

Personal Growth Part 5 – Being Accountable and Controlling What You Can Control

Hey TD Fitness Family. This is episode #117 of the TD Fitness Podcast and the fifth episode in this personal growth series. In this episode, I'm addressing ways to remain accountable in your personal growth efforts, some approaches to controlling the things that you can control when it comes to personal growth, and perhaps most importantly, identifying and dealing with things that are outside of your control!

So, let's jump right into accountability. When you're working to grow in different areas of your life, having something or someone to hold you accountable is not only beneficial, it's often a requirement. You see, we tend to either be motivated extrinsically when we know others are "watching" (either literally or figuratively), or we're motivated intrinsically through a sense of accomplishment. When I get up early in the morning to exercise, my wife will typically ask me what type of exercise I did, or someone at work will ask if I was able to work out this morning, and I usually have the same types of questions for those that I work with. That's a form of extrinsic motivation, because many of us have at least some desire to please others, to show that we've accomplished our goal or followed through with our intention. And that in itself is a form of accountability. Similarly, when I look at the amount of exercise I've done over the past year through the fitness app on my phone, I have a sense of pride and accomplishment that drives me to want to continue to stay consistent. That's also a form of accountability, but moreso to myself. It doesn't necessarily have to be a physical person keeping tabs on your progress, it could literally be a handwritten tracking log. Either can work, but as we talked about in our last podcast episode, it's got to be about you and what drives you. If you want to be consistent, which is the key to personal growth, then accountability is often a requirement.

So, what does accountability look like in fitness? The most common accountability mechanism that comes to mind when we think about personal growth in fitness is a workout partner, or someone who's there for you to either motivate you to

exercise or to follow up with you after you exercise. And workout partners are great. But there are other ways to approach accountability in fitness too. Sometimes we need accountability with the types of fitness we're undertaking. I know folks who think all they need to do is lift weights to ensure a healthy and long life. But there's more to it than that...cardio, stretching, etc. So, perhaps a trainer or an exercise plan where you can track your progress can be helpful. For me, another way to stay accountable is to mark off progress as I go. I've done this in the past through an online fitness tracker, or app, and now I use my Garmin watch to track my activity, stretching and sleep. The good thing about using technology like this is that it makes it easier to track, especially when you're not engaging in a planned exercise session. I can get fitness credit for walking or playing with the kids, for example, as my watch monitors my heart rate and automatically logs activity. Whatever you do, consider some type of accountability mechanism for growth in fitness.

Now, accountability in nutrition can be difficult. Those close to us aren't always interested in, or motivated to engage in the same nutrition goals that we have, for one. And many times, especially for those of us with busy schedules, we may find ourselves eating one or sometimes two meals alone, making it even more difficult and driving the need for self-discipline and accountability. So, here are a few of the techniques I use. First, I try to limit the amount of unhealthy food I have access to throughout the day or at home. If I bring a salad for lunch, then that's what I'm going to eat. If I don't buy processed snack cakes for the house, then I won't eat processed snack cakes. I've also seen a number of people plan their meals for the week. Meal planning and prepping early in the week can help to add some structure to your nutrition growth. And just like fitness, technology can be helpful as well. I've used apps to track my intake, calorie consumption, and most recently, a habit tracker to track my daily and weekly goals for vegetable intake. And an added benefit of using these types of tools is that you can share your progress (or lack of progress) so those who aren't physically close to you can help you remain accountable! And one other thing with using technology to assist in tracking fitness or nutrition goals...I've found that when starting a new habit, technology can be extremely helpful. But I've also seen that once your actions actually become

habits, there's less of a need to track as often. This is the benefit of normalizing behavior, and that's the goal that we all have when it comes to adding healthier habits to our lives.

Let's switch gears to accountability in managing stress. There are a number of things that we can do to manage stress. We've talked before about how we can counter stressors that we can't control, reduce stressors that we can control, manage stressors through our actions, and cope with stressors through our outlook. A great way to counter, manage, reduce and cope with stressors is through interaction with friends, particularly those who have similar interests or are a part of the same peer group. There's benefit and accountability in sharing experiences and concerns with those that you're close to. Exercise is also a good way to manage stress. And when you can combine both your friend network and the need to exercise, it helps in lowering your stress levels. The accountability that comes from a cohort or group of individuals with shared interests is certainly valuable in countering, reducing, managing and coping with the many stressors in our lives.

When it comes to marriage and accountability, I go back to the three things that, in my mind, can make for a successful marriage. Those things are: your attitude, your actions, and communication. And each of these are things that we can actually control. So, the way that I look at accountability in marriage is by asking myself these questions: how is my attitude toward my spouse, are my actions ones that reflect my accountability to my spouse, and in what ways am I communicating with her to keep myself accountable in this relationship? Perhaps I can give my spouse the benefit of the doubt and assume that her intentions are pure, despite how I may perceive her actions. What deliberate things am I doing to uphold my end of this agreement and the promise we made to each other before God? Am I giving 100%? Because marriage isn't 50/50, it's 100/100. And am I continuously working to communicate with her? One simple example that my wife and I have used in the past is to write a weekly note to each other. It could be as simple as a text message, but it's deliberate in the sense that I'll tell her what I'm most thankful for in her over the last week, I highlight some things that could be

stressors for me or us in the upcoming week so that she knows what's on my mind, and I recommend ways that we can strengthen our bond in the coming days, maybe through deliberate time together or activities as a family. We've found that this weekly note is an action that displays my attitude toward her and the relationship while fostering communication and keeping me accountable in the promises I've made to her.

We all know that parenting is difficult. This is why accountability in parenting is all the more important. This is true no matter how old your children are, but what accountability actually looks like can vary depending on your kids' age. If you have children in elementary school like we do, they may do a pretty good job of holding you accountable simply by asking for what they want. Just recently, my daughters asked for me to ride bikes with them, to help with a home project, go with them to a birthday party, play school, help with homework, the list goes on. And when they're older, I'd imagine these requests will take different forms, but the fact remains that it's up to us to stay accountable to our children and to our responsibilities as their parents. We also had family movie night recently (which was another ask from our daughters). We watched the movie "Yes Day." It was a great reminder that, as parents, we can't always say "yes" to our children, but we don't have to say 'no' all the time either. Sometimes staying accountable as a parent means checking our "no's." Being accountable as a parent is one of the most important things we do.

To wrap up my thoughts on accountability, here are a few thoughts on accountability in faith. For me, staying accountable in faith is a lot like the requirements for accountability in marriage and parenting. This is because each of these are relationships, with your spouse, your children, or in this case, with God. So, accountability here really comes down to regularly doing things that followers of Christ do. And we know that in order to live your life that way, you must think about the things that you do every day. As I think about some of the things that I have in my life to keep me accountable to God and my chosen way of Christian living, it's things like going to church. It's things like listening to Christian or uplifting music. Ninety percent of the time, that's what's playing in my vehicle or on Alexa. There's also accountability in the actions

we take toward others, and in the attitude we have toward adversity. Do people view you as someone who treats others with kindness? And finally, where do you place your hope and comfort? Are you constantly worried, or do you have faith in the fact that God will provide and help you through future trials? Each of these examples and others like them keep you accountable in your faith. God wants us to be accountable, and it's necessary to have that accountability. But remember that He always keeps His promise to us too. That's what blessings are.

Moving on to the second topic of this episode, I'd like to address something that I believe is just great advice and approach toward growth and life. And that is to control what you can control. And it certainly applies to just about every area of our lives where we seek to grow or improve. There are so many things occurring around us that we simply cannot control. But there are also things that we can control. And that's the key. Recognizing that there are things that you can change and things that you can't. When we understand that, we can put our focus in the right place, and our efforts toward something that will yield results. Some things that we have more control over than we typically realize are our attitudes, our actions, and our environment. Attitude is related to mindset. We covered that in my very first principle of personal growth, which is believing that you can. Our actions are related to our environment. And this is a key takeaway – your environment is extremely important. The advice from habit expert, James Clear, is helpful here. He says, "It is not necessary to change a person in order to change their behavior. Just change their environment." When I think of environment, I think of the things and people around us. Who do you surround yourself with? What does your support system look like? Do you have a support system? Who do you have that shares in a similar goal of improving their health like you do? Who do you have in your life that will support you in your endeavors, even if they don't necessarily share the same goals? We need people in our corner. And the things around us matter too. Look around. What's around you, in your immediate environment and surroundings? What's in your kitchen? What's in your bedroom? What's around you at work? Are the people and things around you conducive to helping you maintain healthy habits and goals? Your

environment is important, and there are things in your environment that you can actually control in order to make your environment work for you.

So how does this apply to fitness? When it comes to fitness, one thing you can control is making time for it, no matter how long or how short that time is. Plan your exercises for the week. If you won't have access to exercise equipment, plan for that. There are plenty of exercises you can do that don't require anything but you! And each day, even if you don't have a lot of time, you can add small bits of exercise throughout the day. Exercise doesn't have to be a formal event. You can also control things like how far away you park from the entrance so you can walk farther, or you can take the stairs, or simply walk instead of drive. If you exercise in the morning, lay out exercise gear the night before, pack your bag the night prior, and know what workout you're going to do beforehand. You want to remove as many barriers to morning exercise as possible. If you need to, invest in equipment as your budget allows, from an exercise mat, to suspension straps, all the way to more expensive home equipment such as a spin bike, row machine or treadmill if that will help you stay consistent. Just don't make large purchases thinking that that alone will get you to exercise. Establish habit patterns first, then incorporate ways to make those habits easier to sustain. This is where an exercise partner or an exercise group is good to hold you accountable in maintaining those habits. Finally, remember that your attitude is important too. You can't control the weather, but you can still exercise in some way, perhaps at home or in a hotel room, even if the weather tries to thwart your plans. Each of these are examples of effective ways to improve your fitness habits.

The process is similar on the nutrition front. You can control your nutrition and healthy food intake by drinking more water. Carry a bottle with you, drink water first thing in the morning by placing a bottle on your nightstand, be deliberate about scheduling your water intake, or set hydration goals throughout the day. You can better manage calories through portion control, by boxing up a portion of your meal as soon as the waiter serves it. You could eat plated food on smaller plates that you own (as opposed to eating from a box, bag, carton, or container). You can set daily or weekly

goals for fruit and veggie intake, or to limit the amount of added sugars you consume. These are all actions you can take, but again, your environment is important too. What's in your kitchen? Do you stock healthier foods or a lot of junk food? Do you have fruits and veggies available or a lot of preservatives? Do you have water and healthy drinks, or sodas, alcohol and artificially sweetened beverages? What about at work? Perhaps you can't control the fact that there are no healthy nutrition options where you are, but you can control what you bring to eat, your portion sizes, the amount of water you drink, or at least choose the least unhealthy option available. And again, peers or partners are very helpful when they are aligned with your nutrition goals. You can lean on an accountability partner when you're tempted to make less healthy choices.

Stressors in life don't have to be all-consuming and they don't have to control you either. There are a number of things that you can do to counter, remove and manage stress. Some things that work for me are, first, being deliberate about my sleep. It takes discipline to go to bed early enough to get enough sleep. But less rest equals more stress. You can't cope with the stressors of life as easily when you're sleep deprived. That's why I also turn off email and social media alerts on my phone, and keep my phone downstairs when I go to bed. This provides for some quiet time before bed and it prevents me from checking my phone as soon as I wake up. I'm also deliberate about not committing myself to activities or events when I don't have to. This is because I know that having less in my already bulging bag of responsibilities means less to carry and less to worry about. It's ok to say "no." Along that same line, I also try to manage my time and not let my calendar control me. This requires planning, prioritizing and commitment. Finally, white space is key. You need time away from obligations. You need time for family. And sometimes you just need time for yourself. Don't underestimate that. Control what you can control to manage your stress. Rest and time management are two areas where you can have the biggest impact.

How do we focus on the things that we can control in marriage? Well, marriage is a relationship and when you're in a relationship, you can't control the other person. You can only control yourself. What I've come to learn and what's worked for me are three

things that I focus on - my approach, my actions and my attitude. First, in controlling my approach, it's about the position or the stance I take. Am I thankful for what my wife brings to the relationship and to our family, or do I focus on what I perceive as negatives? Do I assume that her actions are well intentioned, even though the way she approaches something may be different than the way I would do it? When it comes to my actions, am I deliberate about them every day? I strongly believe that it's about viewing love as a verb, something you do in marriage, not just viewing love as a noun, or a thing that exists in marriage. Successful marriages require active investment. Do things together and invest in the relationship. And with respect to my attitude toward marriage and toward my spouse, do I view her as my partner? Again, do I understand that marriage is not a 50/50 arrangement, but rather a 100/100 arrangement, and that I have to put in 100% effort? I've heard people say that marriage is give and take. I believe it is. You have to give credit, give love and give grace...and you have to take responsibility. Those are the things you can control in marriage.

Much like marriage, parenting is also a relationship. It's a relationship between you and your children. And I tend to take the same view toward this concept of controlling what you can control when it comes to parenting. Again, for me, it's about my approach, my attitude and my actions. And my approach to parenting is driven by my attitude. I try to focus on the long view, understanding that we're not just raising our kids - we're raising our grandchildren's parents. I also think about the need for patience, understanding that this parenting thing is just as much about my growth as it is theirs. And therefore, my actions, the things that I can control are typically driven by my attitude. It helps me to understand when to scold and when to teach. It causes me to think about whether our children's actions are acts of disobedience or simply mistakes, because those two scenarios need to be handled differently depending on the age of our children. And my attitude and approach to parenting also influences my actions because I realize that the learning comes from allowing them to make mistakes. My wife and I can't teach them everything. They have to learn a lot on their own, but we have to give them the freedom to do that. These are the things that I can control as a parent.

Now, how can you continue to grow in your faith? And what types of things can you control in this growth journey? Going back to how your environment and how people around you can influence your actions, it's important to point out a couple of things when it comes to growing in faith. And again, I'll use personal examples, not to imply that this is what you need to do, because everyone's journey is different. But rather to relay what works for me. When it comes to environment, I start my day with a devotional on my phone, I pray with the family, I listen to uplifting music at home and when I'm in the car, we attend church each week, and I seek opportunities to learn. For me, it's about surrounding myself with as much as I can to remind me of my faith. And my wife and I also try to surround ourselves with people who are positive influences. This is grounded in scripture. Proverbs 27:17 states, "As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend." And the saying, "show me your friends and I'll show you your future" actually comes from the book of Proverbs 13:20, which states, "Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get in trouble." And finally, Ecclesiastes 4:9 says, "Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed." They can help each other succeed...this is why it's important not to view church as just a building or a place you go, but rather as a community of support. When trying to grow in faith, the things around you and the people around you have a huge influence on your actions.

Ok, switching gears now, how do we deal with things beyond our control? It's one thing to capitalize on the things that you can control. It's another thing to, first, recognize the things that are beyond your control, and second, to deal with those things. But this is really one of the most important concepts for us to grasp - realizing that there are things that you have no control over, that will affect how you progress toward your goals, and determining how you will address these circumstances. Identifying the things that can serve as obstacles or impediments to growth is the first step. What is it that can prevent you from reaching your goals? What could get in your way? After you identify possible stumbling blocks, you have to determine how you will overcome them. Do you need to adjust your goal, or perhaps your timeline for achieving that goal? These are legitimate considerations. But if I could point out what I believe is THE most important thing to

understand in all of this, it's your attitude in approaching the challenges and obstacles you face. This concept has been presented in a number of different ways. One way is in the "and" vs. "but" mentality that I've spoken about before. An example would be changing the statement, "I need to exercise more, but I work long hours" to something more like, "I need to exercise more and I work long hours." The first statement creates a helplessness around the challenge of working long hours, whereas the second statement simply relays a fact that must be accounted for in the goal to exercise more. Another way I've seen the concept of mindset be presented is expressed in the Serenity Prayer. "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference." The first line is asking for peace in accepting all that is beyond my control. And finally, a principle in Stoic philosophy is that the obstacle is the way. In fact, I'm reading a book right now with that same principle as its title. *The Obstacle is the Way* is a book by Ryan Holiday that presents a way of turning obstacles into opportunities through the way you look at them. As you work to grow in different areas of your life, you will encounter challenges that are beyond your control. Understand what these challenges are, and approach them with a proper mindset, not one of frustration or helplessness.

So, when it comes to improving or maintaining our fitness, how do we deal with things beyond our control? Well, let's first revisit the three main components of growth in the fitness domain. First, exercise and movement, next, flexibility and mobility, and finally rest and recovery. With each of these, you may feel as though you simply don't have the time to devote to exercise, or stretching, or rest. And you may be correct in that the demands of your schedule don't allow you to get as much of these things as you'd like. But does your schedule truly prevent you from getting any exercise, or any stretching, or a little more rest? Don't think about the time you don't have. How will you utilize the time you do have, no matter how short or sporadic that time is? I know a lack of equipment is also something that we often view as a roadblock to exercise. But remember that movement is exercise. You don't need exercise equipment to walk, jog or perform calisthenics. In fact, I've created an entire workout regimen based on having minimal to no equipment. Remember, when you're seeking growth in fitness, it's less

about the specific exercises, and more about the habit patterns you instill. Can you start with 10 body weight squats, or 10 push-ups, or 10 minutes of stretching every morning. When you do, you will have created a routine of doing something. And as you know, consistency is key. And finally, one other thing that you cannot control may be the fact that no one else around you shares in your goals or desires to live healthier. And this can be a challenge, because we draw motivation and strength from those around us. But remember, you can also gain accountability through an app or an online community. The key figure on all of this is you, and it's what you do that will help you grow.

Now, when it comes to nutrition, many people say that eating healthy is hard. But if this is true, why is it the case? What things are truly beyond our control that make healthier eating difficult? Some would offer that eating healthier is more difficult in some areas, either due to a lack of access to healthy options, or because of how much it costs. Well remember, it's not just what you eat, it's how you eat as well. Anyone can drink more water. Anyone can limit their calorie intake through portion control. Anyone can be more aware of the amount of added sugars and unhealthy snacks they consume. And if you don't have access to, or can't get fresh fruits and veggies, perhaps the next best thing is frozen fruits and veggies. The point is to eat a little bit better than you do right now. Do you have to pay more? Possibly. But oftentimes it's not paying more money that will make us healthier consumers...it's paying more attention.

On to stress...there will always be things that you have no control over. It's a fact of life. In fact, most of the things that happen to us or around us are beyond our control. So, when we worry about these things or try to change them, it causes more stress. More frustration. We get down on ourselves. And none of these feelings are beneficial to our cause. But there are a few approaches I use to handle stressors that are beyond your control. The first is to be clear on what those things are and to simply let go of them if needed. So, you have a flailing side gig that stresses you out? Perhaps you turn your attention to something else. Are you rebuilding a vehicle that causes more frustration than fulfillment? Consider selling it. Another thing I do is focus on the thing that truly stresses me out. When my mother was near the end of her life, there were

times in the hospital when I felt helpless and frustrated. But it wasn't really her illness that stressed me out. It was not knowing what would happen. It was my desire for her to be comforted. It was my wanting to talk to her again like we used to. Think about what I'm saying here. MY doubt of the unknown. MY desire for her comfort. MY wanting for things to be like they were. My stressors stemmed from my mindset. And of all the things that we can't control, we actually have way more control over our minds than we think. Once I came to realize this, I could accept and be comforted by the fact that my mother lived a long and full life. She saw all of her children grow into adulthood. She was an integral part of her grandchildren's lives. She was there with my father until the end of his life through over 50 years of marriage. And I realized that sickness, death and loss are a part of the circle of life. And once I came to terms with what was within my control and what wasn't, not only was I better able to cope, I was also better able to comfort others. Your mindset is perhaps the most important factor in dealing with stressors. Accept the things you can't control by tapping into the control of your mindset.

When it comes to marriage, it's almost comical to talk about dealing with things beyond your control. I would jokingly say that marriage is all about losing control. In his book, *The Meaning of Marriage*," Timothy Keller highlights a point that Ethics Professor Stanley Hauerwas has made famous. That none of us marries the person we think we do. And that is because the institution of marriage inherently changes each of us. I'm not the person I was before I got married. My wife is a different person too. So, trying to exert control in marriage is both difficult for you and sometimes off-putting to your spouse. Too often we view marriage as a mechanism for making "me" happy, when in fact it should be a union for "us." So, by definition, that means giving up a lot of control for the betterment of us. We have to understand what marriage is, what it isn't, and what it's all about. Marriage is a compromise. Marriage isn't a selfish institution. It's about serving, about giving love, it's about you and your spouse, not just about you.

Moving on to dealing with things beyond your control in parenting, if you have a hard time dealing with things beyond your control, then raising kids will bring you to your knees. Whether it's them having to go to the bathroom at the most inopportune time, or

them forgetting to bring the one thing that they needed for this particular trip or event, or failing to plan for what was seemingly obvious, shaping these young beings into productive members of society can be quite the challenge. So, the thing that I have to often remind myself of is that they are not perfect...at any age. In fact, if they were, they wouldn't need us. Our job, our duty, our obligation is to raise these children, which means there will be times (a lot of times) when things are beyond our control. But remember, we determine how we react in these situations. And you will set an example for them. The question is, what type of example are we setting when things don't go our way...especially when things don't go our way?

And finally, how do we deal with things beyond our control in faith? Well, in some ways, this is incredibly difficult when it comes to faith and in some ways it's extremely easy. It can be difficult because if we're not comfortable in our faith, it's hard for us to cope with things that happen to us or that happen in our lives. But when we're grounded in faith, we understand that we were never in control, and that everything that happens is ordained by God. It's all a part of His plan. In fact, that's what faith is. One of my favorite songs is by Christian artist, Laura Story. It's called, Blessings, and it contains a simple line that says, "What if the trials of this life are your mercies in disguise." You see, we don't know that what we perceive as bad news could have been worse news. We don't always see that challenges could have actually been roadblocks. We don't always realize that things that get us down, could have been things that would have taken us out altogether. But through His blessings, we're still here, challenged, but not beaten. So, what if the trials of your life are His blessings in disguise? Think about that as you contemplate what it means to have control, and what it means to live through faith.

As I wrap up this episode, I just want to say that I so appreciate you as a listener and supporter of TD Fitness. The goal here was to provide a few methods for you to stay accountable with your goals in each of our personal growth areas, to think about how you can control the things that are within your control, to figure out those things that you can't, and how to deal with those things.

As always, thank you for listening. If you like this content and these topics, don't forget to spread the word. And leave a rating or comment. And I'm always open to any feedback you have.

To get more of these principles and concepts to help you grow in different areas of your life, head over to tdfitness.net and 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, have a blessed one. Coach T, out.