

Is Now the Best Time for Growth?

There are two extreme ends to the way we can look at goals in our lives. On one end is the desire to do everything all the time, to go all out, to be forward leaning in almost every aspect of your life, and to seek to achieve perfection and minimize wasted time. On the other end is inaction, passiveness, apprehension about taking the leap into the unknown. And as you can imagine, neither of these extremes is particularly healthy or a good approach for every situation. The focus of this podcast series is on thriving through balance. And in order to approach betterment and personal growth in a balanced manner, you'll need to find the sweet spot between going all out all the time and paralysis through inaction. The key is in finding the right time, in practicing tactical patience when needed, without avoiding change because of fear or procrastination. You may be ready now, but is it the right time (in your life and given your situation and surroundings) to make a change for the better? Let's unpack that here.

There have been several instances in my life when I've put off improvement or making myself better because I was simply scared to make the leap. We talked about this in Episode #123. But there have also been a number of times when I started something prematurely, or at least without taking into account the myriad of other things that I had going on. And as a busy, focused and driven individual like many of you are, moving out in that manner can be just as detrimental to our goals.

So, the two questions I want you to think about through this episode are:

1. Are you ready?
2. Is now a good time for change, growth or improvement?

Let's start with the question, "Are you ready?" Are you ready to change something in your lifestyle? Are you ready to commit to a different set of priorities? Are you ready to do what needs to be done to achieve the results you seek? Are you ready to grow? These are all questions that you really need to consider before investing time and resources into your next steps. And perhaps one of the most important things to point out is that it's ok to not be ready right now. Each of us are at different stages of readiness in our lives, and we're also at different stages in different areas of our lives. But the good thing is that whether you're ready or not, you can absolutely get ready. You can move forward. Let me provide a construct that may help with that.

Through my personal trainer and health coaching education and training, I was exposed to a model that helps us determine where an individual is with respect to readiness for change. This model is called the Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change. It's a fancy way of saying that there are levels that define a person's readiness for change in any particular endeavor. The model is used in different types of coaching paradigms and psychological constructs and it consists of five stages of change, or growth. An individual can only be in one of these five stages at a time. The five stages are:

1. Precontemplation
2. Contemplation
3. Preparation
4. Action
5. 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 think that the amount of effort required to grow or improve in an area of their life is beyond their ability, and subsequently see the goal as being impossible to achieve. Precontemplators may say, "I won't do this," or "I can't do that."

At the next level, 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 at a particular thing. This is the, "I might" crowd.

And then, our level 3 folks are those in the preparation stage. These individuals are preparing for growth by seeking out opportunities to do so. These individuals combine intent with behavior and actions. Those in the preparation stage may say, "I will do this."

In the fourth stage, the action stage, you are consistently acting in ways that contribute to continued growth and improvement. You seek out opportunities to maintain those practices. Those in the action stage say, "I am doing this."

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 am still doing this."

Now, with this model, there are a couple of general rules to be aware of as you look to improve or grow. The first is that you don't try to jump multiple stages. After you determine which growth stage 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. Next, it's entirely possible to 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. These areas could include fitness, nutrition, stress management, parenting, marriage or your faith or spiritual life.

So, think about these five stages or levels of readiness for change. Think about the goal you're considering, and ask yourself, what's my level of readiness? If you're not quite where you want or need to be, you can take the necessary steps to move to the next level. But the exercise should help you answer our first question...are you ready?

Now, for question number 2, is now a good time for change, growth or improvement? What's going on in your life? What's happening around you? Is this a particularly stressful period? The number and level of external stressors are some of the greatest predictors of success or failure in our efforts. External factors absolutely get a vote in how successful you will be with your goals. So, is now a good time? Are these circumstances going to allow you improve, or will they keep you from improving. It doesn't have to be the best time for change, and your circumstances don't need to be optimal, but it can't be the wrong time either.

I get it. We've all 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." But change is hard to achieve even when everything is going our way. And where many of us stumble is in embarking upon a personal growth or change journey either before we're ready or at the wrong time given everything that's going on around us. Think about it from a sports analogy standpoint. If you're a world class sprinter, or any other type of athlete, your goal is to match your peak performance or readiness with race day or game day. You want your team to peak during the run to the championship, not early in the season. 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 good timing. Notice I didn't say optimal timing...we don't want to wait for perfect conditions either. So even if you're ready to change or to grow in some area of your life, 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. Now again, I'm not advocating procrastination. Don't necessarily wait for the stars to align, but consider waiting until there's better alignment if you need to.

But ask yourself, how are the external stressors in your life affecting your ability to live healthier? Sometimes we do ourselves a disservice by not even considering that question. Sometimes we may not

even realize the amount of stress we're under, or the multiple things we're trying to juggle already. This is particularly true for those of us 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 what little "spare" time I have, 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 all of us. So, the key, as we think about our environment or surroundings, and the things that we can and can't 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 we live and how we feel. Is now the right time to try to improve in a certain area of my life or should I wait for this temporary period of higher stress to subside? I said this before, but it's worth repeating. External stressors are one of the greatest predictors of success or failure in our efforts. So, take stock of the multiple things you have going on. Write them down. And consider how long the temporary stressors and obligations will last. Either make "now" less stressful by offloading some of the distractions or stressors if you can, or choose a time to start that increases your chance of success.

As I've come to ask myself these questions on numerous occasions, I've come to realize that in my life, my faith often better influences my decisions or helps me come to terms with the timing component of what's happening around me. God's timing is intentional. Now, it may not always align with what I think is perfect timing, but it is intentional nonetheless. There's a song by Christian artist, Tauren Wells, called "Joy in the Morning." And in that song, there's a line that states, "It ain't even faith until your plan falls apart and you still choose to follow." I've leaned on this line more and more as I've recently questioned the timing of some significant changes in my life. But when you look at things this 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 your outlook. It certainly changes and affects mine. I've come to trust that sometimes, many times, growth occurs when I don't feel ready for it or when I'm not expecting it. That's the point...to grow you through that circumstance. I often refer back to a quote I read some time ago that says, "God will not protect you from what He can perfect you through." So, as I think about whether I'm ready for growth and whether this is a good time, I'd offer that when it comes to faith, spirituality, and 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, back to our opening questions...are you ready, and is now a good time? Well, you can determine your level of readiness. And you can assess whether this is a good time or not...and act accordingly. But also remember that you can't control everything...perhaps what's required sometimes is trust.

Thanks for listening.

Coach T, out.