

Life
is a
FAT
ONION

My 8 Rules
for Losing
Weight and
Gaining Life

Charles Cicciarella

Foreword by Mike Ryan

[FAT ONION Inc.]

INTRODUCTION:

Welcome to the
FAT ONION Lifestyle

It is seven a.m. on a mild and sunny Sunday in the fall of 2008. I have been walking for approximately twenty-five minutes, breathing in the fresh country air and appreciating nature's offerings. I notice a deer prance across the road far in front of me while a family of squirrels makes its way across the road just twenty feet away. Most of the neighborhood is sound asleep, but not me: I'm walking, listening to my iPod, and thinking about my plans for the day. I pause for a moment to look up at the sky. Clouds have formed; it has suddenly become overcast.

When I feel a drop of moisture on the tip of my nose I convince myself it is sweat. Unfortunately, the drops become more frequent. I have to acknowledge the grim fact that I'm stuck in what is fast becoming a violent downpour. Damn! Should I call home and get my father to pick me up? That won't work because my cell phone is in my gym bag. I continue my walk, puddles forming around me. I'm getting drenched by the second. My new sneakers have become soggy and my clothing is sticking to my skin. I can't stop because there is nowhere to shelter myself.

A voice inside encourages me to continue despite the rain. The road before me seems endless. The fog forming ahead isn't helping me gauge my time and pace. The animals have sensibly sought refuge. I hear thunder and see lightning. I crank up my music and keep on walking. My inner voice is becoming more pronounced, urging me to hang in there.

Every step I take is heavy and squishy, but as I look up, I notice that the sun is parting the clouds. The thunder and lightning have ended and the rain is stopping. I'm now an hour into my walk, feeling like a sponge but keeping my chin up and continuing. The sun dries everything around me. The sky has turned blue and I hear the birds again.

I'm at the end of the road. I turn around and full-heartedly tackle the second half of my trek.

My clothes are drying out and the voice is congratulating me. I smile and feel a true sense of accomplishment. My journey, be it wet, dry, long, or short, is guided by the inner voice that gives me the strength to persevere regardless of the obstacles that present themselves. By placing one foot in front of the other, listening to the voice, and believing in myself, I have successfully arrived at my intended destination.

My name is Charles Cicciarella. I'm a healthy man with a truly amazing and inspirational story to share with you.

Ever since I can remember, I have always been slightly larger than my peers. I always stood in the back row in classroom pictures. I wore adult-sized clothing in elementary school and looked three years older than my age. Furthermore, though I came into this beautiful world of ours a month early, I weighed in at a bouncing thirteen-and-a-half pounds. I was big since before day one.

I struggled with my weight. I started dieting at the age of eight, and for twenty years I tried just about everything to lose the excess pounds. Everything I did proved unsuccessful. The constant failures eventually led me to give up.

It was at the beginning of fall 2003 that I pulled up my socks, listened to the voice, and changed my life — forever. I had turned twenty-nine and was on a downward spiral. I was living in the shadows of my peers' successes, and my inner person was dying to come out. Friends were getting hitched, having kids, getting promotions, and living life. As for me, at 385 pounds I was headed to an early grave. With diabetes, cancer, and stroke in my family history, the writing on the wall couldn't have been any clearer. I was growing, too, but in all the wrong ways.

I projected a happy-go-lucky attitude but deep down inside I was

crushed and hurting. I cried myself to sleep every night. I was drowning in my own life. My self-esteem and confidence levels were virtually non-existent. I lost my favorite aunt, who died far too young, in January 2003. I was unemployed and in debt. I was confused and unhappy. My world was collapsing.

In September of that year I experienced the beginning of the end of my old life.

I was returning home from an Indian dinner. I must have visited the buffet nine or ten times that evening. My stomach was bursting at the seams. Sweat was percolating profusely on my forehead. I reeked of curry. The short cab ride home felt like an eternity.

Upon arriving at my posh downtown loft, I stumbled to my bedroom and plopped onto my bed. I was dazed, out of breath, and tired. I barely had the energy to remove my clothing. As I lay on my bed, the fat around my neck pushed against my throat and made it difficult for me to breathe. The mountaintop my stomach resembled was as solid as a rock.

I panicked and started to hyperventilate. My throat tightened. I was convinced I was going to die. The time was eleven-thirty. I rolled off my bed, stood in front of the bathroom mirror, and broke down.

I cried. I balled. I shed many tears. I had my moment: my big fat epiphany. I stared in bewilderment at myself in the mirror and recalled what my Aunt Mary had said to me in our last conversation before she died:

“My dear, you have always been successful. Nothing will get in the way of your getting what you want. You're smart, and you always have been. Good things will happen to you.”

I paused and collected myself. Believing that I had the power to change

my life, I set upon my journey, packed with determination and drive. I wanted to capture this moment forever. How could I do that? I dug out my digital camera from my messy den and started clicking away. I needed a reminder that I was not the person I saw in the pictures. I took well over sixty photos of myself in front of the mirror (frontal, rear, eyes, sweat beads, mouth, and tongue). I printed the photos and plastered them around my loft: on my refrigerator door, in my cupboards, by my bed, next to my toilet, and in my laundry room.

I wanted to engrain in my mind that I had a problem. That I had to change. Now — not tomorrow. Now — not Monday or next week.

I didn't sleep at all that night. At six in the morning, I showered and got dressed as pictures of every body part stared back at me. I decided to go to the closest weight-loss clinic of the ones I had seen advertised on television. Those clinics' endless commercials had promised a new life. I had already spent thousands of dollars on quick fixes; what was another couple? I needed help, period. This was something I could not do on my own. I needed a kick in the butt to launch me on my journey.

I walked to the clinic at six-thirty. The voice inside me was telling me to keep on going. I checked into the clinic at seven, registered for the program, and in desperation paid a large amount of money. A nurse politely told me I was fat.

No kidding, Einstein — me fat?

The next few weeks were hell as I virtually starved myself and started to move. Little did I know when I signed up for the program that I would experience days on end of mood swings, rashes, constant cravings, twitches, tears, and visits to the bathroom.

By week three of my program I had already lost close to forty pounds. The staff cheered me on and I started feeling better. I was definitely on the right road to a destination long overdue.

Four weeks into the program, I picked up the book *The Ultimate Weight Solution* by Dr. Phil McGraw. I read the book in about a week. It opened my eyes even wider. It made sense. It spoke to me the way I needed to be spoken to. Dr. Phil made do without all of the medical crap. He presented the facts in a no-nonsense, no-BS style. The kick in my butt became more pronounced.

With Dr. Phil's book in hand, I stopped visiting the clinic. I felt I had the ammunition to propel myself to a higher level. Over the next three months I achieved remarkable results. I was losing weight so fast it shocked me. Incredibly, I shed a further 114 pounds within four and a half months and started to take control of my life.

I wanted to thank Dr. Phil personally for giving me with the motivation I needed. I went to his website and shot off an e-mail to him.

Unbelievably, four hours later Dr. Phil's producer contacted me. The next day I was on a plane to Hollywood.

I put a website up pronto because I knew appearing on *The Dr. Phil Show* would spark curiosity and prompt many searches. I called it www.massivemeltdown.com. I quickly planned some media exposure around my appearance on his show: local television appearances and interviews in newspapers. I felt I needed to announce my achievement and inspire others.

As they say, the rest is history: seven years with only one fall off the wagon, a total loss of 155 pounds, three million visits to my website, thousands of new friends, and now this book. I have proven that people not only can lose a significant amount of weight but they can also keep it off for good — if they really want to.

With my success came thousands of best wishes and a great deal of curiosity. At one point I was receiving about 200 e-mails a day. People

wanted to know what I did to lose so much weight. I listened carefully to my guiding voice and decided I was going to write a book.

One summer evening in 2006 I revealed my decision to my very good friend Melinda. We were sitting on a bench in Dundas Square in downtown Toronto. “My book is going to be about my weight-loss journey,” I said. “I’m going to use the analogy of an onion ...”

Melinda let out a soft snort and rolled her eyes. “No, this is going to be great,” I said. “I’m onto something big here. You’ll see.”

She did her best to stifle her laughter. Just then we felt something hit our feet. We looked down. There sat a plump, nicely peeled onion. Our jaws dropped.

Melinda grabbed her camera and took a picture.

“Life is a fat onion; that’s the title of my book,” I said.

Melinda smiled and gave me her blessing.

Within minutes I came up with a word for every letter in the words Fat Onion. Each word would illustrate aspects of what I had done to lose my weight. True to that inspiration, the chapters of this book focus on the following topics:

F is for Friendship

A is for Activity

T is for Targets

O is for Ownership

N is for Nutrition

I is for Ink

O is for Opportunity

N is for Nest

Welcome to the FAT ONION lifestyle.

In this book I include my past and present experiences, honest advice, tips, and strategies. I want to help you, my dear reader and fellow future-weight-loss-success-story. I show how I transformed my life and how you can transform yours. This book includes weblinks to proven weight-loss nutrition and exercise plans and to expert advice from health/fitness gurus. To add an extra layer of knowledge and humor, I have interspersed interesting facts about onions on my website to support its objective and this book’s objective: to inspire you to live the fat onion way.

I wrote *Life Is a FAT ONION* over a four-year period, beginning in 2006. I put it on hold several times because of difficult situations in my life, chief among them the death of my mother and father during the six-month period between December 2008 and June 2009. I am extremely grateful for losing weight when I did because it enabled me to take care of the two most important people in my life. I gave up everything to become their caregiver. I sold my condo, quit my job, and even sacrificed my health and well-being to make their last days peaceful. They deserved the best care ever. I did what was right, and today I have no regrets at all.

After my father died, I woke up one morning and faced the fact that I had gained back about fifty-five pounds due to stress, lack of sleep, and bad eating/exercising habits. I had lost control of my life. The weight had crept back on.

I was living in my parents’ empty house. I was heartbroken, saddened, financially broke, and fat. I made the decision to reinvent myself. I followed my dad’s advice to sell the house and live my life. After selling the house, I put a whole generation’s worth of memories and belongings into storage. I packed my luggage with two pairs of shorts, two t-shirts, and a pair of flip-flops. Destination: Venice Beach, California, where my dad had instructed me to go.

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It was there that I regained my life, health, and kneecaps (I could see them again). I began to heal from the loss of my parents. I made new friends. I became part of Venice Beach's health and fitness culture. I worked out with an amazing personal trainer, Mike Ryan, at Gold's Gym. I lost fifty-five pounds (my stress weight) and was back to where I was before my parents fell terminally ill.

I ran on the beach daily. I ate meals at local health joints. I rode my bike everywhere. I enjoyed learning about nutrition at the local bookstore. I attended seminars on health. I shopped weekly at the farmers' markets. And I finished writing my book under a tree in my front yard overlooking a canal. What more could I have wanted?

Most importantly, though, I regained my life during those four months in Venice Beach. Today I feel prepared mentally and physically to help others change and begin living a healthy life.

The fat onion lifestyle fell upon me for a reason: to help me change the lives of others. I have written this book to be an uplifting account of my weight-loss journey. If you are like many readers, this book will leave you speechless and in tears and send you running to the gym to realize your full potential and revolutionize your life, pound by pound. Be sure to have plenty of tissues and gum on hand.