

How to Reach the Fitness Goals You Never Thought Possible

This is part two of my three-part series on enabling and empowering you to reach even your most unbelievable fitness goals. You have the tools. Hopefully after last week's podcast, you have the mindset. This week, I want to give you a way to approach the actions, habits and disciplines themselves. I'll do this by continuing the story of my Ironman experience. But as I said in the last episode, this isn't just a story about triathlon. This isn't a story about distance races. This is a story meant to highlight some fundamental things that are required to reach any goal, particularly if it's a stretch goal for you...something that you're not quite sure you can achieve. Everything from walking a mile, to running a 5K, to exercising 3 times a week. It doesn't matter what level you're at. Stretch goals grow us beyond our present state. These are the best types of goals because they really push us to grow. And that's what this episode, this podcast and TD Fitness is all about - personal growth. So here we go...

When you set out to improve any aspect of your life, you really need to address three broad areas. These are based on my research, my experience in working with others, and my own personal experiences. Those three areas are a growth mindset (that's what Episode #128 was about). The actions you take, the disciplines you follow, the habits you practice...that's what this episode is about. And the perspective that you maintain through the ups and downs of your journey. We'll talk about that in the next episode.

So, before jumping into the practices or disciplines required to actually reach your goal, let me remind you of the personal example I'm using to relay some of these principles. In 2015, at the age of 40, I sought out to accomplish a goal that was beyond imaginable and beyond scary for me. I wanted to complete a full Ironman race...a 2.4 mile swim, a 112 mile bicycle ride, and a 26.2 mile marathon, A total of 140.6 miles in under the allotted time of 17 hours. A little bit later in the podcast I'll get into why this was such a crazy goal for me, especially considering where I started from a fitness perspective, but needless to say, at the time that I decided on this as a possible goal, I had never done any fitness event longer than a couple of hours. So that's kind of where we are in this story.

As I said in episode #128, something like this has to start with your mindset. But the next piece of the puzzle, and the one most people think about immediately is "how will I actually do this?" How will I train? Where will I find the time? Can I even do this?

All very good questions. So, let's jump in on the first of three principles that I'll highlight today. We don't often think to ask this question, but perhaps the most important thing to ask ourselves at this stage is this, "is this a good time?" There's a lot to unpack here because on one hand, if you wait for the perfect time, you'll never move beyond where you are. On the other hand, if you go headlong into striving

toward your goal before you're ready or when your environment isn't conducive to your progress and success, you're setting yourself up for failure. So, it's important to consider these things.

Let's start with you, and the question, "am I ready for this challenge?" You know, one of the hardest things for us to do sometimes is to be honest with ourselves. But this is a fundamental question when you set out to reach your stretch goal. Are you ready? Are you bought in? Do you really believe in the end state you're trying to reach, or have you let someone else's goal or reality for you seep in?

You know, I've got years of experience as a personal trainer, and even more years as a health coach. The fundamental difference between the two is that as a trainer, I was more involved in setting goals for my clients. As a coach, however, I was more involved in helping them define and reach goals that they set for themselves. In fact, that's one of the reasons why I decided to become a health coach.

When it came to my Ironman experience, I had to look myself in the mirror and say, it's now or never. I'm not getting any younger. This will not be easier if I wait until later to try to achieve this goal. At the same time, though I wasn't prepared to reach my goal immediately, I was ready to do the things that were required to ultimately reach that goal. Ten months of training. Early wakeups. Long weekend workouts. Being uncomfortable. Improving my diet. Learning from others with experience in what I was trying to do. I had the mindset and outlook required to attempt what I once thought would never be possible. I was ready to start, and fairly certain that I could stay committed. And that was all that I needed from a personal level.

The obvious question for you here is this, "Are you ready to start, and do you think you can stay committed?" You don't have to be sure about the second part. In fact, I'm going to give you some techniques to help you stay committed and to make you more confident in that realm here in this episode. The other thing to consider when it comes deciding whether this is a good time to pursue your goal is what's going on around you. If reaching your goal involves doing things that will take a lot of your time, be honest about how busy you are right now, and how much extra bandwidth you truly have. What does your support system look like? Will you essentially feel like you're alone on an island, working against everything and everyone around you? If so, it's important to understand that. And if you can't do things to change it, then at least you're aware, and you can do things to ensure success despite those challenges around you. Or you can wait until things and people around you are more conducive to your success.

But be careful here. It's easy to fall into the trap of using the lack of support in our environment and surroundings, or our busyness with other things in our lives, as excuses to push off or delay our goals for improvement and a better life to a later, "more convenient" time. If you're making these decisions for convenience, then that's the wrong reason. If you're making these decisions to avoid hardship and maintain the easy road, that's the wrong reason. Something to understand here is that you can't train to

walk a mile without getting out and walking. It may be uncomfortable, but that's part of the deal. And you can't train for a marathon without putting in time to improve your cardiovascular capability. That's part of the deal.

For me, I was actually in what was possibly the busiest time of my life yet. My wife and I had been married for 7 years at that point, we had a 2 year old, our first daughter, I was in a leadership position responsible for a demanding military mission and the health and welfare of a number of people and their families, and I was still working through TD Fitness to grow the business and provide more to my followers. It would have been easy for me to say, I'm too busy right now to attempt something like this. It would have been easy for me to say, I'll just wait until my daughter gets a little older and I'm in a less demanding job. But as I predicted, those times never came. We had our second daughter a year later. And my "easier assignment" later down the road was defined by my mother's deteriorating health problems and her ultimate passing and going on to be with God. A lesson for me in all of that, and one that I try to pass on is that the calm after the storm that we anticipate or hope for may not come when we think. Perhaps we're in the calm right now, as hard as that may be for you to believe right now, and we just need to adjust our way of thinking to do more with what we're given and the hand we're dealt. Does it seem like you're in a storm right now? How does this period compare to past experiences? What do you anticipate or hope the next period will be like? Perhaps you should make today the day you decide to improve, versus waiting for a "better" opportunity.

Consider where you are, both personally, and with respect to what's going on around you. Both aspects are important as you decide your way forward in your growth journey.

This is an important concept, and it leads to the next fundamental principle in the practices and disciplines required to reach your goals. That is making your plan of attack about you, and not about the goal you're trying to achieve. Here's what I mean. As I looked at becoming an Ironman, what I saw were professional athletes on TV, their very fast times and seemingly effortless races. They made it look easy. And I saw more, I'd say "regular" people who had the Ironman tattoo, or who were training for races, but they all seemed to be following the traditional approach of eight to 14 hours of training per week. And I knew that I was neither the natural athlete that I saw those professionals as, nor was I even a regular athlete who could carve out that much time to train. Rather, I was a moderately fit, full-time employed military member, husband, and new father who was trying to grow a small business. And I knew I wasn't willing to sacrifice my family or my career to meet this lofty goal of becoming an Ironman. But I also knew that I have a knack for planning. From my personal training experience, I knew how to set incremental fitness goals, develop plans to avoid burnout, and gradually improve performance. And another strong suit of mine is being able to stick to disciplines that I set for myself. A lot of that comes from my training as a health coach and putting into practice the very disciplines that I try to pass on to you through this podcast.

So, I started with my strengths. I created a plan that required minimal training time in the beginning, and gradually stepped up the training each week to get to some rather long distances.

I started my journey where I was, not from where I wanted to be or where I saw others start. I made steps toward my goal integrate into the life I was living and the person I already was. I didn't have to start exercising. I simply modified my workouts and made some of them a bit longer in the beginning.

I capitalized on the strengths that I did have, versus trying to force my goal and change my weak areas.

Let me say that again. I didn't try to battle my weaknesses, instead I leveraged my strengths. You see, we usually default to drastically changing our lifestyles to fit the change we seek to make. Instead, make that change fit you. You have strengths. Use them.

The third principle I'll offer here to you is to take action through consistent habits. If you're a repeat listener or follower of TD Fitness, you know that I talk about habits and consistency...a lot. Why do I talk so much about this? It all starts with habits...just about everything we do, who we are, our state of health. Habits are the building blocks. If you have a habit of sitting down a lot and rarely moving around, that affects your health and who you are. Similarly, if you have an active lifestyle, that also affects your health and who you are. If you want to be healthier, that requires a lifestyle of healthier living, which requires behaviors that make up that lifestyle. Those behaviors are also actions that you take, and repeated actions are called...anyone? Habits! It's all about habits and being consistent with the actions that will get you to your goals.

Now, when it comes to habits, I like to talk about them in terms of the three P's - Plan, Prioritize, Practice. First, plan. Plan to do things that will actually have a positive effect on you meeting your goal. Or plan to do something that may not give you the most bang for your buck in progress toward your goal, but that will give you a mental or psychological boost that will add to your confidence and increase the likelihood that you will continue to keep pressing forward. Whichever way you decide to go, it's important to plan. I created a plan to prepare myself to complete an Ironman in 10 months' time. I created a plan that accounted for my personal desires, strengths, weaknesses, and time available. I added the completion of a half ironman as part of my training for the full ironman so that I could build the confidence I needed by reaching an intermediate goal along the way.

Now, planning is not necessarily a strong suit for everyone...I get that. But you can enlist or hire help. This is where a personal trainer or a coach comes in. Professional athletes have personal coaches and trainers to create plans for them, so there's nothing wrong with you doing the same thing. If planning is not your strong suit, outsource it. Just be sure the plan accounts for who you are as an individual. In addition to planning, you also need to Prioritize. "Oh, that's easy" you might think. Well, the truth is that it is somewhat easy to determine what's important, but prioritizing is more than just picking out the

important things. My goal was to complete an ironman, but time with my family, my duties and obligations at work, my rest...all of those things are important, i.e., "priorities" as well. In his book, Finish, John Acuff says that you need to determine what you will do and decide what you will bomb. What he's saying here is that everything can't be a priority. Yes, my family is of the utmost importance to me, but the decision to compete in an ironman had to be a family decision because they would have to sacrifice too. My work, while important, couldn't be a job in which I spent over 12 hours a day at. I needed to take some time to exercise, and to rest. Now, this is a tricky one because we often don't have the required amount of flexibility in our jobs to dial that back. If you do, then that's an option. But if you don't, perhaps you'll have to plan around your work obligations. But this brings up another point. Usually there's a lot more time available to us than we think. As the saying goes, "how did we spend all of our free time before we had kids?" Well, the truth is that you seemed just as busy then, you just spent your time on different things. That's what prioritization is about. For new parents, the kid is the priority. The kid's needs trump your personal desires to watch TV or take a nap perhaps. When we prioritize, we're saying what we're not going to do, just as much as we're saying what we will do or what's important to us. Where we tend to conflate things is by feeling as though the things you may not do right now are unimportant. But that's not the case. It's just that right now, during this period of time, I have a goal and my priorities have to temporarily be adjusted in order to meet that goal.

Some things to consider as you think about what your priorities should be...in what area are you closest to meeting your goal? If you're already close to being able to walk a mile, perhaps you set that as a goal to build your confidence, reach your milestone quicker, and use that momentum to propel you to even bigger goals.

Maybe you choose a goal that you can start right away. I'm going to park farther away from the entrance to get a few extra steps in. Or one of my personal favorites, pick something that excites you. You want to exercise more, but you don't like running? Use your excitement as a Pickle Baller to make that a bigger part of your exercise and fitness routine.

Or you could choose to prioritize things that get you closest to your goal in a shorter amount of time. Want to walk or run a 5K? Then prioritize walking and running.

Everything is a tradeoff, usually between the amount of time you have and the time and effort required to meet your goal. Or perhaps it's between practicing things you like to do vs. doing exercises that you don't like to do. Whatever it may be, your priorities are an expression of the plan or approach you landed on. And those priorities will guide your progress.

And speaking of progress, our final "P," you have a higher probability of success when you can be consistent, use small steps, and have some sort of accountability mechanism to keep you honest. I think a great example of this is the plan that I developed to reach my ironman goal. My training plan allowed me to focus on consistency over time, vs. perfection all the time. There were 4-5 workouts each week, mostly short workouts of 30 minutes or less, with a long workout on the weekend. I utilized high-intensity interval training to avoid boredom and keep the workouts short. I didn't plan to do something every day. I allowed for slack and some slop. I allowed for rest. The distances I was training toward increased gradually each week. Almost unnoticeable from week to week, but over time it was a good progression. The takeaway is that I planned to be imperfect. I knew there were some workouts that I may miss, but over the 10-month period, I completed the majority of them. Not perfect, but consistent over time.

And I built in slack. I took a complete week off every 4 weeks. This allowed for some room to make up for missed workouts or to just rest my body. I also took small, incremental steps. My goal to swim 2.4 miles in over an hour started with me swimming for 5 minutes in my first workout. My goal to bike 112 miles started with a 5 mile ride for my first workout. My goal to run a marathon started with a 2 mile run. And I very gradually built on each of these over the course of several months. That way, I knew my goals from week to week were achievable because I was only attempting a little bit more than I had done in my previous workout.

For me, my workout plan and being able to check off the boxes of each workout was my accountability mechanism. I could look back and see all that I had accomplished, vs. worrying about what was to come. I also had a peer group to keep me accountable. Most of us followed the same plan that I created. Sometimes we worked out together. Most of the time we didn't. But we always checked on one another to see how things were going. Whether you're the type of person who can hold yourself accountable with a tracking mechanism or log, or you're someone who needs a peer group, it's important to identify what or who will serve to keep you accountable as you work toward your fitness goal. We all need something to keep us on track.

So, there you have it. Aside from a goal oriented mindset, you also need to practice the disciplines that will actually get you closer to your goal. The three major takeaways here are first, your consideration as to whether now is the right time to work toward your goal. Consider whether you're personally and mentally ready, and consider what's going on around you and in your life. Second, make your goal about you. Leverage your inherent strengths. And finally, practice consistent habits. They will get you closer to your goal.

That's it for this episode, TD Fitness Family. Before I sign off, I'll ask that you help yourself, help others, and help me.

Help yourself by downloading a short cheat sheet of the principles and you can use to practice the disciplines for achieving your goals, no matter what they may be. It contains the things that I laid out here. You can find it at: tdfitness.net/practice. That's tdfitness.net/practice. You can also find a link in the show notes for this episode at tdfitness.net/129.

Help others by sharing this episode if you know someone who it can help.

Finally, I'd appreciate it if you'd help me by liking or commenting on this episode or post. I love your feedback, and I use it to make what I provide to you better.

Before you go, the thing I want you to remember this week is that consistent habits matter.

And with that, I'll sign off.

Have a blessed one.

Coach T, out!