

Key Three: A No-Fail Environment

Unlock the Door to External Control

*Sometimes it is not good enough to do your best;
you have to do what's required.*

—SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL

KEY #3: A NO-FAIL ENVIRONMENT.

You can't eat what's not there. When you reduce your exposure to food, you program yourself against out-of-control eating and make it practically impossible to fail at weight loss.

This key unlocks the door to *external control*. External control means that your environment—places like your home or office, anywhere you see food, think about food, store food, prepare food, sneak food, and eat food—is safe from problematic foods and reminders to eat. With external control, food is out of sight, out of reach, and out of mind.

Because many of you overeat because food is available and accessible, the best way to counter inappropriate, problematic eating is to change your exposure and access to food by rearranging and managing your external environment. A case in point: recently, I received letters from two women who took to heart my message that “You can't eat unhealthy food if it's not there.” They decided to clean out their cupboards and refrigerators, and avoid fast-food restaurants and other places that did not support their weight loss goals. With these very simple changes in their lifestyle, these women lost 10 and 14

pounds, respectively, in only three weeks. As they did, you will find that weight loss becomes so much easier when you control your environment by eliminating opportunities that invite needless snacking, overeating, and bingeing.

This key has nothing to do with increasing willpower or trying to mentally resist food temptations, but rather with reengineering your environment in such a way that it “pulls for” the result that you desire. Any self-destructive behavior involving a “substance of choice,” whether it is nicotine, alcohol, food, or something else, will manifest itself depending on the level of access to that substance in the environment. Remove access and you stand a better chance of quitting. As proof, there are documented cases of soldiers who became addicted to heroin in Vietnam, but upon returning home to a different environment, were able to permanently kick their habit.

That’s why, in the same way, I can cure smoking, alcoholism, or drug addiction; I can cause addicts to defeat their addiction 100 percent of the time, provided I put them in an environment where there is no tobacco, alcohol, or drugs. Addiction cured. Realistically though, nothing short of parachuting them into the Antarctic will ensure such a temptation-free environment. But each and every step in that direction will improve their chances of success.

So if you truly want to manage your weight, you must program your environment in every possible way to avoid difficult foods, binge foods, and reminders to eat. In doing so, you can meaningfully influence and control your eating behavior.

PERSONAL ENVIRONMENT AUDIT

Let’s begin this process by auditing your environment and your level of exposure to food and to reminders of food. What I want you to do here is to take a critical and probing inventory of the food in your home, office, your car, anywhere you stash food, encounter food, or are exposed to reminders of food, in order to see exactly how problematic your world is. Without this critical review, you will continue to be influenced by situations in your environment that are setting you up for disaster. In answering the questions below, circle either *yes* or *no* for each of the twenty questions. Unless you are 100 percent honest in your inventory, you are doing yourself no good.

1. Do you keep lots of junk food in your house? **Yes/No**
2. Do you store food in your house in plain sight? **Yes/No**
3. Do you have candy-filled dishes and/or bowls of nuts in your house? **Yes/No**
4. Do you store food in rooms of your house other than your kitchen? **Yes/No**
5. Does your desk drawer look like a convenience store? **Yes/No**
6. Do you keep food stashed in your glove compartment or purse? **Yes/No**
7. Do you routinely prepare family-style meals served on large platters? **Yes/No**
8. Do you choose restaurants with buffets or family-size meals? **Yes/No**
9. Do you have numerous diet books in your house? **Yes/No**
10. Do you eat by the clock? **Yes/No**
11. Does your daily route take you by vending machines, restaurants, bakeries, or other eateries? **Yes/No**
12. Do you shop without a grocery list? **Yes/No**
13. Does the presence of specific people trigger you to eat? **Yes/No**
14. Do you prepare snacks for your kids or spouse? **Yes/No**
15. Are you the only one who cleans up the kitchen after a meal? **Yes/No**
16. Do you keep fattening foods easily accessible? **Yes/No**
17. Do you buy fattening foods in large packages? **Yes/No**
18. Do you buy extra-large bags of easy-to-eat processed foods (such as chips, candy, or cookies)? **Yes/No**
19. Are you reluctant to throw out fattening leftovers? **Yes/No**
20. Do you plan what you will eat prior to going to a restaurant? **Yes/No**

SCORING AND INTERPRETATION

For every “yes” answer, assign one point, and add up your total. Realistically, any score higher than two indicates that your environment is a standing invitation to eat. If your total score is ten or higher, your environment is riddled with problems. Food is everywhere you turn—your house, your car, your office. It’s tough to exercise control when food and reminders of food are so prevalent in your life. Yours is a temptation-rich environment, for sure, but remember, it is the environment over which you have the most control.

THE POWER OF CUES

For this key to fit the lock, that is, get you through the door of external control, I must first talk to you about the “cues” operating in your environment and how they’re standing in your way to positive change. In theatrical terms, a cue is a signal to a performer to recite a line or begin a certain action. Similarly, eating cues—which are basically reminders of food—trigger your decision to eat. If you prefer the “shrink” term for cues, they are stimuli that elicit your response, and that response is to eat. Most overweight people are more vulnerable to cues than are their thin counterparts—much research bears this out.

Eating cues are either *external* or *internal*. Some internal cues are physical; that is, they’re signs of true biological hunger, brought on by specific responses that go on inside your body because it demands nourishment. Some of the main internal cues for eating include stomach contractions (the growling or gurgling you experience when your stomach is empty) and a physical weakness brought on by low levels of blood sugar, the major fuel used to supply your body’s energy needs. These cues arise from honest-to-goodness hunger. Hunger is, of course, a very basic motivator guiding your food choices and certainly one that is essential to your very survival.

If these were your only internal cues for eating, however, you’d probably be slender and fit because you’d eat only when truly hungry and stop when full. But many people who are overweight don’t recognize when they are physiologically hungry, and instead eat according

to other types of internal cues, such as painful emotions, boredom, depression, or unchecked stress. These cues are entirely psychological, rather than physiological. The desire for food comes not from your stomach, but from your head.

Let's move on to external cues. These are triggers that exist and operate in your environment, and they powerfully stimulate your urge to eat, whether you are physically hungry or not. As I've just said, if you are overweight, you typically fail to respond to biological internal cues—you *literally do not know when you are physiologically hungry*—but instead you're highly inclined to eat in response to external cues. Examples of external cues include:

- Sight of food
- Passage of time (you eat according to the clock)
- Vending machines
- Aroma of food
- Flavor of food (sugary or salty foods, in particular, have an addictive appeal)
- Watching television
- Certain locations in your house
- Being in your car
- Your office
- The route you take to or from work
- Restaurants and drive-throughs
- Watching people eat
- Being offered food
- Vacations
- Parties
- Food advertisements
- Recipes in magazines or books

Sometimes these cues scream pretty loud, catching you completely off guard. You immediately start thinking about food and want to start eating. Every time you even think about food, your body starts reacting at a physiological level to heighten your desire to eat. One of these reactions occurs within your mouth: you begin to salivate. You experience a physiological change in your mouth, and you want to eat.

Scientists also believe that another reaction is triggered, one that comes about deep within your body, at the hormonal level. Suppose you're standing in front of a bakery, drooling over a banana cream pie in the window. In response to the sight of that pie, your body begins to churn out more of the hormone *insulin*. Even if you don't eat a single morsel of pie, insulin begins to do a couple of its regular jobs. For one thing, it accelerates the intake of fat into cells for storage (yes, just looking at food may make you fat!). Second, insulin reduces levels of blood sugar in your body, which it ordinarily does after you've eaten, in order to move that blood sugar into your cells for energy. This creates a state of low blood sugar that leads to hunger.

Astonishing, isn't it? Thoughts about food, triggered by a cue, have the power to elicit dramatic physiological reactions. There is a very substantive association at work here. The cues in your environment will arouse your hunger in a big way, whether you need to eat or not, and they may even activate fat-storing processes. If you're constantly bombarded by external, environmental cues, then the physiology that simultaneously occurs will work against you.

Please recognize too, that much of this bombardment comes from the food industry, which includes companies and restaurants that produce, sell, and serve food and beverages. This industry has capitalized on powerful flavor cues by developing an ever-increasing array of high-fat, sugary, salty foods with addictive appeal and by encouraging you—through advertising—to eat more of them. The imperatives of the food industry, in order to drive profits and make shareholders happy, are to lace foods with sugar, salt, and fat, and to make these foods convenient and readily accessible so that as a food-buying public, we'll eat them quicker than God can get news. Giving our power away and letting the food industry make our choices for us has become a growth industry—an \$800 billion industry at last count, in fact. It should come as no surprise to you that millions of people look to the food industry to make their choices for them, from breakfast

all the way to late-night snacking, a job that this industry is more than happy to perform. As food buyers, we've yielded our power to choose. Consider the proof: if you are the average, typical American, you consume roughly 158 pounds of sugar a year, in the form of pure sugar, corn sweeteners, honey, maple syrup, other edible syrups found in soft drinks, sweets, commercially baked foods, and other processed foods. You are also eating, on average, 63 pounds of added fat a year (that's double what people ate in the early twentieth century) from the butter on your bread to fats and oils used in fried foods and commercially prepared cookies and pastries.

If you regularly watch television—the most widely used advertising medium—you are being bombarded with messages that tell you what to eat, where to eat, when to eat, and why to eat. (I do not want to let it go unnoticed that now there is an entire network devoted to food, and to food only.)

Not by accident, the most heavily advertised foods are the ones most responsible for the obesity epidemic: fast foods (fast-food restaurants plunk down most of their ad budget on TV commercials), snacks, candy, prepared convenience foods, soft drinks, and alcoholic beverages. You are urged to eat them in your car, at parties, at sporting events, in restaurants, at movie theaters—practically everywhere except your dining room table. To make matters worse, a lot of you are eating them in front of your TV—a behavior that has been shown to pack on 14 pounds a year.

Food advertising sells you food emotionally—have you noticed? Eat more food and it will bring more fun, happiness, belonging—even love, to the point of sometimes suggesting that food will help you attract someone of the opposite sex. By appealing to other human motivations, ad campaigns like “Join the Pepsi Generation” play on your need for acceptance and belonging, the emotional desire to be part of a family, an organization, or a peer group. Beer ads like “Grab all the gusto you can” tug on your inner need for self-worth, telling you beer will help you realize your full potential as a person. The more your internally defined self-worth is lacking, the more vulnerable you are to this type of external cue. In short, if you aren't squared away within yourself, messages like these can get to you from the outside. You'll cave in to eating and drinking stuff you certainly don't need.

The food industry is pushing a “make eating fast” agenda, as well.

Since 1972, the number of fast-food restaurants in the United States has doubled, hawking high-fat, high-calorie, nutritionally weak foods to millions of consumers only too willing to gobble them up. Burger King alone sells 4 million Whoppers a day!

It is a fact of modern life that you find fast-food restaurants everywhere these days, but their latest encroachment is in the most unlikely and surprising place of all: hospitals. I recently read a national news item reporting that more than a third of America's sixteen top hospitals now have regional or national fast-food franchises on their premises. Talk about mixed messages: we're obese because we eat too much fast food but while we're in the hospital being treated for obesity-related diseases, we can eat more fast foods. I don't know what gives, or where it all ends, but somebody's lost too many balls in the high weeds.

Along with our waistlines, portion sizes in prepackaged ready-to-eat foods and at restaurants are getting bigger and bigger. This is in part because, as consumers we value a greater quantity of food and drink for a lower price—a “value” that the food industry is more than willing to provide. A good example is the soft drink. Where once the 12-ounce soft drink can was the norm, it has now been displaced by the 20-ounce bottle, sold in vending machines, at convenience stores, and elsewhere. As for food, go to any fast-food restaurant and on the menu you will find not only large, medium, and small, but “super-size,” “king-size,” “queen-size,” “monster meals,” and “biggie” items.

You need to go on the alert here, that you and your family are being targeted by these billion-bucks industries. I'm calling on you to “move the target”—that's you—so that you miss their aim. Move the target by not buying into this stuff. If you continue to let the food industry make your choices for you, then you're setting yourself up for more years of living in the same state of continuous chaos. It's about you deciding whether you are going to be the bull's-eye for the rest of your life, waiting to get hit by the arrow. You control what you buy or don't buy, you control where you decide to eat, and what you decide to eat when you get there. Like it or not, a lot of cause and effect is in your hands. The greater the knowledge you have about what's going on in the world around you, the more power you have to control the outcomes in your life.

CUE ELIMINATION

Clearly, cues govern your behavior in powerful ways—which is why you have to eliminate as many of them as you reasonably can from your own environment, and make choices to avoid them. When you rid your world of cues, making small but meaningful adjustments to your lifestyle, you powerfully program yourself against the possibility of weight gain.

If you have any doubts about the power of cue elimination on your behavior, think about anti-smoking reforms. State laws restricting smoking in public places; smoke-free office policies; cigarette taxes; and restrictions on tobacco advertising and promotion have been enacted that have made smoking very difficult. And according to 2002 figures from the American Lung Association, smoking has been significantly on the decline for the past forty years. Even cases of lung cancer have been steadily decreasing, particularly among men, as people smoke fewer cigarettes a day or quit altogether. In states where there is vigorous enforcement of tobacco control, fewer young adults are opting to smoke, although elsewhere tobacco use is unfortunately increasing among this population. What these trends suggest is that the removal of opportunities to smoke, and the removal of messages to smoke, have helped lessen a highly destructive behavior—one that is responsible for one in five deaths in the United States—and have done so in a dramatic way.

I'm making such a big deal out of this because I know that if you remove access and opportunity to behave in a negative manner, you are less likely to engage in that behavior. Granted, unlike tobacco, alcohol, and drugs, food is a substance from which you cannot totally abstain. But you are not powerless against it.

So if you want to lose weight, you must make your environment as free and as safe from fattening foods as possible, because wherever there's food that's easy to eat, you'll eat it. Programming your environment in this way will produce near-automatic changes in your behavior, making it totally unnecessary to rely on willpower. Sure, willpower helps you build up a short-lived burst of energy that will lead to some temporary changes, but it is never going to be enough. When willpower fades, you'll resume your old patterns of eating and

coping. You'll eat everything that isn't moving. You'll lose days and weeks of hard-won control. And you'll regain your weight. Programming, on the other hand, moves you out of the repetitious rut of bad habits and gets you into the groove of permanent weight control.

For example, if you always grab a handful of candy from the candy dish next to your sofa, it doesn't make sense to battle the fickle emotion of willpower in order to resist the urge to eat it. The best way to deal with that candy is to empty the dish and get rid of the stuff. You can't eat what's not there, so pretty soon your candy-eating habit will no longer have you in its clutches. Failure-proofing your environment doesn't involve any big inner struggle, either. All it involves is removing fattening impulse foods from your line of sight.

In my own life, I've experienced how dramatically effective programming can be. I am invariably hungry when I come home at the end of the day. For the longest time, I would enter the house through a door that led me through the kitchen. I would tell myself repeatedly that I wasn't going to snack before dinner. Sometimes the emotion of willpower would carry me, sometimes it wouldn't. As I cruised through the kitchen, the environment was full of temptation, and I'd start grabbing junk foods, right and left. Maybe they were cookies on a platter one day, a chocolate cake the next, or some other food I would quickly consume. It was not unusual for me to wolf down anywhere between 1,500 and 10,000 calories in one sitting ("standing" would be a more apt description), shower, then sit down for a full dinner. Essentially, I was eating twice.

To program myself for success, I just started entering the house through another door that did not take me through the kitchen. The route I took had no opportunities for failure, and I got past the habitual, reactive snacking that had plagued me. By the time I sat down for dinner, I was eating only once, instead of a couple of times. Believe me, this method is a lot more pleasant, and effective, than having to muster up willpower.

The significance of programming is that it recognizes that your life is full of temptations to overeat and opportunities to fail at weight control. But when you learn to reprogram all the wrong things you have been doing, you will discover that it is so much easier to lose weight because your life will no longer revolve around food.

The best and most effective way to deal with cues is to wipe them from your environment or lessen your exposure to them. If you never see cookies, you will lose your cookie-eating desires, and cookies will eventually become less tempting. Further, if you replace those cookies with apples, oranges, or some other healthy snack food, a new preference is developed. Each time you choose the healthier substitute, that preference gets stronger and more appetizing. You already know this yourself if there was ever a time in your life when you used to drink whole milk, and then for whatever reason you switched to drinking skim milk. At first, you found the taste of skim milk bland and watery, but you just kept on drinking it. Eventually, you began to enjoy skim milk, and in fact, now you actually find that drinking whole milk is quite objectionable because it tastes too heavy and rich.

I don't want to just blow by this. Decreasing access and exposure to foods is a big deal, it works, and it has been scientifically verified to work too. In numerous experiments, investigators have shown that a person's choice will shift from high-calorie, high-fat snack foods to healthy foods when it becomes difficult to obtain the snack foods but easier to get fruits, vegetables, and other more nutritious snacks. This research into what investigators call *choice shift* acknowledges—and proves—some commonsense wisdom: you'll eat what's available, you can't eat what's not there, and you won't eat what you don't buy. It also shows that after a period of new eating behavior, you may not desire any snack food other than foods like plump, juicy fruits, or delicious, satisfying vegetables.

ACTION STEPS THROUGH THE DOOR TO EXTERNAL CONTROL

What I'm now challenging you to do is reduce the availability of fattening foods so that your own food choices will shift to healthier and more nutritious foods. I want you to make sure that your exposure to high-calorie, high-fat junk foods, and the cues to eat them, are greatly reduced in your environment. There is no room here for cutting corners or rationalizing the maintenance of any of these cues in your life. You are dealing with environmental influences that you set

up through the choices you made. I also want to challenge you to listen to internal cues signaling true physical hunger—and eat in response to those, rather than to external cues. Here are the steps.

STEP ONE: MAKE YOUR ENVIRONMENT SAFE

Thinking about the important work you completed in the Personal Environment Audit, what I'd like you to do is comb your pantry, your refrigerator, your closet, your drawers—wherever you store food—and see what you can throw away, or at least minimize in terms of your exposure to it. It is certainly not unreasonable to rid your environment of any of the following:

- Cookies, candy, and any high-calorie, sweetened snack foods
- Salty foods such as potato chips, pretzels, taco chips, nuts, and other packaged munchies
- Sweet rolls and doughnuts
- White bread, white rolls, white buns
- Crackers
- Cold cuts
- Ice cream and high-sugar frozen desserts
- Quick-fix prepared foods such as pizza, fried entrees and dinners, microwavable sandwiches (If the food in question requires no preparation, throw it out or at least store it out of sight.)
- Syrups, jams, and jellies
- High-fat spreads, peanut butter, and dips
- Sugared soft drinks and beverages
- Alcoholic beverages
- Any food that can be classified as junk food
- Any food that you habitually binge on

I do believe that eventually many of you will be able to develop a healthy relationship with food and will not have to deprive yourself or be afraid of certain foods. But for the time being, toss this stuff out, feed it to the garbage disposal, take it to the Dumpster, or at least get it out of your sight. Do this now, do this right away, so that it is impossible for you to fail. Begin today to reprogram your environment and set yourself up for success.

Okay, I suspect that right now you are thinking, “Well, that sounds fine and good, but there are foods I need to keep around for my kids. They aren’t fat. Why should they suffer?”

Trust me, I understand your concern, having experienced it in my own family. Robin and I have a very active, athletic sixteen-year-old son, Jordan, who in addition to the healthy stuff we eat at our house also likes pizza, brownies, potato chips, and all the rest. Seriously—what teenager doesn’t? For those of you in the same boat, there are solutions if you have to keep these foods around. What we do at home, for example, is designate a specific cabinet in our kitchen for Jordan’s foods and snacks. That’s his territory, and it’s off-limits to anyone but him. We don’t go pecking around his food.

Barbara, a woman who has been using the seven keys to lose 80 pounds, asked her 6-foot, 5-inch husband to store fattening food in the top shelf of a kitchen cabinet that she, at 5 feet, 3 inches, could not possibly reach without going to considerable trouble. “After a few days, I honestly forgot about that food, since I’ve never used that cabinet, not even for dishes,” she told me. “Out of sight, out of mind has been a godsend for me.”

Then there is Taylor, a single mom on the road to losing 35 pounds using the seven keys. She had wanted desperately to lose weight in order to be attractive and start dating again, but she just could not keep the weight off for any reasonable length of time.

Until using the keys, Taylor kept a lot of cookies around for her two children, but not only that, she kept them in plain view, in a large cookie jar. She admitted to overindulging in cookies herself “because they were there,” and these indulgences led to full-blown binges and their resultant weight gain. Ultimately, what Taylor decided to do was empty the cookie jar and put pet treats in it instead. As for the cookies, she stored them in an empty drawer in a corner of her kitchen that she hardly ever uses, or even goes near.

Another way to decrease your exposure to foods you buy for your kids is to purchase these foods in smaller packages. Rather than get a jumbo sack of chips that you're likely to scarf down in one sitting, why not buy smaller single-serving sizes? With this approach, you've got automatic portion control. Yes, it's costlier, money-wise, to buy food in single-serving packages rather than in the economy sizes, but far less costly to your weight and to your health.

But I pause here to issue a critical caveat: you do need to monitor what your child eats or does not eat. Too much unhealthy food can actually harm your children's health and pave the way to childhood obesity, and with it a slew of medical and emotional problems. The rate of childhood obesity in this country is reeling out of control. If you don't think so, just take a trip to the nearest fast-food restaurant in your neighborhood and observe the roly-poly jowls and balloon tummies on grade school kids and teens lining up for super-size meals.

As a parent, you are the person who is the food buyer and food preparer in your family. That means you are accountable for your kids' health and well-being while they are under your care. Start setting the right example by buying healthy snacks and serving nutritious meals for your household. Your kids reflect what they see in you, and they will take your example far more seriously than they will take your advice. You are their role model; be a healthy, responsible one.

There are two other related concerns we need to address right away. First, are you preparing or purchasing foods that you say your kids like, but secretly, they're your favorite binge foods? Maybe you're baking peanut butter cookies because you crave them, not because they're your kids' favorite cookies. Maybe those taco chips stashed in the cupboard are for your late-night snacking, and not really an after-school snack for your son or daughter. Don't con yourself here. If you feel you must keep certain foods on hand for your family, make sure that these are foods your kids or spouse really like—not foods you want. I'm calling your attention to this because honesty here is absolutely fundamental to managing and programming your environment for success.

You can con yourself in another way too: by telling yourself that if you get rid of all the goodies your kids like, they will think you don't love them anymore. Hold it, let's take an intermission to examine the faulty logic at work here: you believe you are loving your children with food, when in fact you are poisoning them with too much

junk food that will someday make them physically sick and obese. Feeding your family with nutritionally weak food is toxic in its eventual outcome. How dumb is that? Look at it this way: the sooner you interrupt your family's habit of eating junk food, the easier it will be to establish new, healthier, more productive behaviors in their lives. Consider the advantages these healthy actions afford you in nurturing your family. You will be healthier and in better shape, and so will they. That is an incredible display of love.

STEP TWO: BEGIN THE PROCESS OF CHOICE SHIFT

This step is simple and straightforward—more commonsense than anything else. It stands to reason that as you remove junk foods from your environment or place them out of sight, you must replace them with better foods so that your food choices will naturally and eventually shift to healthier alternatives. Begin to stock your kitchen with:

- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Whole grains
- Lean meats
- Low-fat milk products (milk, yogurt, hard and soft cheeses, etc.)
- Low-fat or fat-free foods or snacks
- Sugar-free beverages

Remember what the principle of choice shift says: your taste preferences will shift to healthier, more nourishing foods if you give yourself every chance to break from the old and come in with the new.

STEP THREE: PRACTICE SMART SHOPPING

This step addresses one of the most temptation-rich environments you will ever encounter—the grocery store, where there are more than 50,000 food items, all packaged attractively and positioned

strategically on the shelves to get you to buy them. Step Three helps brace you against their allure, so that you can exert an astonishing level of control in this environment. Make it a point to:

- Shop from a grocery list prepared when you are not hungry or stressed out.
- Determine exactly what you need for a particular period of time, and don't overbuy.
- Stick to the outer aisles where the fresh, additive-free foods are located, when you are grocery shopping. There's a logical reason for this placement: fresh foods require more frequent restocking and therefore must be situated as close to the outside shipping docks and stock rooms as possible.
- Never go grocery shopping when you're hungry. The entire store, from the food aisles to the checkout line, can tempt you to buy foods that you neither want nor need.
- Assign someone else in your family the job of grocery shopping on occasion in order to limit your exposure to food.

STEP FOUR: MAKE CHANGES AWAY FROM HOME

As a part of failure-proofing your environment, you must have particular plans in place for handling what could be some of the weakest spots in your efforts, such as eating out, eating away from home, or eating too much while on vacation.

Whatever your trouble spot is—and I'm sure you already know it—you need to have some strategies in place to overcome these prominent weaknesses because there are going to be situations that will arise when you will be faced with challenges and temptations. For many of you, eating away from home is problematic. The key is to take some time to plan for those situations and identify those things that could and should be the focus of your management efforts. When you are dining out, for example, choose a restaurant that offers a variety of foods so that you can choose healthier menu items. Plan ahead of time what you will order. When you get there, be assertive

with the waitstaff; tell your server you want your food prepared without fats, oils, or sauces.

At parties, get in the habit of passing up the fattening food and opting for healthier choices instead. Choose smaller portions, and ask for a diet soda or club soda in lieu of an alcoholic drink. Stand away from the food, and focus on people and conversations, rather than on food.

Vacations can be difficult, but try to exert the same control in your choices that you would at home. If you are flying, you don't have to settle for the typical airline food. Simply call the airline ahead of time and request a low-calorie meal. You can do this practically anywhere, even on cruises, as long as you give the food preparation personnel plenty of notice. Compensate for eating calorie-dense foods by staying active while on vacation. If the circumstances are such that you simply cannot control your choices, take it easy, and eat smaller portions.

Bottom line: there's no good reason for you to experience any backsliding when you have a strategy in place to handle it. When these situations arise, as you know they will, you won't panic and start eating everything in sight. You will simply say to yourself, "This is the very thing I knew would happen, and I know how to deal with it. I won't panic, and I won't give in just because I am encountering normal challenges of day-to-day life. I am in control."

Before leaving our discussion of how to fat-proof your environment, let's get real about one additional dimension of your life. Sometimes the most problematic aspect of the environment in which you interact is not your home, but your place of employment. You might be in a job that pays you pretty well, but here's the deal: it is contributing to your obesity. If you work in a restaurant or grocery store, for example, you're surrounded by food day in and day out, and this assault of food cues is creating disaster in your life.

I recall a young man named Stephen from one of my seminars who absolutely craved desserts. Although he managed his weight fairly well while attending college, every summer he would take a job at a restaurant, working as a waiter at night and doing food prep during the day. The food prep part of the job involved slicing cheesecakes and preparing ice cream parfaits. The trouble was, before long

Stephen was gobbling down more cheesecakes and parfaits than he was preparing. Being around these fattening foods crushed his resolve, and his weight began to pile back on, and with it, the guilt over eating fattening foods. The fact that Stephen worked to earn money during the summer was admirable and honorable, but the problem was the interfering nature of his job choice. Because he was especially vulnerable to food cues, he should not have worked in a restaurant.

Look at it this way: if you were an alcoholic, would you apply for a job as a bartender? How dumb is that? I don't really have to tell you that if you are chronically overweight, you should not work in the food business, do I? It comes back to the fact that your job may be a toxic, high-risk situation, one that is producing negative momentum. The hard, cold reality is that you might have to start looking for employment in another field. If you value your health and your life, dig down and find the courage to change your job or career. I know this is scary, but stop denying yourself the chance of getting what you truly want. You deserve it and you are worth it.

STEP FIVE: DO A CLOSET CLEANUP.

This final step challenges you to make a no-turning-back commitment to losing weight and keeping it off. It is very specific in its instructions: do a "closet cleanup" in which you throw away your "fat wardrobe," or donate it to charity, so that you have no oversize clothes to return to, ever. Doing so builds another level of accountability into your life that will help you stay the course.

Let me tell you why this is so important: if you hang on to your larger-size clothes, this means that subconsciously you're expecting to fit back into them someday. You're clinging to a "fat" lifestyle, and psychologically to a "fat" mind-set. You're telling yourself, "This won't work either." If those clothes stay in your closet, you are committing to failure. By contrast, having no fat clothes to return to is just one more motivating factor that will help you reach—and remain at—your ideal weight.

Throw away your elastic pants; full-figure fashions; oversize housedresses; muu muus; "big men's" clothes; and all expandable

clothes (don't leave yourself any "wiggle" room). As you work your way down in weight, rid your closet of clothes that are too big for you. Women, if you wear a size 18 and you once wore a size 24, throw out any clothes that are larger than a size 18, so that you have no larger sizes to return to. Guys, if you used to fit into size 80-waist pants and you've trimmed your belly down to a size 46, clear your closet of anything greater than your size 46s. You must do what is required here if you expect to succeed.

Should your smaller-size clothes ever start feeling snug again, you are out of luck. You can't wear your size 18s or 24s anymore because you no longer own a wardrobe in those sizes. You won't have anything to wear, and you would never think of running errands or going to work naked. This means it's time for a reality check: you've let things slide, and you're gaining weight again. Don't go out and buy another whole fat wardrobe; get back on track.

There should be no regression or retreat to what you have always done before, or to what you have always been. Have the willingness and courage to throw off your past, go after your weight-control goals, and pursue a life that is defined as healthy and fit.

When you revamp your environment using the steps I've discussed, you'll discover that weight control is so much easier than ever using a whit of willpower (which is impossible anyway). Removing access to and availability of fattening food will succeed like nothing you've ever tried before. It's one of the easiest ways to lose excess pounds. Yes, it does require some effort on your part. But keep at it, because these are vital real-life steps that will help you lose pounds, stay fit, and feel happier for life.