

Not Just Another New Year's Resolution

By Brian Ayers, CSCS

How many of you have made your New Year's resolution to lose some weight this year? If not, you at least have family, friends, or co-workers who have. The truth is that losing weight and getting in shape is the most common New Year's resolution which is why the gyms and health clubs are packed that time of year. Unfortunately, the reality is that the majority of people that make these resolutions end up failing. As a matter of fact, statistics show that about half of the people that sign up for gyms in January stop going after less than 2 months. Why do you think they make you sign a year contract to start at most gyms? In order for facilities to stay in business they need to make sure that they continue to get paid even if you don't show up. The percentages aren't much better for people who decide to buy equipment for their homes. How many people do you know, perhaps yourself included, who own a treadmill, elliptical machine, or some other fitness device that currently does nothing more than collect dust or serve as a clothing hanger in the basement?

Why do such a large percentage of people stop exercising after only a couple of months, especially if they are still paying for their memberships or have already purchased home equipment? Everyone who has failed has his or her own answer to that question, the majority of which are rooted in frustration with lack of progress. The most commonly heard reasons include: "I just didn't have the time", "I wasn't getting anywhere", and "It was too hard". The reality is that most of these failures occur not from lack of effort, but rather lack of planning. The analogy I use to illustrate this phenomenon is that making a New Years resolution to lose some weight and get in shape without a plan of attack is like leaving for a vacation without first deciding where to go, how to get there, or how long you will be staying.

I live in Connecticut, so what if I decided to go to California one day and just got in my car and started driving west? What do you think my chances are of ever getting to see California? Pretty slim, right? With no map or real idea where I was going, I would most likely get lost and frustrated along the way. Even if I made it there it would take forever. It's exactly the same for people with no fitness plan. They find themselves going in circles, losing a few pounds only to gain them right back. Inevitably these people get frustrated and give up. The best way to avoid this fate is to take the proper steps to insure your success.

California is a large state so obviously my first step in planning my trip is to decide where exactly I want to visit. I should also decide when I want to go and for how long I want to stay. In other words, I must more specifically define my goal. This is the step that many people neglect when beginning a fitness program. "I would like to lose weight" is a wish; "I would like to lose 18 pounds by May 15" is a goal. Your goal should be specific and have a beginning and an end date. It is also

important at this stage to make sure your goal reasonable. I would love to see every part of California but if I only have a week to vacation, and I leave with that as my goal, I am setting myself up to be disappointed. I need to focus on what's most important to me so that I can reasonably achieve my goal in the time that I have. Fitness goals work the same way. If you start planning your workout with the goal of exercising every day and looking like a supermodel by swimsuit season then you're setting up for disappointment. It's important to consider that for most people a reasonable healthy fat loss is an average of 1.5 to 2 pounds per week. Therefore, you should figure out how many weeks you have to achieve your goal, as well as how much time and effort you can reasonably devote to exercise and nutrition each week. Once you have a time frame set up you can plan your goals accordingly.

Let's say that on my trip I'm going to plan to arrive in San Diego on June 10, spend 4 days there visiting the beaches and then spend the rest of the week site seeing in Hollywood. I now know exactly what I want to achieve on my vacation and have made sure that my time frame is reasonable. The next step is to figure out how I'm going to get there. In fitness, much like traveling, there are many ways to get where you want to go. When traveling, one flight might be cheaper but less convenient because I have to take several connecting flights, just like one gym may be cheaper but further from your house than another. You have to make your decision based on time investment and monetary investment. Just remember, no matter how I decide to get to California there will still be good deal of travel time involved. Some methods of travel will be faster and more direct than others but so far no one has invented an instant teleportation device. Similarly, there is no magic pill that you can take to achieve your fitness goals. Don't be sucked in by the "get fit quick" gimmicks. You wouldn't hand someone money that told you they could teleport you to California would you?

So now I've decided that I'm going to take a direct flight to San Diego and stay at a hotel that I found online for a couple of days. After that, I will rent a car, drive to Hollywood and spend the rest of my vacation there site seeing. The fitness people have decided that they will cut down on junk food and workout 3-4 days per week. At first glance those look like pretty solid plans. However I've never been to San Diego, so how do I know if the hotels I'm going to stay in are the right ones for me? Also, how do I find the hot spots to see when I get to Hollywood? New fitness people run into similar dilemmas. What exercise is best to tone my thighs? Will I burn more calories on the recumbent bike or a treadmill? This is where a personal trainer can help. Personal trainers will help you get the most out of the time you spend exercising. Think of them as the travel agents of the fitness world. Just like my travel agent will help me pick out the best places to stay and get me a map to the stars in Hollywood, your trainer will set you up with the proper exercise program and nutritional guidance to get you to your fitness destination.

Success in fitness is not as difficult as most people perceive it to be. It does however, take hard work, determination, and focus on your goals to avoid pitfalls and setbacks as well as the frustrations that they cause. This year as you embark on your fitness journey, do so with a solid plan in mind and if you need some help be sure to contact me at www.areyourugged.com.