

Small Steps to Health and Wealth Overcoming Obstacles

Henry Ford said, “Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goal.” Happy New Year! Many people across the nation today will be thinking about goals. What do they want to accomplish in the year 2009? How can this year be different?

Sometimes obstacles get in the way of success with our goals. Some common obstacles are denial, environmental influences, fear, and lack of specific goals, negative thought patterns, not knowing where to get started or other people.

As not to deny one of the obvious factors from the start, let's look at denial first. How is this for an example of denial – in a recently survey, well over 60% of workers gave little thought to managing their money for retirement, yet nearly the same amount of people were fairly confident about the adequacy of their retirement plans. Hmmm. Sounds like a case of out of sight, out of mind. Or denial. As well, sixty percent of people who qualified as overweight by government standards said they were at a healthy weight.

Why all the denial? People optimistically think they are doing better than they are because it is far easier to remain in a state of denial than to be fully aware and start taking steps to improving health and wealth. Of course, we also live in a world that makes it challenging to resist immediate gratification. Our environment can truly affect our ability to make changes. Many people report that even their work environments can make it challenging to make behavior changes – maybe there is a culture at your work place of having food at every event or a regular coffee and donut break each morning. It takes careful planning to get caught by your environmental influences. In my own work, I have purposefully brought a healthy breakfast item to a weekly donut break. I will

typically eat an apple or a bowl of oatmeal, since I am working to maintain a decent cholesterol level. Planning is key to overcoming environmental factors. Of course, for me, it helps that I do not really like donuts. It'd be more challenging if chocolate brownies were the environmental factor I was up against!

Fear is another factor that can make behavior change. It is important to think about what you are afraid of . . . Sometimes it is fear of failure, or fear of how much time and effort a change will take, sometimes it may be fear of the sacrifices you'll have to make. However, I firmly believe that some people are actually afraid of succeeding with their efforts to change. For instance, if you have always been referred to as a "teddy bear" of a guy, because of your softness and extra weight, it could change your whole image to become fit and firm. What if it also changed how people thought of you? In many instances, succeeding at your goals could be scary.

Or maybe you've always had friends who couldn't ever afford to do much and if you succeeded in saving money, you wonder if you'll still have anything in common. Fear can be paralyzing, and interestingly, fear of success can be a huge obstacle to change.

Not having specific goals can be barrier as well. Perhaps this year, you have vowed to eat better. "Eating better" is very nebulous. A more specific goal would be to eat at least one serving of fruits and vegetables at every meal. Maybe your goal is to save money this year. A more specific goal is to set up an automated savings plan of \$50 per month. The more specific your goal is the easier it is to accomplish.

Being negative is a big barrier to success in anything in life. Instead of thinking, "I'll never lose 30 pounds," say "I will lose 2 pounds a week for the next 15 weeks."

Not knowing where to get started is also an issue. I recommend as a first step, purchasing the book *Small Steps to Health and Wealth* from your local county extension office. A second step is to actually read the book – making notations about your behavior change plans in the margins.

Other people can either be resources or obstacles in meeting your goals. Instead of letting your couch potato spouse dictate your exercise patterns, find an active friend who will meet with you daily to exercise. Who knows, pretty soon, that couch potato may sprout some different habits because you have become a resource to meeting a health goal!

I hope that with the tips from your MSU Extension Office, you can keep your eye on your health and wealth goals in 2009.