

Behavioral modification



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

A friend of mine who was trying out for the football team at school recently approached me for help in developing a program to help him lose weight. I started by asking him questions regarding his dietary habits, his workout habits and how much time he has to spend working on his goal. I asked him a number of questions about what he hoped to achieve, not only for his short term goal of playing football, but for his long term goal of becoming healthier as well.

Along with an exercise program that focused on the building of muscle strength necessary in sports, I also put together dietary guidelines that he followed in order to be successful in achieving his goal. On the first day of the program, I had him run a mile around the running track and then had him exercise on the stationary bike for another hour. I encouraged his progress by offering positive, vocal input and by letting him leave fifteen minutes early to see his girlfriend. Five days a week for a month, he was to wake up and go for a run in the morning, and then have his breakfast of healthy oatmeal and fruit.

Then in the afternoon spend two hours at the gym working to build his up his strength and circulatory system. Lunch would follow of a grilled chicken sandwich and a salad. In the evening I let him choose what work out he wanted to do, as long as it was within guidelines. Five days a week for a month was the schedule, and his goal was to stick to it, no matter what happened. I impressed upon him the techniques of personal behavioral modification, if he followed the exercise and diet plan, the positive feedback would be more free time to watch television, visit with friends or go to the movies.

If he followed my program, hopefully it would lead to breaking bad habits he had formed over a lifetime. I also introduced him to the diet during the first week that he would be following for the next month. The diet was designed to be a low salt, low fat, low sugar and low carbohydrate diet. That meant also that he was not allowed to have alcohol for the remainder of the month long program due to the high sugar and carbohydrate level that is contained in alcohol. I wanted the subject to build strength and muscle, not fat, and I also wanted him to keep his mind on the goal at hand.

I explained to him the dangers of alcohol as a depressant, but also the impact it has on reasoning and judgment when the alcohol is consumed. At the beginning of week two of the behavior modification program, we had a setback when my roommate admitted that he had spent the weekend drinking. I made it very clear to the subject that if he continued on this path, he would not make the football team. I presented negative reinforcement to him by threatening to take money that he set aside for the coming weekend and I would give it back to him when he became serious about the program.

I also told him that if he was not that serious about joining the football team then we could just end the program now. The subject protested that his former conditioning had not prepared him for the strenuous modification program that he was now experiencing and that he found it was difficult to change his behaviors. In response I encouraged him by again telling him that his hard work would pay off in the end he would realize his dream of joining the football team. I also informed him again of the drawbacks of alcohol on his body, focusing more on weight gain than on the depressant setbacks to get the point across.

He took this information to heart and began to remove himself from situations where he knew alcohol was going to be consumed. He also began to diminish the level of glucose intake and intake of empty calories, such as high fructose corn syrup based drinks. At the beginning of week three, his progress began to plateau in his conditioning and he started to break through his previously learned behaviors. He continued with the regular schedule of running in the morning, going to the gym in the afternoon and then doing a yoga class in the evening.

He also began adding organic meats, green vegetables and fruit to his diet. He began to give me feedback on how his body was adapting, and I praised him for his efforts with positive reinforcement. I began modifying his program, adding several variables of positive reinforcement, from taking a shorter runs in the mornings to adding a dessert to his diet menu. This was based on a fixed interval schedule and if he completed a goal for the first day of the week; he received his award the same day.

He informed me that he started to feel like he was reaching his goal when week four began; the renewed energy that he was feeling was a direct result of his dedication. He lost ten pounds in weight and gained another five in muscle mass; he stated that his energy was boosted by his diet. At the end of the four week program, he did try out for the football team and was accepted and he also managed to maintain a schedule of diet and exercise and reach his goal in the thirty days he had projected.