

familiar? For some of you reading this, just substitute the words *cholesterol* or *credit card debt* for *weight* and you'll know immediately what I'm talking about.)

I have learned the hard way to do a lot more self-monitoring when it comes to my weight. Now I get on the scale every single day, so that any gains can be immediately countered with better eating and some (gasp!) exercise before they get too out of hand and I need to change clothes sizes again. This is what is so brilliant and effective about Weight Watchers—mandatory weekly weigh-ins and a detailed accounting of everything you eat each day, though somewhat time-consuming, keep you fully aware at all times of how well you are doing each week as you work toward your goal. Weight Watchers and programs like it are essentially lessons in the power of self-monitoring.

Too Little of What You Need, Too Much of What You Don't

Most of the mistakes you can make on the way to achieving your goal fall into two broad categories of wrongs. The first is what psychologists call *underregulation*,¹ not doing enough of something you need to do for success. So far the mistakes I've talked about in this chapter, missing opportunities and not self-monitoring, are examples of this kind of error. Lacking the self-control to avoid temptation and control your impulses is another kind of underregulation. Many of the strategies I'll be sharing with you in the remaining chapters are effective for dealing with this kind of saboteur, because underregulation is by far the most common problem.

The second kind of wrong is called *misregulation*, and just like the name suggests, it is choosing an ineffective strategy to reach your goal. You can be working as hard as you can, practically killing yourself to succeed, yet success will elude you because you're going about it the wrong way. Maybe you're working too quickly when it's vital to be careful and accurate. Perhaps you are trying to fight temptation by suppressing thoughts about food, and it's backfiring. (Incidentally, thought suppression almost never works. Whatever you're suppressing usually just pops up later with an even greater force.) Maybe you're overthinking something you usually do naturally and expertly, and it's causing you to choke under pressure.

It's hard to give good advice when it comes to misregulation because a strategy that works with one goal may not be good for another, so making generalizations that will be true across goals is difficult. Probably the best advice I can give here is to make sure you are self-monitoring, because evaluating your performance is the best way to discover that you need a new strategy, long before it's too late to make a change.

Too often, people blame their goal failures on the wrong things. I hope that after reading this chapter you will take some time to reconsider some of your own past disappointments. Perhaps you thought you lacked ability, when really you just used the wrong strategy. Or you thought you didn't have the time to work on a goal, when really you just let the opportunities you had slip through your fingers. Maybe you were operating in the dark, without the feedback you needed to keep yourself motivated and on the right track. Now that I've told you where your problems may really lie, it's time to start focusing on solutions.

What You Can Do

Many of the solutions for conquering the goal saboteurs will be coming in the following chapters, but here are a few things from this chapter to keep in mind.

- **It's about execution.** Most of the time, we know what needs to be done to reach a goal—we just don't manage to actually do it. Focusing on execution is essential for success.
- **Seize the moment.** Given how busy most of us are, and how many goals we are pursuing at once, it's not surprising that we routinely miss opportunities to act on a goal because we simply fail to notice them. Achieving your goal means grabbing hold of these opportunities before they slip through your fingers.
- **Know what to do.** Once you've seized the moment, you've got to figure out exactly what you're going to do with it. When you can't act swiftly, you risk wasting the opportunity.
- **Put your shields up.** Goals require protection—distractions, temptations, and competing goals can steal your attention and your energy, and sap your motivation.
- **Know how you are doing.** Achieving a goal also requires careful monitoring. If you don't know how well you are doing, you can't adjust your behavior or your strategies accordingly. Check your progress frequently.