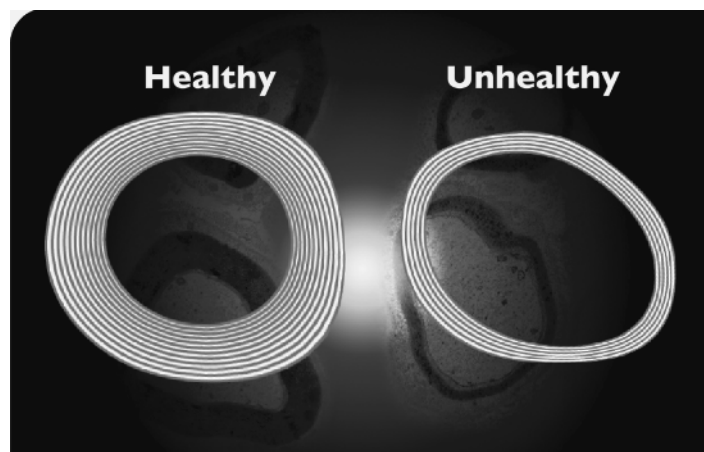
1. The prefrontal cortex of the brain can only handle one step at a time. If you become too busy or stressed, and are trying to do too much all at once, then you can easily fall right back into your old habits.
2. Do you remember the old phone cords that had a soft rubber coating surrounding the phone lines? This same type of protective coating or insulation of every nerve fiber throughout the human body is called the myelin sheath. The myelin sheath is built one strand at a time and is essential for every thought, emotion, and movement throughout

the entire body. The thicker the myelin sheath, the faster and stronger the signal, and the stronger and more powerful habits become. (See Figures 1.2 and 1.3.)

How would you teach someone how to ride a bike, play a musical instrument, or do a triple flip off a high dive? People need to be taught by breaking the activity down into small steps, because building the myelin



**FIGURE 1.2** Myelin Sheath



**FIGURE 1.3** Healthy and Unhealthy Myelin Sheaths

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sheath takes repetition and time! If one of your goals is to have better health, then building solid, sustainable habits is all about building your myelin sheath.

Once a habit is built into your myelin sheath, you have that habit for a lifetime and to break this habit you must consciously think about undoing your behavior until a new habit takes hold. This takes time, focus, and energy, and that is why when we become stressed or too busy we go right back to our old comfortable habits (and also why taking small steps, one at a time, is critical for developing new, healthier habits)!

When I began in the personal training business many years ago, I couldn't wait to share with my clients everything that would make them healthy. I educated them about the wonderful benefits of wheatgrass, cod liver oil, flaxseeds, spirulina/chlorella, hydration, body alignment, strength training, progressions, stretching . . . the list was long. This was a huge mistake on my part because I did not understand that, in most cases, **information does not create transformation.**

To help others build sustainable habits, I had to think about how to help them begin a journey of habit building.

In Shawn Achor's 2010 book *The Happiness Advantage*, published by Crown Business, Shawn states that we are "mere bundles of habits." A habit is an activity we repeat on a regular basis, and we typically don't think twice about the building of our myelin sheath. When brushing your teeth, what side of the mouth do you begin on? Putting on your socks, do you begin with the left or right foot? How many different ways can you get dressed?

Shawn states that building habits is centered on "energy activation," the amount of energy needed to begin any activity. If you get home from a long day at work and the remote is staring at you, we all know it is extremely easy to sit on the couch and turn on the television, but if you took the batteries out of the remote, and placed them upstairs in a drawer, you probably wouldn't walk upstairs and go through this entire process because of the amount of energy you would have to activate. If your goal is to build a new habit, you need to make the activity as easy as possible and then repeat it over and over. If your goal is to change a poor habit into a healthier habit, then you should make your current habit more difficult to perform.

For example, a question I receive on a regular basis is "how do I break the habit of drinking diet soda?" I ask, "What do you enjoy about drinking diet soda?" People usually say they enjoy the sweetness, the carbonation,

and the energy boost. So let's put the diet soda in the basement and replace it with mineral water mixed with a shot of organic pomegranate or cherry juice! The mineral water has the carbonation, and the juice adds sweetness and is very refreshing. Then repeat this behavior over and over until it takes little energy to activate.

A few years ago, prior to speaking at a large dental conference for dentists and dental hygienists, I had an appointment with my dentist. While sitting in the dental chair, I asked my dental hygienist if she could give me the inside scoop about some of her challenges at work. She immediately started talking about prevention and the challenges she had with getting her patients to floss on a regular basis. Something that is so simple, takes little time, and yet only about 10 to 15 percent of her patients add flossing to their regular routines. I then took a big gulp because I was part of that group that did not floss on a regular basis, and we all know you can't lie about flossing to your dental hygienist. So I asked the magic question, "How many days a week should I floss?" She said, "Let's start with flossing two times per week," and I asked, "Is that enough?" She told me, "You don't floss at all now, so yes, two times per week is a good place to start!"

Following her recommendation, I started flossing, and at first it was something I had to plan. It took energy to floss, but truly very little time, and I knew it was something that would give me great benefits in the future. The day arrived when I was speaking in front of a large group of dentists and dental hygienists, and I opened up with a story about my new flossing experience. After telling my story, feeling proud of my newfound habit, a dentist in the front row said, "Flossing two to three times a week is not enough." For a few seconds I didn't know what to say, and then I asked him, "How often are you exercising?" The entire room became still, and he responded by saying he was not exercising on a regular basis. I said, "What if you went for a walk twice a week for 10 minutes; do you think this would be a good place to start?" After the presentation he approached me and said I had inspired him to start exercising! Three months later I received an e-mail saying he is now exercising three to four times per week and has also hired a health and fitness coach that he meets with every two weeks. At age 72, he said, he hasn't felt this good in years!

So, start slowly and build your habits, one step at a time! Understand that your journey comes with every change you make along the way. Focus on what you are gaining, not what you are giving up. How can you ask better questions? How can you make the change journey more enjoyable?

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Your journey does not have to be painful, and it won't be if you take it one step at a time. One step always leads you to another, and it's time to get ready for that next step.

### Step 5: Monitoring Your Success

With every successful change and new habit, there is usually some form of monitoring system in place. Feedback is the breakfast of champions, and you need some way to measure your new habits to see if they are working. If your goal is to lose weight, get off some of your medications, run a personal best in a 5K, or have greater energy throughout the day, you need simple tools to measure your progress and success! Whether you are tracking your water intake, nutrition, exercise habits, quality of sleep, belt size, how tight your pants fit, the numbers on your scale, blood work, skin, hair, nails, blood pressure, resting heart rate, or strength, there are hundreds of ways to monitor your success.

While working out the other day, I began talking to a guy who was asking me about the benefits of eating healthy fats. As we talked more, he asked me what I thought of the Weight Watchers program. I told him I thought Weight Watchers was terrific and a great way to help people stay focused. I asked him what he liked about the program, and he said he liked the camaraderie of the members along with the group's ability to keep him focused because he knew he was going to weigh in each week. Regular monitoring is an essential component to keep the momentum going; it helps determine if your plan is working and allows you to have small celebrations along the way. Celebrating even the smallest success is critical for supporting your commitment to change!

The importance of making changes and keeping momentum over time really hit home for me when I was watching an interview from one of the past winners of the television show *The Biggest Loser*. This gentleman began his journey weighing over 416 pounds when he came to the Biggest Loser Ranch and by the end of the show he weighed 198 pounds—he lost 218 pounds! He won the \$250,000 first-place prize money and became an instant celebrity overnight. During an interview they asked him how much he currently weighed, and he said he had no idea. He had not weighed himself in over a year. He knew he had regained a great deal of weight but truly did not know. He guessed he now weighed around 300 pounds, but only 18 months after his first-place finish he stepped on the scale and was



shocked that he now weighed over 400 pounds! The look on his face was heartbreaking. How could he fall so quickly?

As the interview went on it was clear that he did not believe he could continue the lifestyle activities he learned at the Biggest Loser Ranch on his own. He said he could not continue the regimen of exercising three to four hours per day along with eating only 1,500 to 1,800 calories per day, so he went back to his old habits. I don't believe any of the trainers from *The Biggest Loser* recommended exercising three to four hours per day or an eating plan so limited. From this interview, I learned how powerful a person's beliefs may be. It's important to set up realistic goals. Was it possible for him to weigh 198 pounds 24/7? How much exercise is enough? Did he understand that he could never out-exercise a poor diet? What was his WHY? Was he truly taking one step at a time and building sustainable habits? Did he have a monitoring system in place to track his progress and to celebrate his successes along the way? Are your goals sustainable?

## What's Possible in Your Life?

Whenever you feel like you are stuck, having a difficult time making the changes necessary for your future growth, keep coming back to this chapter. Making sustainable changes can be hard work and difficult for almost everyone. Climbing that mountain begins by taking that first step!

### THE BOTTOM LINE

1. What is possible in your life can be a fascinating yet scary question to ask yourself.
2. Making lifestyle changes can be difficult for almost everyone.
3. It takes five steps for sustainable change to take hold. Your On Target Living Journey begins with self-awareness, focus, finding your WHY, one step at a time, and monitoring your success!