



October 26, 2005

Do You Have SMART Goals?

“You must have long-range goals to keep you from being frustrated by short-range failures.” Charles C. Noble

As soon as I saw this quote I knew I had to include it in an Eat Smart Newsletter... It exemplifies what I believe about making permanent changes in our lives. I believe that *strong* long-range goals are the only way to achieve big things. And I also believe that you should consider failure as merely a short term “pause” between where you are and the final attainment of your goal. I mean really... isn't that all failure is—temporary? If you fail at sticking to a 1600 Calorie meal plan by eating an extra donut does it mean you *have* and *will* fail at reaching your weight goal of 180 pounds? Heck no!

It only means you have eaten an extra donut right now. A donut that is harmless in and of itself and should not be a reason for feeling “bad” about yourself or giving up on your goals. It cannot and will not have any bearing on your final outcome if you continue pushing toward your goal despite the donut (which again is *just* a donut ☺). But if you sit and wallow in the *temporary* “failure” and think about how hard it will be and all the donuts you will have to give up and how poor your willpower is... etcetera ... then you can kiss your 180 pounds goodbye. Why? Because while you are wallowing in pity over the difficulty of reaching your goal you forget your goal entirely! Wallowing in problems rarely brings desired results—it only brings more wallowing.

Many of us dwell on the problems we encounter on the way to the goal and forget what the goal is! We forget what we really want! We let a “small failure” ruin our ability to stay focused on what we're trying to achieve in the first place! So instead of letting a piece of food (or a rainy day or a far-too-busy week) lead you to believe you can't do *it* (whatever ‘it’ may be for you)...forget the *problem* for a moment and remind yourself of where you want to be 3 months from now, one year from now. Let that reminder pull you through the short term *pause* in your plans and allow it to *push* your “go” button toward success.

Perhaps you're thinking “hmmm easy for *her* to say! But it's so much tougher than that!” Sure it is. It's tough. No doubt about it. But don't forget this is about what you say you want! You don't have to want to lose 30 pounds. You can be just as healthy eating nutritious foods and exercising for the sake of health and *keep* your extra pounds. You don't have to fit into size 6 or 8 or 4. You can choose to be happy with your current status quo. And that is perfectly acceptable! But this article isn't for you. This article is

for those who really want to do things differently. *You get to choose your goals and your commitment to them.* Why not do it right?

S.M.A.R.T. GOALS

If you've read this far I assume you're still interested in attaining a health related goal—or any goal for that matter. But goal setting is not a natural born skill for many people. Most of us have to *learn* how to set goals—S.M.A.R.T. goals! If you're ready...this is your chance to practice. Take out a piece of paper and scribble down some goals you have—not just fancy wishes...but things you really want to accomplish and are willing to devote time to.

Write down one goal (below) you have that is related to your health—then read on and check it against S.M.A.R.T. goal criteria.

My Goal _____

S.M.A.R.T. Goals are:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Action Oriented
- Realistic
- Time-stamped

Specific

Goals are not what you hope will *happen* to you; they are *behaviors* or *actions* you *will do* to reach your dreams. Goals should be straightforward and emphasize *exactly* what you want to do. A specific goal has a much greater chance of being accomplished than a general goal. Specifics help us focus our efforts and clearly define the five “W” questions:

- Who – Who is involved?
- What – What do I want to accomplish?
- When – When will I do this? How often?
- Where – Where will I do this? Identify location(s)
- Why – Why is this important for you to do?

Measurable

If you can't measure it, you can't manage it. How do you know when you have exercised “more” if you haven't defined what “more” means? On the other hand, you can time a 15-minute walk on the treadmill at 3mph. Establish concrete criteria for measuring

progress toward the attainment of each goal you set. When you can measure your progress, you stay on track, reach your target dates, and experience the thrill of achievement that keeps you going. Measurable goals also give you a light at the end of the tunnel. If you choose to swim 4 days per week, you'll know that after day two... you're halfway done!

Action Oriented

A goal of reaching 15% body fat by losing a pound a week and gaining 1 pound of muscle a month is specific, and measurable, but HOW in the world are you going to reach this goal? This is where you sit down and plan your ACTIONS—what sort of cardiovascular workout do you need to do? How often? What changes do you need to make in your diet? What sort of strength training program would help with the muscle gain? Often times, in this step, you will find it helpful to enlist the help of an expert (a personal trainer or exercise physiologist for the exercise part and a registered dietitian for the diet help) who can provide you with suggestions and advice that will motivate and educate you.

Realistic

This doesn't mean "easy" it just means "do-able." It's got to be something that you are both *willing and able* to do. It shouldn't require resources, skills, support, and money that you don't have. A realistic goal may require you to be a wiser spender, try new recipes, or try strength training, but it shouldn't force you to become a full time chef or spend hours at the gym.

On the other hand, a goal does need to stretch you slightly so that even though you believe you can do it, it will still take a commitment on your part. For example, if you plan to lose 20 pounds in 2 weeks, we all know this is not possible—except perhaps on the new reality tv show "The Biggest Loser" where contestants spend hours in the gym with a trainer each day! But setting a goal to lose ½ a pound to 1 pound in one week is possible.

If you are inactive, setting a goal of walking for 90 minutes every day will no doubt wear you out quickly and send you to the nearest couch for hibernation. But, starting with 10 minutes 4 days a week may work much better. You have the rest of your life to become a marathon walker! Step it up above your usual routine, but be *realistic*.

Remember that goals are not hopes. Goals are *things you do* so they must be within your reach, otherwise you probably won't commit to *doing* them. Although you may start with the best of intentions, the knowledge that it's too much for you means your subconscious will keep reminding you of this fact and will keep you from giving it your best.

When you identify goals that are most important to you, you begin to figure out ways you can make them come true. You develop the attitudes, abilities, skills, and financial capacity to reach them. You begin to see more and more opportunities to bring yourself closer to the achievement of your goals. That's when goal setting gets exciting!

Time-Stamped

Set a timeframe for the goal. Will you do this by 5pm today? Next week? Next Christmas? Putting an end point on your goal gives you a clear target to work towards. If you don't set a time, the commitment is too vague. Imagine if the line "till death do us part" was dropped from all marriage vows...would the commitment be that meaningful? If you don't set a time, what you want to do may not occur because you'll feel you can start anytime or quit anytime. Without a time limit, there is no urgency to *start taking action now*. Put a time stamp on it!

Now look over your original goal—does it stand up to S.M.A.R.T. goal criteria? If it doesn't it's time to revise it! And then create tiny goals to help you reach the big one.

Use S.M.A.R.T. goal criteria to fill in the spaces below:

BIG HAIRY GIANT GOAL (what is your ultimate health dream?)

BABY STEP GOALS

(what are 3 small steps you can start to take *now* to get to your health dream?)

Exercise _____

Diet _____

Other _____