

TV Reporter: Lose Weight or Lose My Job

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Two years ago, a single conversation changed my life: My boss told me I needed to lose weight or kiss my job goodbye. Actually, she didn't say that at all — but it's what I heard.

In fact, she never used the words “fat” or “lose weight.” She never threatened my career. But when she said my clothes didn't do me justice, and that she wanted to send me to a stylist, I took a different message away. I took it to mean that if I didn't physically reduce my size I would no longer appear on ABC's “Good Morning America,” where I have been a long-time contributor.



TV is, after all, a visual medium, and everyone should look their best.

So lose weight or lose your job is what I heard. I had been fat my entire life, trapped by it, but seemingly powerless to change. In retrospect, I was itching for an overwhelming reason — short of a heart attack or Type II diabetes diagnosis — to have to lose weight. The thought of losing a job I love was the spark I needed to get going.

If you've spent your life as a fat person, when you desperately don't want to be, you know it's like being in prison: you want to escape, but despite many efforts, you fail to make a break from behind those bars.

I was fed up with allowing the shame of my weight to control many poor decisions — from wearing navy on my wedding day to avoid looking like a massive marshmallow in a traditional white dress, to skipping all routine medical care for more than 10 years because I didn't want a lecture about my size.

When I set about losing weight, I really didn't know how I was going to actually do it. But I knew one thing for certain: I wasn't going to go on yet another diet. I had been there, done that. Actually, I had tried pretty much every diet out there from Atkins to The Zone, cabbage soup to the Cookie Diet. Sure, I'd lose some weight, but each and every time I'd tire of the regimen, revert to old habits and gain it all back again. I came to conclude that diets simply pause bad behavior, and this time merely pausing wasn't good enough.

Instead, my plan was fairly simple:

Eat less: (duh), which I arbitrarily determined to be half what I used to eat. My little trick became if I could name everything I ate that day in under 10 seconds I was doing fine.

Choose better: For me, that meant cutting carbohydrates, which meant saying goodbye to a lot of white foods — anything with flour, pasta, rice, potatoes and sugar.

No cheat days: While many diets prescribe a weekly day off for good behavior, I knew that didn't work for me. I'd wait until my cheat day arrived, eat every offender I could find, and before long I'd be back to eating with abandon full-time. I now think that rewarding anyone trying to lose weight with a cheat day is akin to telling an alcoholic he can celebrate a month of sobriety with a beer. It doesn't work. If I could handle moderation, I wouldn't have been fat in the first place.

Move more: This was the easiest of all, since I wasn't moving at all. Taking the stairs, walking to and from work and strolling around the block a few times a day evolved into a daily walk on the treadmill next to my bed.

Hold myself accountable, daily: I weighed myself every morning to always be aware of where I was. No more burying my head in denial.

Pause before bingeing: Mindless snacking had always done me in. This time before eating, I stopped to think: preference or priority? The preference may have been to go for the chips or cookies, but the priority was always to lose weight. Just reflecting on that for a moment allowed to make the right choice.

Over the course of one year, using this simple plan, I lost 62 pounds. I've since lost another 10 pounds. I came to learn that what I put in my head is far more powerful than what I put in my mouth — and I'm forever grateful to that boss who set me on this journey.

When it comes to losing weight, no pill, potion or plan trumps patience and perseverance. That was the missing piece of the puzzle for me — the steel bar that kept me from feeling the freedom to finally figure it out. In the past, I expected overnight results, and when I didn't get them, I stopped trying.

I was successful professionally, with a loving husband and beautiful kids. But when it came to losing weight, I was a disaster, failing time and again because I lacked the right mindset.

My message seems to be resonating with people who have fought long-time or life-time weight battles. I have gotten thousands of e-mails from people who say my story is their story — that they, too, were lulled into complacency by one diet gimmick after another, only to lose a little and gain it all back.

In this age of outsized Powerball wins, many of us think that all you need to do to get rich is buy a lottery ticket. Want to be the next Lady Gaga? A few appearances on "American Idol" will do the trick. We're always looking for the quick fix, the easy out, to solve what ails us.

The past doesn't have to dictate the future. Each of us has the power to change our mind for a happier, healthier, better life. Anyone can make the shift.

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