

Episode 18 – Achieving Results Through Technique and Repetition

This is the TD Fitness Podcast with Coach T, episode number 18.

Welcome to the TD Fitness Podcast, giving you ways to live a healthy lifestyle, without giving up the things that make life worth living, and now our host, certified health coach and personal trainer, Coach T.

Hey, guys. Welcome back to another episode here at TD Fitness. I'm your host, Coach T, and before we get into this session, I wanted to mention two things. The first is to talk about charity: water. I've written about water on the TD Fitness blog.

I've talked about it in the podcast. It's got its own lesson in the academic portion of the Fit Life Program, and there are habits in that program that help you consume more water as well, because water is important. It's important to health, and it's important to life, but I've done all this though without really thinking too much or come into the realization that there are people in the world who don't even have clean water. That's something that we take for granted here in the United States, and what made me realize that was a video that someone sent to me recently. That's the same video that I sent to you if you're on the email list, the TD Fitness email distro, then you receive an email from me yesterday and another one today talking about charity: water, which is a nonprofit that helps to give clean water to adults and children in other parts of the world.

You can find that link at TDFitness.net/charitywater. If you did not get the email, if you're not on the TD Fitness distro, I'll post that link in the comments, but when you go to that link, you'll find a video and a button to donate. That's the first thing I wanted to touch on. The second thing, last week's episode, episode number 17 was all about childhood obesity. You can catch that at TDFitness.net/017, but since then, actually just today, I came across a study that talked about the link between childhood nutrition and mental health, because often, we relate dietary habits to physical health and it's important to physical health, but there are some very, very tangible benefits to mental health as well, so this particular study, which was published in the BMC Public Health Journal studied 7,700 children between the ages of two and nine years old from eight different European countries. I'll just read off the five takeaways that I thought were important, some things that are important for you to consider.

The first was that better wellbeing was associated with the consumption of fruits and vegetables in accordance with the dietary guidelines. The second was that better self-esteem was associated with a limited intake of refined sugars, and the third was that good parent relations were associated with fruit and vegetable consumption, again according to the dietary guidelines. The fourth thing they found out was that fewer emotional problems were associated with fat intake according to those guidelines, and the fifth and final was that fewer peer problems were associated with the consumption of fruit and vegetables, again according to the dietary guidelines. Now, like I said, oftentimes, we think that diet and nutrition have positive benefits on our physical health, and they do, but this is just another point to let us know that there are just as many mental and cognitive benefits as well. Again, I just wanted to follow up with you guys on that.

Like I said, last week was the childhood obesity episode, and we had a lot of good discussion topics in that episode, but I thought that this information that I came across today would be beneficial for you today as well. Now, let's dive into this week's episode where we're talking technique and repetition. One of the things that I wanted to do with the podcast from the very first episode was to provide some perspective on self-improvement, not just on health, but do what I could do to help you improve not just your health and fitness, but your wellbeing and your overall lives as well. That's one of the goals that I have here with this podcast and this videocast. One individual that was very good at that was a man by the name of Terry Laughlin.

Terry Laughlin was a swimmer. He was a coach, a teacher, and the creator of a program called 'Total Immersion'. Total Immersion is a method of teaching swimming that is different than the traditional method, and I'll get into a little bit of what I mean by that here shortly. One magazine article said about Terry Laughlin, said, "He taught people that the lessons learned in the pool can be applied just as easily to life too." What I wanted to do in this episode was to talk a little bit about swimming, but more so about some of these, how these lessons can be applied to other things in your health and fitness journey, and to your overall lives, so I thought the swimming example would be a good way to do that.

As we talk about the importance of technique and repetition when it comes to taking action in your life, in this case, again, through the example of swimming and swimming instruction, I'm going to start with the story of how I came to understand this, and it's the story of how I learned to swim for triathlon, and it wasn't that long ago. It was 2010, I decided to do my first triathlon race, and it was really to honor my father who had passed three years earlier. Every year around my father and my mother's birthday, I want to do something. Some kind of fitness event just to commemorate them. Something, maybe a long distance swim, or bike, or triathlon, run, something like that. Some kind of fitness event.

This particular year, in the D.C. area, they were having a triathlon. It's The Nation's Triathlon. It was on September 11th, 2011. September 11th was my father's birthday, and obviously, September 11th holds a place in history, in our country's history for another reason as well, so I've thought that it would be very appropriate for me to do an event on that day. A little less than a year out, I decided that I wanted to do that triathlon, but I did not know how to swim.

I had always been comfortable in the water, but just did not know how to swim for efficiency, for distance. I mean, I could barely make it from one end of the pool to the other, swimming just the complete length, so I researched some local swim clinics, and a couple that I came across mentioned this TI Method, which stood for Total Immersion. I didn't know that at the time, but I just decided to research what the TI method was, and when I went to the website, I saw that I could buy a DVD for like 20 or 30 bucks, rather than paying a couple hundred bucks for swim lessons that may or may not be useful, so I decided to start with the DVD, and I just got this DVD that had 10 swim lessons on it. I would watch a lesson, and then get up early in the next morning, and go to the gym. I got there when the pool opened at 5:00 AM, and I practiced.

I had only been practicing for a couple of weeks before, I kid you not, I was swimming. I had gone from barely swimming the length of the pool to swimming multiple laps, probably three, 400 meters or so nonstop, and this is in a two-week period from someone who did not know how to swim efficiently at all. That really served as a lesson to me on how proper technique and a proper understanding of the principles related to what you're doing, and proper instruction can get us to our

goals quicker and more efficiently. Our past experiences, they shape us, and a lot of the times, our first experiences determine the path or the approach we will take to something, so unless you're open to new avenues, new approaches, new techniques, then you could be hampering yourself, and that swimming technique that I learned changed everything. It was a new way of looking at swimming, and the way I describe it to people was that, "Most things that you do in life that are fitness-related involve production of force, so if you want to run faster, you produce more force to run faster. If you want to bench press more, you produce more force to push that weight up", but swimming is different.

I was trying to use power and force to move in the water, but it's not about that at all. At least that's not what the Total Immersion training teaches. It teaches that it's not about force production. It's about minimizing drag. It's about technique over power, and one of the things that the training talks about is that the shape of the vessel is more important than the size of the engine.

Meaning, if you can reduce your drag and streamline your body in the water, that's going to be more effective for you than trying to produce a lot of force, trying to kick a lot, and trying to pull a lot with your arms. I thought that was a great example of the importance of proper technique because it was a new way for me of looking at things, a new way of looking at swimming, but also, I thought that it's a good way of looking at goals, health and fitness goals in general. Weight loss being one of them. Healthy living being another one. As I thought more about this topic, I really break it down into three categories, the category of action, of methodology, and of technique.

When I say action, I mean that's that you do something. Right? Action that you take. When I talk about methodology, I'm talking about what you do, the method you choose, and then technique is how you decide to do that, so action. The fact that you do something.

If I wanted to learn to swim better, than I had to go get in the water. I couldn't just read a book on it. I had to go get in the water. I had to do something. I had to take action. For sedentary individuals looking to improve their health, those that have not exercised in over six months or more, or that just sit a majority of the day, whether it's through work or through other activities they take part in, maybe watching TV or just sitting on the couch, if you're sitting more than standing, if you're staying stagnant more than moving, then you are a sedentary individual.

If you are this type of person, then it's more important that you do something, some type of activity. That's more important than what you do. It doesn't matter whether you go to the gym and get on the elliptical, or if you go the pool, or if you take a walk around the block. It doesn't matter. It's more important that you take action. Okay?

You've heard me say that before. It's more important that you do something than what you do. Now, what you do is also important, and that's the methodology. That's the second category, so again, going back to the swimming example, if I wanted to become a better swimmer to participate in triathlons, then I needed to practice freestyle swimming. I could have done the breast stroke, I could have done the back stroke, the side stroke, but none of those would have been as effective for a triathlon because freestyle swimming is a faster stroke, you use less energy, you can spot and look where you're going, so what you do in that case is important.

Yes, I had to take action and go and get in the water, but I also had to practice the right type of stroke, the right swimming technique. If you want to build muscle, what you do is important. Jogging is

not going to get you to build muscle. Resistance training is going to be better for that, so again, what you do is important. If you want to lose weight, changing your diet is more beneficial than exercising more.

We have these two categories so far, action, the fact that you do something, and method, what you do. Both are important, and what you find is that the more specific you get with your goal, the more important the details become of the implementation, so the third category is how you do it. That's your technique. One of the exciting things to me is that we continue to get smarter in this area, the technique area, but that's also where a lot of the debate lies, particularly when it comes to weight loss. It's in the application of proper techniques, so again, going back to the swimming example, Total Immersion taught me not to separate the swim stroke into the traditional kick and pull.

That's how a lot of the traditional coaches were teaching. A lot of people still teach it that way, but it's not about kicking more. It's not about generating more force. Again, it's about reducing drag, so understanding your posture and your body position and focusing on hitting those points where your arms, your legs, your head, and your chest need to be in the water. How you do it, the technique is important in that regard.

When it comes to marathon training, for the longest time, coaches taught that if you want to run long distances, then you need to practice long distances. It's called 'Long slow distance training', LSD training, but we've come to learn that interval training has a lot of benefits and can be just as effective when it comes to improving your distance times. If you incorporate interval training along with some of your distance training, then you can be just as effective. It's just as effective in your cardiovascular system, and in your endurance. That's one of the things that's I think that's cool about marathon training and distance training when it comes to triathlon and things like that.

You can incorporate. You can work smarter to incorporate some of that interval training. It saves some of the repetition and the battering on your knees while getting the same results. When it comes to weight loss, for years and years and years, we've been taught that calories in versus calories out. It's going to be the area you need to focus on when it comes to weight loss, but that doesn't even begin to scratch the surface, and that leads people down the wrong road.

We've learned to look at other things now, things like meal timing, sugar intake, insulin response. All of those things, your hormones, they all play a role in weight loss, so action, methodology, and technique are all important. The fact that you do something, what you do and how you do it is all important, but they're important at different stages, so technique though is only one half of the equation because the other half is repetition. Seth Godin, one of the individuals that I follow, back in August, he wrote a post called 'Don't Forget The Second Step'. I really like this one because I think it summarizes what we're talking about here in this episode.

He says, "The first step is learning how to do it, finding and obtaining the insight, and the tools, and the techniques you need, understanding how it works, but step is easily overlooked. Step two is turning it into a habit, committing to practice, showing up and doing it again and again until you're good at it, and until it's a part of who you are and what you do." See, these are the two things that are important. You can know the technique, but you have to practice it. The hard part is in making it a part of your routine, a part of who you are, a part of what you do each and every day if necessary.

Those are called 'Habits', and as I think specifically about healthy habits, I mean, that's why I created the Fit Life Program. Right? That's what it's about. I talked about Terry Laughlin in the beginning. Terry Laughlin died in October of last year, on October 20th.

He died at age 66 from cancer, but I had an opportunity to listen to the last long-form interview that he did before he passed. It was with Tim Ferriss, and I'll link to that in the show notes as well. Terry Laughlin quoted one of his mentors, a man by the name of Bill Boomer. Boomer was also an Olympic swim coach, but he quoted Boomer as saying, "Conditioning is something that happens while you build, refine, or increase skills", so conditioning is not the goal. Right?

When people come to me with weight loss goals, I tell them that, "Weight loss is something that happens while you learn, implement, and practice healthy habits." Weight loss is a byproduct. It's not the goal per se. If you make the goal healthy living or healthy habit if necessary, or even lifestyle change, then weight loss is likely going to be a result. I've seen the story over and over again, severely restrictive diets, excessive exercise, and people say, "Hey, I'm making some drastic changes."

Those are the efforts that we can see. Right? Those are the things that we notice. We notice that effort. At least, we notice the claim that that effort is being made, and it seems hard. It seems difficult.

It feels more dramatic. I think though that it's more controllable and actually easier to do that than the alternative. The alternative is small healthy habits every day forever, even when you don't feel like it, especially when you don't feel like it, so we have to remember when we make an effort to do this, to perform healthy habits daily, even when we're not successful and we're not perfect, and we won't be perfect, but what we do is create a situation where we're successful most of the time, and you've heard me say before consistency over time is a more realistic goal than perfection all the time. Those things that you want to achieve in health, in fitness, in life, they don't always have to be hard. If we continue to believe that our goals require exorbitant amounts of effort, we'll never get out of the cycle of trying the next new thing and the next, and the next, looking for that golden bullet.

Effectiveness in the pool isn't about making a big splash. It's about gliding effortlessly. That's why swimming 50 meters is not much different than swimming 2,500 meters if you have the proper technique, but effective is, it's kind of boring. Right? It doesn't make a splash.

Long-term change is boring. It's hard because it's continuous, it's repetitive, and it's monotonous. This is a part of the reason why we give up, because change is hard, but I actually disagree with that, and I say that change isn't hard, but maintaining change is hard, but here's the thing. It's only hard until it becomes your normal, and then it's easy. Once you have those habits in place and it becomes a part of who you are and what you do every day, it's no longer hard.

It's not change anymore. It's a habit. It's a routine that you have. Many of you probably saw the college football championship game last week. That was a great game, and that's what we see. Right?

Winning the championship, that's the exciting thing. What we don't see are the 5:00 AM workouts, the two a days, the season starting before college even started, the time in the wait room, the hours of tape that they watched in preparation. To use photography as an example, I'll never forget, I went to the dentist last year, and there were these really cool photographs hanging on the wall, and I

was asked the dental tech about them, and she told me that she took those photos, and one of them was the most beautiful photograph of the night sky that I had ever seen. She told me that she and her friend had hiked to the top of this mountain to get this shot. In the first night, they admitted it wasn't right, so it's kind of fuzzy.

The next night, they thought they had the perfect shot, but then, like a tour bus or something came through and the lights were shining all over the place. They couldn't get the shot. They were up there for three nights in order to get that shot, but all I see is the really cool photograph. I don't understand necessarily all that goes into that behind the scenes and the sacrifice and those types of things that you don't really think about when you see just the end product. We were at church this past weekend, and the subject of discussion or the sermon was about the Book of Proverbs, which is the book about wisdom.

Primarily about wisdom in the Bible. The pastor said that, "Wisdom is described as a path in Proverbs. Not a pill", and I would say that positive change is also a path. It's not a pill. It's not something that happens overnight. It's a path and a process that you go through, and this path has made easier and more efficient by understanding and knowing the proper techniques, and practicing those techniques through repetition.

I want you guys to think about that, and I'm going to close with the quote just by Ralph Waldo Emerson, and he says, "The mind, once stretched by a new idea, never returns to its original dimensions." Whether your goal is weight loss or moving more, or swimming a mile, or completing a triathlon, I want you to take time to learn the proper technique, and then take the next step. Make it a part of your routine, a part of your normal habits, a part of your daily lifestyle. That's how you achieve long-lasting results. All right? That's about all I have for you guys in this episode.

Again, the link to the show notes will be at TDFitness.net/018. We'll get those up in the next few days. I'll hang all of the reference links from this episode on that show notes page as well. As always, guys, thank you so much for listening. You all have a blessed one. Coach T, out.