

Setting and Keeping Goals

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I learned to ride a bike when I was about 4 and spent my childhood tooling around on it and progressively bigger versions. The neighborhood kids and I would ride to each other's homes and on adventures. As an adult, my bike has been used as a mode of transportation or entertainment, like family outings. This does not mean that I have ever considered riding a bike a form of exercise. That was for those people with the fancy outfits, not my leisurely pedals as I opted for biking over driving.

After years of recreational distance running, though, I'm finally heeding advice to diversify my forms of exercise. So on a sunny Friday afternoon recently, I strapped on my Bell helmet and took my hybrid bike toward a nearby state park with mild terrain. I was not exactly the picture of a serious biker, but I felt excited to try something different and take my childhood hobby to a new level.

Boy was I in for a surprise when I got to the first incline and my bike... just...stopped. Despite my perceived level of fitness, I looked up at the incline and realized there was no way I could pedal up that hill. So I did what no self-respecting cyclist would do; I got off the bike and walked it to the top. As I was riding on a forgiving flat stretch of trail, I thought about how that hill paralleled a lot of efforts in life, especially regarding wellness. It's similar to getting out the door to exercise those first several times when trying to lose weight. Or changing habits that are so comfortable but not so helpful to a healthy lifestyle. Mastering the task seemed impossible, insurmountable.

The key to learning anything new or making any behavioral change is to know where you are going and work toward it. Imagine if you wanted to

go on vacation but didn't pick a destination. How would you book tickets or plan your road trip? Where would you stay? What would you do? Without goals, we are wandering beings, just moving around with blinders. If you have a goal, you can start taking small, intentional steps toward it. You may take off the blinders and start looking around for information, resources, or ideas.

What is your goal?

Goals are most helpful when they are more specific than general. For example, "I want to lose 10lbs," may leave you floundering. A specific goal that will lead to weight loss looks more like, "I will keep a food log at least 3/7 days this week." It's also important that your goal is easily measured. You work hard; know when you can take credit for it! "I will exercise 3/7 days," is specific but it will be even more helpful if you make it measurable by stating the type, duration and frequency of exercise like, "I will ride my bike for one hour 3 times this week." These specific and measurable goals will actually lead to weight loss that, with consistency, will add up to 10lbs!

Another way to work toward a goal is to create accountability by telling others about it. It's a scary and exciting feeling to claim a desire you have out loud to a safe and supportive person.

One of my goals is to ride my bike up that darn hill. Imagine if I turned around from that ride assuming I just couldn't do it and moved on with my life. But I don't want to give up. Though that hill was tough, it was only the beginning. I also cruised around curves overlooking the Bay. I chatted and laughed with others on the trail almost like my neighborhood friends. And the thrill of going downhill is fun and scary all at the same time, especially when I realized one of my brakes didn't work! So now I need to 1) tune up my bike (about 10 yrs overdue) and 2) practice riding a little further each time than I did the last. I may even ask someone with more experience than me about proper gear and form. Change doesn't happen

overnight. But it is possible. You just have to know where you're going and work toward it.