



HEIDI A. ECKER
Washington Lobbyist's Extreme Makeover Story

32 year old lobbyist Heidi lost 100 pounds and then had a \$200,000 makeover on ABC's "Extreme Makeover."

1) Heidi were you always overweight or is it something that happened in recent years--and what was the most you ever weighed?

Honestly, I have been overweight my entire life. You'd never know I was born premature weighing only 5lbs! But slowly over the years, I started to gain weight and before I knew it I was the overweight kid in elementary school. And just as I progressed through junior high, high school and college, so did my weight. It didn't seem like anything extraordinary, gaining anywhere from 5-10 pounds a year, but at 32 I realized I was the biggest I had ever been: a size 24 and 270 pounds at 5'8.

2) When you were heavy did you feel bad and have any health problems as a result?

When I was heavy, especially in my thirties I started to feel the effects of my weight more and more. I was more sluggish, didn't have as much energy, seemed to always be tired. And for those of you familiar with the Washington, DC area's unforgiving humidity, I sweat profusely! It was a terrible feeling and as I packed on the weight I found myself taking more cabs around town because it was just too hot and too much work! But its important to also note that while these issues started to surface, I became more cognizant of the daily challenges my Dad, who's like a big teddy bear, faces because he is overweight: Diabetes, High Blood Pressure, Sleep Apnea and a number of other weight-related conditions.

3) Was there something specific that happened that made you decide you wanted to make a change and get in shape?

It's funny, people always want there to be an instant moment when it became oh so clear, but in all reality, it wasn't. I've always been an insightful person, meaning I spent a lot of time journaling and writing about my good days and bad days. And, you know how this goes. One day you are cleaning and you find your old journals and start looking through them and reading the entries. A chapter here a chapter there. And you start to realize there are a lot of sad entries. You start to realize every year, you make the same New Years resolutions: to change your lifestyle to be healthier. And year after year you acknowledge in your own "journal world" where you are free of judgment that you failed.

I couldn't understand it. Professionally, if I want something I go after it and get it. But why not in my personal life? And then it hit me, why go to try to defeat something that has beaten you for over 30 years. It's only natural we gravitate towards the things we are good at. And that's exactly what I did with my life: focus on my career, great friendship base, being good time Charlie.

After much debate with myself – arguing I was predispositioned to be overweight via genes, family life and couldn't change a thing – I was forced to answer one very big question. When I tried, did I really give it everything? Did I give it my all? And I think back of my diets and all my efforts, I couldn't unequivocally say yes. And that's when I told myself I had to give it one more try.

4) What was your plan and goal when you started your weight loss and fitness program and did you have any setbacks along the way?

When you take something on that has defeated you for 30 years, the entire process is horrifying. I told myself in this DC age of your supposed to know everything about everything I had to get over it and pretend that I knew nothing, to open my mind to learn more. I wanted to start from the beginning and understand the basics about my metabolism, eating healthy, and exercise and that's exactly what I set out to do.

I talked to trainers at the gym, I listened to what advice people around me had to say, and I researched information on line. I made the decision to be proactive and learn about this machine I was trying to "tune up." I listened to my body to see what was working or not working. And yes, I certainly did have setbacks and disappointments. But what I found was that those disappointments made me stronger. Let's face it, if it were easy, it wouldn't be such a victory. And these experiences showed me every moment is up to you.

It's important to realize that the goal of this effort was to engage in a healthy lifestyle, not to be a certain weight or size. When you have failed at something for that long, you recognize you are going to try your hardest to win, but you don't expect success. And frankly, I didn't think my heart could handle the heartbreak at not making a goal. I needed this to be a positive experience, so it was about changing a mindset and lifestyle.

5) Once you lost the weight did you feel like a different person inside as well?

I am the same person inside, but it's like Heidi amplified.

What's amazing about this experience is I feel like I have the best of both worlds: I am still the girl who knows what it is like to be overweight most of her life and is sympathetic to related hardships. But I have the benefit of knowing what it is like to live life, undefined by your weight.

When you go from being 270 pounds to half the woman you used to be it's an amazing experience, actually more so a journey. That journey of going through the good days and bad days taught you about what's inside. I found I was much stronger than I ever gave myself credit. I found out that I could change things in my life I didn't like. I found that I wasn't a victim, I was a challenger. Even more incredible, every day I learn something new about Heidi – the Heidi who is not defined by her weight.

When you take on the single thing that has taunted you your entire life, despite years of fighting a losing battle, and you win, an amazing thing happens. You are empowered. You are unstoppable. You really are sitting on top of the world. And it makes you want to take on all those things you never thought you could do. And that leaves me awestruck.

6) Did people react to you differently when you got thin?

When I started this plan on October 4, 2004 I called my friends and family members and told them that I wouldn't be a very good listener. I told them that this was the year about me, and as much as I loved them all I knew in my heart of hearts this would be the hardest thing I would ever take on and that meant I had to be focused and I could not allow myself to be distracted. That this plan had to be a full time job. And that it was.

I think initially people thought "Oh, that's great," patted me on the back and sent me on my way. Don't get me wrong, they were super supportive, but I don't think they realized the level of commitment I was determined to make to make that lifestyle change. But when I had dropped 50 pounds within 3 months and turned down dinners, social events and other activities to go to the gym, I think people started to understand it something bigger than "I'm going to drop a few pounds" was going on.

It was tremendously hard to go through this experience, especially when there was little time to engage socially since I would some times have to go to the gym twice a day to get results. But one thing remains true; my best friend Brian was my "Rock" throughout the process. He was there though it all, even when my friends started to slowly fade to black.

Friends were ecstatic for me, but I think my big change was hard for some to acknowledge. Weight is a very personal issue and I saw a range of emotion from my friends: love, support, jealousy, and awkwardness. I learned through this process that people take things different ways. And its okay, because just as I am going through the shock of major change, so do those around you. It's natural and it's healthy.

7) What made you decide to go even further with your transformation and get the plastic surgery and makeover?

As I started to lose weight, my body started to change. And while I felt better about myself than I had in my entire life, I couldn't help but start to notice all the excess skin I had from dropping all that weight. And I started to realize I was going to have to find a way to address the excess skin issue. It got to the point that I could exercise all I wanted and my "little old man" (the nickname I had for the excess wrinkled belly skin I had) would always be there. It didn't look natural or right. The skin was thin and would tear. And that's when I decided to apply for an ABC Extreme Makeover.

8) How was your experience on Extreme Makeover?

I had an incredible ABC Extreme Makeover experience that I will never forget. Receiving this makeover was a gift. A true gift that would finally harmonize my inside with my outside and it truly meant the world to me. I had lost over 6 feet of fat and to have access to the best medical team, like Drs. Andre Aboolian and Garth Fisher, to remove the steady reminders of something that defeated me for years. It was an emotional experience.

I had never had surgery before, but I was ready. I was ready because I knew my future, the harmonized Heidi, was on the other side of recovery.

8) Do you think plastic surgery is a positive thing for people--especially women?

I think plastic surgery is a valuable tool for harmonizing your inner and outer selves – provided you are looking to "complement" the package and not have plastic surgery "be" your package. Don't get me wrong, it's great to feel fabulous about the outer you. But I can't stress enough that plastic surgery is about completing the package of who you are from a variety of perspectives: your persona, personality, career, interests, among other things.

9) Has it been hard to keep the weight off and staying in shape?

I still engage in a healthy and active lifestyle, because I love how I feel physically and mentally that comes from that type of commitment. Do I have days when I think about being a couch potato? Sure, but I also remind myself that every day is filled with decisions and it's up to me to make my fate.

10) Where do you go from here and what are your goals for the future?

My entire life is about the future, because I feel like I have received a new lease on life! I feel great about myself, I have new interests and there is nothing I am more dedicated to than sharing my story with people across the nation!

I have received thousands of emails from people and as a result, started my website Heidi Hype! If you go to www.HeidiHype.com, you find an exciting world of reality that says sure its tough losing weight, but we can laugh together and lose together!

Through this site I am connecting with individuals to share my story and inspire people across the nation to give that lifestyle change one more try. But not only give it one more try like I did, give it one more try *with* Heidi Hype! Every day I get new registrations from people who want to receive my updates! I a truly honored – not to mention excited!

I'm receiving requests to speak across the nation, companies (large and small) are starting partnerships with Heidi Hype to try and do their part to fight obesity, and rumors are swirling about a book! And while all of these things are amazing, they pale in comparison to one thing: the hope that I can inspire, just one person to muster up the courage to say, "Okay, I'm going to give it one more try..."

HEIDI BEFORE



HEIDI AFTER

