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Eric Cochran handed my life back to me on a platinum platter!

When I joined Midtown about three years ago, I was working with a personal trainer elsewhere. I was also under the care of multiple physical therapists for about five years and had been ordered not to do any exercise but Pilates due to the type of injuries and pain that ravaged my body 24/7. There were many days when I could not get out of bed to feed myself. On top of this, I had a visible and demanding career that kept me traveling around the world.

In addition to the chronic pain I had grown accustomed to, I was inexplicably gaining weight. Having exercised consistently and maintained a healthy diet for over 25 years, I found the weight gain perplexing and bothersome. While I sought pain relief from multiple specialists, I also pushed for answers to the weight gain, wondering if there was a connection.

When I first joined Midtown, I tried taking up tennis, but the pain I experienced on the court was severe. Soon I understood why my physical therapists had advised that I stick to Pilates. I then elected to work with Pilates instructor Megan Drabant. Knowing my story and my desire to explore other types of exercise, Megan introduced me to Eric Cochran. I had two goals: (1) exercise consistently with minimal to no suffering and (2) fit into the clothes in my closets that I could no longer wear. So began our journey together.

Before sharing more about my experience with Eric, let me give you a bit of background about who I am. I was born and raised in Jamaica, West Indies. In my mid-teens, two of my younger siblings and I immigrated to the United States with our parents. We landed in Queens, New York and made that our home. Soon after, I went off to college to study hotel, restaurant and institutional management and dietetics at Kansas State University. I was fortunate that after graduation, my career moved me all over the country until I finally arrived in Chicago. I fell in love with the city and decided to stay. Single and loving life, I've lived in the West Loop neighborhood just over 10 years.

Two years ago, after decades of working for global companies such as Baker McKenzie (the second largest law firm in the world), Baxter Healthcare, Monsanto, Rockwell Collins and Sodexo, I retired from corporate life. For years, stress had been the central theme of my career, and pain, fatigue and injury had all played starring roles. Eventually I received a diagnosis of fibromyalgia and knew it was time for a change.

In 2017, I founded Bridge Arrow LLC, a diversity and inclusion consultancy where I am the managing director. I'm also a global keynote speaker, a career coach, a Governance Fellow at the National Association of Corporate Directors, and an author. My latest publication is a popular Harvard Business Review article, "To Retain Employees, Focus on Inclusion—Not Just Diversity." I love my work and it keeps me busy, but in my off-hours I also enjoy writing poetry, cooking, hosting networking dinners in my home and, of course, exercising.

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As my coach on the journey to being fit and pain-free, Eric has turned out to be a genius. Our sessions would begin with him trying to understand where I was feeling pain so that he'd know what exercises to avoid. Sometimes I'd tell him that my right and left knee had been on a conference call that morning—I wasn't invited—and they'd decided which one was going to be out of commission for the day. Initially, I could barely do simple things like lift my arms above my head to stretch, or bend to touch my toes. Sit-ups? Forget about it. Sometimes I didn't know which muscles would be impacted by a given task, and after one time through the routine, I'd tell him I can't do X anymore because I'm in agony. At times, I felt like someone was cutting across my back with a hot knife or stabbing me in the knees with an ice pick.

Through it all, Eric was exceedingly patient. He had the uncanny ability to make up a routine on the spot based on how I was feeling that day and switch gears mid-workout if necessary, all while giving me the feeling he'd spent lots of time sketching it all out in advance. A genuine being, he has an intellect and warm personality that's unmatched by anyone I'd ever met. Beyond his smarts, he's witty and a superb listener. Quite astute at reading people, he knew when to give me space and when to engage. I've always felt as if I'm the only client he had because of the special care he provided.

But enough about Eric. Well, not really. It is because of him I now boast a body I'm proud of. I can bench press over 100 pounds, deadlift 146 pounds, complete 100 push-ups, and do sit-ups for so



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support I need to keep living my life with purpose and passion, and embracing each day as a gift."

long (beyond 500!) that I'm bored to tears. When I began working with Eric, I could only exercise once weekly because it would drain me. But now I can say, except for about 16 days here and there, I've worked out every day since June 2018. This regimen is not for vanity but for pain management. The weight lost and the muscle gained have been sweet bonuses. Best of all, I've met my goal of fitting into my clothes again. Because of my experience, my doctors are sharing my story with patients, advising them to exercise to manage fibromyalgia.

It is because of Eric and my own hard work that I have such a high quality of life. Along with running my practice and speaking around the world, I'm able to squeeze in other activities that I enjoy. One is serving as a citizen diplomacy ambassador and board member of WorldChicago, a non-profit organization that promotes interactions among global citizens to make the world a more peaceful and prosperous place. I'm also an active member of Chicago Council on Global Affairs where I've spoken twice. Having just published a white paper, "Running Circles Around the Ol' Boys Clubs," I'm now working diligently on a book targeted at C-suite executives. The book draws on dozens of interviews I've done with remarkable women in various industries and illustrates how having women in leadership roles empowers organizations to achieve their business mandates.

My number one priority in life is to be healthy mentally, physically and emotionally. Midtown is central to helping me maintain this goal. I thoroughly enjoy the many exercise options, and I practically live in the sauna. I love that I can be nourished onsite by the offerings in the restaurant, enjoy the family atmosphere and strike up a conversation with the many other members who visit each day. Yet, nothing beats the people who work there. They treat me with great respect and kindness, especially the workers in the locker room. The entire staff make you feel as if you are a guest in their home, welcomed and cared for. I am inspired each time I walk in, trusting that I have the support I need to keep living my life with purpose and passion, and embracing each day as a gift.