

Personal Growth Part 2 – Using the Past to Ready Yourself for Future Growth

Welcome back to the TD Fitness Podcast. This is episode #114 and I'm happy to continue with the topic of personal growth, specifically with respect to putting the past into perspective and readying yourself to move forward with progress. You may recall the six different lenses through which I'm addressing these topics in our personal growth journey – fitness, nutrition, stress management, marriage, parenting and spiritual living. I'll stick to that same approach here as I pick out some important concepts related to our past experiences and our readiness for growth looking forward to the future.

So let's start with the past, because ultimately, we don't want to dwell on the past, but rather we should learn from it. It's important to frame it this way because it helps us realize that no matter what our current state or condition, we're actually exactly where we're supposed to be. If you keep that outlook, then there's less of a tendency to view our past attempts in a negative light. When we look at the past negatively, it affects us, either consciously or subconsciously. But here's what I want you to know right now. YOU define who you are and how you view yourself. And that means you can change who you see in the mirror right now...through a simple mindset shift. I know it doesn't always seem that easy, but if thoughts of why you can't do something are based on what's happened in the past, you absolutely have the power to change that. You can grow and improve in any area of your life that you choose. Consider this...we tend to amplify the negatives and suppress the positives when it comes to our own self-image. If you smoke from time to time, you may be considered a smoker. Yet if you only run from time to time, you're not considered a runner - not unless you run a lot! We all have these definitions of who we are, but the definitions are created or perceived in our minds. Again, you define who you are. If you want to be someone who eats better, decide that now and be that person. If you want to be someone who exercises more, decide that and be that. Your mindset controls what you can do. The past does not.

Now, I know there's someone in your life who just won't let the past go. Guess what...that person is you. We're our own toughest critics. But you have to let the past go in order to move forward. Holding on to the past can be like a ball and chain that prevents you from stepping forward, but the funny thing is that the chain is not actually shackled to anything. You're holding the end of the chain in your hand – it's not connected to the ball. You're holding the chain just like you're holding on to the past. Just let it go. Move on. Remember, you're exactly where you're supposed to be right now. Your past attempts at healthier living have helped shape who you are and how you think right now. The past should serve merely to inform how you move forward. It does not determine what your next outcome will be. You can use it to improve, because past attempts are gifts of learning. Free yourself of any guilt you have, and do it quickly. Just let it go. And let go of internal phrases such as "I'm sorry that this happened," or "I regret that this didn't work for me," or "I'm sure that I can't do this because I've never been able to before." Be unapologetic about putting those thoughts in the rear view mirror. We are looking forward now. Your past doesn't define you. Your mindset sets the stage for who you are going forward.

So, what's the point here? Again, you are exactly where you're supposed to be right now. Your past experiences, whether you view them as successes or frustrations, have brought you to the place where you are right now. It's all a part of your journey, your story...and now you're here in your present state. Your current fitness level, your current eating habits, your current stress levels, the parent or spouse that you are, and wherever you are with your faith...as you look to grow in these areas, don't view your current state, situation or circumstance negatively. Simply accept that you're here now, and for good reason. Because right now, in this moment you are more equipped to shape your future self than ever before. And no one else has more power or know how to get you to a healthier state than you do. You're the most qualified, and you can do this. So, use the tools you have, those tools that you've acquired through the ups and downs of life to start living a little bit healthier today, and to grow in each area of your life.

Let's start with fitness. Have you tried to be more consistent at exercise in the past? Did it work for you? You likely remember those instances, those new year resolutions of years past. That exercise program you bought after seeing the infomercial. The trainer you hired to "keep you motivated." Where are those things now? Are they gone because you don't need them anymore? Because you lost interest? Or because they didn't work for you? Here's the real question. Have you let go of the thoughts of those unsuccessful attempts? Or do they pop back in your head when you're considering trying a new exercise program, plan or routine? What do the thoughts of those past attempts do to your current motivation? How do you view them? Because they do have an effect on you, and that effect is either positive or negative...usually negative. Now, it's hard to just forget things that are a part of your life or a part of your history. And I don't necessarily want you to forget. I'd rather have you learn from your past attempts. Going back to the questions I asked, did you lose interest, did the program not work for you...better questions are *why* did I lose interest? Why wasn't I able to stick with it? Was it too much too fast? Did I try a program that I didn't enjoy? Was my trainer hard to get along with? Was she too demanding? Did he not explain the why behind what we were doing? Anyone can improve their exercise habits. Anyone can improve their flexibility. Anyone can improve their sleep and rest habits. You can do each of these things. The problem with consistency isn't with you. You just need the right approach. Learn from those past attempts. And use that knowledge in your next attempt. Use it to improve. Use it to get better. Use it to grow.

On the nutrition side, the thoughts we have around improving our dietary habits are often similar to those we have when it comes to exercising more and improving our fitness. We think back to the many attempts that we've tried...those things that haven't worked for us. And then we make sweeping conclusions about our lack of ability to improve our nutrition habits. Or we keep reaching for the next new thing...the thing that seems so easy that anyone could do it (or at least that celebrity on TV can do it, right?). Again, do we ever stop to think about why we weren't successful at those past attempts? Actually, let me phrase that question the right way. Do we ever stop to think about why those diets or programs didn't work for *us*? There's an important distinction

here. There's a difference in saying, "I wasn't successful with that program or attempt," and saying "that program or diet didn't work for me." But that's the real truth, that the results of those past attempts came about because the method didn't work for you. It wasn't right for you. It's not your failure, it's in choosing the proper approach. So, what have you learned in your lifetime of experiences with attempts to eat healthier? Have you learned that restriction diets are hard for you to manage? They're actually hard for just about everyone, so you're not alone. Did you learn that you could stick with a diet for a little while but that it was hard for you to maintain? Maybe you need an approach that allows you to be more consistent and that is more realistic for long-term practice. Maybe you learned that your energy levels were low and your irritability levels were high on that one diet you tried. That's great feedback as you look to improve your habits...maybe add more carbohydrates to provide that energy, or avoid long gaps between meals so you're not as irritable. There are things to learn from every attempt. We just have to find the learning points and use them to our advantage going forward. The problem with sticking to diets is almost never your fault. Your attempts to eat better have to account for where you are, your personal desires, and they have to suit you. The best way to account for those things is to learn from past attempts.

I talk a lot about stress management. The truth is that dwelling on the past causes more stress than just letting it go. Many of us stress about the future. I suppose that's understandable... because the future is unknown, and we often fear the unknown, and that causes stress because we can't control what we don't know is going to happen. In a perfect world we wouldn't do that, but not many of us are completely secure and confident enough to totally let go of those apprehensions of the unknown future. But when it comes to thinking about the past, those past attempts, those outcomes that many of us would define as failures, we tend to hold on to those things. Even though they've already happened. Even though what's done is done. We hold on to those things that we wish had turned out differently...that diet, that race we signed up for but never ran, the supposed misstep we had in raising our children, the way we treated our spouse, or our shortfalls in practicing our faith. Here's what I'd tell you. Many of us have enough to worry about with all of the things in our lives that cause stress. Be

it work, family, relationships, money, health, you name it. So given that these stressors already exist, why would we dwell on the past, on things that have already occurred, that we can't necessarily change? I say flip those experiences from regret to preparation. So what you tried didn't work. You now know to approach things a little bit differently next time. Don't let your negative thoughts about past attempts get you down. Use what you've learned to reduce some of the stress of what will happen with your next attempt. We're all learning, all the time.

Do you ever dwell on something your spouse did that upset you? If we're honest, I think most of us would say 'yes.' In marriage, we're quick to forget our missteps but we have a long memory when it comes to our partner's actions. Forgiveness is hard, but like most things, the more you practice it, the easier it gets. Remember, love is a verb. The things you do or don't do, like forgiveness, determine how healthy your marriage will be. Remember too, that this isn't a 50/50 arrangement. Both of you need to give 100%, full effort. And the part of that that you have control over is your 100%. So as we talk about not dwelling on the past, my encouragement to you is to let those irritants, those things that have rubbed you the wrong way and those little things that your spouse may have done that annoyed you or upset you...let them go. Don't dwell. Instead, move forward with forgiveness. This is especially important in your relationship.

We have to move on as parents too. Things are constantly changing in the life of a child. I mean, the developmental stages are rapid, particularly the younger your children are. Ours are ages 9 and 6 right now, and as I think about all of these changes that we're witnessing, and that they're going through, I can't help but think that one of the most important things in their lives is the constant and consistency of me and my wife, their parents. When everything within and around them is changing, when friends come and go, when fads and styles come and go, when things that are popular come and go, when their feelings come and go...the parents remain. We remain, and we [hopefully] stay constant and consistent. Why do I bring this changing nature of childhood up here? Well, with things changing so rapidly in our children's lives, and those fleeting moments of parenthood where our children seem to grow up so quickly, I

feel like there's really no time to dwell on the past as we work to rear our children. They do things, we do things, but at the end of the day, we have to get over it and move on. There really is no time to dwell on missteps and mistakes. This is also important as we remember something that you've heard me say before...you're not just raising your kids, you're raising your grandchildren's parents. The example you set in how quickly you get over setbacks or roadblocks or those times when your child seems to bring out the worst in you, will serve as an example to them. Teach them to learn from things, but to move on. This will grow their confidence and show them that it's not an all or nothing world. Learn, let go, don't dwell, and move on.

Wrapping up this bit on letting the past go, and thinking about it from a spiritual sense, I'm reminded of a church message I heard recently. The pastor preached from the New Testament, but he referenced scripture from the Old Testament as well. This isn't uncommon, but it was a reminder to me of the Good News, meaning God's word of freedom from our sins, and closing the gap between us as a broken people and God as the Savior. What this means in the context of letting go of the past is that God knows that we are sinners, that we are broken, that there is nothing that we can do to earn his love, forgiveness and eternal salvation. So he sent his Son to pay the price for our sins by making the ultimate sacrifice. That is reason enough to let go of that negativity from your past, to accept the gift of forgiveness, even though we're not deserving. God knows and has orchestrated the plan for you and for me. The past doesn't define you. You are defined by Him, and how you live is a manifestation of that. There's a song called Redeemed by Big Daddy Weave. In it they sing, "I am redeemed, you set me free, so I'll shake off these heavy chains, wipe away every stain, because I'm not who I used to be...I am redeemed." I love that message. I am redeemed. You are redeemed. And it's because we no longer have to live in the past or be held down by past mistakes or actions. Let go, let God, and move forward.

Alright, now...as we move beyond the past and look to the future, there are some other things that need to be considered as you look to grow in different areas of your life. You need to consider your readiness for change. You see, there are times in our

lives when we're more ready for growth than at other times. The Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change is a concept used in different types of coaching paradigms that describes five stages of change, or growth, in any particular endeavor. An individual can only be in one of these five stages at a time. The five stages are precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance. Precontemplators aren't open to changing much at all. They may not even know they need to grow or change, and if they do, they may see that required growth as impossible to achieve. Precontemplators may say, "I won't," or "I can't." The next stage, the contemplators are at least thinking about growth. They may be weighing the pros and cons as they try to determine how to get better. This is the, "I might" crowd. And then those in the preparation stage are preparing for growth by seeking opportunities to do so. These individuals combine intent with behavior and actions. Those in the preparation stage may say, "I will." In the fourth stage, the action stage, you are consistently acting in ways that contribute to continued growth and you seek out opportunities to maintain those practices. Those in the action stage say, "I am." Finally, those in the maintenance stage have made the new behaviors a part of their lifestyle. As a maintainer, you have a desire to keep those positive growth habits and you're more capable of handling setbacks and lapses in your progress. As someone in the maintenance stage of change or growth, you may say, "I still am."

With this model, there are a couple of general rules to follow as you look to improve or grow. The first is that you don't try to jump multiple stages. After you determine which stage of growth you're in, the goal is simply to move to the next stage, nothing more. We work to move from precontemplator to contemplator and so on. The other thing to know is that you can move up or down on the ladder in different periods of your life and under different circumstances. My readiness for change in my diet is lower when I'm in the middle of a move across the country than when I've been established in a routine. And finally, it's common to be at different stages of change or growth depending on the area of our lives we're talking about. I've seen and worked with many who are absolutely ready to improve their fitness habits but are in the precontemplation stage when it comes to their nutrition. Some are ready to be better parents but aren't quite ready to take steps to improve their marriage. So it's important to identify your

stage within each of your desired areas for growth. And again, the areas we focus on here are fitness, nutrition, stress management, parenting, marriage and your faith or spiritual life.

So let's talk about Fitness. It's April now, and there are many who started the year with resolutions to improve fitness but didn't actually make it past January with their efforts. Why do so many attempts to improve fitness habits fail? A good part of the reason is that we often neglect the most important consideration when it comes to improvement and personal growth. That is asking "how ready am I? Is this something I want to do, or something a doctor told me I must do? Am I truly ready to get better, or am I setting these goals just because the calendar says January 1st and everybody else is doing it?" If you're not mentally ready to commit to more, then you won't. So how do you know if you're truly ready? Well, one thing to ask is where the motivation came from. Did you come to the conclusion yourself? Are you just along for the ride because your best friend is on a particular program? It doesn't matter what others are doing. What matters is what you're ready to do. Now, your readiness can improve because of those around you or because of a desire to live healthier in 2022 for example, but ultimately you still have to decide to take action to improve. That's what motivates you from the beginning, and that's what will help you get through the challenges that come with trying to improve. Are you ready to improve your fitness habits?

What about on the nutrition side? Are you ready to try another diet? Have you ever asked why diets don't seem to work out for you? Well, just like the best exercise plan is the one that you'll stick to, the best diet is the one that you can maintain. And the way to maintain a new diet, or a new attempt to improve is to first be honest with yourself on what you're willing to do. Are you willing to have a complete veggie meal for lunch every day? No? Then don't choose that approach. Instead, maybe just add some vegetables to the lunches you already eat. Are you ready to manage calories by fasting each day? If that's not you, then perhaps you look to limit some of your portions instead. Your readiness is linked to what you're asking yourself to do. "Are you ready to walk to the store" is a different question than "are you ready to go run this marathon?" I'm

probably ready to take a walk, but I'm not ready to run 26.2 miles. So when it comes to improving your diet, you may not feel ready, but remember that you can change the expectation and still improve. Choose an approach that makes your diet better, even if only a little bit.

Now, when it comes to stress management, I'd venture to say that just about all of us would like to reduce the amount of stress in our lives. Both fitness and nutrition are good ways to reduce or manage stress. Another way is through optimizing our sleep, either by making it more restful, by getting more of it, or both. So my question for you is this, "what are you ready to do to reduce stress?" More specifically, what can you do to improve your sleep habits? You may not be ready to commit to eight hours a night. (You may not even need eight hours a night.) But perhaps you're willing to invest in an eye mask, or in turning the temperature down a degree or two, or in some blackout curtains. Maybe you're willing to stop checking your phone immediately before going to sleep, or immediately after waking up. Or perhaps you can finally invest in that better mattress that you've needed for a long time to enable you to sleep better. What are you ready to do? Whatever you decide, that action is part of a broader need to focus on your rest as a way to better manage the stressors in your life. Those are actions you can take now to make your sleep more restful and manage your stress levels a little better.

As we apply the readiness discussion to marriage, I'm not sure why this is, but for some, one of the hardest things to do is to show more love to your spouse. One need only look at the divorce rates to get an idea of how difficult this is. It seems as though we'd sooner give up than either change our attitude, change our actions or improve communication with our spouse. And it's because each of these things require effort and many aren't ready to take even the smallest steps in any of these areas. So, here's what I would tell you regarding your readiness for growth if you happen to be in a relationship that you find it challenging to grow. First, be honest with yourself about your current stage of growth. Do you find yourself saying, "I won't," "I might," "I will," "I am," or "I still am?" If you find yourself consistently saying, "I won't" or "I can't," what is it that can get you to say, "I might?" Whatever that is, don't make it contingent on something

your spouse must do first. What can you do, how can you change your attitude, outlook or actions to get to “I might?” If you’re already saying, “I might,” great! Let’s work on getting to “I will.” If you’re already at, “I will,” go ahead and do what you need to do to say, “I am.” My wife and I continue to live in the “I still am” realm (actually the phrase we use is “I still do,” which is something we learned at one of the several marriage retreats we’ve attended). Actually, attending a marriage retreat or marriage weekend is a good example of taking an action that can show your commitment to one another, grow your attitude about marriage, and help you improve communication with your spouse. So, identify where you are, and take a step to move to the next stage of personal growth within your marriage. This is an investment that will pay off.

Applying our readiness for change to parenting, one thing many of us don’t realize or at least forget from time to time is that parenting is just as much about our growth as it is about the rearing of our children. None of us were born knowing how to be parents. For many, it may be the first time that we’ve had the responsibility of caring for children, let alone the added pressure of teaching these little humans. And when we look at it that way, as a lifelong opportunity for personal growth, this allows us to frame the question about our readiness for personal growth differently. The truth is that whether we’re ready or not, our children require our personal growth as their physical growth continues every day. So perhaps the biggest takeaway in this context is to simply remember that you’re on a journey too. That you’re not expected to be a perfect parent. It’s not necessarily a question of whether you’re ready...we almost never are. Rather it’s a question of how we can make ourselves more ready. And that starts with understanding that we’re on a growth journey in the parenting realm while our children are on their growth journey to adulthood.

Wrapping up readiness in the spiritual living department, it’s not surprising that the question, “are you ready for growth” takes on a different context when we’re talking about faith and spirituality because God changes everything. For me, it’s always been less of a question of whether I’m ready, and more of a knowing that God is always ready...for me. He is always ready, waiting and willing to accept each and every one of

us. Therefore, moving to the next stage of your relationship with Him becomes easier. You can't rush your willingness to grow in faith. That's something that I hope everyone chooses to do, but I can only encourage in that regard. The takeaway is that whenever you're ready, whenever you decide to take the next step, whether it's at a time when you're at your lowest point or when things are going better than ever...God is waiting for you. He is always accepting of us, no matter who we are, no matter where we are.

Ok, there's another piece to consider when it comes to future growth, and that's the timing of it all. I'm sure you've heard the phrase, "better now than never." Or, "it's now or never...don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today...get it done." Well, here's the deal. Change is hard. Personal growth is hard. And where many of us stumble is in embarking upon a personal growth or change journey either before we're ready or when the time isn't conducive to success. If you're a world class sprinter, or any other type of athlete, you must match your peak performance (your readiness, which we just talked about) with race day or game day. That's the timing piece. It doesn't do you much good to be perfectly ready after the event. Nor is it optimal to peak well prior to your race. Readiness must be timed with what's going on around you. These are the two pieces of performance...readiness and optimal timing. So even if you're ready to change or to grow in fitness, nutrition, stress management, marriage, parenting or faith, you should look at what's going on in your world and determine whether you need to either wait a bit or change your approach based on better timing. Don't get me wrong. This isn't a pitch for procrastination. You shouldn't necessarily wait for the stars to align, but consider whether better alignment is around the corner.

Maybe you've been there with fitness. Whether it's a new year and you're motivated for a fresh start. Perhaps you just purchased a new piece of exercise equipment like a stationary bike, rower or treadmill and you're excited about starting your new routine. Or maybe you and a group of friends decided to hold one another accountable and meet up to exercise regularly. These are all great things. Motivation comes in many forms. But motivation and readiness have to align with timing. Any of those exercise initiatives that I just mentioned could be sidetracked if you're constantly

traveling back and forth to another state to care for an ailing parent. Or if it's a particularly busy time at work, for example if you're an accountant and it's tax season, kind of like it is right now. The point is that sometimes we underestimate the impact that external stressors and obligations have on our attempts at personal growth. Set yourself up for success by considering what other things are going on in your life as you attempt to grow.

When it comes to nutrition, I've encountered a number of different things that tend to work against me and my attempts to maintain a healthy diet. A busy lifestyle is one of those things. I'm typically up early, busy at work all day, and spending time with the family in the evening. If I don't make time to prepare a salad for the next day's lunch, there's a chance that I'll eat something less healthy. Sometimes a lack of healthy food options works against those of us on the go. And sometimes it's just a lack of planning...not thinking about our healthy meal options until we get hungry. You can have the best intentions for a healthy eating plan, but if you don't take the time to think about it beforehand, or if you let yourself be controlled by the events of the day or the lack of options available, it will be tough to eat healthier. You may be ready to eat healthier, but if your environment and the timing aren't quite right, your road will be difficult. Keep this in mind as you go about trying to improve your nutrition habits.

When it comes to stress management, do you ever ask yourself how the external stressors in your life affect your ability to live healthier? We usually don't even consider that question...because we may not even realize the stress we're under, let alone account for it or try to fix it. I try to focus my advice and perspective toward those with busy lifestyles. And the truth is that the stressors of busy lifestyles offer plenty of things to get us off track, despite our best intentions. I live that every day with a demanding career, I've had aging parents with health issues, I'm running a passion-based business in my "spare" time, I have family obligations, and the blessing of two young daughters that demand my attention. Believe me when I tell you that stressors exist...and stress affects us, right? So the key, as we think about our environment or surroundings, and the things that we can or cannot control within that, is to ask, "what stressors are in my

life right now? Which of these can I control, eliminate or reduce, and what must I accept?" Because they all have an effect on how I live and how I feel. Is now the right time to try to grow in a certain area of my life or should I wait for this temporary period of higher stress to subside? External stressors are one of the greatest predictors of success or failure in our efforts. Either make "now" less stressful by offloading some of the distractions, or choose a time to start that increases your chance of success.

You've likely heard me talk about attitude, actions and communication with respect to marriage. When is the best time to try to improve or grow in these areas that I consider some of the pillars of marriage? Let me ask this another way. Is there a time when it's not good to have a better attitude toward your spouse or the institution of marriage? Is there a time when you should avoid getting better at what you do and what you provide for your spouse? Is there ever a time when improving communication in marriage is bad? Now, there may be a brief period of time when your spouse is upset with you, or vice versa, when either of you is caught up in your emotions. I mean, we're human, right? But those times tend to pass relatively quickly. The thing to understand is that when we're working to improve or grow in marriage, parenting, or any other relationship, it's almost always the right time from the relationship standpoint. But unless you're ready, your attempt at personal growth within the relationship may fall flat. So, consider your readiness for growth. If you have the desire, and if your intentions are pure, now is probably as good of a time as any.

The same is true with parenting. I think a lot about the advice I receive from those who have raised children, or who are raising children that are older than our daughters. I always hear that the time goes by very quickly. Which makes me wonder why we, as parents, don't seize more opportunities to course correct on the relationships with our children. I think it's because we get caught up with the busyness of life, the frustrations of parenting, and the rate at which our children are learning, navigating life, and changing their attitudes, opinions and their outlook every day. I mean, it's a moving target, trying to relate to your child, provide appropriate advice and inevitably stepping on a frustration that neither you nor your kid knew existed. It's tough.

But the fact remains that the moments are fleeting. As the adults, we have to have the patience. We have to impart the wisdom. And yes, sometimes we have to just eat the frustration. We may feel like now is not the right time, but I'd argue that if it isn't, we won't know that until the time has already passed...and then it may be too late.

And finally, applying the timing aspect to growing in faith...you may be asking, "Is now the right time for me to try to grow in this area of my life? The phrase that comes to mind as I think about this from a spiritual standpoint, and as I reflect on my life and my experiences, is that God is growth. And His timing is intentional. Now, it may not align with what we think is perfect timing, but it is intentional nonetheless. And when you look at things that way, when you think of every experience that you encounter or endure, and understand that each and every one is an opportunity for growth, it changes things. In fact, sometimes that growth occurs when you're not ready for it, or when you're not expecting it. That's the point...to grow you through that circumstance. Some time ago I came across a quote that read, "God will not protect you from what He can perfect you through." So as we restate the question, "are you ready for growth," I'd offer that when it comes to faith, spirituality, and your relationship with God, readiness is a state of mind. It is being accepting of what He has in store for you, and for what you're going through.

So, to put a bow on the themes we hit in this episode, the past is the past...let it go. And there are two parts to future growth...your personal readiness and considerations for the timing of things going on around you that are beyond your control. Understanding how to look at the past and use it, and how to ready yourself for the future are things that will help you grow in multiple areas of your life.

Ok, that's it for this episode. I'll close with a reminder to leave a rating or comment, and spread the word if you like this. And if you have feedback, hit me up. Finally, if you're interested in the principles and concepts to apply to any area you want to grow in your life, head over to tdfitness.net to download my "Principles for Personal Growth." It's a one-pager, it's free, and I created it for you.

As always, thanks for listening. Coach T, out.