

# Reaching Fitness Goals

Fiona Cosgrove

In recent years, the health and fitness industry has been encouraging lifestyle and behavioural change in order to promote weight loss, fitness, renewed vitality, and to reduce the prevalence of lifestyle-related diseases. Health clubs, weight-loss centres and personal fitness studios have been appearing every day. Countless diet programs and books have hit the shelves.

Yet the expert advice and efforts of the fitness industry has been producing limited long-term results. There are three main reasons for this:

- 1 People know what do to achieve their fitness goals; they just don't know how to do it.
- 2 Histories of failed attempts have undermined individuals' beliefs in their ability to succeed.
- 3 Confidence is not increased by being told what to do: people like to have responsibility and control over their own lives, rather than hand it over.

The current statistics on the health of Australians show there is much work to be done and that perhaps the fitness

industry's ways of working with people could be improved. The great news is that a model is being developed that can help people change – for good. This is referred to as the 'coaching approach'.

## How is the 'coaching approach' different from traditional fitness instruction and personal training?

- 1 Coaching fosters lasting life change by looking at the 'thinking' processes that produce change, rather than just the outcomes.
- 2 The client is regarded as the expert on what works best for them, not the coach. The coach simply creates structure for the client around their own objectives.
- 3 Expert advice is offered only when clients can't come up with their own answers.
- 4 Many clients find coaching less intrusive and intimidating.
- 5 Changes are more deeply ingrained and therefore last longer.

## THREE STEPS TO COACHING

### 1 CREATE A VISION

A client is encouraged to create a vision of where they would like to be if they were at optimum health and wellness. This is not just about losing weight or starting to exercise: it is a more comprehensive picture of what else would change in their life if they were to achieve their lifestyle goals. For example, would they gain more confidence and, if so, how would that affect what they do, what risks they take and how they live? The goal of 'losing 10 kilos' is not terribly inspiring and says little about ultimate lifestyle goals.

A good coach will help their client recognise the personal strengths they can bring to their change process, and identify what obstacles could get in the way. Strategies can be designed to overcome those obstacles, but it must be in collaboration with the client - not by giving them the next step.

### 2 GET READY TO CHANGE

Don't set your client up for failure: a good coach always helps their client set achievable tasks, starting with the most achievable.

### 3 PLAN TO ACHIEVE GOALS

- a Plan long-term goals first. For example, at the end of three months, plan to be eating three well-balanced, low-fat meals per day.
- b Weekly goals are the stepping stones to success. They could include eating breakfast every morning, having three alcohol-free days a week, or walking three times a week for 40 minutes.
- c Goals should focus on behaviours rather than outcomes. Losing weight is great, but living as a healthier person is more exciting!

**WHEN THESE GOALS ARE DESIGNED WELL, THE CLIENT WILL ACHIEVE THEM.**