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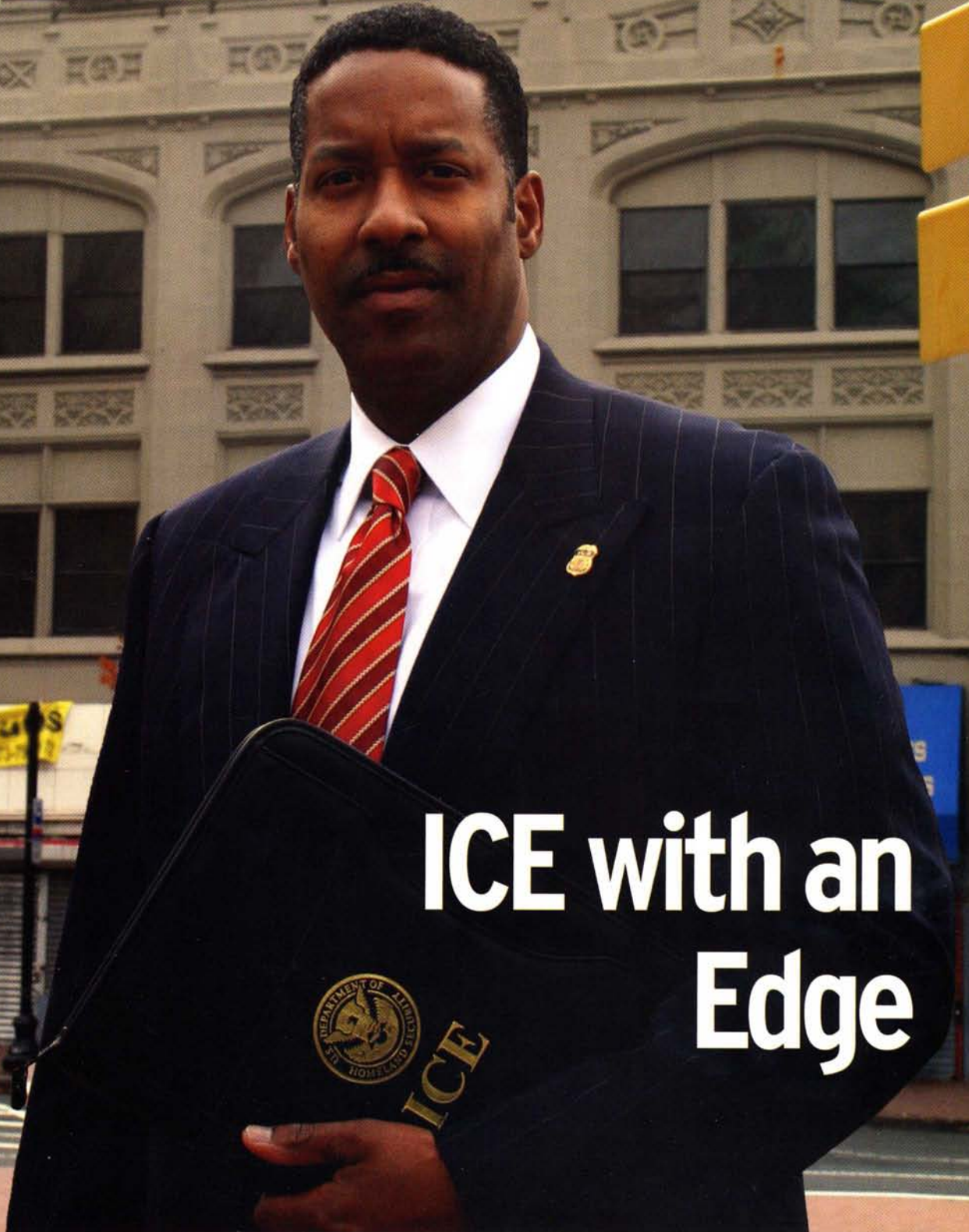


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ICE with an Edge

Make smart resolutions



Matt Brzycki

■ BY MATT BRZYCKI

As 2009 comes to a close, many of you will likely make a New Year's resolution; some statistics show that nearly half of all Americans do so. Unfortunately, most people break their resolutions. As a matter of fact, many resolutions are abandoned within the first week.

Lose weight. Quit smoking. Exercise more. Eat better. Sound familiar? These are some of the more popular resolutions that people make. Though well intended, those resolutions and others are destined to fail. Let's see why.

SETTING GOALS

Essentially, resolutions are goals. Effective goals are SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timed.

Specific: One of the main reasons why people fail to achieve their goals is because they're not specific. The truth is that those who have specific goals in mind are more likely to reach them. A general goal is to get fit; this is abstract and has numerous interpretations. A specific goal is to increase the number of push-ups that you do in your next fitness test; this is concrete and has one clear objective.

Measurable: If a goal can't be measured, it can't be managed. And if a goal can't be measured, it can't be assessed. Indeed, how do you know if you've achieved a goal if there's no way to measure it? So rather than have an ambiguous goal to exercise more, a measurable goal is to do strength training an average of two days per week; rather than have an ambiguous goal to eat better, a measurable goal is to consume three servings of vegetables per day. Goals that can be measured are more likely to be met.

Attainable: Although some people have goals that are specific and measurable, they're often far too difficult to attain. A goal of losing 25 pounds of fat in three months, for example, cannot be attained (at least not in a healthy man-

ner). An attainable goal is to lose one pound of fat per week for the next two months. Remember, too, that a successful outcome is more likely when a goal is within reach.

Realistic: Having realistic goals is closely related to having attainable goals. Don't set your sights on running a six-minute mile if the last time that you did so was 10 years and 20 pounds ago at the academy. Don't think about trimming your mid-section by a few inches if you get your three daily servings of fruit from a blueberry muffin, an apple pie and a banana split. In making realistic goals, it's important to be honest with yourself. Take into consideration things like your age, situation, skill, ability and motivation.

Timed: By this, I mean that you should put a time requirement on achieving your goal. A goal to gain five pounds of lean-body mass has good intentions but when is it supposed to be attained? In one month? Six months? Whenever? The point is that it's easy to put off goals unless a deadline is attached. The deadline could be weeks or months or a specific date. For instance, a timed goal might be to gain five pounds of lean-body mass by June 30. Or it might be to run a marathon by your 40th birthday.

TRACKING GOALS

When setting goals, it's important to keep some type of food/activity diary or journal. Chronicling your efforts helps you to stay focused on your goals and progress (or lack thereof). Essentially, using a food/activity diary makes you hold yourself accountable. One study found that people who used a food/activity diary for at least six days per week lost about twice as much weight in six months as those who didn't use such a diary.

If a goal has to do with nutrition, you should record the specific foods that you eat as well as a rough idea of the quantity. The food/activity diary should track good choices (such as the number of fruits and unsweetened beverages) and bad ones (such as the number of cookies and sweetened beverages).

If a goal has to do with exercise, you



should record your physical activities. The types of activities should be noted as well as the duration of the activities and, if applicable, the distances that are completed. Participation in formal activities (such as strength training and aerobic training), informal activities (such as walking, skiing and playing "pick-up games") and organized sports should be included.

THE BOTTOM LINE

When it comes to resolutions, many individuals aren't very successful. However, you can increase your chances of success by having SMART goals. ■

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