

Be True to Yourself

» SUSAN CANTWELL

Illustration: Stephanie Carter

When you think of all the great benefits we get from exercise and leading a healthy lifestyle it really quite astonishing that more of us aren't as active as we could be. There are people that don't exercise at all, those who own home fitness equipment that acquires a fine layer of dust and those that have a gym memberships who don't use the gym as often as they should. So, we all have good intentions. We know that we should be exercising, but other seemingly important things get in the way. What was a priority in January has turned into exercise in guilt by March.

This is a story about how we fool ourselves to make us feel better about our decisions. If you are not exercising and taking care of yourself the way you know you should be or are struggling with exercising consistently and eating properly, then you'll want to read about Beth.

Beth Langille says she's no different than many other people. She's been married for 22 years and has three children, 11, 15 and 18 years old. She works full time and has an active social life. The

kids are busy with part time jobs, friends and music lessons. Beth says that she has not exercised consistently for a long time.

While this may sound familiar to some of you, those who don't have children may want to substitute school, studying, friends, family commitments, work or other responsibilities for things that get in the way of leading a healthy lifestyle.

Beth's wake up call came in February of last year when she got the official news—all of her three children were diag-

nosed with a kidney disease that most likely will require kidney transplants for all of them within 5-15 years. Beth knew that she had to prepare herself both mentally and physically so she would be at her best for when the children needed her. Now, Beth hadn't exercised on a regular basis for over 10 years, her eating habits while weren't bad, but weren't exactly great either. Her sleeping patterns were erratic and on the whole Beth knew she needed to make some changes.

But, Beth did not change anything. Instead, Beth told herself that she needed to focus on the children saying, "So, what about me! I can concentrate on me later. My children need me to focus on them." Remember, Beth said she needed to get in better shape for when her children needed her, yet she hasn't done anything about it because the children need her. Her intention was to start exercising. However, her actions where in



conflict with what she truly knew she had to do. Beth was stuck.

The Breakthrough Moment

The breakthrough moment came for Beth during our first coaching session.

“Beth, it would seem that you should have a lot of motivation to get in better shape so that you will be available both physically and mentally for your children should the time come that they need surgery,” I said.

“I know. I keep telling myself that I’ll get around to it later,” said Beth.

“What would happen if you were told tomorrow that one of your children needed surgery tomorrow? How would you handle it?” I asked.

“I think I’d fall apart. I’m not ready! Beth said with emotion.

“I’m seeing a large gap between what you tell me you truly need to do and your actions. What’s in that gap?” I asked.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

“Persistence is what makes the impossible possible, the possible likely, and the likely definite.” ROBERT HALF.

“Well, I keep telling myself that I’ll get to it later and later never comes though it’s almost been a year since we got the diagnoses.” She said.

“Beth let’s get back to the gap between what you tell me you have to do which is exercise, eat properly and take better care of yourself so you’re as strong as possible should your children need you and your inability to act on it. You said that you’re not ready. What aren’t you ready for?” I said sensing that Beth was working her way through something.

“I’m not ready to deal with it. I’m not ready because I haven’t started to exercise. I’m not strong enough yet.”

“Are you avoiding something here?” I

asked softly.

Beth paused and took a large breath, “I’m in denial. I’ve been fooling myself thinking this disease will wait for me. That this disease will not get full blown until I’m ready, so if I’m not ready it won’t happen,” Beth got quite and then said, “I think I knew this deep down. I was just wasn’t willing to examine it.”

“What do you think about what you just said? I asked

“I said I’d get to getting myself in better shape later. Well, later has come and gone. I don’t have time to wait. I must do something now!

“What are you willing to do next week to move you closer to your goals?” I asked.

"I can guarantee that I will swim two days per week and that I'll do Yoga or Pilates video or dance for one hour," she said. Beth also agreed to keep a food log so that she has a better idea of what she's eating and start looking for ways to improve her diet.

One week later Beth called in for her second coaching call. I was interested to see if Beth would keep her commitments or if she would revert back to her old way of thinking. But, Beth had a surprise for me. Not only had Beth joined a gym with a friend, she had exercised five times. The first day she walked on the treadmill for ten minutes and went to a No Bounce aerobic class and as Beth puts it, "did what I could." The other four days she walked on the treadmill for 30 minutes. She also made an agreement with her sister to participate in a 11 km walk in May. She kept her food log and told me what she wanted to improve including increasing her water intake and adding more fruits and vegetables to her diet. We discussed proper exercise guidelines and how to gradually increase activity with emphasis on *gradual*. It seems that once Beth realized what was in the gap for her, moving into action became easy.

Beth situation is undoubtedly an example of how you can fool yourself into inaction or not being consistent or committed. Your excuses make you feel better about your choices because on some level you know that some choices are not in alignment with your goals. This is the birth of the gap between intentions and actions. Once you see what's in the gap in your own life, the closer you'll be to permanent healthy lifestyle change.

"There is no time like the present," says Beth. "You have to realize you are not doing yourself or anyone else around you any good by not being healthy. For me, it was an awakening a re-birth so to speak. I remember having our first child naturally and saying to the nurse I can't do it! She looked at me and asked who is going to do it for you; you are the only one here who can. I am the only one who can do this and I need to be selfish in a way. I have a wonderful support system and excellent reasons for becoming stronger physically and mentally. Like any of our children's birth the result has been and will be incredible."



ARE YOU BEING TRUE TO YOURSELF?

If following statements are familiar to you, you may want to examine what's really getting in your way and how it could be yourself.

I don't have time to exercise or I'm too busy.

I can't justify taking time away from my family.

I won't exercise today. I'll do it tomorrow.

It's a special occasion so I can eat anything I want.

I paid for this meal so I should eat it all.

I don't want to offend my friends by refusing dessert.

I'll exercise more consistently when things calm down.

I'm not seeing results. What I am doing this for?

I'm too tired to today.

These statements represent the most common thoughts or phrases that people use to fool themselves and excuse behavior that is not consistent with reaching their healthy lifestyle goals. If the statements have a familiar ring to them, you may want to ask yourself if there is something larger at work and how you can be honest with yourself so that you can remove *true* obstacles to a healthier you.

Susan Cantwell is the President of The Lifestyle Coaching Institute which provides individual, group and corporate lifestyle coaching. The Lifestyle Coaching Institute also provides training for health and fitness professionals who want to become lifestyle coaches.

For a **free** download the first chapter of Susan's Book, *Mind Over Matter*, go to www.lifestylecoaching.ca and click on the e-book.

Invitation

If you have a fitness and/or lifestyle goal and would like to be coached, please send Active Woman Canada an e-mail to susan@lifestylecoaching.ca, outlining your goals and challenges. Also, include your name, contact information, age and city that you reside in.