

Peak to Peak counseling



New Year, New You

Intentional Steps Towards Sustainable Changes

By Amy Skinner, MA, LPC, NCC, ACS, RPT-S

Bob started talking even before he sat down in the chair. “I’ve made so many changes in my life! Over the past few years I’ve stopped using substances, started exercising, included vegetables and fruit in my diet, reconnected with my adult kids, and just wrapped up my last debt payment. It’s like I’m a new person, and everyone is always complimenting me. But I still have times when I have the old thoughts and fight to not do old behaviors, like being mean and selfish to my family. I don’t want to be the old me anymore, but sometimes I feel like I can’t help it.”

Bethany had been trying to lose the last few pounds for a few months now. She’d added in healthy behaviors, altered her diet, and processed during counseling sessions her relationship with food and body image. “I don’t get it. I was able to lose the rest of the weight pretty easily! What’s going on? I think there’s something psychologically going on here.” “Wait,” I stopped Bethany, “what do you mean your weight loss journey has been easy?” “Oh you know,” Bethany shrugged. “I just changed my diet and added in some exercise. No big deal.”

Change—awareness, taking steps, and sustaining it—is difficult for all of us, no matter how “easy” it looks. With Bob, we used Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) to create a specific treatment plan. Bob started with attending one weekly local AA meeting, reaching out to a buddy for twice a week workouts, and crafted an outline for an initial phone conversation with his oldest daughter. Once Bob’s life structure was healthy, positive and sustainable, it was time for us to dive into

Originally published in *The Mountain-Ear*, www.themtneer.com.

All rights reserved. Please request permission before reprinting in whole or in part.

Read more articles by Amy Skinner by visiting <https://peaktopeakcounseling.com/articles/>.



the “why” behind the behaviors. As Bob and I began exploring his childhood memories, he struggled to remember concrete experiences with his parents. Through conversations with his extended family, we learned he had experienced significant trauma in his younger years. Bob began to work on accepting and processing that although his mom and dad did the best they could, his childhood with them was painful and difficult.

Bethany was experiencing cognitive dissonance, a type of denial that can happen after we make positive changes. Our brains can get so used to the positive changes, we forget what it takes to get us there! The truth was, Bethany had completely turned her life upside down to create a healthy lifestyle. Sugary desserts became fresh fruit, negative self-talk was replaced by positive, truthful messages, Saturday afternoon Netflix binges turned into exercise time outdoors, and eating grew into a mindful, thoughtful time. We took a session to focus on mentally integrate all the changes she’d made, and Bethany realized with a little more attention to portions and an additional walk with the dog, her goal weight became a reality.

So this new year, if you’re taking time to set some intentions for 2022, don’t forget to assess what specific steps need to take place. It can mean the difference between a lifelong change, and a lifelong struggle!