Forget About Your Goals.
Focus on Your System.

This is the TD Fitness Podcast with Coach T., episode number 88.

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 your host, certified health coach and personal trainer, Coach T.

Hey guys, welcome back to the TD Fitness Podcast. This is Coach T. And I'm here with you in episode number 88. And in this episode, I am encouraging you to forget about your goals and to focus on your system instead. Now, I know that might sound a little crazy. But let me tell you where this thought was inspired from or this concept was inspired from. It comes from a book that I read not too long ago called Atomic Habits by James Clear. And he says, "If you want better results then forget about goals. Focus on your system instead." He says, "You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems." I think that that is such a great way to look at things because so many times, we get wrapped up in what our goals are. But really, we fail to realize what it is that truly helps us reach that goal. That is the systems that we implement. And they could be formal systems, they could be informal systems. But they're systems nonetheless.

Let me tell you what reiterated or backed up this point that I had read in the book Atomic Habits. And it was actually at church where I also tend to get a lot of my inspiration for these types of topics. But the sermon that day was referring to the passage in the Bible that says, "Faith without works is dead." Essentially, intention without action is just hope and hope is not a strategy. You have to take action. So what I thought I'd do for you here in this episode number 88 here is to kind of walk through the system that I use and that I also use for others that I coach. And I'm going to do that through kind of the lens of the Action Taker program, which is my monthly member program.

So I'm going to give you some examples, some personal examples of my goals and how I've systematized them. Or some of the things that go into the thought process for systematizing the things that I want to accomplish. So, I just picked three of my most basic goals, which is, this is really what I focus on primarily is just these three goals from week to week. These have been my goals now for over two and a half months, I'll say. I have one goal for fitness, one goal for nutrition, and one goal for stress management. Now that may not sound like a lot. But as we get into this, we'll unpack how and why I've come to settle on those three goals for this time, this point, this period in my life.

So, in the fitness lane, my goal is to exercise four times a week. Now, remember, it's not the goal that gets me there. It's the system. So for example, if I do not put time for exercise on my calendar, then it won't happen. It just so happens that I'm in a pretty busy job right now with my military career. And I just don't have as much time that I have had in the past. So, if I don't put time for exercise in my calendar, it won't happen. Also, I find that if I don't do exercise as the very first thing in the morning, then it usually doesn't happen. Again, it goes back to a busy schedule. If I don't prepare my workout gear the night prior, then it's likely that it won't happen. I try to remove all the barriers that I can beforehand. If I don't get enough sleep the night before, guess what? I'm probably not going to get up and exercise the next morning.

If I don't coordinate, for example, with my wife beforehand, then that's another thing that could throw off my workout. Because we both tend to exercise early in the morning because that's the best time when you have young kids, especially before they wake up. That's the best time to do it. She's busy during the day. I'm busy during the day. So the mornings are typically the best time for each or either of us to get exercise. And speaking of that, if I get up early, I get up pretty early, typically around five o'clock. And if I don't do things a certain way, then it could throw off my plan to exercise. For example, if I'm too loud in the house, I could inadvertently wake the kids and guess what? My workout's not going to happen. If I don't keep track of how often I exercise or if I don't have some other type of accountability through tracking, then I'm usually not going to stick with exercise consistently.

So all of these things, all of these examples go into quote, my system, if you will, for exercising, which ultimately to meet my goal for exercise four or five times a week. Now remember, you don't rise to the level of your goals, you fall to the level of your systems. So let me go through a couple of examples for my nutrition goal, how I systematize that. And the stress management goal, which is getting six and a half hours of sleep for me as an average throughout the week. And then after I go through these three examples, I'm going to explain the system that I have put in place to ensure that these goals and any other goals that you have in your quest for healthy living to help you reach those goals.

So on the nutrition front, my goal is to eat veggies. And specifically, it's to have half of my intake come from vegetables on four to five days a week. Now, again, it's not the goal that gets me there, it's the system. And I find that if I don't do that at lunch, if I don't eat vegetables at lunch in the form of a salad or something like that, then it's just less likely to happen. Because at the end of the day, I have less willpower. I usually will have a meal that our entire family wants. I mean, we eat dinner as a family typically. And guess what? The seven and the four-year-old aren't really keen on all-veggie meals at this point. We can't exactly just give them salad for dinner and they're growing.

So, that's something that I tend to do, try to knock out during the day at lunch when I'm eating on my own. Also, if I don't have access to healthy options, then it's a lot harder. It's probably not going to happen for me to get my intake of vegetables that many times a week. Again, if I don't track it, just like on the fitness, if I don't track it, then I'm not consistent. If I wait too long to eat, then it probably won't happen either. Now, I do still fast just about every day. But I usually have a coffee or tea, which kind of curbs my appetite in the morning. But if I don't have that and I wait too long or fast for too long, then I just get really hungry and I don't have the willpower to eat something like a salad. I want something more hearty for my meal.

And just like the exercise, if I don't put time in my schedule to eat, then it probably won't happen. That sounds kind of crazy maybe for some of you but I will tell you that again, with a busy job, literally I have to schedule time for lunch. And if I don't eat some vegetables that I like, then guess what? It's not going to happen. I'm more of a Caesar salad kind of person than a beets and Brussels sprouts kind of person. So, typically I will stay away from the things that I don't like and I will try to eat things that I do like, like different types of salad or different types of cooked vegetables. So, that's kind of what I do to systematize on the nutrition front.

And just a few examples or a couple of bullets on the stress management side where my goal is to get six and a half hours of sleep or to average six and a half hours of sleep per night throughout the week. Remember, again, I'll say it again. It's not the goal that gets you there. It's the system. So how do I do that? I try to be deliberate about going to bed. I try to have a comfortable bed, right? I make the environment conducive to sleep. So, the temperature's at the right level. We keep it dark in the bedroom. And then we get the kids down early because that is something that's going to allow us to get some rest as well. So those are kind of the

three big goals, if you will. And some of the things that I tried to do to systematize those goals in the nutrition, fitness, and stress management front through exercise, eating vegetables, and getting enough sleep.

Now, let me walk you through essentially the 10 steps that I use to systematize these goals and the goals for all of our action takers in the Action Taker Academy, which is the monthly member program through TD Fitness. So, there are three big blocks or I break these up into three categories. First is to plan what you're going to do. Second is to act. And then third is to kind of assess and adjust. So let's go through some of the steps in the planning phase.

Step number one is to prioritize. So think about the areas of your life where you can start to make change. And don't overthink this. So, going back to my example, I try to focus on just one or two small things at a time. I prioritize. I don't have six goals. I have two or three goals. In my case, I have three. I've been doing the habit implementation thing for a long time. So three goals honestly is a lot for most people. But this is something that I have studied that I teach on, that I podcast about, and that I run as a program through TD Fitness. So, I have a fair amount of experience in implementing or prioritizing these goals and to systematize them in a way that I can actually make some progress. So I do have three. But typically, I will only advise people, particularly newbies, to focus on one or maybe two goals. And they have to be things that apply to you. So, focus on one or two small things at a time. Just prioritize that.

Also, I put time for fitness and eating healthy into my calendar. You heard me say that with my fitness goal and with my nutrition goal to eat vegetables. So, I have prioritized those things by putting them onto my calendar which by definition means that there is something that I am not doing during those times. That's one of the things that I talk about in the program and talk about with the action takers. And that is the fact that when you prioritize something, just as much as you saying that this is important enough for me to prioritize, you are also saying that there are other things that aren't as important at the moment. And that is an important point to consider and to remember. Making time for exercise is important enough to me that I should do that just about every day over things that I would normally do that may be related to something else in my life like work.

The same thing for eating healthy. I have to prioritize that because that is something that's important for long-term health. So, setting priorities, again, is just as much saying what you won't do. You know, I want to read more. I could probably spend more time at work and get more done. I could sleep longer. All of those things would be beneficial to me but I can't do it all. I have to prioritize. So that's step number one in the system is to prioritize.

Step number two is to make it personal. Going back to my nutrition goal for eating vegetables, as I said, if I don't do it at lunch, then it's less likely to happen. Because at the end of the day, I don't have as much willpower. And it's not likely that I'm going to sit there and eat a salad while the rest of the family is eating some type of pasta. So, I have to make these goals personal to me and systematize them in a way that fits my lifestyle. I also said that if I wait too long to eat, it's not going to happen because I just get too hungry. Right? So it has to start with knowing yourself. It has to start with knowing your preferences and your current habits. Remember I said I'm not a beets guy? I don't like beets and I don't like Brussels sprouts. There are a number of vegetables that I do like. So guess what? That's where I start. I don't go on the beet and Brussels sprout diet if I'm trying to add more vegetables to my routine because that's not going to work for me, okay?

To use an example with sleep, I know that my schedule will allow for about six and a half hours of sleep and I function well with about that amount. If I try to schedule eight hours of sleep, that's not going to work. It's not going to be sustainable for me because I just have too many other things competing for that time and it won't be beneficial. It's not realistic for me

to try to get eight hours of sleep every night. So, step one, prioritize. Step two, make it personal. Step three, make your goals specific, realistic, and actionable. Okay? That's what we call a performance-based approach. So, specifically my goal, exercise four times each week over the next three weeks. Specifically for the nutrition, I want to have half of my daily intake of food come from plant-based foods or veggies on four days a week.

Another example could be, and I've had this in the past but I'm not currently working on this goal, is to keep my added sugar intake to less than 50 grams per day on four days of the week. And as I mentioned, average six and a half hours of sleep or more each week over the next three weeks. Those are specific goals. They are realistic and they involve taking action. Okay? So, specific, realistic, and actionable. That's where you want your goals to be because that's how you can systematize them. My goal is not to lose weight. But it's to take actionable steps towards healthy living, to become or to remain an action taker, which is what everyone in the program is. They're action takers. Remember, it's about performance. It's not about the outcomes. It's about the action you take in measuring that. It's not about weighing yourself and trying to meet a certain weight on the scale. Okay?

So those are the top, those are number one, two, and three. Prioritize, make it personal, make your goals specific, realistic, and actionable. And step number four is don't try to be perfect. You may have noticed already that none of my goals are seven-day-a-week goals. So, I average or I aim for typically four times per week for my fitness and nutrition goals. And then I aim for an average of six and a half hours of sleep. That is not to say that I will get six and a half hours of sleep every night. Typically, there's one night of the week that I get way less than that, like four, four and a half hours, for one reason or another. Maybe it's a weekend and I go out with my wife and we stay out late at a nice dinner or something like that. And then the kids wake us up early. Or maybe I just have work to do or other things to do around the house that I just have to catch up on. And I get to bed really late and still have to get up early the next day.

So, I'm not trying to be perfect with those things. Typically, I will shoot for about four times a week. And that varies. Sometimes I shoot for five or six times a week. I just haven't been able to do that with my current schedule and current work rhythm, if you will. So, I'm shooting for four times a week at the moment for both my fitness and nutrition goals and shooting for an average of six and a half hours of sleep. That's not perfection. That's consistency over time. And that is what we're aiming for. So, that's step number four. Don't try to be perfect.

Step number five, identify the obstacles that could get in your way. I mentioned or I alluded to it before, kids waking up early before or while I'm exercising. That can cut my workout short because they need attention. Not having my gym bag or workout gear ready to go for the workout when I wake up. That can be an obstacle because any barrier to exercising in the morning for me at 5:00 AM, anything that will say, "Well..." Or anything that could possibly prevent me from doing that, that's a barrier. So I need to get rid of that beforehand.

Not getting enough sleep and being tired, that's another thing that could prevent me from getting up to exercise. And then there are other planned events or obligations that I have in my schedule. Again, going back to kids or work. So that's why I do it in the first thing in the morning. And as I said too, my wife also tends to work out early in the morning, so we have to coordinate. We have to communicate. Because we could have conflicting plans and that in itself could be an obstacle. So step number five is identifying the obstacles that could get in the way.

And then step number six is really an extension of identifying those obstacles. But it takes it a different direction in that you have to make your environment work for you. So given those obstacles, what can you do to overcome them? How can you make your environment work for

you? So that's step number six, make your environment work for you. Having those clothes ready when I wake up, having access to healthy options for lunch and if there aren't any, then change your environment. Shop beforehand and take your own lunch so that you have that salad or that you have a healthier option to eat for lunch.

Also putting time in my schedule for fitness and eating healthy. I mentioned that before. That was in the priority section. But also, this is how I make my environment work for me. I put it on my schedule and the secretary helps me with that. Getting enough sleep the night before exercise. That is making my environment work for me because I'm being deliberate about going to bed. How do I do that? I turn the TV off. Maybe you could put your phone in the other room. Again, having a comfortable place to sleep and making the environment conducive to sleep, with a lower temperature and darkness, and getting the kids down early. That's what I'm talking about with making your environment work for you.

So those are the first six steps and they all fall in kind of the planning stage. I'm prioritizing, I'm making it personal. I'm keeping my goals specific, realistic, and actionable. I'm not trying to be perfect. I'm identifying those obstacles and then making my environment work for me, not against me. Then in the act stage, these are the final steps.

Number one, I want to make it fun. So, when it comes to exercise, there are some things that I just don't like doing. So I try to stick to those things that I enjoy doing more. For example, I would rather play basketball for example than maybe get on the row machine. So if I have to exercise then maybe I'll go to the gym and shoot around for a little bit and get some good cardio in on the basketball court versus trying to do a workout on the rower. Okay? So make it fun. Make it personal to you. Next is accountability, and I mentioned this earlier in the podcast, but keeping track of progress, keeping track of my workouts, keeping track of the number of days that I do succeed in my goal to make half of my intake come from vegetables, keeping track of how much I sleep each night. And you can do that through...

My wife has gotten me a nice watch that kind of tracks my sleep. You can do it through apps and devices, your smartphone, or things like the online platform that all of my action takers have access to. I'm tracking the habits that they have chosen to implement. And I give them feedback and progress reports on those throughout the month. So those are forms of accountability. Accountability and tracking helps with that consistency. So again, it could be an accountability partner like someone who does things with you. It could be a device, platform, or program.

So, also in the act phase is this concept of measuring the right things. If we go back to the types of goals that we set, being specific, realistic, and actionable, I'm going to key in on that word actionable because that allows you to measure the right things. I can measure how many workouts I did last week. I can measure how many days that I actually succeeded in making half of my intake come from vegetables. I can measure how much sleep I've gotten each night. Those are performance-based measurements and they're based on the action that I have taken. I'm not looking to measure how much I weigh. I'm not looking to measure maybe waist size. Those things have their place. But when it comes to making forward progress and positive change, the best approach is to measure the steps you take towards those goals. All right?

So measuring the right things is number nine and then number 10 is cycling. What I call cycling, the short bursts and planning breaks. So, going back to this concept of not trying to be perfect. For every plan I implement, I intentionally plan some downtime. So, if there are four weeks in a month, I will schedule the habits to take place for three of the four weeks. And then the fourth week, it's your time off. You can do whatever you want. That's not to say that you can revert to your old ways but it's just to say that there's no need to measure it.

And this is the approach that we take in the Action Taker Academy, in the monthly member program. We only shoot for the habits three of the four weeks. And if it's a five-week month, then we'll only do it for four of the five weeks.

So I want to cycle those short bursts and insert some white space in there. I want to plan those breaks. Again, I'm not looking for seven days on any of these habits. I'm only looking for a majority of these days. If you're just starting out, it may not even be a majority of days. If you're not eating any vegetables, for example, and you have the goal to incorporate more vegetables into your diet. Maybe you start with one day. Maybe you start with one meal a week. That's where you start. But that's how you can grow. Okay? You can add to that goal and systematize it over time.

And then the final thing that kind of wraps all of this up is, and you can do this during that final week and this is what we do. You can assess how you've done and make adjustments going forward. So how did you do over the past three weeks? How many workouts did you actually get in? How many days did I actually succeed in meeting my vegetable intake? What was my average amount of sleep this month? So, how did I do and why? And what can or should I change? Okay? Am I good on all of these things that I attempted? Maybe I can shift my focus to another area now where I need some improvement. Or did I not quite meet the goals that I had set? Did my system not work properly? Do I need to change my system in some way to refine my goals or what have you? So, you feed that back into your healthy habit implementation so you can continue to improve. All of this that we've talked about is by definition living a healthy life.

Living a healthy life is not necessarily having a body mass index of 25 or less. It's not necessarily fitting into a pair of skinny jeans. It's not necessarily being able to bench press 200 pounds. It's doing the things on a regular basis that lead to better health and reduced stress. I'll say that again, it's doing the things. So what I've laid out here is essentially this 10-step process, this system that my action takers are using each month. We haven't forgotten about goals. But rather, we've reshaped and reframed them using this system, a system that you can use to implement positive and healthy change in your life. And that's why I love my action takers. That's why I'm so passionate about helping and equipping you to take action as well.

In fact, and I haven't done this before in any other podcast, but you probably know that I open up my monthly member program, the Action Taker Academy, three times a year. It runs on four-month cycles. And it's currently closed for the rest of 2019. So if you're listening to this delayed, I'm recording this and releasing it in September of 2019. But I have a feeling that this message may be one that someone out there listening needs right now. And for you, if you're that person, as a thank you for listening to the TD Fitness Podcast and for joining me here, I want you to know that I do sincerely want to help you.

So what I'm going to do is I'm going to open up my Action Taker Academy program just for you, just for those who are listening to this podcast episode and want to want to take the next step. So what I've done is I've created a link at tdfitness.net/takeaction. Take action's all one word, where that will take you to the information and sign-up page to become an action taker. Now you can read more about the program there and you can sign up there if you want to too. So if it's for you, if this is something that's for you, then I encourage you to join the rest of those who've taken the step towards positive, healthy change in my monthly member program, the Action Taker Academy. So I hope to see you there.

Now, as I wrap this up, I'll leave you with a quote. This is something that I read recently in a post by Seth Godin and I'm going to paraphrase just a tad. But he essentially said, "It's easy to turn waiting for later into a habit, especially if change is uncomfortable. But remember that now is usually better than later." So I encourage you to take action now. It doesn't have to be

through me, it doesn't have to be through TD Fitness, doesn't have to be through the monthly member Action Taker Academy program. I just encourage you to take action, use the 10 steps that I laid out, and try to implement some positive change in your life. Because small wins lead to big successes over time, you just have to start. All right?

So, you can find the show notes for this episode at tdfitness.net/088. And again, if you are interested in taking action toward a healthier life, then head on over to tdfitness.net/takeaction. Okay? There's also a link to it on the show notes page. So, I thank you so much for tuning in. As always, I want you to have a blessed one. This is Coach T. signing out.