

Practice Points for Students

How to Become the Biggest Maintainer of Weight Lost

Interview by Hope Warshaw, MMSC, RD, CDE



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This interview was first published in 2012 on Hope Warshaw's blog (hopewarshaw.com/blog/dialoging-about-how-become-%E2%80%9C-biggest-maintainer-weight-lost%E2%80%9D). It was completed as a result of Bob and Hope meeting and striking up a conversation on this topic at the 2012 Weight Management Symposium.

As a dietitian and diabetes educator I know the critical importance of weight control as part of disease prevention and/or control and healthy living. I also know how challenging it is to keep pounds lostwell, lost forever. It takes inner strength, fortitude, perseverance and much more. Compared to taking the pounds off, keeping the pounds off is THE hard work and it goes on endlessly. Good news is experts say it gets easier over time.

In this blog I'm dialoging with Bob Wilson, a dietetic technician in his day job. Bob was a morbidly obese teenager. He weighed 400 pounds in the 8th grade. He lost 250 pounds over 2 years when he hit 21. He has now kept his weight between 155 and 160 for 39 years. He's been on a remarkable journey. Through his struggle to manage his weight Bob has amassed many learnings and skills and shares these at his website: balancedweightmanagement.com and in his book *Lighter and Free from the Inside Out*. Bob wants millions of others to win "The Biggest Maintainer of Weight Lost" award. He graciously agreed to share.



Bob Wilson, DTR

HW Q: You discuss 12 Essential Skills for long-term weight loss/control. Can you list the top 5 and briefly state why they're most important to long-term success?



BW A: My overarching message: for lasting success discover skill power, not willpower!

Skill #1 Take time to create a new life: If you don't make the time to evaluate your current life patterns, then you won't know what to change. Select skills and habits to change. Practice new approaches. I have needed to simplify and slow down my life. For me, daily prayer, meditation, and contemplation have been invaluable.

Skill #2 Make great tasting, healthy food/meals a priority: Even in the midst of a hectic lifestyle, my menus get planned ahead. They celebrate vegetables and fruits. I use food to fuel my busy lifestyle and to provide energy for my activities. By planning ahead, I avoid fast food, junk foods and save \$\$\$!

Skill #3 Move more: The reward for consistent physical activity is vibrancy! I feel the power to celebrate inner strength and well being from allowing my body to

experience the joy of movement. I make it a priority to take time for an active life. I plan family and personal vacations around activities, or invite a colleague to talk business over a walk rather than lunch. I hike in beautiful natural areas. My increased physical abilities bring me personal freedom and a sense of awe and appreciation for life.

Skill #4 Learn the skills for emotional nurturing: These skills helped me transform emotional eating, addictions, and low self-esteem. I learned to celebrate my life! I became a compassionate and loving friend—to me!

Skill #5 Get the help you need: Counseling and support groups have been invaluable. In the past I didn't have any role models for living healthfully with wholesome relationships, effective problem solving, and strategies for respectful conflict management. Through reading, individual counseling, and support groups, I was able to dismantle unproductive responses to life events and learn to be my own personal lifestyle coach.

HW Q: What are two of your other key skills for long-term weight control? Why are these also critically important?

BW A: Skill #1: Pay attention: I can't change what I don't observe so I keep a lifestyle journal to continue to look in the mirror. I can see the type and amounts of food I eat each day, and how my emotions, people, places, and events influence my choices. I can identify my problems as well as eating and lifestyle patterns. I use a daily personal check-in to find answers. Gradually I developed my "witness-self" that observes patterns of success or self-sabotage and helps plan alternatives.

Skill #2: Cultivate life-long health: You manage to achieve and maintain a healthy



Bob at 260 pounds—my high school graduation picture. Top weight, 400 pounds.



At my maximum, I weighed about 250 pounds more than shown here on a hike I could not have done before the weight loss!

body weight through your daily choices. It's an ongoing investment in YOU. You feel empowered and capable because of your self-discipline.

HW Q: Do you feel the 12 key skills you've identified for long-term weight control are similar to those identified by weight maintenance research or studies of people who've lost weight and kept it off?

BW A: Yes, I explore the same skills that support lasting weight loss and maintenance as the National Weight Control Registry. Several are: maintain a high level of physical activity, eat out less often, learn to prepare delicious and healthful home-cooked meals, develop self-management strategies and individualized tools to support your weight maintenance.

HW Q: Do you suggest a particular eating plan for long-term weight control or do you find that people need to explore and find what works for them?

BW A: I suggest people start where they are and plan a healthier eating plan, step by step. I do share guidelines for a foundation food plan. I like the *Healing Foods Pyramid*. It shares terrific nutritional guidelines. I DO suggest people find out what works for them and learn how to follow the plan within the context of the various environments of their life.

HW Q: As we know, much of the work for long-term weight control requires mental mindshifting. A person needs to change their relationship with food, as well as the role of food in their life. What are psychological strategies people can try to do to change their mindset?

BW A: Consider choosing to be healthy not because a healthcare provider said to, but because YOU want to love and respect yourself more. Learn to free your heart and mind from personal distress, release self-judgment. Become your own best friend.

HW Q: Do you continue to enjoy food and eating? What's your balanced approach?

BW A: You bet! I celebrate the pleasures of healthy foods. Food is one of the ways I nurture myself, but it is not the only way. To promote my healthy life style, I find one new recipe and new food idea at a time. Have "mouth fun," enjoying what you eat! This is essential if you are to make your new choices a permanent part of your lifestyle and not just a "diet." I also suggest learning and practicing mindful eating, It can help people eat less and enjoy their food more!

HW Q: Do you have any "mantras" that you say to yourself day in/day out which keep you on this path?

BW A: I start with gratitude and thankfulness for life's joys and blessings. I remember where I've come from and how my life has improved. I'm aware of my root challenge: "my head and heart can dream up commitments that my body, mind, and emotions can't keep up with!" I balance self-care with service to others. This is a dynamic dance. Practice doesn't make perfect, it makes permanent!

HW Q: What will people find in your book *Lighter & Free from the Inside Out*?

BW A: *Lighter & Free from the Inside Out!*, describes effective paths toward developing a holistic well-being of body, mind, and spirit. It can be ordered at my website and through Amazon.

Thanks for sharing, Bob! Continued success to you as one of the "Biggest Maintainers!"

Bob Wilson, DTR, celebrates a healthy lifestyle that has allowed him to maintain a 250-pound weight loss for 39 years. Bob has discovered 12 essential skills for life-long well-being and weight management. Bob has been teaching healthy living classes at a local HMO for over 22 years and provides lifestyle coaching on diet and health.

Bob received the Award of Excellence in Practice by the Oregon Dietetic Association in 1987 and nationally in 1996 by the American Dietetic Association.