

The Simon Cowell of Weight Loss
by Donna Phelan

Ian McCranor has been called "the Simon Cowell of weight loss" -- a perfect description of this straightforward, brutally honest, in-your-face transplanted Brit. At 50, Ian, a rugged, 6-foot former international karate champion is an imposing figure with his athletic build, confidence, and animated nature. "Forget metabo-this and turbo-that," says Ian, throwing his hands out in dramatic fashion. "It's all bollocks. At the end of the day, it's about burning more calories than you put in. End of story."

Eat Less, Move More is the philosophy of KickStart, a weight loss program offered by Ian and KnowSweat Workouts. The name KickStart was inspired by the goal of the program -- to start overweight individuals down the path toward better health. Laying the groundwork for the lifestyle changes required to achieve better health and fitness is all part of the "Weight Loss Motivation and Exercise Education" of KickStart, which focuses on the learning required to lose those first 20 pounds. Sessions are limited to 10 people and meet twice a week for 10 weeks. Participants track their progress in a weight loss game they are all playing. They talk and ask questions, and spend a portion of the program learning how to exercise. Cardio, body weight exercises, free weights, resistance training, and the use of gym equipment are just some of the techniques taught. As an added bonus, participants have the chance to win up to \$400 if they lose 20 pounds in the 10 week session -- enough to cover the cost of the session and then some. While the program focuses on combining good eating habits with exercise to increase the potential for success in maintaining good health, no topic is "off limits." One recent discussion involved frustrations with everyday life -- from sex to grocery shopping! "This is life and it affects motivation," says Donna, one of the KnowSweat partners. "We joked with the class about how we spent the hour as sex therapists, but you can't teach someone a sit-up if they are emotionally knotted up over relationship issues. It's awesome that the class feels comfortable enough to discuss those things with us, and a real tribute to Ian that his own honesty brings out the same in them."

Studies show that 90 to 95% of the people who lose weight will gain it right back. Says Ian, "People focus on the wrong goal...they look at the 50 pounds they want to lose, their wedding day or class reunion. Once they get there, they think they can return to the beer drinking, chip eating lifestyle that got them out of shape to begin with. You can't be a part-time fit person. People look at me, Donna, Liz or Marcia (the KnowSweat team) and grumble, 'Easy for them to say....they are already in great shape.' They don't see me at 6AM running on my treadmill. They don't know about the 85 lbs. Donna lost, the 40 lbs. Marcia lost or the 3 times a week that Liz lifts weights at 5AM. Our *lifestyle* keeps us in shape!"

Ian accepts no excuses from his KickStart classes. Vacations, hectic schedules, visiting relatives are not acceptable reasons for making poor choices. "Your body doesn't know you are on vacation," Ian states. "Calories in, calories out is a simple strategy that can take a lifetime to perfect. Sure it's unfair that some people can eat 5000 calories a day and not gain an ounce. Tough. That doesn't change facts. Each person has to learn to work with what THEY have been given. Dr Phil says it perfectly, 'You can't change what you don't acknowledge,' " adds Ian. "No one is here (KickStart) because of what they saw on the scale. They are here because of what they saw in the mirror, here because they are fat. In 10 weeks, they can be well on their way to not being fat!"

"When I first heard Ian saying things like that, I found myself playing Paula Abdul to Ian's Simon," says Donna. "I told him, 'you can't talk to people like that! It's rude!' But, although Ian tells KickStarters the brutal truth, he does it with an amusing honesty that has them laughing at themselves. He is just verbalizing what they already know."

"Compliments Aren't Free," Ian reminded his KickStart group toward the end of another recent session. "If you want someone to tell you 'nice abs', then get nice abs! And, by the way, don't ask someone 'does my arse look big in these jeans?' The person you are asking is just going to say NO anyway, even though you already know the REAL answer. The truth is, we are all inspired by compliments whether it's a job well done at work or a successful dinner party. After a few weeks you can expect to be getting unsolicited compliments as friends and colleagues start to see the results of your hard work; just do the work, play by the rules, and you can't fail."

What keeps KickStart participants coming back week after week for this good-natured abuse? "Ian does NOT let me off the hook when I have a bad week. I so want to walk into KickStart, give Ian this," jokes Sue, demonstrating an obscene gesture, "and say to him -- I've had a GREAT week, so there!" "You do NOT get flowers with Ian!" laughs Donna. "Ian *makes* you figure out why you succeeded or failed in any given week. It's not the kids or the card club -- it's what you choose to do about it."