

# Eyeing the Prize

Relevant goal-setting makes the difference

**W**hile vacationing in Samara Beach, Costa Rica, in November 2005, Susan Johnson lounged in a hammock and read novels, as planned. What she didn't do was take a kayaking trip to nearby Isla Chora. She later regretted not having taken the one-hour trip, saying, "It sounded like fun, but I knew I didn't have the upper body strength and that I wouldn't be having fun after five minutes or so."

Corporate life had provided a nice paycheck but promoted a sedentary existence. Johnson says: "I was 47, looking at my parents and sisters, none of whom were very healthy. I thought, 'If I don't change something now, I won't be able to do anything physical eventually, and that's not how I want to live.'"

Johnson had been considering personal training prior to her trip, even going so far as getting contact information for a Portland-area trainer. Then she found out later that the highly recommended trainer was straight, and she felt that she would be more comfortable working with a trainer in the queer community. Johnson and I started working together in January 2006.

"My goals weren't based on how I looked necessarily, or losing weight," she says. "Those things were not a major motivator at that time of my life."

Her goals were to get stronger, develop strength and, eventually, to kayak. Single for more than a year, she also had the ulterior motive of expanding her social circle this way.

Johnson took to personal training with a stubborn resolve that tends to make the trainer work harder, too. Together, we started looking at the



**Dear Ethel**  
BY MARIA CALLAHAN

other areas of her life that needed fine-tuning. Long hours at the office led to multiple visits to the vending machine or to fast food restaurants. We enlisted the help of my caterer friend Meridith Zero, owner of LL Brown Bag Services (LL stands for "lipstick lesbian"), and Johnson was soon enjoying healthy home-cooked meals at work. Stereotypically Italian, Zero usually brought enough food each visit for two or three meals, and the cost wound up being comparable to eating lunch out. Johnson had aversions to many foods, but Zero, a culinary master of disguise, managed to make everything tasty and healthy. Envious co-workers stopped to gawk at Johnson's lunch to see what Zero had delivered.

The change had a lasting effect, Johnson says. "I've developed a taste for healthier foods that I had never eaten before, and I prefer them. I am much less likely to eat fast food now."

Johnson's co-workers commented about her weight loss, but in actuality, she had only dropped six

pounds. What she so quickly lost was inches. As a result of her dedication to strength training, she went from a size 14 to a size 10 in four months. Johnson also noticed that with exercise and a cleaner diet, she was less stressed, more balanced emotionally and sleeping better, and the acid reflux attacks that she had suffered from for years had greatly decreased in frequency.

Reaching all of her initial goals in April 2006, Johnson and I went on a kayaking trip to celebrate. "It was the first time I can remember being on a boat, paddling and still feeling like I was having a good time," she says.

Naturally gregarious and gaining more confidence every day, Johnson then decided to set new, more specific goals. We sought out a team sport that would provide her with exercise and social contact simultaneously. When Johnson expressed an interest in trying out for the Amazon Dragons, it seemed like a perfect fit.

"The first dragon boat training was tough," she says. "Dragon boating has a complicated stroke that requires the use of your entire body. In the past I would have given up."

She now has the confidence to hang in there while learning the ropes. "I don't feel singled out or punished when the coach wants to give me tips."

I'm going to gloat and take credit now, because I have a perfect record with regard to matchmaking. One day, Johnson walked into my studio early and noticed a "really cute" client I was working with. After each of them inquired about the other, I introduced them formally and they've now been dating for



**Susan Johnson's healthy transformation led to major changes in her professional and personal life.**

nearly a year. Her girlfriend is a motivated athlete, and although Johnson's main motivations now are to contribute to the team and to keep up her health, she believes her girlfriend's active lifestyle is a motivator in and of itself. "She inspires me to be my best."

Last year, Johnson quit the corporate gig and founded Now We're Organized, an organizational services company. She says: "I really don't know if I ever would have left my cushy corporate job and ventured into self-employment without having gone through this transformation. I really believe that getting myself into better physical shape contributed to this change."

Don't you just love a happy ending?

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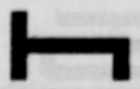
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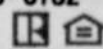
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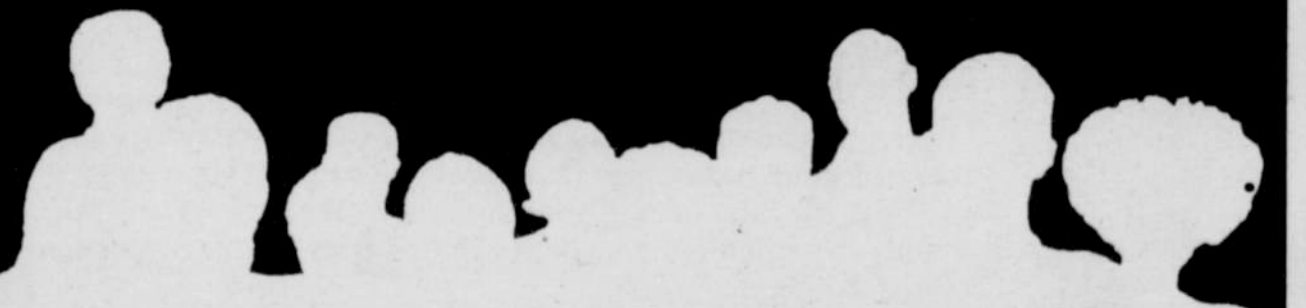


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