

## *Module 12, Lesson 2 Handout:*

### **Common Roadblocks**

We know that change isn't easy, and the reality is you're going to come across clients who come in with a goal but can't seem to put in the effort to meet those goals. Even clients who are super motivated to make changes and well into the preparation or even action phase can often get stuck before getting to maintenance. Here are some common roadblocks that many clients come up against, and ideas on how you can help them get over the hump and finally make lifelong changes.

#### **Lack of Competence**

Some people feel like they just can't do it, that the work is too hard or that they just don't know how. This client may be in the contemplation stage of change and is feeling overwhelmed by the work ahead. For the client who is overwhelmed, your counseling strategy should be to start with small manageable goals. Ask your client what seems easiest to adjust. If breakfast is stressful and hard, don't start with it! Maybe focus on getting more vegetables into dinner if the client is already cooking family dinners every night anyway. Once your client starts with what is easy and masters it, you can build on that. Tweaking one small thing that you do every day is typically a manageable way to start. If your client eats a bagel for breakfast every day and you can swap that out for a slice of Ezekiel toast, that small change will really add up over time. Keep a running list of changes made and conquered and build upon it. This is a great time to implement the "I am a Rockstar" tool from Level 1. Acknowledging a client's successes will give this person the confidence she might need to continue making new and meaningful changes,

#### **Unclear About the Reason for the Change**

This is a common roadblock with clients in the precontemplation stage. If a client's cholesterol numbers are off the charts but she feels fine, it may be hard for her to adopt changes to bring down her numbers. She may want to make changes later - or never, and not see why she should put time and effort in. If a client is resistant to change because she doesn't see or understand the benefit, here you may want to do a good amount of educating and framing the changes in the most non-invasive light. You may say, "You don't have to be a vegan, but could we find some places where we could swap out the cheese for avocado or the bacon for the nuts." As we talk about in the Stages of Change handout, be non-judgmental here. Offer education, but not in an aggressive or demeaning way.

## **Fear of the Unknown**

Our food cultures are really intimate and food is tied to who we are. Walking down the health food aisle that your client had previously labeled as being for hippies can be scary. Ordering a lentil mushroom burger instead of a quarter pounder may seem scary and intimidating too. Your clients will only take active steps toward the unknown if they genuinely believe – and truly feel – that the risks of not changing are greater than those of moving forward towards a goal. To help your client who is fearful, ask open ended questions about what would happen if he makes changes versus if he doesn't change. What does the future look like? This type of motivational interviewing can really open a person up to realize not changing may end up being even scarier down the road. You can also help this client by doing some role playing and go over shopping lists, restaurant menus and/or social fears together. Clients also like a name brand endorsement so they can shop online or look for a label in the supermarket easily. Taking out the guesswork can help your client to be more successful!

## **Hardwired**

Lots of resistance comes from a fear of losing one's identity. People see themselves as chocoholics. Their culture is one that serves rice with every meal. The bagel with lox and cream cheese is a connection to childhood and family. If you have a client who is pained at the thought of giving up a big Sunday family dinner, make sure you keep it part of his week, maybe just modified to stay in line with his goals. If you have a client who has fried chicken in his veins, make sure you craft this indulgence in a plan. Work with the client to figure out which parts of the client's identity can be tweaked (can she have the lox and cream cheese on a whole grain cracker or mini bagel instead?), which parts absolutely need to go (goodbye smoking!), and which parts can stay (that nightly glass of Pinot noir.)

## **New Way of Thinking**

When people believe the information they're getting is trendy, poorly researched or not coming from a credible source, they can be resistant to adopting changes. Make sure your client isn't wary of your credibility. Be ready and able to back up your recommendations with science and research, not just anecdotes. This builds trust and credibility and helps clients overcome some of the barriers they may be holding up.

## **Changes to Routines**

People have routines for a reason: they make us feel safe and help us to know what's coming next. If you have a client who seems reluctant to your suggestions, ask yourself if you made too dramatic a

shift in your plan for him. If you put breakfast into your plan and your client hasn't eaten breakfast since the fifth grade, maybe you made too big of a leap. Sometimes just introducing a change in a smaller form can make a big impact. What if you had that client try a banana with his coffee before his workout? Small changes first can build trust. Then you can build on those changes in the future.

## **Risk to Benefit Ratio**

It's really tough for clients to not see results fast. It's one of the main reasons that diets fail and how many clients can slip back to the contemplation stage of change. True behavior change and lasting success takes time, and sometimes clients struggle in deciding if all this effort is really worth it. Don't sugar coat it: the work can sometimes feel slow and plodding and don't pretend it's easy. Be honest with clients and have a discussion about it. Praise and recognition for their hard work is an absolute must. This is another place where the "I am a Rockstar" worksheet from Level 1 can come in handy.

## **Putting it Into Practice**

We know that change is not linear. Clients are bound to get frustrated, have rough days and question this whole process. Acknowledge their struggles and concerns and empathize that this isn't easy! Help clients see the bigger picture in what they're doing and get them back on track with their health goals. This journey takes time and requires patience from both you and the client. For most, the journey will pay off.