

Personal Growth Part 7 – Ensuring Long-Term Success

Hey TD Fitness Family! This is episode #119, the seventh and final episode of my personal growth series, and the final episode of the year! And in this episode, we wrap things up with some long-term thinking and approaches to becoming the person you want to be – whether that's in fitness, nutrition, stress management, marriage, parenting, or in your faith.

As I jump into this, let me start with a little bit of perspective. It's important to understand that developing the skill of improving is more important than the actual improvement you want to make. We must assess performance with the bigger, long-term picture in mind. It's not win or lose, it's try and learn. It's about learning the process. We're working toward long-term lifestyle change, not short-term solutions. And I feel like my job is to help you refine your approach toward that long-term view and mindset of healthier living.

And trust me, I get it. We live in a world that has us accustomed to instant results, next-day or same-day delivery, and answers to questions literally at our fingertips. So, in some ways, it's perfectly normal to have an expectation that our goals and desires for better health, a smaller size, less stress, a stronger marriage, kids that listen to you, or becoming strong in your faith...that those things can and should happen overnight. And honestly, sometimes those results that are pleasing to the eyes or instantly fulfilling can happen rather quickly, but not usually in a way that's either healthy or in a way that will last. If you've followed me for any length of time, you know that I'm not about overnight results, I'm about a healthier life...for you, and for the long term. So, when you work toward your goals, it's not win or lose, it's try and learn. We are constantly learning what works for us and what doesn't...*that's* the point. Because as we go through life, what may have worked for you in the past may no longer get the job done. Healthy living is a process. And going through this process, living it, not completing it...makes us healthier. It's not a finish line that we should seek. It's learning what works, what doesn't, how to improve, and how to be a little bit better...those are the things that lead to healthier living. The skill of improving and bettering ourselves - that's the important piece here. There's no goal line, and it's not win or lose...it's try and learn.

Now, as we think about this approach and our goals for fitness, you know, we are aging every day, every minute, in fact. So, we have to constantly assess and adjust. I can't perform workouts that I did 10 years ago, at least not at the same level that I used to be able to. And even if I could, they may not yield the same results now that they did before. So, what is one to do? I could provide an answer for you, giving you an exercise plan, provide you with the tools needed to start exercising. But that's only one piece of the solution. One of the things that drove me to become a health coach after successfully

working as a personal trainer for seven years was the realization that just giving someone an exercise plan, no matter how good that plan was, is not enough for many people. Without knowing how to incorporate exercise into your life, or how to start the habit of moving more, how to keep exercise as a part of your life...without those things, an exercise plan was just that - a plan, not action. That's why I became a health coach, to better help you live a healthier life. You see, it's not just about giving you the answer to a specific obstacle you might face. That doesn't equip you to deal with the next problem when I'm not around. I want you to be equipped with the tools to move more and take care of your body...for the long-term. That means learning your body, learning your motivators and demotivators. Learning when you're more likely to move more and when you aren't. Not just knowing what muscles are strong or weak, tight or flexible, but knowing when you need to rest and when you need to move. And no one can know these things better than you can know it about yourself. That's because our bodies are constantly changing. And that's why developing the skill of learning your body is more important than the specific exercises that you perform.

What about nutrition? Well that's the key word, nutrition...not dieting. This is about nutrition. Not diets in the weight loss sense, but diet as a way of life and a mechanism for nourishment. The food and beverages that we consume, the way in which we consume those things, and how we think about it all - those are the important things to remember here. Healthy eating is a long-term approach, and whether or not you always see or notice it, there are immediate benefits. Your body knows right away when you eat healthier and when you don't. But we tend to think of eating, nutrition and dieting as short-term strategies that should produce instant, visible results. The disconnect is in expectations and outlook. So, ask yourself, what are you doing this for? Why are you paying attention to the things you put in your body? Why are you trying to make healthier eating a normal part of your routine? Hopefully, it's for long-term health. And if so, then this is a reminder for you in that regard, and encouragement to let you know that you're on the right track, you're going about things the right way, and it is making a difference, whether you can see it right now or not.

On to stress. I've seen the results of attempts at immediate solutions to stressors. I'm sure you have seen, or maybe even experienced it sometime in your life too. Whether it's taking part in an activity or partaking of a substance that you shouldn't. Perhaps you or someone you know has engaged in unhealthy eating habits like binge eating or worse. Or perhaps you've experienced the worst...when someone you know or someone close to you decides to hurt themselves or those around them as a way to cope with life's stressors. You know, we often talk about the stressors of life and how to deal with them. But it's not lost on me that there are things beyond stressors...there are conditions and circumstances that my advice may not help with. In these instances, I encourage anyone who is in need of more direct support, help or intervention to let someone know. But getting back to those stressors of daily life, the things that detract from our ability to live a fulfilling life, I'd offer this in terms of a long-term outlook. Your

stressors likely didn't all come overnight. So, is it fair to expect that they'll all disappear overnight? Probably not, right? Continue to do the things that we talk about to counter, remove or manage some of the stressors we face. Healthy steps like exercising, eating better, getting enough sleep, and having a positive outlook on the situation. Each of these things provide some immediate relief, and over time, they serve to mitigate the stressors you face. And when you practice multiple healthy habits, the synergistic effect works in your favor to make life more pleasant...more fulfilling, even.

As I think about how this applies to marriage, I'm reminded of the book, *The Infinite Game*, by Simon Sinek. This book is a more modern look at a concept that James Carse wrote about in his book called *Finite and Infinite Games*. The concept being that in finite games, the goal is to win, but in infinite games, the goal is to keep playing. And one of the takeaways is that we often look at infinite games as being finite, and therefore, have the goal of winning in mind, vs. continuing play. This relates to our discussion on the long-term view and specifically, how to apply that to marriage. The goal in marriage is to stay married. The goal is not to prove your point all the time. It's not to win arguments. It's not to get the upper hand. It's to make your partner feel like a partner. More than that, really...to make your partner feel loved. And that requires thinking long-term, and not getting bogged down or caught up in short-term desires. There's a difference between success and a win. In the military, there's a saying about winning the battle but losing the war. Keeping a long-term outlook focuses us on the true purpose of what it means to be together, to live together and to be married to one another. Fifty plus years of marriage, like my parents had, like my wife's parents are about to have...that's success. It's about staying together, supporting one another and loving one another. Keep the long-term outlook in mind in your marriage and relationships.

Now, when it comes to parenting, I have to be honest...sometimes it is very hard to look beyond the here and now when you're in the throes of parenting. "Right now" frustrations distract us from the long-term at times. But then there are other times when our children are caught up in the here and now, but experience has shown us that this too, shall pass. We know that teenage crushes may not be enduring love. We know that high school assignments can affect long-term education and life goals. And we also know, though we sometimes forget, that this situation that we're facing with our kids, whatever it is, will pass as well. But the relationship, our relationship will endure. And we're the ones that have to protect it. That's part of parenting. Situations and challenges in life come and go. But what remains constant, what has to remain constant is our children knowing that we'll always be there for them, no matter what. That we'll always have their best interests in mind. That we'll empathize with them, hopefully like our parents did when it was needed. That we'll encourage them, even when they don't believe in themselves. That we'll discipline them, not out of anger, but out of love. Because we know that discipline leads to destiny (as Ryan Holiday has recently written about). We, as parents, have to think long-term...because we're shaping future adults and future parents.

How does this long-term view apply to faith? I mean, when would you say you've achieved your goal of being faithful. What milestone do we have to reach to win this race of living a life of faith? How much church attendance, how many good deeds, how much giving, when is it all enough? Of course, the answer to these questions is that it's not a goal, not a race, but rather, it's a practice. When I was younger in my faith, I remember questioning the purpose and the rules surrounding tithing...the act of giving 10% of your "first fruits" as the Bible says, back to God. And my questions centered around where to give this money. I was torn because on the one hand, the church seems like it's doing fine, not really in need of my measly 10%, but the homeless person on the corner, however, could really benefit from what I was giving. And I think it finally occurred to me, while listening to one particular sermon at church, that it's not as much about where the money goes, it's about where the act of giving comes from. Is it from a sense of obligation? Or is it from the heart, from a place of helping, from a place of thankfulness? Tithing, and everything else that we do as part of our life of faith, is about the practice. And it's through this practice that we learn. We're not out to win. The goal is to learn how to live better, to represent Him in all we do. It's what's behind our actions and habits that leads to long-term peace and fulfillment.

You know, the long-term view often feels counter to what we're used to. What makes it difficult is that it requires something that many of us have become less accustomed to practicing. And that thing is patience. Being more patient in different areas of your life will improve those very areas of life. I strongly believe that. But as it applies to healthier living, I'd like to relay a couple of thoughts from James Clear, author of Atomic Habits. This is from an interview that Amy Porterfield did with him on her podcast (<https://www.amyporterfield.com/295>). I'll paraphrase what he said. He said, "good habits make time your ally. Bad habits make time your enemy. If you have good habits, all you need is for time to work for you. You just need to be patient. If you have bad habits, you put yourself behind a little bit more each day. That's why small habits matter so much. They don't just add up. They compound." I cannot say it better than that. The challenge with any compounding process is that the returns and results that we can see are delayed...they don't come overnight. Sometimes they don't come over months! But that doesn't mean that change isn't happening. That is why patience is key. In this same interview, James Clear used an example of melting an ice cube. If you walk into a room where the temperature is 25 degrees, and there's an ice cube sitting on the table, you can gradually heat the room one degree at a time, and still see no noticeable difference in the ice cube all the way up to 32 degrees. But above 32 degrees (the freezing level), the cube will begin to melt. It doesn't mean change hasn't been occurring from 25-32 degrees, it just hasn't been perceptible to you. Same thing with the final chop of cutting down a tree, or winning the championship game, or finally meeting your goal weight. We notice the final act, and oftentimes become impatient when we haven't reached that threshold yet, but change is happening. By practicing healthier living habits, you are making progress, even if you can't see it. You're not only getting healthier inside,

you're learning or re-learning how to sustain and maintain these habits in your life. There's progress happening...changes occurring. And just like the ice cube that starts to change, your change is happening as well. But patience is key. Don't give up before you notice your change.

One of the challenges with having patience in fitness, particularly as we exit our 20s, move through our 30s and into our 40s, is that changes in our bodies that occur due to age and metabolism, work against us and how we view ourselves. We're more susceptible to add weight, exercise may become harder as we realize that we're not quite able to perform at the same level that we used to. On top of that, many of us are in a busier time of our lives as we're raising families and the demands of work are increasing as we're progressing in our careers. When you add all of this up, frustration can occur because we feel like the work that we're putting in should equal the same outcome as it did when we were 25. Unfortunately, the math doesn't work that way. However, while all of these things that I pointed out do indeed work against us, we have something in our favor. Life, experience and maturity (and maybe even having kids), has taught us to be more patient. At least I hope it has. But you can use that to your advantage. Once we understand that the ripped abs, super slim hips and really toned arms were more of a function of our age vs. the work we put in back in the day, and we learn to accept some of the changes in our body that come over time, and be comfortable with who we are (still healthy, but comfortable), then it frees us up to do the important things related to health and fitness. Things like staying consistent with exercise vs. going 110% at every workout like we used to. Things like getting the rest our body needs to recover and destress vs. staying up into the wee hours like we did when we were younger. Times change and so do the requirements for health. Be patient with yourself, and remember it's about long-term health, not a fitness competition.

But much like we often do with our fitness, we take steps in our nutrition habits (sometimes drastic steps) expecting to see almost immediate results of our efforts, usually through a slimmer figure. But nutrition doesn't necessarily equal weight loss. And weight loss doesn't necessarily equal health. Let me explain. We eat to nourish ourselves. Nutrition is about getting the fuel our bodies need to function efficiently and to perform throughout the day. Can that happen without us visually noticing any external change? Absolutely! It happens every day. When I drink my 100 ounces of water throughout the day, I don't necessarily see a change in my body, but I know that I feel better, move better, am less susceptible to cramping, etc. when I drink water than when I don't. Do I see the effects of that multivitamin, or even of my daily consumption of salads? Usually not. But over time, I absolutely see the effects of fast food day after day, excess sugary drink consumption and constant snacking on deserts and highly processed foods. I want you think about nutrition at the metabolic level, not at the waistline level. When we eat healthier, our body is better on the inside. Sometimes you will see this on the outside, but not always. So be patient as you approach your nutrition habits. And realize too, that just because someone is skinny doesn't mean they're healthy. Again, that's because health is about more than just a slim figure. We need

to manage our weight for sure, but I'd take health over skinniness any day of the week. I hope you would too. Be patient with nutrition.

How about patience and stress? You know, I often wonder...is impatience the thing that causes the most stress in our lives? Think about it. What are the stressors that you have right now? A sick family member? Not knowing how your next performance appraisal will turn out? Are you wondering what your next job will be? Perhaps another question to ask is if the stressors that you have right now, today, are the same ones you had 10 years ago. I'll bet they aren't. In fact, you probably can't even remember the stressors you had 10 years ago. So, the point is that if we wait, our problems usually pass with time. Now, that's not to say that the outcome will be exactly what we want. It's also not to say that we just sit, do nothing, and wait all the time either. Now, sometimes doing nothing is the right thing to do. But more than anything else, being calm and patient during the waiting period is what will serve us best. Patience isn't just about waiting. It's about how you act and how you feel while you're waiting. You want to lower level of stress in your life? Try practicing a little more patience in every aspect of your life.

When it comes to marriage, it's not uncommon for us to show the least amount of patience and grace to the person that we should be closest to – to the person that said they'd spend the rest of their life with you. Why is that? Why is it that we sometimes take out frustrations and circumstances on our spouse? I think it's partly because we're around them more than anyone else, so by definition, they have more opportunities to experience our frustrations. It's also because we know our spouse better than anyone else, and vice versa. And the more you know someone, the more likely you are to identify differences between you and your spouse. Differences in thought, in opinion, in the right way to do things, in child rearing, in finances and just about everything else that comes with being a part of a family. But do you know what overcomes all of this? All of the differences and frustrations? It's love and patience. We have to practice both. I've said before that love is a verb and you have to practice it. Patience is a trait, a characteristic that we also get through practice. Ryan Holiday, author of a number of books related to Stoic practice, has said that we should be disciplined with ourselves and patient with others. Demonstrate patience with your spouse. Your spouse deserves it.

As parents, the funny thing is that what tries our patience the most is our kids! Is that bad to say? I mean, there are a number of reasons for this. They're young, they're growing, they don't understand the importance of time, of our time, of doing what we tell them to do...and on and on and on. So, what are we going to do about that? Well, of course we're going to teach them. We're going to help them grow and learn, and we're going to help develop them into the people they want to be. But none of that happens overnight. And that's one reason why we have to be patient with them. And remember, just because they don't understand how important our timeline is to us, or just because they don't understand why they can't have candy while their friend has candy, doesn't mean that we need to try to make them understand

overnight. Yes, we need to instruct them on those things, but more than anything, we need to just be patient. I need to be patient. Our kids' misunderstanding or not knowing what's important to us, particularly when they're young, is not their fault. That's part of growing and learning. But when we lose our temper, get upset or frustrated because of it, that is certainly our fault. Practice patience in parenting. It will strengthen the relationship you have with your children, it will grow you as a person, and set an example for your children that they will remember when they are parents.

You know, faith and patience go hand in hand. That's because we have to have faith while waiting for prayers to be answered or blessings to occur. But that's exactly why faith is important. It's just that...it's being secure in the fact that God is in control, even when it seems like we've lost complete control of what may happen. Faith is resting in the fact that it will be ok. Patience is being at peace while you wait. Each is important and both are required if you want to grow to be more like Him. So, what is it that prevents us from practicing faith and patience? More specifically, what is it that prevents you from doing these things, because each of us likely have different reasons. I can't answer that for you, but I will encourage you to practice patience in your daily life. It will bring you closer to living the life of faith that you seek to live.

So we've talked about the long-term view and being patient. But the truth is that life puts obstacles in our way and deals us setbacks from time to time. It happens to all of us. We have the best intentions of starting a journey toward better health, only to become overwhelmed by life events, other obligations, and obstacles. So, what's the fix? How will things be different this time?

Really what we're talking about here is overcoming obstacles as they arise and handling setbacks. No one is perfect, but having the resiliency to continue, to press on even when things don't go your way or when they don't go as planned...that's the key to continued success. And your best chance for success is to first identify obstacles and then to develop solutions before they become an issue. On any given day, there are plenty of things that can prevent you from reaching your goals. So, ask yourself, "what could get in the way now?" Identify those possible stumbling blocks and obstacles, and figure out how you will overcome them now.

I like to take a three-step approach to tackling anticipated obstacles. First, identify it. Next, anticipate it. And finally plan for it.

Some of the obstacles that I tend to identify are a lack of time, family obligations, work responsibilities, and things of the sort. I then anticipate those things popping up, and try to figure out a plan to tackle those things...right now...*before* they arise. It's important to understand that in times of stress or uncertainty, we revert to what we know and what's comfortable. This could look like blowing off

that workout altogether, or skipping that healthy meal for a more convenient unhealthy snack, or choosing the easy road of giving your loved one the silent treatment instead of apologizing. But if we've anticipated those missteps and we have an idea of how to address them, we're better postured to make a healthier decision. Plan for obstacles that could hamper our progress and remove uncertainty by determining how to deal with them beforehand.

But what about the unexpected? You can't plan for everything. Things come up that you didn't anticipate or had no control over. This is when flexibility and some self-forgiveness is key. Remember to keep the bigger picture in mind. It's about the long-term and being patient throughout. Be flexible, and when you can't do everything you set out to do, do what you can. If you couldn't get that workout in, what can you do? If you couldn't have that healthy meal, what can you do? Remember that 50% of doing something healthy is better than 100% of doing nothing healthy. And there's always some way to improve in your own healthy actions.

Obstacles will come. The key is in how you plan to avoid them, and when they're unavoidable, in how you handle them.

So, let's briefly talk about handling setbacks with your fitness goals. Do you beat yourself up when you don't meet your fitness goals? Week after week, I plan for that "perfect week" of hitting my workout goals and running the gamut of exercise types and stretches that my body needs to stay fit. And week after week, I miss the mark. Michael Jordan is quoted as saying, "I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed." What this makes me think of is that it's not the outcome of the attempt, it's the attempt itself. So, I planned for five workouts this week and only did three or four. I meant to exercise for an hour but only had 20 or 30 minutes in me. Those attempts, those apparent failures are actually successes when you consider the fact that it's better than nothing, and you're instilling habits to exercise through a bias for action, vs. habits to avoid exercise for whatever reason. Keep striving. Make today better than yesterday. Setbacks are temporary. Determination is eternal.

With nutrition, trying to stick to a diet or nutrition plan can seem futile. It's hard. It's hard for me, at least. Now I've learned to fit healthier eating into my lifestyle, whereas before I tried to fit my lifestyle around particular diets. What are some ways that I do this? I plan for the unexpected. You will rarely find me without the bottle of water that I carry around. I also think ahead to anticipate times when only less healthy options will be available, or when I'm susceptible to skipping meals. That's why I often carry healthier snacks as a backup. Also, I know I have more will power earlier in the day, so I'll typically have a healthy breakfast at home and pack a salad for lunch. Then I've at least made over half of my meals for

that day healthier. And when these things don't work? When I gorge myself with Turkey and all the fixins like I did over Thanksgiving, I move on. I don't sweat it because I know that one meal, one day, one week even, doesn't define my regular. I try to be more healthy than not. That's what better nutrition is. And that's what I try to practice.

Now, stress...we often underestimate the effects of stress on our lives. I suppose it's common to think about stress and how it makes us feel from day to day, but the impacts of stress on our attempts at healthier living is not something that we typically account for. I've said before that trials, difficulties and even lapses are a part of your growth process. But did you know that lapses and inconsistencies in your attempts to improve are much more likely during periods of your life when your stress levels are high? Busy time at work? Maybe that's why your diet is shot. Stressful time at home? Perhaps your inconsistent workouts mirror those same periods. Working through health issues? Maybe you've lost faith and have veered away from believing. Stress has a number of effects on who we are, how we act and how we respond. Some of those effects are things that we don't even realize. Understand that stressful periods make it harder for you to reach your goals. And work extra hard to keep doing those things that you can to help manage the stressors...a good diet, regular exercise and staying strong in your faith.

Setbacks in Marriage: No marriage is perfect. We all have missteps and things that, as we look back on them, we would have done differently. I shouldn't have said that. I shouldn't have reacted that way. I should have given her a little more grace. I should have done a better job at considering his feelings. Your marriage partner is the person you spend the most time with on this earth. You share together, love together, and yes, argue with each other. As I said, it's partly a function of the sheer amount of time you spend together, but it's important to remember that each of you, each of us are human too. We're humans with emotion...with good days and bad days. And sometimes we take it out on one another. So now what. How will you respond? Your next steps will either make things better or worse. But remember some of the principles that we've already talked about. Patience. The long view. That's what marriage is about. And I'll add one more...forgiveness. I'd say that one of the things that both my wife and I have gotten better at over the years is having grace and forgiving. That's not a pass to treat each other badly, but it is something that becomes easier with time if you're open to it. Keep a mindset of grace and forgiveness. Say "I'm sorry." Say "I forgive you." You'll find that handling those setbacks and missteps in marriage gets a lot easier when you do.

As parents I think it's critical to ask ourselves this very important question: Who are you growing? Are you growing a kid who gets straight As or finds his or her passion and goes all in? Are you growing a kid who follows all of the rules and directions or one that isn't afraid to push the limits, experiment, innovate and create? Are you growing a kid who answers questions or solves problems? Are you growing a kid who accepts the answer or asks tougher questions? What's the goal here? There is no right answer,

but unless we think about that question, it's possible to just stumble our way through this parenting thing, and that would be a disservice to our children. And once we figure out what the goal is with our parenting efforts and with our kids, then we can have a better understanding of expectations and put their supposed missteps into context. If the goal is to develop your kid's extensive talent for art, maybe we don't come down as hard when they don't get straight A's in math and science. This is a key in handling what you perceive as their misstep. And when it comes to our missteps? Perhaps the biggest thing is admitting when you're wrong. As parents, we don't often feel like we can or should do that...highlight our missteps. Don't feel like you have to always be right as a parent. When you apologize to your kids or point out times when you were wrong, you actually strengthen your relationship with them. And you set an example of humility and honesty. And isn't that what we want our kids to embody?

And finally, handling setbacks in faith...there's a song called "Blessings," by Laura Story. In it, she sings, "What if trials of this life are your mercies in disguise." What a powerful thought. It speaks to perspective, to perspective that, without faith, we would otherwise ignore. Faith allows us to put things into context. Even bad things, and even if we don't fully understand them, we can still believe that things are going to be ok and that things happen for a purpose. Tony Robbins is quoted as saying, "Sometimes God lets you hit rock bottom so we can again realize that He is the rock at the bottom." And the Bible itself, in Psalms 119, verse 71 says, "It was good for me to suffer so I could learn your lessons." What is all of this saying to us? It says we may not know what's going to happen. We may not understand why bad things happen. But perhaps it's not always for us to know. God is in control of this story, not us. And that's discomfoting to many. Sometimes it's discomfoting to me. But we're comforted when we believe. We're comforted when we know that through Him all things are possible and that ultimately He wants what's best for you. God will not protect us from what He can perfect us through. There will be trials. We will endure challenges. But these things are much easier to handle when you know that everything happens according to His will, and that for everything, there's a purpose.

That's it. The final episode in this seven-part series on personal growth, AND the final episode of the year. Think long-term. Be patient. And remember that obstacles pop up and setbacks are a part of life. But you can plan to avoid them, and when they're unavoidable, handle them with patience and a long-term mindset.

Thank you for your time and for listening. My hope is that this series, this podcast have helped to make 2022 more productive for you. And I wish you nothing but the best in 2023.

I'll take any feedback you have, and if you like this content, please spread the word, leave a rating or a comment.

One final reminder to download my “Principles for Personal Growth.” You can find it at www.tdfitness.net. It's a one-pager, it's free, and I created it for you to help you grow in different areas of your life.

Thanks again.

Coach T, out!