

The Mindset for Reaching Your Dream Goal No Matter Your Fitness Level

Did you know that you already have the tools that you need to reach even your most unbelievable fitness goals. It doesn't matter what your current fitness level is. Today I'm going to tell you where to start. And I'm going to do that through a story of my own. See, in 2015, at the age of 40, I sought out to do the impossible...to complete a full Ironman race...a 2.4 mile swim, a 112 mile bicycle ride, followed by a marathon of 26.2 miles. A total of 140.6 miles. But this story and this lesson isn't about the size of the feat. Or how outlandish your goal is. Because for some of us, just running a marathon, or a half marathon, or learning to swim, or running a 5K, or walking a mile, or walking again...may seem like a pretty unbelievable feat right now. But what I've learned, through my experience, through having the opportunity to work with many others, is that before we get to the "doing" part, we have to start with the thinking part. Every goal, from the simplest to the most challenging, starts with your mindset. So today, in this episode, I talk all about the mindset that will allow you to reach your dream goal, no matter your fitness level.

In order to gain a full appreciation for how this story developed, you have to understand a little about me. You see, I'm not someone who would typically be described as an endurance athlete. In fact, I didn't learn to really swim until a few years before the Ironman race. In 2010, I struggled to make it from one end of the pool to the other without gasping for breath at the end and holding on to the wall. Before starting to train for the Ironman 10 months before, I could count on one hand the number of times I had attempted to run or walk double digit miles. I suffered from knee pain, a lack of flexibility in one of my ankles due to previous basketball injuries, and as far as riding a bike for distance, I wasn't that guy either.

But somehow, I got this crazy notion in my head, roped a couple of friends and coworkers in, and the journey began.

It didn't matter who I was. All that mattered was who I wanted to be. I wanted to be someone who had done it. Someone who had completed a full Ironman. One of the 0.01%, or 1 in 10,000 who has done it. I wanted to wear the t-shirt. I wanted the Ironman tattoo, I thought. (I chickened out, but that's another story.) I wanted to prove to myself, my family, my friends, that my age, how busy I was, my lack of experience and athletic ability...doesn't have to stop us from achieving the unbelievable. That's how it began.

But I couldn't start this by jumping right into what I thought I needed to do. It had to start with the type of person I envisioned myself being. Decide who you want to be.

I had to ask myself, "who do I want to be? How do I see myself now, and how do I want to see myself? How do I want others to see me?"

By asking these questions, it helped me define where I was going. Knowing what to do is important, but knowing where you're going is the thing that will keep your eyes on the prize, especially when things get tough. And believe me, it will get tough. If your goal was easy, it would hardly be worth it, right? Another way to describe the importance of knowing where you're going, versus just knowing what to do, is this...you know how to drive, but knowing how to drive won't get you to your destination if you don't know where you're going right? Again, decide who you want to be. That's your destination.

So, the first thing to do is to decide who you want to be, the type of person you want to be. The next thing, the next requirement, is to believe in yourself. So many of us struggle with this. Who am I to think I can do this? Who am I to attempt to be one of those people? Who am I to think I could join the likes of triathletes?

I'm going to tell you a secret...something I've learned over the years. Something that most of us don't realize. You can actually change who you are and how you interact with the world right now. Right now! How? By changing your mindset. You become a believer by deciding to believe. You become a walker by deciding to walk. You become a runner by deciding to run. It doesn't matter what the world thinks or how the world defines it...this is your goal, your destiny, your dream. Own it. Make it yours.

There's simplicity in that concept. But there's also difficulty. I know it's not always easy to do. But I'm here to tell you, it gets easier the more you practice it. When you start believing you can do small things, reach small goals, those thoughts grow. And as you learn to believe in yourself, that belief spreads to other things in your life. It spreads to other goals. It spreads to other definitions of who you are. You have to believe in yourself.

Leading up to one of my races, I decided to get shirts made for the group of us that were participating in the event. On the front of the shirt was a reference to Philippians, chapter 4, verse 13. It says "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." My belief is grounded in my faith.

Luke chapter 1 verse 7 says that, "For with God, nothing is impossible."

I'm not telling you where to find your belief, but will tell you that I'm crystal clear on where my belief in my ability comes from. It come from my belief in God. That's the foundation for me, and it's where I find my strength.

Belief in yourself is critical if you're going to achieve your goal.

What made me think I could complete an Ironman? I'll be honest, and this is something that is often a help to anyone who's working to reach a goal. It's seeing that it can be done, especially if you witness it firsthand. As I think back, I distinctly remember first thinking that I may be able to attempt a distance or endurance event when I saw my wife cross the finish line of a half-marathon. That was really the catalyst in my distance journey. And for the Ironman specifically, I knew at least someone who had done this before. And I also remember a co-worker, Dan, telling me that I would complete an Ironman one day. And this was just when I had completed a couple of shorter sprint triathlons and one Olympic distance race, which is about a quarter of a full Ironman. But it's remarkable how people, including each of us, can actually speak things into existence.

I also remember seeing people reach their goals of shorter distance triathlons when they didn't think they'd be able to. I had seen others cross finish lines with me. All of these things somehow got me to believe the crazy idea of attempting and completing an Ironman could actually be a reality.

And though there were many, I'm sure, who had attempted an Ironman and didn't finish, I didn't know anyone who had attempted it and failed to meet their goal. Perhaps if I had, this would have been a different story.

You see, when we are exposed to something in our lives that is a reality, it becomes a reality, or a possibility at least, for our life. If you know someone who has accomplished the impossible, it's not impossible. If you know someone who failed to accomplish the impossible, it's still impossible for you...or so we often think.

I've told the story of the four-minute mile before, but I think it's appropriate here too. On May 6, 1954, British athlete Roger Bannister broke through a barrier that was previously thought to be impenetrable...a goal that was viewed as unachievable in track-and-field. He ran a mile in under four minutes. He ran it in 3:59.4 to be exact. Finally...a human had done it. Would it ever happen again? Well, 46 days later, it did happen again. Both Bannister and Australian John Landy crossed the finish line in under 4 minutes. Now two people had done it. The next year, three others ran sub-four minutes in the same mile-long race. The barrier was broken, and for all to run through. And since then, almost 1,800 people have run through it. If you believe it can be done, then it's possible for you too. Believe in yourself.

You also have to be clear about your reason for working toward your goal. What's your 'why?'

I mentioned that having a vision of the person you want to be is akin to having a destination. Well, having a reason for doing it, your 'why,' that's your engine. That's what will drive you.

And it usually has to come from within, in order to be sustainable. I could have attempted to train for an Ironman because someone told me they wanted me to do it. But that likely wouldn't have gotten me up on

those early mornings to train. Now, if someone had challenged me, that may have done it, but that too, is internal motivation. That's motivation to win...driven from within.

My real why for wanting to attempt this feat was multifaceted. But they were all meaningful to me, and based on things I value.

First, I wanted to show that a "regular person" could achieve this feat. This goes back to believing in yourself. I wanted to be an example that allowed others to believe that they could achieve the impossible. Since then, I've worked with a number of people now who have completed a long distance triathlon for the first time. I take pride in the fact that they may have seen my attempt and apparent success at reaching my goal, and I hope that they and many others are inspired by that. I want to be an inspiration to others. That is a meaningful and value-based why for me.

I also wanted to show that it's not all downhill from a health and fitness standpoint after age 30. I was attempting this for the first time at 40 years old. Call it a mid-life crisis if you want, but it was important for me to not be bound by societal beliefs and a mindset of "this is why I can't." I wanted to show that a mindset of "this is how I can" will take you farther than you'll ever think. This was also one of my meaningful "whys."

And I'd be lying if I said that, I didn't want to be a positive example to my wife our first daughter, who was only two years old at the time.

The last why that I remember driving me is one that continues to drive me today. I know so many people who have poured their heart and soul into a life of military service. And many times, we wrestle with how to balance that noble act of service with the things in life that are also important. Our health. Managing stress. Time with our families.

When I completed this Ironman race, I was serving in the most demanding role of my military career, as commander of a high-performing special operations unit. I wanted to show that if I, as the commander, could accomplish this, then really nothing should be impossible for those who have demanding careers and constantly seek to balance their health with the requirements of those careers.

So, I had several whys. And they all served to keep me motivated at some point through my training and on race day.

So, we've talked about deciding who you want to be, having belief in yourself, and being clear on your why. The last piece of your mindset that you have to consider is getting out of your own way. What do I mean by that? Well, there are a few things, that we do to ourselves, that can keep us from being the person we were meant to be.

The first is limiting beliefs, negative self-talk, and letting what others think affect us. There will always be haters. There will always be doubters. Forget about them. And be sure you're not a doubter of yourself and your ability. That's what this mindset is all about. It's about believing in yourself. I remember a number of times when I started to doubt myself and my ability. First, I was never fast. I was (and still am) slow. So, me finishing this race was not a foregone conclusion by any means. I would have training days where I knew that my pace would not cut it on race day. I would get tired. I wanted to give up from time to time. But one of the things I've learned in life is that if you let doubt take root, it will grow. As soon as I feel myself doubting, I talk positively to myself. I try to forget about the doubt...immediately. I don't want it to take root. I want to kill it. That's one way that I try to stay out of my own way.

Another thing within us that works against us reaching our goals is fear. It could be fear of failing, fear of discomfort, or strangely enough fear of success. Did I have a fear of failing. I did, on many training days. I did, on race day. It wasn't until I was about to cross the finish line that that fear went away. Your fear may be with you throughout. That's ok. But you don't have to succumb to it. You can embrace it. You can use it.

I also had a fear of discomfort. I'm human. We seek comfort, unless we condition ourselves to deal with uncomfortability, at least from time to time. Preferably on a regular basis. This makes you stronger. If discomfort is foreign to you, you'll flounder when life throws challenges your way. I was uncomfortable with just about every step when I was doing run training. (ha.) I really do not like to run. And if you think sitting on a tiny bicycle seat for seven hours is comfortable, I've got news for you. And swimming in the open water, where you can't see anything when your head is submerged, when others around you are flailing or kicking you, when you accidentally swallow water, or get stung by jellyfish, or the water is freezing (like it was on race day)...again, not comfortable! It's scary. I had fear. But every one of those fears that I overcame, either on race day or during my training, made me a conqueror. You're a conqueror too, when you prevail over even the smallest fear you may have.

And then I had a fear of success. What if I actually did it? Then there may be expectations to do it again. People may think it was easy for me and expect me always be in great shape. They may judge me when I was eating a cheeseburger or drinking a soda because the thought is that that's not what triathletes do. They may question why I wasn't a faster runner or better biker or swimmer. Didn't you say you completed an Ironman? Fear of success. Fear of labels. I dealt with it then and I still do today. I still struggle with this one. When I wear my Ironman shirt, I feel like there's a certain expectation to live up to. But I'm glad that I didn't make me shy away from achieving my impossible.

Look, we all have fears. But learning to leap despite your fears, will take you farther than you ever thought possible. Make the leap, despite your fears. Don't wait. Start before you think you're fully ready.

The final thing we can do to get out of our own way...let the past go. And don't dwell on the past. Instead, learn from it.

A couple of years before I attempted the 112 mile bike ride as part of the Ironman, I took part in a 75 mile bike ride. This event is a whole other story within itself. But I'll give you the punchline. I was the last to finish...by a lot. The course had pretty much closed down. My wife was worried, and pregnant. The chase car, the vehicle that stays behind the last participant, was with me from pretty much the 50 mile point until the end. I finished, but I didn't come close to making the time I wanted. And if my pace in that event was anywhere close to what I would eventually do in an Ironman, I would be wasting my time if I even entered the Ironman race. There would be no way to finish before the Ironman cutoff time of 16 hours. I was happy that I finished, but I was also disappointed in my showing. So, I had a decision to make. Would I decide that this distance biking thing, and by extension, distance triathlon simply wasn't for me? Or would I use that experience as motivation, and learn from it. I chose the latter.

I knew that my training wasn't adequate for that race. So, the next time I attempted something like that, I would train better.

I didn't let missing that goal and not living up to my past expectation define me. I let it inform my way going forward. You can do the same.

YOU define who you are. Your past doesn't define you.

Use your past experiences, because that's what they are...experiences, not failures...to inform how you should move forward. Those experiences don't determine what your next outcome will be.

I was able to let that past go in order to move forward. Again, you can do the same.

Many times, we're the only ones living in the past is you. We just need to move on.

Which brings me to one of the things that I got from Amy Porterfield in a course of hers that I took. She said "you are exactly where you're supposed to be." And what she was saying is that your past experiences - the highs, the lows, all of it - have brought you to this place, this moment, this situation, right here and right now. And you have a choice. You can view it as good or bad, or you can just acknowledge it. It is what it is. And understand that right now, in this moment you are more equipped to shape your future self, that person who you want to be, than ever before. You are more equipped to define who you will be than ever before.

Not only that, you're the best person to do it. You are most suited to define your future. No one else can do that as good as you can.

So, learn from the past. Live in the present. Plan for the future.

A great question to dwell on as we wrap up this episode, is "How will you use the tools you have, that you've acquired through the ups and downs of your past experiences to reach your health and fitness goals?"

Alright family. That's about all I have for Episode #128. It's good to be back!

I'll leave you with this: The mindset that will allow you to reach your dream goal, no matter your fitness level, consists of four key components.

- Start by envisioning the type of person you want to be. That's your destination.
- Believe that you can be that person.
- Be clear on your why, your motivation, your desire.
- And get out of your own way.

This mindset is the first part, a critical part, to moving forward and taking action toward your goal.

In the next episode, we'll talk about how to approach some of the disciplines and habits required to reach your goal. This is the action part. I hope you'll join me there.

Before signing off, a quick ask that you help yourself, help others, and help me.

Help yourself by downloading a short checklist that you can use to develop a mindset for achieving your goals. I created it just for you and it lays out the key principles that I laid out here. Help yourself by downloading a short checklist that you can use to develop a mindset for achieving your goals. I created it just for you and it lays out the key principles that I laid out here. You can find it at: tdfitness.net/mindset. That's tdfitness.net/mindset. You can also find a link on the page for this episode at tdfitness.net/128.

Help others by sharing this episode if you think it can be of benefit to someone you know

Finally, I'd appreciate it if you'd help me by liking or commenting on this episode or post. I do love to get feedback and I use it to make the things that I produce more beneficial to you.

That's all for now. Thanks for joining me.

Have a blessed one.

Coach T, out!