



## Be the tortoise

By Dr. Roger Landry

A few years ago, I had my left ankle replaced. Yes, ankle. With the marvels of modern medicine, this too, is possible. After decades of mounting pain and limited mobility as the result of a winter accident, I was going to be a new man! I would be walking better and longer. I would have more energy. I decided I would finish the Appalachian Trail... maybe even the Pacific Crest. I'd take more trips. Maybe I now would even be better looking...

"Whoa cowboy!" my inner rational voice finally spoke up and yanked on my reins. Those things could happen (except that last one) but there were a few steps before all that. Like, preventing clots and infection while I was immobile, getting the cast off, rebuilding mobility and strength with rehab...lots of rehab...

### The resolution dilemma

And so it is, my friends, with any change you might be contemplating. PLEASE forget the classic New Year's resolution. That... go for the gusto... just do it... no pain no gain... go for the gold... type of lifestyle change you and everybody else has tried before and failed miserably at. It's noble to want to be better. I applaud it. And *it can happen...* but not the way you think.

There is one slogan I want you to adopt. NO FEAR. Here's why. The reason we fail at big change is because, as a species that evolved from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle, we,

like our ancestors, are internally wired to respond to large change, whether extrinsic or self-induced, with a fear-like response. That response prevents us from bringing to bear all the needed abilities we have on our effort to change. We fail because we present ourselves with large, usually impractical if not impossible, change within a particular, unrealistic time frame. Small steps on the other hand, allows us essentially to do an end run on the fear response and we can move ahead with all our success cylinders firing.

### Our new change hero

I give you the venerable tortoise. Who very un-dramatically takes small consistent steps towards a goal that may be a long distance and a long time away. I also give you kaizen, a Japanese approach to change which is based on small steps, in fact the smallest step possible towards larger goals. Dr. Robert Maurer, in his powerful book, *One Small Step Can Save Your Life* tells of a process which sounds ridiculously simple and even laughable to we overachieving Americans, but which is exponentially more successful with lifestyle change.

So, my post-COVID 19 new-beginnings, brothers and sisters, yes, let's be better in this next year. Let's move towards lifestyles that will keep us healthier as we age, improve the quality of our lives, and make us feel confident we are more in control of our well-being. But let's do as the tortoise, the kaizen way. Here's three simple tips:

## Three tips to be successful at lifestyle change

1. *Do your internal homework.* Ask yourself... and answer clearly... Why and What you want to change. If that's not clear there's no way you're going to stay the course. You will be lured off course by the first miracle claim, or too good to be true "guaranteed" outcome.
2. Then... here's the big adjustment to your classic way of approaching change... Ask yourself, "*What is the **smallest** thing I can do to begin this change.*" Now make *that* your goal for now. Not the BIG goal. Just this small first step. i.e. I'm going to stand during TV commercials vs running five miles every day. Imagine yourself doing that small thing (this begins to program your brain for success).
3. When you achieve the small goal, set the next smallest goal and work towards that. If you fail to meet a goal, step back and make the goal even smaller by say, doing less or giving yourself more time. Forget the self-loathing or picture of a pig on the refrigerator response. You shot too high. Modify it and push ahead. This way, *you cannot fail.* And meanwhile you'll be developing confidence and competence muscles which will make you the Rocky Balboa of your world.

Aren't you better off having multiple small successes over a longer period than one short colossal failure? Really, the tortoise brings it! Maybe slower, but HE DOES BRING IT!

## Contact

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