

Ep #133 Transcript

Self-care isn't selfish. For the past four and a half years, I've had the privilege of leading military formations that consist of thousands of people. The common tendency, or at least my tendency when given this level of responsibility, is to work longer and harder to make sure you're doing everything possible to care for your people while getting the mission done. But what I've come to learn over the years is that self-care is not selfish. One of the leadership lessons that we're taught is to do the things that only you can do, particularly as your scope and span of responsibility increase. I know that when I take time for my fitness, my work decisions are clearer, my demeanor is better, I'm more rested, less stressed, and I'm a better husband and father. It's not working longer and harder that makes me a better leader. It's better balancing work and fitness that makes me a better leader.

There are a number of different types of work requirements depending on your job. But whether you're a CEO, business owner, contract worker, consultant, salaried employee, hourly wage worker, a non-profit worker, volunteer or anything else, you still need balance. The same is true whether your work is meant to generate revenue, to impact people's lives or to make a difference in the world. Personal balance is still necessary. It may feel like you have no control over what happens at work, much less your ability to reduce hours or step away for a bit to exercise. But I want to encourage you to focus on the things that you *can* control. If you can't control your work schedule or the amount of time spent at work, this means you must be more deliberate in controlling the time spent *outside* of work. Remember, you determine your priorities. The time you spend on different things in your life are an expression of those priorities. As Marc and Angel Chernoff have said, "You alone get to choose what matters and what doesn't. The meaning of everything in your life has precisely the meaning you give it." Control what you can control. If you can better balance work and fitness by exerting more control over the amount of time spent at work, do that. If instead, you must focus on the time away from work to seek that balance, then do that.

At times we get wrapped up in our circumstance or situation and spend too much time focusing on the wrong things. Just recently, I read a [post by Seth Godin](#) where he pointed out the difference between problems and situations. He noted that problems have solutions, whereas situations are simply things we need to live with. The mistake we make at times is in mislabeling problems and situations. The fact that your work situation legitimately prevents you from exercising when you want to isn't necessarily a problem. If you can't change that fact, then it's a situation that you must live with. But if you work long hours on your own volition, sacrificing health, fitness and other important things in life, that's a problem. And that problem can be solved.

The way I typically coach people through this is by applications of the word "and" versus the word "but." It's as simple as this. Instead of saying, "I want to exercise more regularly, but I have to work," change

your phrasing to, "I want to exercise more regularly, AND I have to work." This correctly labels your circumstance as a situation that you can accept and adapt to, versus a problem that you can't solve. Your situation is what it is. So how will you work through that situation to achieve a better balance between your work and your health?

As we look to get better at balancing work and fitness, understanding the difference between actual problems and mere situations is key. Once we understand that difference, we can work to solve our problems. This is where measurements of progress become important. We can't lose sight of the problem. The problem, in this case, isn't your health. Nor is the problem that you may need to lose weight. The problem is that there's an imbalance between work and fitness in your life. So, that's what you need to fix. Therefore, your progress toward that fix is what you need to measure.

It's easy to get confused and try to measure so called progress toward goals that aren't even a part of where we're trying to go. For example, let's assume you're getting fairly consistent with incorporating time for fitness into your schedule. Jumping on the scale after each workout, or measuring the size of your biceps aren't the things that are important in this case. What is important, as you look to better balance work and fitness in your life, is the fact that you made time for exercise 3 or 4 times this week. The fact that you deliberately left work earlier than usual to exercise is important. Making the decision to get up earlier to exercise before going in to work...that's important.

Progress can be measured in many different ways. But whatever way you choose to measure progress, make sure it's appropriate for the problem you're trying to solve and the goal you seek to achieve.

The goals I'm talking about here are achieving a healthier lifestyle, perhaps through better exercise habits as that relates to your professional lifestyle. A scale is a tool to measure progress when you're on a weight loss program (and not the best tool at that, but that's a topic for a different day). The types of things you may notice from better balancing work and fitness are things like more energy, better sleep, better decision-making, more endurance or stamina throughout the day, lower stress, or fewer aches and pains. Most of these things actually make you more productive at work, which is an added benefit. The challenge is that they are all either difficult to measure, or you don't realize the benefit until it's no longer there. For example, you may not notice that you are thinking more clearly, you just do. Or, you may not notice that you don't have pain, the pain just isn't there.

The point in measuring progress when it comes to healthier living is to focus on the things that you have control over. Track the actions you take toward your goal for better balance between work and fitness. The outcomes of these efforts aren't things that you can directly control. You control how often you create those balance moments. You don't directly control the results of your efforts. Now, the results you seek

are absolutely more likely when you are able to stay consistent with your actions, but you don't directly control the outcome of the work you put in.

It is important to focus on measuring the right things for two reasons. First, measurements are feedback. If you measure something that you can't control, you're more likely to get discouraged and give up. And if you give up, the probability of meeting your goal is about 0%. What you measure informs how you think about yourself and your ability to continue. Success, on the other hand, leads to the confidence required to continue. And that's ultimately what we want with lifestyle changes such as this.

The second reason why measuring the right things is important is because it gives us a better idea of what we may need to change going forward. If, for example, you didn't meet your goal of leaving work an hour early to exercise, that could mean that trying to leave an hour early was too difficult given the situation. Perhaps you try a half hour early. Or perhaps it could mean that leaving early is just not an option, and that perhaps you need to look at trying to exercise before work, or come in to work a bit earlier to allow you to depart earlier. Or maybe you move your goal to morning exercise a few times a week. Or perhaps you try to break away and come back over lunch. The feedback you get from measuring your ability to do any of these things will help you fine tune your path forward. And that's the important thing.

Let me say that again. The feedback you get from measuring your ability to do any of these things will help you fine tune your path forward. That's the important thing. It's worth repeating because this is another area where those who seek a healthier lifestyle can get distracted. At times we must ask ourselves, what am I really doing this for? In this case, why strive for better balance between work and fitness? Is it to lose weight? Is it to look better? I'd offer that it shouldn't be either of those things, but things like those may very well be side effects of the steps you take to better balance work and fitness.

I like to think of this as the long-term mindset. It's easy to understand when we think long-term vs. short-term. Put simply, all work and no fitness is bad for your health, and could very likely lead to higher stress and a shorter life. Period. That's the truth, and it's a long-term mindset. Weight loss, a faster 3 mile run time, six-pack abs...those are all nice, and each may contribute to your overall health, but each of those things still bring us back to a short-term mindset. I want longer, and better quality living for you. That's my goal.

I'll give you another example of a long-term mindset that I've come to appreciate more, especially after having children. I think a lot about the example I'm setting...for those around me, for my family, and for my children especially. Do I want them to grow up thinking that life is all about work? I want them to understand the importance of balance, and the importance of fitness. They will understand this through the example that I set. As a senior leader in an organization, I also think about the fact that many others in

the organization are actually looking at me, and my ability to balance - for better or worse, as they try to determine whether they want to strive to reach the position that I or their supervisors may hold. If I paint an imbalanced picture, what's the incentive for these junior members to continue? In many ways, the health and future of the organization depends on the example that I set as the leader. These are the types of things that a long-term view allows you to think about.

I remember listening to an interview with James Clear from a few years ago where 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."

When it comes to striking the right balance between work and fitness, it can be hard to do, especially if you've never known any different. And like any change in your life, it may take time to work into. But let me leave you with two more quotes and a final thought.

James Clear has also said, "New goals don't deliver new results. New lifestyles do. And a lifestyle is a process, not an outcome. For this reason, your energy should go into building better habits, not chasing better results."

And a quote from Amy Porterfield, "People quit because it takes too long to see results. The truth is that learning the process is the real result."

Be patient with your change effort. Every minute that you reclassify for self-care, isn't selfish. In fact, it's those balance moments that allow you to keep going as you carry the burdens and responsibilities of your work.

So that's it. A bit shorter episode to round out this series. Remember that like most things in life, balancing work and fitness starts with your mindset. It requires a disciplined approach, and your perspective remains important.

As always, thanks for listening. I hope you enjoyed this episode. If you think this can be helpful to someone else, please share.

You can also download my free single-page guide to gaining the perspective needed for success at tdfitness.net/perspective.

Finally, I love comments and feedback. They help me continue to provide content that is most useful to you.

And that's it! Remember, it's important to maintain the right perspective...it matters.

Thank you for listening, have a blessed one, Coach T. out.