

## Be Consistent, Not Perfect

I'm busier now than ever. Work demands, family obligations, health and fitness requirements, and all of the things associated with this, my passion...this podcast and helping you through some of my experiences. It can really be a lot. It is a lot. I'm sure many of you can relate to being busy and feeling like you're pulled in so many directions. So how do I remain positive? How do I deal with the stressors of balancing competing demands on my time and in my life? In this episode I want to provide both a framework and some examples of how I approach that very thing.

Throughout the first few episodes of this year, we've focused on some of the aspects of a mindset that can help you go from unproductive to not just more balanced, but actually to thriving in certain areas of your life. Our mindset is so very important. I mean, you have to believe in yourself. You have to have a sense for the type of person that you want to be. You have to know what's driving you...what's your why? And you have to get out of your way by being honest with yourself about your internal fears, letting the past go and utilizing your strengths.

But there's more that's required than just a mindset. Mindset alone won't produce results without some type of action...consistent action. My stance is that the essence of consistent action comes in the form of the disciplines that you practice and the approach you take. One of the ways to set the foundation of consistent action is by understanding whether you're ready to change and improve, and in understanding whether what's going on around you is conducive to you reaching your goals. This was the topic of last week's podcast, Episode # 125, "Is Now the Best Time for Growth?"

The challenge with any change or personal growth initiative is filling in the difference between where you are right now and where you want to go, who you want to be. There needs to be a plan, an approach to walk the path. So how do you move toward your goals and how do you make those steps a part of your daily life? It's been said that vision without action is merely a dream, but action without vision is a nightmare. Well, the goal, the vision is to build better habits. Habits are the building blocks. We tend to focus on the goal, but we need to focus on habits. Why is this? Well, think of this this way. If the goal is to grow so that you can improve your lifestyle in some way, remember that a lifestyle is made up of behaviors...how you act from day to day. Behaviors are defined by the actions you take. And what are repeated actions? They're called habits! So, habits are key. They define who we are and how we are. Think about it. Those who are deliberate about practicing healthy habits are generally healthier. But this concept applies to more than just fitness. Those who practice their faith and put it into action are living a more spiritual life. And the converse is also true. If you have unhealthy habits, your health will be worse. And if you don't do things that will get you closer to the parent or spouse you want to be, you'll move

farther away from being that person. Sounds simple, right? Well, it sounds simple but it can be harder to put into practice.

I acknowledge that it's difficult to put action behind our intentions...to move closer to the person you want to be. But the best way that I've found to get there is through relevant and consistent habits. The most important thing in personal growth, no matter what area of your life you're looking to improve, is to practice consistent habits over time that will grow you as an individual in those areas. Sporadic habits won't do it. Consistent habits practiced only for a short time won't do it. And obviously negative habits won't get you where you need to go. It's relevant habits practiced consistently over time. You can't rush it, and you must remain consistent. Not perfect, but consistent. And once a habit is formed, it's your new normal.

So, where should you start to make a habit consistent? This part is easy. Start small...small enough to make that action something that you can maintain and sustain. Remember, habits are the building blocks of behaviors, and behaviors, those actions that you consistently take, define your lifestyle. Therefore, for long-term growth, start small and grow through consistency. Starting small can make your habits sustainable and consistent. At this stage, it's not just what you do...it's that you do something. And it's that "something" that needs to be maintained. How small should you make your new habit? You may be thinking that if you just barely move the needle a little bit at a time, you'll never reach your goal, right? But it's important to understand that although it may not have a huge physical impact on your eventual goal of being the person you want to be, starting small is how you begin to instill the mindset of being that person. So, what I teach is to take small enough steps to create psychological wins, but large enough steps to be a slight physical challenge. This approach is better than taking on more than we're ready for. If you think you can begin a new habit by practicing it 5 times a week, try starting with 2-3 times a week and see how it goes. It's better to grow a small positive habit than to fail at a larger attempt, get discouraged and give up completely. Get some wins in your corner. Then add more as you remain consistent with your habit. This will increase your confidence in both your attempts and your overall ability, and that confidence will spread to other areas of your life as well. That's the snowball effect of success. Long-term growth starts small and is developed through consistency. Constantly achieving small victories will help to develop habit patterns that lead to lifelong growth.

There's another important aspect to consider as we talk about consistency. We sometimes tend to assume that consistency should equal perfection. But consistency over time does not mean perfection all the time. In fact, striving for perfection usually has the opposite effect of the one you're looking for. Why? Because perfection is an unachievable goal. And when we fall short, and we will fall short when striving for perfection, it can have devastating effects on our motivation and self-efficacy (which is the belief in ourselves that we can indeed achieve our goal). So, I want you to remove the word "perfect" from

your vocabulary. Things happen to disrupt our plans. That's called "life." Things happen. But here are four keys to remaining focused on consistency over time, instead of perfection all the time.

1. Accept that you won't be perfect in your attempts. Voltaire said, "perfect is the enemy of good."
2. Build in slack. Don't just accept your imperfect attempts, plan for it! Plan short breaks or periods where you're not expected to follow your plan.
3. Remember that imperfect action is still action.
4. Avoid the "all of nothing" mindset. I missed my Monday workout so this week is shot anyway. I'll just try again next week.

Ok, so let's move past the framework and into some application. What does this look like in my life as I try to balance competing demands and thrive in each of them? I do focus on not only starting small, but keeping things small and sustainable until I can grow them. And despite the many different things that demand my attention, I know that I can't do everything so I don't try to do everything. I can't be everything to everyone. And when it comes to being consistent, but not perfect, having that mindset frees me to do what I can and not feel guilty about what I don't get to do. For me, it's a constant balance of family, health/fitness, work, and TD Fitness. So, for example, though I'm at work during the weekdays, I add small habits like breaking away for a few minutes to see the girls off or to meet them when they get off the bus. Or even though I may go in really early in most days, I will try to be at home when they wake up and have breakfast with them on some mornings. My wife and I are deliberate about finding time, even short stints of it, to have lunch together, or to talk for a bit while the girls are otherwise occupied or asleep. And instead of trying to carve out an hour or more each day for exercise, I've been successful in using 20-30 minutes of my mornings for exercise and/or stretching. And when it comes to TD Fitness, which is the vehicle I use to exercise my passion of reach you all and to provide health and life advice, I'm constantly tempering the amount of time I spend on this, which is usually some early morning weekend time while the family is asleep, with the other demands on my time. I don't try to do too much. I'm not posting every day. And currently, I'm producing just one video or podcast each week. And guess what? If I miss a week here and there, that's ok, because even if 40 episodes in a year isn't as much as 50 episodes, it's still 40 more opportunities to share with you and to hopefully help you reach some of your goals. It's not perfect, but it is better.

You know, stress equals worry. When we place unreasonable expectations on ourselves or set artificial goals, we also set ourselves up for increased stress. Whether it's the pressure to maintain an unreasonable diet, the expectation to follow someone else's exercise regimen, to parent like someone else, or whatever it is, you have to be you and run your race. And understand that it's normal to have periods where you aren't as effective at meeting your goals. I try to remember that it's not about being perfect all the time, it's about consistency over time. I try to remember that I won't be perfect. I build some

slop into my plans and I add down time in working to achieve my goals. And I'm trying to get better at freeing myself to take action, no matter how imperfect that action is. Because as I've said, even imperfect action is action. It's not about being perfect. It's about getting better and reducing some of the stressors associated with a busy life. The busyness of life will continue, but it's easier to manage when you have a routine that's built on habits. With habits, there's a predictable pattern, one that allows for more white space in your schedule. If you just let life take you along for the ride, you're prone to stress because you never feel like you have control over what's going on. But if you're deliberate about your actions and habits, you'll be better able to handle and manage stressors as they come up.

So, in my life, it's those techniques of habit forming and practices and consistencies that allow me to balance and thrive amongst all that's going on. But it does start with a foundation of faith for me though. So, I also have habits that I practice for my faith. I read the Bible, do daily devotions, attend church regularly, listen to praise and worship music, and I pray and reflect on the Word. And I'm not going to lie, practicing habits isn't always easy, but it certainly gets easier the more you do it. And it's comforting to me to know that God isn't looking for perfection. He simply wants better for me and you.

That's all for this week, family. Until the next time, I want you to think about what small thing you can start doing, not necessarily to get you closer to being the person you want to be, but rather to get you into the practice of doing something that is representative of the type of person you want to become. And give yourself the freedom to just get into the habit, and to not be perfect. Because we're already perfect in His eyes.

Have a blessed one. Coach T, out.