

Introduction

When it comes to weight loss, fitness, and healthy living, the marketplace is inundated with marketing gimmicks and false promises. It's easy to get confused and wrapped up in all the hype, as I have been on occasion. No wonder our chances of weight loss success are stacked against us.

So how is this book any different? My approach is to lay out the facts stripped of the advertising hype and allow you to use them to your advantage. You may or may not have noticed that there is no mention of the word "diet" in the title. It candidly may hurt book sales, but it is clearly by design. If I achieve my goal, you'll read this book and reflect. You'll have a conversation with yourself that might go something like this, "I know eating that fast food burger and fries isn't good for me, but now I at least know the degree to which it is sabotaging my goals." This subtle change in mindset will help you achieve sustainable success and finally defy the enticing diet community who posts a dismal 95% FAILURE rate. The increase in obesity rates is undeniable and getting worse. If we're not ready today for a completely different approach, then I don't know when we will be.

Before you can understand my approach and fully appreciate my story of personal achievement that led me to write this book, allow me to give you some background. Growing up, I was a very active youth constantly playing outside and later participating in multiple sports like soccer, tennis, wrestling and lacrosse. I grew up

in a household that ate dinner together often and did not substitute good quality food with easy-to-consume fast food.

I graduated in 1987 from Radnor High School located just outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. At that point I stopped growing. That meant I graduated at an intimidating 5' 8" and 135 pounds. Yeah, I know, a little scrawny, but I was tough. I only remember these weights so vividly because I wrestled. (Wrestlers compete according to weight classes.) I also remember this weight because when I attended the great Penn State University in the summer of 1987, I put on 20 pounds of muscle. No, seriously, it was 20 pounds of muscle because it was really the first time in my life I had ever lifted weights, which I did consistently all summer long. In fact, it was probably the most my body changed in any given period of my life. I remained very active throughout my four years in Happy Valley and likely graduated around 160 to 165 pounds.

Within the first five years of graduation, I remained active and participated in triathlons (swim, bike, run), weekly softball games, and adult soccer games. I even ran in the famous Washington D.C. based Marine Corps Marathon in 1994 and 1995. At this point, I had no concern about weight gain. In fact, I didn't even start worrying about weight gain until I was 28 years old in 1997. At that point in my life, as it is for so many of us, the job became my number one priority. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it did come with a cost that, in retrospect, was my health.

Because I was determined to be the first at the office in the morning and the last to go home in the evening, I started making bad decisions, such as not eating breakfast, eating lunch at 2 p.m. or 3 p.m., and then eating a less-than-nutritious dinner. About that time I started asking myself, "How am I gaining weight if I'm only eating twice per day?" I asked the question, but I certainly didn't do much to change the outcome, especially since I had the job to

worry about first. Sound familiar? Coincidentally, these new eating patterns couldn't have come at a worse time given the fact that my metabolism was naturally going to slow down with age anyway, so I was really compounding the problem. I did this knowingly but without any real understanding—a key distinction. Knowing something doesn't usually drive us to dig much below the surface on the topic while understanding it means we realize there is some degree of impact. Taking the knowledge gained from the understanding and applying it results in the “Ah Ha” moment that leads to lifestyle changes and sustainable success.

From 1997 through 2004 I experienced my progressive, yet subtle weight gain. I'm fortunate that I have fairly broad shoulders, so I carried it well and most people wouldn't have considered me to be overweight. I'm not so sure this is really a blessing because it probably numbed me to the inevitable that I was gaining weight. Throughout these years, I gained approximately seven to eight pounds per year until I reached my breaking point. Mind you, I got married in 2002, and like most soon-to-be spouses, I joined a health club with the intent of losing the weight before the big day. Granted I did lose maybe 10–15 pounds prior to the big day, but I was still around 180 pounds. When I look at my wedding photos now, I look huge compared to my current weight. It probably didn't help that my wife looked amazingly beautiful with her toned body and 100 pound frame.

So what changed? Why didn't I continue down the path of gradual weight gain or maintain the same unhealthy levels I had already created for myself? I took control of the situation and said, “Enough is enough.” I know, earth shattering, right? Seriously though, the math of losing weight really isn't very difficult to understand; in fact, it's simple. The key, and what I hope you take away from my story, is that you need to allow yourself to absorb the fundamentals which also means to stop believing the hype. The hype I refer to is the constant barrage of pills, gels, shakes, and any number of quick

fixes to weight loss. As the old saying goes, "If it sounds too good to be true, then it likely is."

"Ah Ha" Moments

What are Ah Ha moments? Surely you've experienced them many times throughout your life. They come in big and small moments when something clicks and a concept or application or process that was previously murky, becomes crystal clear. They are usually followed by a quick burst of adrenalin to mark the point of success. Sometimes, we even step back and laugh because the Ah Ha was staring us right in the face, but we needed to view it from a different angle to realize it. Sound familiar? They occur in all aspects of our lives, and they should be celebrated because they often define a small victory.

I think we all need to rejoice and appreciate more of the small victories in life we so often allow to pass us by. The real benefit of an Ah Ha is that it means you are engaged, listening to yourself and not simply going through the motions. It reflects a level of desired understanding with a bigger purpose in mind. With a topic like weight loss and sustainable healthy living, the real achievement comes when combining many individual Ah Ha moments to form sustainable healthy habits that last a lifetime.

I know exactly when I had my first incident that drove me to discover these future Ah Ha moments. It was the fall of 2004, and I was in my closet simply distraught that my size 36 inch waist pants were getting too tight. It was traumatic enough that about four years earlier I had to transition from a size 34 that I wore much of my adult life to a size 36. Now I was on the verge of having to purchase 38 inch pants. There was just no way I was going to allow that to happen.

There were two more life events that strengthened my determination. After two miscarriages, my wife was four weeks pregnant with our first daughter, Cate Marie LaTour, who would later join

the world in August of 2005. As life would have it, my father-in-law, Henry Heishman, was losing his battle with cancer and would later pass away in December 2004. I remember vividly that I had to scour my closet to find a suit for the funeral that I could wear—not an easy task. I finally settled on the one that was the least uncomfortable but by no means fit well. It was also a struggle to find a dress shirt that didn't cut off the circulation in my neck. I'm actually a little embarrassed to say that I had to unbutton the top button soon after the funeral because I was so uncomfortable.

That was really the last straw. It became very clear to me that I had to take control over the one thing in my life that was getting the best of me. I had to do it for my unborn child so that I could lead by example and embrace every moment of her young life. In retrospect, it's a little ironic that I set out on a course to lose weight and get healthy while my wife was gaining weight, albeit baby weight. Naturally, she was very supportive and the discussions about our respective weights provided some humorous moments throughout the pregnancy.

This was also the time that I became committed to dusting off the concept of JumpSnap, The Ropeless Jump Rope, that I had bouncing around in my head for about seven years since 1997. The concept of the product is to harness all the calorie-burning benefits of a traditional jump rope while removing the part that frustrates most of us, the rope. At that time, I didn't have the skill set, money or the motivation to pursue its development. This was probably a blessing in disguise. Now, I had a much deeper personal motivation to create and develop this new fitness product and figured what better way to test it than on myself. After many trips to Home Depot and Toys R Us to preview parts and materials, I had created a working prototype that was good enough that I could begin to test the benefits of JumpSnap. I figured I would use the product in its crude form while the designers did their job to make it more appealing for the mass market.

When I first started my JumpSnap workouts, I could barely do one minute without stopping and couldn't do more than five or six minutes combined. I immediately knew I was onto something by the pure sweat I was enjoying in just a few minutes of the exercise. It was also one of the first times in many years I had stuck with anything. I would JumpSnap right after I got home from work and before dinner, so I had no excuse. I literally would walk in the door, greet Susan, put on my shorts and sneakers and head down to the basement for five to ten minutes of JumpSnap while watching the evening news. I really think this is one of the key contributing factors that enabled me to stick with it because I was literally done before my brain could even rationalize why I couldn't work out that day. Compared to the standard health club membership, I was done and showered in the same amount of time it would have taken me to drive to the gym, change clothes, and scout out an open machine. For me, like everyone else out there who struggles to exercise regularly, time was the number one stumbling block.

As the months went on and the formal development of JumpSnap came together, the weight kept coming off. When I started in the fall of 2004, I reached my heaviest weight of 205 pounds and I had a goal weight in mind of 175 pounds by my birthday of April 14, 2005. This gave me roughly six months to lose 30 pounds. I felt that was achievable, and the more weight I lost due to my JumpSnap workouts fueled my appetite to learn more about healthy living. Remember what I said previously about “knowing” and “understanding”? The progress I was gaining encouraged me to become a student of healthy living which ultimately make up the Ah Ha's in this book.

I was JumpSnapping five days a week feeling good about my exercise when I realized I needed to focus equally on my intake, specifically my calories. Since nutrition is half the equation for sustainable weight loss, I became a student of the basics. Creating my own calorie log was an eye-opening experience and allowed me to

maximize my exercise with reduced calorie nutrition. By the time my self-imposed goal of April 14 arrived, I weighed 175 pounds, that was a full 30 pounds lighter than my previous weight, and people were noticing. I had to purchase an entirely new wardrobe that brought me back to my 34 inch waist pants. I was ecstatic.

I really had a lot of positive momentum going and realized my initial goal was just phase one. I wanted more. I was gaining a deeper knowledge of how it all worked together that made me more confident to laugh at the millions of myths that pop up in the market every day.

My next goal was to get back to my high school weight of 155 pounds, which candidly I wasn't sure I could do. (I only share that with you because bouts of self doubt are part of the process, so don't beat yourself up over every little imperfection.) After two periods of plateau, I was able to lose the remaining 20 pounds by the spring of 2006. All in all, it took me about a year and a half to lose the entire 50 pounds. That may not stack up to the statistics of the next bogus diet of the week, but this is real weight loss for real people.

Naturally, my personal story differs from yours. Perhaps you are a dedicated mother who always puts her family's needs first and literally forgets about her own health and wellness. Or maybe you are a busy father who struggles to juggle the demands of the office with those of raising a family. Or maybe you've been overweight your entire life and have grown to accept it as if it's genetic. Regardless of our stories, we are all in the same place. We want a change and are willing to work at it and take the common sense approach to healthy living. The basic principles of weight loss apply to us all. That's the good news. The better news is that you will be successful if you invest the necessary time, energy and discipline to incorporate these Ah Ha's into your daily life.

You and the Mirror

Remember, it took me seven years to amass the weight, so being able to take it off in under two years is a pretty good return, if you ask me. The best news of all is that I've been able to keep it off for over two years and know exactly which levers to pull if I'm not feeling as fit as I should. The weight loss is great, but the knowledge and confidence you will gain along the way is really what I want to share with you in this book.

With this goal in mind, to encourage you to maximize your progress, I've included a brief workbook component following each Ah Ha which I've titled "You and the Mirror." The name illustrates what this journey is all about. The intent of this workbook section is to inspire you to look closely at yourself (in the mirror) and take immediate action to apply each Ah Ha. I want you to enjoy the book, but more importantly, I want you to apply the contents to best suit your goals. I want you to be able to go back and reference a given Ah Ha when you need it. Write in the margins and take notes about key concepts to help you absorb the material. If you can use my experiences and adapt them to your life, then I have achieved my ultimate goal. I want you to advance beyond the head-nodding stage and take an active role in your own success. As the description implies, at the end of the day, it's you and the mirror that determine your level of success.

Before we jump in, let's take a deep breath and prepare ourselves to absorb the information. Don't overcomplicate it. You've probably heard some of the stuff before, but what I want you to focus on is the simplicity and how to incorporate it into your daily life. Let's have some fun and enjoy these Ah Ha moments together. Expect success, but don't expect it overnight. I look forward to hearing about your personal achievement and doing your part to help lead by example in the pursuit of healthy living.