

Reclaim Yourself

One Woman's Weight Loss Journey



| Lesley Christensen

» SUSAN CANTWELL

Photo: Robert McGee

“Deep down, inside all of us, is the power to accomplish what we want to, if we’ll just stop looking elsewhere.”

Harvey Mackay

Lesley Christensen, a thirty-nine-year-old single parent from British Columbia, has a big goal: she wants to lose over 100 pounds.

Like most people who find themselves looking at a large weight loss goal, Lesley gained her weight over a period of years starting when she quit smoking.

Over the years, she had tried a variety of diets and exercise programs, only to fall back into her old patterns when life got hectic or the goal became over-

whelming. When Lesley called me for lifestyle coaching, I heard a warm, intelligent, and honest woman on the other end of the telephone. But the thing I noticed most was her wonderful sense of humour. I heard a woman who wanted something different for herself and was willing to step outside her comfort zone to get it.

Like many people, Lesley is an emotional eater, and when she feels stressed she eats. She also eats on the fly as she juggles working full-time and taking care of two children. Her day often begins at 4:30 a.m., readying her children for their swimming practice. Then, the kids have to get to school and Lesley to work. After work, it's dinner, homework, and all the household tasks.

The vision

But despite her busy schedule, Lesley had a vision for herself: "I would like to look in the mirror and see the person I know I am - not the person I've become."

When I began coaching Lesley, she was already swimming twice a week, but her eating habits had remained unchanged. For the next three weeks we strategized and Lesley made choices about changes she would make and what she was willing to commit to. We worked in three areas: nutrition, exercise, and stress management. Lesley became more aware of what she was eating and started making different choices. She also figured out what causes her stress and developed a plan to handle her stressors.

Lesley also told me she wanted to increase her exercise and that a gym

membership was her best option.

For most people, a gym can be an intimidating place. It's a new environment and everybody looks like they know what they're doing. The people are strangers, the equipment and process of getting started unfathomable. The greatest fear of new exercisers is making a fool of themselves. For overweight people, they fear that they will stand out in the crowd and draw attention to themselves.

The breakthrough

Lesley chose to join the gym where her children swim each morning. She began by alternating workouts on the bike and the treadmill. But she told me what she really wanted to use was the elliptical crosstrainer.

"Lesley," I asked, "What's stopping you from trying the crosstrainer?"

Lesley responded, "I don't know how to use it."

"Is there someone available for you to ask?" I asked.

"Yes, I'm sure there's someone," she said.

"So, what's holding you back?"

This was the question that opened up an entire dialog about how she believed other people perceive overweight people, both inside and outside the gym.

Lesley told me she thought people would stare at her or think, "What's that big person doing here?" Lesley had drawn conclusions based on how she perceived other people would perceive her.

"That's a lot of perceiving," I said. "And it leaves a lot of room for misunderstanding others."

Support in the gym

I then shared with Lesley my understanding of how overweight people are viewed by others in a gym environment, based on my twenty years of experience in the fitness industry:

"I found that many people really wanted to express support for people who had larger goals than themselves, but they didn't approach them for fear of offending them. Instead, they would make their comments to someone else, usually a gym staff member. Most people admire their courage and commitment;

COACH'S NOTE:

Coach's note: Lesley wanted to share her story to encourage others to start or restart an exercise program, make healthy choices, and lead their best lives. She also wanted to announce her intentions, in a public way, something that can be difficult for a person not used to drawing attention to herself.

Do you have any thoughts or words of support you'd like to share with Lesley? Please e-mail her c/o susan@lifestylecoaching.ca. Use the subject heading "Lesley's Journey."



What is lifestyle coaching?

Lifestyle coaching is a powerful, collaborative relationship between you and a coach. It can help you to realize extraordinary results through a process of discovery, goal setting, and meaningful action.

In each meeting, you choose the focus of the conversation while the coach contributes observations, questions, and expertise. This process helps you to gain clarity and understanding about where you are today and where you want to be in the future. Coaching can help you create a clear path to your goals, uncover your real motivation, and make more permanent lifestyle changes.

Welcome to the Canadian Lifestyle Coaching Column

The Canadian Lifestyle Coaching Column is one of our regular features. Susan Cantwell is president of The Lifestyle Coaching Institute, which provides training for lifestyle coaches as well coaching for individuals, groups, and corporations.

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they've all been there – a stranger in a new gym. As for those who don't support you, so what. They're not people you care about. They're not your family, friends, or even acquaintances. And more importantly, they're not even people you'd want to be friends with. So, focus on yourself and let others do or think what they want; however, I think you'll be surprised at the level of support that's available to you, if you open yourself to it."

To date, Lesley has lost over fifty pounds. She is swimming for an hour twice a week and uses the stairclimber and the crosstrainer four to five times per week for 75 minutes. She's also starting a weight training program. Not bad for a woman who started by biking for 10 minutes, twice a week.

Looking back, Lesley says, "It's getting started that's hard, after that it gets easier. Now, I look around and realize that very few people really know what they're doing. I wonder what I was worried about."

Lesley has a few more goals beyond her weight loss. First, in 2004 she wants to do a sprint triathlon: a 400 meter

swim, a 5 km run, and a 20 km bike ride. After that, she wants to be able to do a chin-up. I have no doubt she will accomplish both.

Lesley sums up her experience when she says, "This whole process is a journey. It's not all about weight loss. It's about reclaiming a part of who you are and discovering what you're capable of doing. I would encourage anyone to go for it." «

Do you have an unfulfilled goal?

Answer these questions to help determine what's holding you back and how to move forward.

- Have you been thinking of doing something, but not acted?
- Are you concerned about what others might think?
- Do you want something different for yourself?
- Have you put off making healthy changes in your life?
- Are you waiting for the "perfect" time to start?
- What is the "perfect" time?
- Are you ready to seek the support you might need to stick with it?
- What will it take to get you to act?
- Are you willing to map out a plan of action?
- What's one thing you could do today to move closer to your goal?