



Willpower is NOT the X factor — so what is?

A client recently said something like this to me recently:

“I do an amazing job eating in response to my body’s needs. But when things get hard, I don’t seem to do it so well.”

I was so glad she brought that up because it is a point of contention for a lot of people who are trying to change their long set habits. Any time we push ourselves to try to incorporate new habits, to grow, change, improve, something always seems to set us off and we lose our groove and are left to watch everything blow up and have us reverting to our old ways, and sometimes even worse.

It’s a struggle we all go through. And it begs the question -

What does it take to become truly great at something?

There is a long list of things we can attribute to success, like...natural talent, motivation, and the big one - willpower.

I could be SO great! IF only I had more willpower.

How many of us believe that willpower is the greatest obstacle to our success in so many areas in our lives? As a coach, I hear it so frequently with my clients, about food, about exercise, about their short temper or lack of patience.

What I want you to know is that there is a good reason why you struggle with willpower. And I want you to know that there is a better way to reach the results you are seeking.

Willpower is not a gift. You aren’t born with it, you don’t inherit it, and it doesn’t come from just wanting it so badly. It is a conflict inside of you between something you want and something you should. What we need to focus on is that it is a conflict. And like any conflict, it needs a constant input of time and energy to maintain. As soon as any of your resources are challenged, your *wants* overcome your *shoulds*. Your willpower falters and you beat yourself up.

No matter what path you take, at the end of the day, any food or exercise or maddos plan is a system that you are trying to interject into your life. And like any system, if some part of the machinery is not connecting or calibrated properly, the system doesn’t work.

What I have come to understand is that you can't be successful implementing any system in your life if there is something blocking your access to your intuition.

In order to rely on intuition, we have to assume that you are in a regulated state. For example, people who are food deprived obsess about food and come to overeat it when they finally get it. People who are under duress may have a hard time sleeping even when they are tired. People who have suffered abuse turn away from those closest to them, even when they are reaching out with love and support.

If we are in a dysregulated state then our intuition is compromised. Our intuition breaks down and we are forced to rely on willpower - a willpower which will most likely break down as the odds are stacked against it.

Our challenge is that we quickly rush to work on willpower. How can I strengthen my resolve? What can I do to avoid situations that test my willpower? And all of those techniques can help to an extent. But the more pressing question is, "What is out of whack in my life that my Intuition isn't working? Why do I keep ending up in situations that are a test of my will?"

I've been working on a 5 step process that allows us to compassionately explore where we are uncalibrated in our day to day lives. Whereas willpower is a struggle, we are seeking to find a way to heal the different hurts that are causing us to be dysregulated. I took my client through these 5 steps and we were able to come to a remarkable place of acceptance that allowed her to stop fighting and stay the course.

The first step in our process of healing is to focus on our **values**.

What is my real goal? What do I value more? Is it to find solutions to the many pitfalls that send me running to food? Plugging up one hole in the sinking ship just to see another one pop open? Or is it to assuage the disruption inside that cause that desire in the first place? To fix the engineering problem that's causing all those holes?

Once you are clear that it is better to work on the root of your challenges than to chase the symptoms, you are ready to **tune in** to your body.

Find a quiet spot and allow yourself to slowly scan your body, looking for any pain, or sensation, or vibration you might feel inside. It might be a tightness, or a ball, or a big jumble of knots. Identify where you feel it and what is surrounding it.

Now that you have tuned in to the feeling inside, it's time to **listen**. Oftentimes, when we are scared to feel unpleasant sensations because we believe that we have to fix them. You don't have to fix those feelings. Just listen. What is the feeling trying to tell you? What does it want to teach you?

The next step is to find **compassion**. Without acting or answering, just create a space for that feeling to exist. It might help to envision it as a child. Can you allow this pained child the space to be? Can you love it and support it, even if you don't necessarily know how to "save the day" or make the hurt stop?

You are now ready to work on your **regulation**. We are often living our lives in a state of dysregulation. We run from one moment to the next without pause to appreciate what we need in each moment in time. We can't. We are too busy, out of breath, befuddled. When you can tune in to your body, listen to it, and respond with compassion, you will have the space to understand what it needs. That might be something physical, or spiritual. It might be the compassionate ear or shoulder of a loved one. It might be some moments alone to appreciate yourself and to hug yourself.

Compassion and regulation create a remarkable loop. The more compassion you give yourself, the more you are able to regulate yourself. The more you are regulated, the easier you will find it to give yourself compassion. As the cycle gains momentum, you will find that you are more stable, more involved in your own decision making. You will slide toward calibration.

Intuition isn't about willpower. It's about avoiding the willpower showdown. That's an interaction that saps us of vitality. But in order to live intuitively, you first have to live compassionately, accept your emotions, support them, and then get regulated.

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