

Episode 054: Put Your Mask on First

As we leave the gate, please make sure your seatbelt is fastened. To fasten, insert the metal tip into the buckle and adjust the strap so it's low and tight across your lap. To release the belt, lift the top of the buckle. If there is a drop in cabin pressure, panels above your seat will open, revealing oxygen masks. If this happens, pull the mask towards you until the tube is fully extended. Place the mask over your nose and mouth. Slip the elastic strap over your head and adjust the mask if necessary. Breathe normally and note that oxygen is flowing even if the bag doesn't inflate. Be sure to adjust your own mask before helping others. Before we take off, please be sure your seat backs are in the upright and locked position. Your tray table is put away and all carry-on items are securely stowed.

This is the TD Fitness podcast with Coach T, episode number 54.

Welcome to the TD Fitness podcast, giving you healthy living insights for your physical, mental, social and spiritual wellbeing. Now your host, certified health coach and personal trainer, Coach T.

Have you ever thought about why they make this announcement on flights? Surely everyone knows how to fasten the seatbelt, and we've heard so many times that you should put your mask on first. Why is it that they make this announcement prior to every flight? Well, I'm sure there's some safety component to it. The airlines want us to be safe, and there's probably something to do with liability and insurance as well, but I wonder, do we really have to be reminded to put our masks on first?

As it turns out, we, humans, are very logical creatures when things are going normally. We're not so logical when we're dealing with stress, but throw in a little bit of stress, a little bit of apprehension, a little bit of uncertainty, and that's where we revert to instinct. Instinct in this case, meaning I have to take care of my child first because that's the parental instinct. I'm sure parents can relate to that. That's what we're talking about in this episode. We have to be reminded to take time for ourselves, to devote attention to ourselves. I want to remind you of the benefit, of the value and the necessity of putting your mask on first, whether it's in fitness, health and fitness or from a mental standpoint, from a family perspective or in a spiritual sense. Let's dive in.

When it comes to health and fitness, if I were to ask let's just say random people on the street, regardless of how fit or unfit they seem, if I asked them what they needed to do to be healthy or to feel better, to move without pain, it's likely that just about everyone I would ask would answer with the same themes, exercise and healthy eating. This is not surprising information. We've heard it time and time again. Why is it that a third of our country is obese and two-thirds of the country is overweight?

I played a lot of basketball in high school and in college, and I was never the best player on the team, though in my mind, I thought I was, honestly, but I did work very hard. That's something that I think my upbringing in my high school coach frankly instilled in us, was that work ethic, particularly when it comes to playing sports and playing basketball. When I went on to play in college and then even recreationally after college, I realized part of the reason that I had been effective at times, my ball handling skills, they were decent. I could dribble

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with both hands, both left and right. I had a fair jump shot, both midrange and long range. I never dominated down low. I'm only six feet, two inches tall, so I played power forward in high school, but that was the height of most of the guards in college. Actually, a lot of the guards were taller than that.

What I was very good at though was driving, driving to the hole, specifically driving to my left, which is the defender's right. This was effective for a couple of reasons. Number one, most of the people at the levels that I was playing at drove to their right hand, their strong hand, and it was more natural to defend against this because that was common. That was more common. A drive to the left was less common and a little bit harder to defend against because you weren't expecting it. Secondly, my left-handed drive, because I've been somewhat ambidextrous in many things throughout my life, I think my left-handed drive was very strong and very quick.

Why do I bring all this up? Well, opposing teams, if they scouted us, they would know that I like to drive left. Opponents I played against all the time in recreational play knew that I like to drive left and that I was probably going to go left. Why did it continue to work? Why was I effective with that strategy, with that technique, with that move?

Well, it's one thing to know which way I'm going to go, but it's another to remember that and to think about it when you're on your heels, you're backpedaling as I'm approaching on a fast break with two of my teammates. Unless we're diligent and super highly trained, we almost always revert to instinct or what we've been accustomed to for our entire lives in times of stress or in times of uncertainty. For those that I played against, they reverted to that uncertainty about which way I was going to drive, when they should have played the odds in my 80% chance of going to the left.

When it comes to making time for exercise, we all know that it's necessary, but it's the demands of work that make this week, for example, a wash. I'll start next week, we say, or we know that we should eat healthier foods, but, hey, I didn't anticipate having to work on this project through lunch. I just need to grab something quick and get back to my desk. We put off the important things related to our health and fitness for the things that have seemingly more tangible benefits, but the truth is that regular exercise and healthier eating, those things help us to cope better with that busy job in those stressful times.

Don't get me wrong. I am not preaching here because I genuinely struggle with this. It's one of the reasons why I try to plan to participate in endurance races because in my mind, when I'm training for an endurance event, months out, every workout is a small deposit towards the withdrawal that I'm going to make on race day. If I'm not training for something, it's easy for me to blow off a workout for more important things at work or in life.

Let's talk a little bit about the social aspect here and specifically about family in this concept of putting your mask on first. If you followed me for any length of time, you know that I am very family-oriented and my family is very important to me. This is where I find it hardest to balance my personal health and fitness with the time and attention I feel my wife and my children deserve. I'll get up at sunrise, 5:30 in the morning on the weekend to go get a bike ride in before the kids wake up at 7:30 because I don't want to take time away from them, or I'll skip an evening workout after the kids go to bed because that's the only time I have alone with my wife during the whole day. I work all day and then come home and we're taking care of the kids and then they go down. We want to spend some time together.

My wife does the same thing. She'll choose to walk or run outside, for example, or to not work out at all, but she'll choose to walk or run outside with our daughter in the stroller or just skip

a workout altogether instead of doing one of her favorite classes at the gym because she feels guilty about putting the kids in childcare at the gym while we exercise. I can understand that.

None of these things are inherently bad, but I'll say that we can't live our entire lives like this. I have to constantly remind myself that kids are resilient and that they get just as much from seeing us take time to exercise and eat well as they do from us sitting down to spend time with them. It's a balance, of course, but the point is they observe a lot of things about what we do as parents, and that is what informs their worldview.

Like I said, there's benefit in both. There's benefit in spending time with your children and spending time with your wife, your family, but there's also benefit in taking time for yourself. There's a balance that's required there, and that is the keyword, balance. Whether we're talking about a gym rat who ignores his kids or a parent who feels like they can't ever exercise because they want to give their child love and attention, those two things are on opposite ends of the spectrum, but realize that neither is good. Our kids and our spouses need our love and attention. It's hard to give if you don't maintain your own health.

Again, I bring this up because I constantly have to remind myself of these very same things. I'm in the military. My job is to be fit. I'm a personal trainer and a health coach. My job is to be fit, but I'm also a father and a husband, and I feel like my job is to be there. After all, they won't be this small forever. How do I reconcile the two? It's through that balance, through perspective and the support from my family, from my wife, and putting my own mask on first when I have to. One of the best things you can do for your family is to be healthy and fit, and this happens when you take care of yourself and take time to exercise.

From a mental standpoint, it's hard to put yourself first, particularly if you have what I'll call a servant mindset. It almost seemed selfish to put yourself first, but what my wife and I have both observed and experienced is that giving too much of yourself to others leaves you drained and then you're not capable of helping anyone.

About a year ago, Seth Godin wrote a post online that ended with this simple phrase. He said, "If you're not drowning, you're a lifeguard." I remember thinking that that was such a powerful statement. I was like, that's how I want to live my life because I understand that there are times when I have the capacity to give of my time, to give of my attention to help others. If we have the capacity to help others, most of us do most of the time, then why wouldn't we?

Well, I still agree with the concept, but I found that my concept and my perception of when I'm drowning is a little bit skewed, honestly. It's because we often fail to realize when we actually need to devote time and attention to ourselves. In our own lives, my wife and I were volunteering here. We were helping out there. We were mentoring this night. We were serving another night. We were drowning, and we didn't even know it. We can't let our desire to help someone else get us to the point where we're unable to help anyone. It's okay to say no. It's okay to say, you know what? I'm going to take some time for myself today.

As I look at this through the spiritual lens, putting yourself first on occasion takes on a different meaning because spiritually, it's not about you. It's not about me. It's about our relationship with God in my case. In this sense, in my life, it means spending time in the word, spending time in prayer, building that relationship with God so that I am grounded and I'm on solid footing to deal with the things that come my way, whether that's helping others or dealing with turmoil and strife and things that come at you throughout your life.

When I was growing up, one of my chores, like most young boys, was to cut the grass. For me, that was not a 30-minute chore. I grew up on 21 acres of farm land. I didn't have to mow all 21 acres. A lot of that was farm land. It was fields, but I did have a lot of grass to cut, and I was the only child in the house at the time. My brother and sister had already graduated high school, and I just remember feeling so busy, particularly in my high school years. I started working as a grocery bagger at age 14. I was active in sports. I was a boy scout, and I remember constantly trying to figure out, when am I going to cut the grass this week?

It was over a two-hour job for me, and I had to cut the grass at my father's office too, but never once did I consider using Sunday a day where all I really had to do was go to church and sometimes work in the afternoon, but I didn't really consider using Sunday as a day where I could catch up on cutting the grass. It's because my parents upheld the fourth commandment, I believe it's the fourth commandment, which is to remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy. There was no cutting grass on Sundays in our household or in our neighborhood. Actually just about everyone in the town that I was in was of that same mindset. That's one of the ways that our family maintained a relationship with God, by making Sunday about him, not about our tasks.

Today, the question for most families is whether or not to go to church at all on Sunday or to spend time at home relaxing, recovering and getting some time for yourself versus getting out and going to church, for example. Yes, while it is important for me to put my mask on first, I would tell you that when it comes to actually breathing and breathing life, it's my relationship with God that's paramount.

As I wrap up here, four takeaways. The first, don't let the busyness in stressful times of life prevent you from practicing healthy habits. Making time for healthy fitness and nutrition habits actually help us cope with that busyness and stressful times that we encounter.

The second thing, one of the best things you can do for those who are close to you, those who you love, those of your family members, one of the best things you can do for them is to take care of yourself.

Similarly, number three, don't let your desire to help others get you to the point where you are unable to help anyone. You have to make time for yourself.

Finally, number four, yes, it's important to put your mask on first, but again, in my life, when it comes to my relationship with God, putting him first allows me to actually breathe.

I'll cut it right there and just mention that the show notes for this episode can be found at tdfitness.net/054. This is episode number 54. A reminder that I'm always open to questions. You can call on the call-in line at 888-TDFIT-01. That's 888-83348-01 and just select option three. That'll take you right to the voicemail and the question line. You can email me your questions at tdfitness.net/contact.

Thank you, guys, as always so much for tuning in. Have a blessed one. Coach T out.