



Rewriting Your Wellness Story

by MARIE WALL

A story is one way to understand, remember and share what we value. Our wellness story is a personal story of how we engage life in order to attain a way of living that fulfills our needs to the greatest extent possible. The change from a sickness perspective to a wellness mindset is revolutionary, whether on a community level or a personal level. We are in the midst of a wellness revolution. It is coming at us from all directions – medical, media, the workplace and our communities. To engage and be part of this revolution means a rewriting of our own story. For many of us creating a vision of how we see ourselves and the outcomes we want demand that we re-write our own stories to integrate this new shift in thinking.

Times are changing. A great deal of our efforts has been in dealing with sickness. Sickness is reactive; we deal with what has gone wrong in the hopes of correcting the symptoms, conditions and ailments that have accumulated over time. Wellness is proactive; it is engaging in activities, products and services to enable us to feel better, become stronger and prevent illness. It requires that we make choices to enhance our life and become preventative.

Information and education about health influences abound. Knowing is not enough. We have to change our behaviours and adopt new ways of being that make us healthier, energize us and enhance our emotional well-being. We must realize that the choices we make have a profound impact on our lives. The movement from knowing what needs to be done and to actually doing it is necessary when rewriting your own wellness. Changing how we see ourselves, and consequently how others see us, begins with a desire for something different, something healthier. The reasons to take action to change one's life varies greatly; whether it is for health reasons or to be a good role model for our children.

Each of us has scripted the routines that underline our health. Rewriting the story is a process; a first step is to assess whether your story has a sickness

plot or a wellness plot, is reactive or proactive. I know we all have said, "I don't have time", yet when I am speaking with someone who is dealing with a health crisis there is both time and urgency. Is it enough to want a healthy life? We have to take the steps to affect the health we want. Each of us has the potential to decide which direction we want for ourselves and those around us.

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Once we assess our health plot we need to accept responsibility. It has taken us years to get to where we are presently. It is going to take time and behavioural change to attain new outcomes. As we all know, changing behaviour is often difficult. Thinking and doing are key to that change. The way we think regulates the action we take and our thinking is geared towards the old familiar patterns. To change our bodies we have to alter how we see ourselves and the feedback we give ourselves. What we say to ourselves is essential to moving to a wellness perspective. Learning to focus on ways we want to live instead of the obstacles is an essential step in developing the new and healthier routines that will bring about the results we want. Be positive, be specific and give positive feedback for all the little achievements along the way.

In generating new experiences and realizing the positive effects, we learn there is something better than what we have known. Physically, as well as mentally, we feel more alive.

Recently, I spoke with two people who are rewriting their wellness story. Neither person waited for a

health crisis to occur and both are continuing to get closer to their new imagined self-image, with outcomes and outlooks that are more positive than they have been in years. Paula is a mother of teenagers. She had been a runner many years ago; a highlight was completing a marathon. Life has been busy and paying attention to herself had been on the back burner for years. She said she still felt athletic on the inside but neither her physique nor her performance relayed that message. She has been concerned about the messages her daughters are getting from the media and their friends. She wants to model for her children that healthy lifestyles are more important than being skinny or fat. Paula has begun to run and cycle as part of her weekly activities. This is making a huge difference to herself and the whole family.

Greg is married and has three children. Over the years he has continued to gain weight and has been a closet smoker. While he chose to smoke, he did not want his children to be influenced by his unhealthy lifestyle. It was only when his eldest caught him smoking did he come face-to-face with his own destructive lifestyle. His lack of integrity haunted him and at this critical moment he began to re-write his wellness story. A year later, 30 pounds lighter and fit enough to run a half-marathon, Greg is proud to be with his children. He feels he is a better father and role model for the people most important to him. When asked if anything is suffering because of his taking time to be more active, he laughed and said it is just the opposite.

The story we tell about ourselves is critical to the lives we lead. Both of these stories indicate what is truly valued. Keeping this in mind will help when our resistance to change arises. Validate each step to reinforce the new ways of being. Accepting the healthier changes we are making takes time. When others compliment you on what you are doing or how you are looking, a simple 'thank you' goes a long way in building the foundation of our new image. Start writing the story you want and before long each chapter will bring its own rewards.

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