

Q+A: On Bad Habits, Post-Race Fitness, and “Boring” Work

Clay: [00:00:00] Hello and welcome back to Excellence. Actually, I'm one of your hosts, clay Skipper, joined here by Steve Magnus and Brad Stalberg. Happy Thanksgiving week To those who celebrate, we are going to be celebrating in our own fashion and style and way here today by fielding some listener questions.

These are questions that have come in through the Growth Equation Academy, through our voicemail, through email, and we're very appreciative and thankful and grateful for this community, for you all, for listening. So we thought we'd take the opportunity today to answer some of these questions. If you recognize one of these questions as your own, thank you very much for sending it to us. If you're listening to this and you're like, I didn't know I could ask questions, well now, you know, and after this, at the very end, we'll give you the email and the phone number, or you can look at the show notes and you can ask your own questions as well.

We're gonna try to do more questions going forward in the future, so let's just get right into it. First question. There seems to be a tension between don't expect achievements to fulfill you. That's something we say a lot in here. We talk about the arrival fallacy and the other objective of pursue meaningful goals. If I [00:01:00] truly internalize that winning won't make me happy, or that achievements won't make me happy, won't that kill my drive to compete at the highest level.

Brad: Great question. I will chime in first and then I'll turn it over to Steve. I think that the answer is no, and uh, part of the reason that the answer is no is because I think we need to tease out the difference between happiness and joy in fulfillment and lasting satisfaction. Winning, achieving a goal absolutely leads to happiness. You feel great. You get a high, you get a dopamine rush, whatever neurochemical you wanna call it, it feels good to win, and those moments are wonderful. We also trick ourselves. We say that you gotta find fulfillment in the journey, but each and every one of us still wants to win. That is motivation to go and do the thing and to get the best outta yourself and to try to achieve. However, that happiness that you get while very real is also [00:02:00] very

ephemeral. It comes and it goes. You are on the metal stand for all of three minutes while they sing your country's national anthem. You're on the bestseller list, literally for a week, maybe two or three if you're lucky. You get the promotion and you go out to dinner with your supervisor, and then the next day you've actually gotta do the work. So the happiness is real. It's intense, but it is acute, and then it's fleeting. What is not acute, what is not fleeting is the lasting satisfaction and the fulfillment that you get, and that is what is found along the way. I think the best metaphor to use for this is a mountain, right? Any mountain climber knows that you wanna get to the peak, you wanna get to the summit, you put it on your resume, you said you got to the top of that mountain, you take pictures from the top. If you're lucky and you have enough time up there before the weather changes, you even enjoy the view. But any mountain climber also knows that you spend 99.9999% of your time on the sides of the mountain. And if you can't learn to enjoy climbing, if you can't find satisfaction in the climbing, you're not gonna last very long as a climber. So the best climbers, they're hell bent on getting to the peaks.

[00:03:00] They're meticulous about it. They want it's badly. That's their version of winning. And they've also internalized at the same time that they better find fulfillment in the actual climb itself. So that's how I answer this question. It's not either or it's both. And you get this acute, visceral, but very fleeting happiness from achievement. And that is not to be confused with lasting satisfaction or fulfillment that comes in the process. And it's totally human and totally normal to want both those things.

Steve: I think the only thing that I'd add there is in addition to being a both, and I like to think of it as if you look at these things on a perspective instead of a binary, when I think the question said like, if I truly internalize that winning won't make me happy, won't that kill my drive to compete at the highest level? No, because we have winning, pursuing, going after the thing is so deeply ingrained in us that it's really [00:04:00] freaking hard to detach from that. How do we know this? We can go look at, expert monks who spend a lifetime trying to detach from this stuff, and yet there's still that pull. So for the vast majority of us, we're not gonna turn off that like, oh, I'm gonna detach from pursuing the thing or from thinking the thing that will make it will make me happy. No, all you're doing is saying everything is already stacked so much in that that direction that we're just gonna like pull back on the rope a little bit and say, oh yeah, yeah. Remember like this isn't going to be fulfilling at the end. It might

give us that spark of happiness, but it's not going to last. I think as long as you're pursuing something meaningful to you, that intrinsic motivation is largely gonna like not take care of itself, but it's gonna be there.

Or I should say that drive to win is gonna be there. [00:05:00] You don't need to add more fuel to that fire. It's already there in most of us, especially if you're a pusher.

Clay: Yeah. The only thing I would add, I, I was, as Brad, you were talking, I was thinking about one of the threads you were pulling, this idea of happiness. The way the question is worded, there's sort of this presumption or assumption that we want to get to a state of extended happiness, and I'm thinking it might be worth.

Trying to remember, which I always have to remind myself that like happiness is not necessarily a state. You, you stay in. I think in society we've created this idea that like, you should be happy all the time. But I remember someone once said to me like, emotions have the word motion in them.

'cause they're supposed to drive you towards something. Right? And so like emotions come and go if you were sad all the time, that's not good. We, we call it depression, but we, we believe we should be happy all the time,

so I think it's just helpful to remind yourself sometimes that like being in a constant state of happiness is, is not only not worth striving for. It's pretty impossible, I would say. Which isn't to [00:06:00] say you shouldn't try to make yourself, you know, have more moments of contentment and satisfaction, which I think is even slightly different from happiness.

But this idea that like, we should be happy all the time. That's just, that's gonna set you up for more on happiness in the long run,

Brad: i, I hadn't thought of this before, clay, but listening to you say that I'll respond real quickly then we'll, we'll move on. Um, you know what, probably best mimics the rush that you get. When you win a championship or you hit your PR or you get that promotion you've been longing for, like what you really feel in that acute moment when it happens is a high, we use the term high, right? What happens to people who chase that high? That is the definition of like cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, addiction. You feel really happy. I, so is my

understanding, I've never tried is an addict to those drugs when you're high, but then your whole life gets narrowed because you're just hooked on that feeling. That's not a [00:07:00] great life. So I actually think it's quite good that the thrill and the rush that we get from arriving fades really quickly. 'cause if it didn't, we'd be going around like hedonic zombies in a drugged out state. And there's not a lot of beauty and joy and love that comes from that.

Clay: I thought when you were saying, from my understanding, I thought you were referencing. Hitting an achievement. 'cause the growth equation, curse. 'cause we've all, we've all fallen just short of hitting our, hitting our achievement.

Brad: We broke the curse this weekend.

Clay: What happened?

Brad: What happens? You saw the picture.

The eight. The

eight U. Asheville six sevens won the Western North Carolina Buncombe County preseason

Fall Jamboree

17 Turn Team tournament Representation from Owen, from Fairview, from Oakley, and from Asheville. Best eight U players in the area and, uh, the, the six sevens coached by yours truly won the championship. Hardest part of my coaching this year. [00:08:00] Actually. The parents have been great, but having to convince them that it's okay to name our team the six sevens.

Clay: Steve, you were gonna say something.

Steve: I, I have no words, clay.

Clay: Steve's speechless.

Steve: know, I, this is the greatest moment in the growth equation.

Brad: We finally broke. We finally broke the curse. No, my, my

book's gonna hit the bestseller list. This podcast is gonna blow up like this is it. We've broken the curse.

Clay: Congrats. Congrats. Well, this, this first question leads perfectly into another question on here, which is. Someone wrote, you talk about choosing goals where the process fulfills you exactly what we were just talking about. But what if you're in a field where the day-to-day work is often tedious medicine, law, research, but the impact is meaningful?

How do you find fulfillment in boring but important work?

Steve: So I, I think here that's almost everything.

Clay: Yeah.

Steve: Most things have some sort of tedium to them. But what I would say is like, you don't love the tedium, but you find some sort of like. [00:09:00] Fulfillment in doing that work because you know that it leads to growth development or a positive outcome that is often bigger than yourself.

And I think that's what, when we get in to what the question was asked, so to me, I, I think you can see it, it, it's almost like the expectations and the framing matters a lot. Is if we go into the thing and say, oh, this is so boring. Like I have to enter things on a spreadsheet again and again and again. Or you see it as like, this is just part of the process. This is like doing the stupid ab exercises, the warmup drills, the other things that I don't like about running that much, but they're required to get. Like to get the most outta myself in something that I'm meaningfully pursuing. So I think a, that like framing it, not as like, this is horrible, but [00:10:00] as part of the process. And then I think the other part of that is like you've gotta almost like amplify and get psyched for the enjoyable parts. And maybe that's the competitions, the races, the interactions with people, the doing the thing that helps others, but you've almost gotta remind yourself of like. This is why I do it.

Like this is why I show up. I get this opportunity because of all the boring stuff that I've done. So I think in every, per every single profession. I mean, maybe I'm wrong on some, but No, I, I take that back, like even if you looked at creative pursuits, like, like artists and other stuff. Whenever I've talked to them, it's the same stuff. Like sure, we say they're creative and they are, but there's a

whole hell of a lot of like, tedious, boring, repetitive junk that goes into it before you get to like the magic.

Brad: I think the only thing to add is in knowledge work, what sometimes happens. That [00:11:00] is uniquely devastating is that the tedious stuff bleeds into the good stuff so that you never get time alone with the good stuff. So this is the physician that now only has 12 minutes to see a patient and they have to document the entire time. Or the attorney that is so frazzled responding to clients in her inbox that she has lost the ability to sit down for an hour and a half and do like deep focus work on a matter. And here, I think it's so important to try to chunk your days to have periods where you're doing the good stuff and meant to have periods where you're doing the tedious stuff. And some days there's gonna be all tedious stuff. Some days it's gonna be a lot of good stuff. But what you never wanna get stuck in is this murky middle where what used to be good has now been cannibalized or interrupted by the tedious. So this is something that with my physician clients we work on all the time, is even if you do have one of those tight 12, 15 minute visit slots, how can you have some kind of pre-performance routine [00:12:00] so that when you hit the door and you walk into that exam room. You are fully there for those 15 minutes. You're not thinking about the note, you're not thinking about the dms that you have to respond to from other patients. Um, you have a workflow in your clinic also that allows you to not have to document in flight or if you're gonna document in flight to be able to do it in a way that still feels satisfying, like you're getting the most outta the visit. So I think that what's important is making sure that you protect the good times and you don't let the tedious stuff encroach on the good. It's like the athlete that's like finally getting in the zone on a, you know, 18 minute tempo run. And then every three minutes in the tempo run, a snake goes for their ankles, or they have to stop and take a phone call. The warm ups, tedious, the cool down's tedious. The run you did before is tedious, but man, you get to that tempo run and it makes it all worth it. And I think in knowledge work, what sometimes happens is you finally get to the equivalent of that tempo run, and then you're interrupted. And that's when you just throw your arms up and you're like, come on, gimme a break. And it's really important to identify what the, what the temple runs are, and to [00:13:00] protect them. And look at this. It's Thanksgiving and I am thankful for running metaphors. Never thought I'd say that.

Clay: To pick up on your point, Steve, about how every job has some TDMI I read an essay not too long ago that was about this very thing. It starts with the writer saying, uh, I meet a lot of people who don't like their jobs, and when I ask them what they'd rather do instead, about 75% say something like, oh, I don't know.

I'd really like to run a little coffee shop. This writer then says, which, which I respond, where would you get the coffee beans? And if that's a stumper, then I ask them, what kind of coffee mug is best? Would you bake your blueberry muffins in-house or do you buy 'em from a third party?

What software do you wanna use for your point of sale system? What about for scheduling shifts? And the point of this exercise, the person says is like. In every job there's an element of tedium and I think we often think about like, oh, I wanna switch jobs and it's grass is greener situation, and we maybe fail to imagine that.

There's so many elements of tedium in every job that we're not aware of. 'cause we're seeing 'em from the outside. . All right. Question number three.

How should we think about [00:14:00] going through a period of intense work, one of these periods where life does have to be out of balance, like say something like residency, if you're a doctor, without coming out the other side with. Bad habits or how should we think about breaking them once they're established?

Brad: I think it's a lot easier, um, to not establish bad habits than to break them. So the framework that I like to use here is just to have, uh, minimum effective doses for the core areas of your life that are going to suffer during a season of disbalance. So we'll use the residency example. Let's say that the core areas of your life are exercise. Sleep, community and, um, nutrition. So normally when you are. Having, you know, a little bit more balance or control, whatever you want to call it. Let's say that you exercise for 60 minutes a day.

You sleep for eight hours a night. You have family dinners five nights a week, or with your, getting with your friends once a week. Uh, and [00:15:00] then you only eat out twice a week. Okay? Now in residency, that's all gonna go to shit. So you have to define what's the minimum effective dose to just stay in touch. With the habit that you wanna maintain. So maybe your exercise goes

from 60 minutes a day to 20 minutes, five days a week, and maybe that means that instead of training outside or at the gym, you have to buy a treadmill like Steve has behind him in his office, and you just walk up a hill with a rucksack on for 20 minutes a day because anyone can get that in. Sleep. Let's say that instead of eight hours, you go down to six, six and a half hours. But what you can still do is you can still try to prioritize getting those six, six and a half hours and keep the habits and routines that then you'll apply when it's time to get to eight hours for the family stuff.

If you've got kids, if you've got a wife or a husband, communicate with them. Let them know if this season things are gonna be out of balance. Define what's the minimum effective dose. Is it once a week? Is it twice a week? Same thing with friends. Same thing with nutrition. So. That might even be a stretch to say four things.

It might just be enough to be like exercise and social. So what's the [00:16:00] minimum effective dose for each, and then how do you stick to that? In that way you're not entirely breaking the habit, you're just downsizing it to something that is manageable and not overwhelming you and not gonna feel like you're always falling short. The key is not to let it go down to zero. To define what's gonna allow you to stay in touch with the thing while also having a chance to attain that, that new adjusted goal. And then once that season of craziness ends, you go back to what it's like before.

Steve: It is always easier to maintain than build. It's a universal principle that's that's endurance training 1 0 1, and it applies to life. I think the only other thing I'd add from Brad's excellent. Takes there is, um, sometimes it helps to just like define the time period and I get, residency is long, so it's hard to do that, but like to break it down just like we would in training and say like, you know what, for the next. Six months, I'm gonna be in maintenance mode. And then I'm gonna have like a month, maybe it's [00:17:00] winter break or summer break, where I get to build again. And I'm gonna focus on building good habits in these directions to kind of like buffer and bring things up. And if you can set sort of some sort of defined period, it often helps you. You know, manage it. And if you have the ability to kind of periodize it, where you can bring in some, some good habit weeks or even good habit weekends every once in a while, then that kind of like makes the maintenance a little bit, um, a little bit easier.

Clay: Yeah, I'd say I'm the least qualified to answer this question because you're both much more successful than me and you have small children. So I feel like you've been through, you've been through, uh, periods where you probably have to experience this more. But something that's coming up for me is, uh, actually coming from the recent conversation.

I had with Nick Thompson, for those who aren't familiar, he's CEO of the Atlantic. He's a very fast marathoner. He's father of the three children.

Steve: Go listen to the episode. People go listen to the episode.

Clay: He does a [00:18:00] lot. And so we spent a fair amount of the episode talking about his productivity strategies and.

What he crystallized for me was that, you know, if you, if you think about getting things done, you can think of a whiteboard having like, just imagine a whiteboard with everything on there. You have to be really good at figuring out which of those things you should do. But something I learned from talking to Nick is you also have to be really good at figuring out what goes on the whiteboard, right?

So before you can even get to the prioritization part, you have to figure out what things am I leaving out? And if you're going through a period in your life where you just. It's like super intense and you think of it as like a rope. You have less slack, right? It's like very tau. And so I think you just have to get really good about being like, this is something I can't do.

I can't be, you know, scrolling through Instagram reels for 15 to 30 minutes because that's not, I don't have any slack in my rope, right? And so if you want to figure out how to not come outta these periods out of balance, and to be able to do the minimum effective doses, I think you gotta be really intentional about.

What you're allowing yourself to do, if that makes [00:19:00] sense.

Brad: It does make sense. And I'd also add that if you're gonna throw yourself into something that is gonna be high demand, high reward from a work or craft standpoint, then it's really helpful to be in a culture where you like the people that you're doing it with. Because the truth is, if you're trying to kill it at work.

You're not gonna have as many friends as someone who's not trying to kill it at work. 'cause

you're gonna spend a lot of time working the same is true in extracurricular pursuits. Someone might be listening and being like, my colleagues are all boring, but I work in nine to four and I'm happy about it. Well, if you're training for an ultra marathon and you're doing it alone. That can be much time for social relationships or if you're training with a group of people that you dislike. That's not gonna be fun. So if you wanna run an ultra, then it helps to be in a training group with people that you like, because odds are they're gonna be your friends. They're gonna be the only other humans that you see, especially if you also have small kids. So I also think that part of [00:20:00] acknowledging that trade-offs exist is trying to get as smart as you can about trade-offs, and especially when there's a tension between activity, craft work, and relationship. You've gotta have good people in your life. So if you're spending a lot of time at work, you gotta like the people you're working with, otherwise you gotta change what you do.

Clay: All right, two more questions. These are both training specific, the first is, was in response to our, everything you need to know about Managing Fatigue episode.

This person said you mostly talked about acute fatigue and, and I have a question about chronic fatigue. Um, and they were saying they've done training cycles where, you know, the training starts off well, um. Then they can't seem to bounce back. So fatigue lingers.

And this, the workout that used to be a five 10 RPE rate of perceived exertion is like a 10 out of 10. So they can't do it. Um, and then they can't even go. They're a runner. So they can't even do an easy run without wanting to stop and walk. They just feel [00:21:00] like completely cooked. Um. Yet they see other people.

Or in the past they've done workouts where they, they do go to failure. They do like, do the intense workouts and then they bounce back. How do you manage normal training fatigue? Putting that in quotes to make sure it's not over training or overreaching.

Steve: All right. Here we go. Um, thanks for this question so that I can just riff. So, um, here's what I'd say here. So a couple of things. First off is stop comparing yourself to other people. 'cause it sounds like in that, that question, it's like other people are able to do this and do these workouts, but I can't.

How come throw it out the window. Because everybody handles different running and racing stressors differently or different training stressors differently. And everybody has different recoverability and that recoverability will shift A as you age, and then B, as you train and develop a broader base [00:22:00] generally allows more to more recover building. So I, I think. Throwing away what other people do and focusing on, is this normal for me or is this something that I need to address? What do I mean by that? If in generally you don't recover well off of doing 400 meter repeats, that's what it's been like for years. Guess what?

That just means for whatever reason, physiologically, 400 repeats dig you into the hole. So you're not gonna be able to do those as frequently or as hard as clay over here who's hammering those repeats all the time. So you just have to acknowledge that and not try to mimic something else. If this is a change, right, where you're like, oh, I used to recover really well, and now I'm doing the same things and I'm not bouncing back,

then that means you need to look at everything outside of that.

You're looking at, you know, A, are you getting older? B, are you supporting your [00:23:00] body nutritionally with food, recovery, sleep, all the things that we've talked about in previous podcasts? Are you doing all those things? And if not, maybe that's the weak link. And then from a training standpoint, what I would say is, I think the question, was like a five out of 10 eventually becomes like a 10 out of 10, right? So here what you're telling me just based on that is the accumulation of fatigue is what is getting you, and I see this so often. Where people say, you know what? I can run a 70 mile week with two hard workouts in the long run, and I feel good for 3, 4, 5, 6 weeks. And then I just tank. So what do you have to do? You take whatever you're normally doing and you create more space in it. Where instead of doing 70 miles a week and two workouts in the long run, maybe you do one workout in the long run and you ditch the other workout. Maybe instead of 70 miles a week, you say, I'm gonna go 70 and then 50, and then back up [00:24:00] to 65 and then back down to 55. Whatever it is,

you varied up, you create more space to give yourself ability to handle the accumulated load.

I'll give you one quick, uh, example with, um, Natasha Rogers Marathoner got six at Chicago Marathon. She did one hard workout in one long run a week. That is not how pro marathoners generally trained. Normally, it's two hard workouts and a long run and a lot of mileage. Why did we do that? Because she was coming from the track and what we curricularly realized is like, Hey, those big marathon workouts, which we can't escape.

We can't escape doing the 20 plus mile marathon workouts. She didn't recover, uh, well from them. So our solution. Give her another day of recovery, which meant we couldn't sneak in an extra workout. So you don't go, oh, everybody else is doing that. You say, no, this is what my body is giving me. And if I can sustain one hard workout in one long run a week [00:25:00] for 12 to 16 weeks, I'm gonna be pretty good. If I try the other way, maybe I make it six weeks and then I start to crater. I'm not gonna be pretty good. So play with those variables to give you space so that you can absorb the accumulated load instead of saying, oh, but I handled this workout once, so I'm gonna be okay.

Clay: And then just following up on that, Steve, is there, I mean, again, this is, I, I understand this is difficult to answer this individually without, this is why you coach one-on-one. Um, but the end of that question is how do you manage normal training fatigue to make sure it's not over training,

Steve: yeah, so here I think what really works is you've gotta establish your norm. What does that tempo run feel like? What does that long run feel like? What does, you know, those interval workouts feel like? Establish that norm across months and hopefully even seasons and years where you know, what kind of it feels like when you bounce or when you do that workout and how long it takes you to bounce back. You're looking for deviations from that, and [00:26:00] if you start seeing. You know, deviations that linger, then that is your sign. And the reason I use linger is because acute fatigue lasts for a day or two, and then you get back out and you're like, I feel good enough.

Like I can do the normal thing. The lingering of fatigue makes it where you stop being able to do the normal thing. So if you are used to doing, you know, the day after a hard workout, you're used to saying, you know what, I can go run six, seven miles at a easy pace and I'll be okay. And all of a sudden you're like, I

gotta walk. That's a sign of lingering fatigue that is different from normal that you probably need to address. So it all comes down to me. It's like norms for the individual, not like norms for everybody.

Brad: And I am gonna say something that I think even master Coach of runners, Steve is gonna agree with me here. This is not necessarily true. If you're fatigued [00:27:00] as a doctor or attorney or teacher, but if you're an athlete and you are fatigued, and we're gonna lose some listeners, because everything related to nutrition is a cult, but the number one thing that you can do is eat more carbohydrates and you always feel better.

Steve: So there, there is, especially if you're looking at training for the marathon and the

Brad: You just need more carbs.

Steve: is that you often are in a state of fuel depletion, and especially if you're running or training a lot, I'm looking at you, our triathlete listeners.

If you're doing any sort of physical activity at a decent, a decent enough volume, carbs are gonna be a friend.

Clay: Way to go. Brad. Not supposed to bring up politics and now we've lost all of our carnivore diet listeners.

Brad: I will tell you what, if you're listening to the show

And all that you eat is meat,

but you're still here and you've still got an open mind,

Steve: We love you.

Brad: we love you. Write an email and I will, I'll do a couple free one-on-one coaching sessions with you, [00:28:00] but you can't fake it. You really gotta be a carnivore and I'll know because you'll be jaundiced when we talk on the phone.

Clay: only thing I I'd add is that, uh, Steve brought up. Feelings, that deviate from your normal feelings. And I would say also be aware I'm dealing with this,

uh, currently. I would say that normal can change. You're normal for how you feel or how fast you think you are might change over time.

You might be getting a little older, a little creakier talking about myself here. And so, you know, what is normal for me now on an easy run is a little bit slower than what it used to be. That's okay. It doesn't mean that it's abnormal in a way that I'm fatigued. It just means it's abnormal in a way that I'm not quite in the fitness I once was, and I'm excited to get back there, hopefully.

Steve: I'm a hundred percent I'm, I'm right there with you, clay, getting old and aging. And there is no comparing to past Steve. He just wi Um, but the thing that we often mistake here. The often mistake that we make, especially [00:29:00] in endurance sports, is we think things are like that.

It's math. That. It's like if I just do X and these other people who are running the same times they're doing X plus Y, then that's what it works. But it's not. I remember, gosh, a decade or so when I was coaching, I was coaching three professional runners who were all running the 5K at the ti same time. They were all within about five to 10 seconds of each other. Women who were running, you know, borderline world class times. And if I looked at their training, you'd be like, there is no possible way these people are all running the same times.

Because one of these ladies is doing like a four mile tempo. At five 30 pace. The other can run it at like 12 miles at this pace, and the other's running like six miles at this pace. Like it makes no sense. And the point I I, I like to give on that is like, it's not math. Like we have outliers. Just because someone else is running these times doesn't mean you're gonna be able to handle the [00:30:00] same training. Just because Susie over there has the same Strava segments as you, doesn't mean that you're gonna be running their times.

I mean, I was looking at, uh, at Olympian, Hillary Boer who runs for the us the Kenyan who runs for the us. Um, his, he recently ran a two 10 marathon and. People were kind of railing on him because all his easy runs literally are at like eight 30 to nine minute pace. Like Clay would be dusting him over here. And people were like, what? What's your like, what are you doing? And, but then if you go look at his hard workouts, they're like insane, right? He is running whatever sub five minute pace for way too long. And the point is like for him. That's great. Run a nine minute pace on easy runs, works for other elites.

They're gonna be running six minute pace. You can't compare it to other people. You just gotta figure out what works for yourself.

Clay: Great advice, great spot to end that question. The last question is also sort. Of about [00:31:00] fatigue. Um, someone is asking, I'm stuck in the cycle where I have a training block preparing for a race, then I race. I know because I've learned from you guys that I should have a period of where I'm recovering, right?

But I can't seem to figure out this, this balance between, I'm anxious about losing fitness. So sometimes I, I start back earlier than I should, before I'm fully recovered. Then waiting too long and actually losing fitness. So how do I know like the, the right amount of time, um, before I actually do start to lose fitness?

And do you have any advice on sitting with that sort of anxiety of like, I'm getting slower, I'm getting less strong, or, um, you know, I peaked and now I'm, I'm falling off my peak.

Brad: I'll just sum it up for the every man, and then I'll turn it over to Steve for the elite runners here. The conundrum is real. Okay. If I remember one thing from my My Age group, triathlon Racing Days, it was this conundrum because it was so hard to get this [00:32:00] period of time right, and to speak in blatant terms.

What would either happen is I'd come back from a a half Iron Man raced really hard, or, or a full Iron Man. Arizona in particular and wanted to kind of keep the momentum going. So I take it easy, but I wouldn't really shut it down enough and I never got outta the hole I was in from the race. And then that whole training cycle sucked. But then the alternative is you just take three weeks totally off, which was kind of in vogue. This is over a decade ago, and you end up gaining like 12 pounds of fat. You're really outta shape and you gotta work for five months to get back into shape. And then you've killed half your season because now you're trying to get back into shape

and

it's hard to figure out what that middle ground is.

Then when you're trying to get back into shape, you're a little bit desperate because you're like, oh crap, I gotta get into shape. So then you overreach at the start of your training and you end up setting yourself back and it's a mess. So I think what really good athletes figure out how to do, and maybe Steve, you have some insight into how they do this, is like, you can think of it as like this, like [00:33:00] momentum. And like even when you're resting, you're still building momentum towards, you know, towards this, this mountain that you're climbing over seasons.

Steve: This is when carbs aren't your friend. Um,

Brad: Apparently

they were my best friend, my only friend I was talking to you guys and eating pizza.

Steve: So here's what I would say is it's a legitimate conundrum, but going all the way back to what we said at the beginning is like the idea of building and maintaining, it's easier to maintain and you just have to find your minimum effective dose even when you're looking at resting. And what I mean by that is like generally on the elite side, I mean there are exceptions like Bernard Legat world class. One of the best in the world would take like months off after competing. That is a rare,

Brad: PA passed us to the pod. Said two

months off, right, clay? Was that the number? It was

Clay: I think he said, I think he said three

actually. I think

he said three. Yeah. I'm sure he wasn't off completely, but

Steve: that is [00:34:00] rare. But it generally does occur with people who are like super intense for a period of time. They know what they need to do to like recover and they know they have enough time to build back up. For the normal person, if we take three months off, our habits are shot like we're gonna be Brad and gain 12 pounds of pizza, and it's hard to get going again. So what I like to

do is say, okay, let's compromise. How much time do you feel comfortable taking off where you get to, especially after a season or a big marathon or Big Ironman where you feel like. I allow my body to rest in recovery. I allow my mind to rest and recover without driving myself nuts. Generally, it's like a week or two okay for most people. And then you say, okay, what's the minimum effect of dose where I can feel like I'm maintaining some sort of fitness and maintaining my mental [00:35:00] health without digging into the hole even more so. And for every person, that's gonna vary. Some people it's gonna be, I'm gonna train six days a week, but instead of running 90 minutes every day, I'm gonna go for 20 minute jogs.

Right. Other people, it's like, I'm gonna go three days a week and I'm gonna do an hour 'cause I like running an hour and then I'm gonna take the days off. Whatever it is, you just de, you just have to figure out kind of like what that maintenance dose is that allows you to kind of take the edge off of like, oh, I'm losing something. Before getting back into it. And then the last thing I'd say is, part of it is psychological in the sense that like you, you are supposed to lose some fitness. Like that's part of the point because if you ride that edge for too long, eventually you're gonna burn out. And we know this from all sorts of things, whether we're looking at the intensity, even if we're looking at, we joke, but even sometimes if you [00:36:00] ride like, Hey, I'm racing at this weight on the lead side, what you often see is sometimes you raced at a lower weight and then you say, okay, like. I gotta train at a higher weight. I gotta put on the 12 pounds of pizza in order to like, be sustainable enough to fuel my body and be robust enough. So like, I've gotta put that kind of back on again. Talk to a nutritionist. Don't trust Brad, Steve, uh, clay but the point is.

There's thought, there's thought to it. So I'm, I'm giving you a lot here, but what I would say is it's like balancing that, that neurotic, I'm gonna drive myself nuts with also allowing your body to have enough time to restore. I think where people often make the mistake, especially as amateurs, is they think I have to take this set period of time off and it's like, no, like take some time off, but like if a couple times a week. You want to go for a jog, like it's not going to kill you, or [00:37:00] instead of a workout, you want to go do some strides to make yourself feel fast so you don't lose speed. Go do some strides. The key is you're just not digging that hole again.

Clay: yeah, I try to think of just like I'm running an experiment and everything is just collecting data and trying to use that data to then inform my new hypothesis, because there are no, something we've sort of echoed a few times here. There are no. Easy, broadly applicable, universal answers. And, and not even just from person to person, but from race to race, right?

Like some races you're gonna bounce back more quickly than others, and, uh, others are gonna take more time. And it's just like observing your body and observing where you're at and observing how you're feeling. And I think trying to make the best, um, guesses and estimates off of that. But that also requires experience in doing it, right?

So another another reason for playing the infinite game and continuing to come back to these things and engage in the process over and over and over again.

Brad: And you gain a feel for it. And I know that this is [00:38:00] implied, but like, no, no biometric tracker is gonna tell you. You gain a feel for it. And the best coaches, they gain a feel for you as the athlete after having worked with you for a long period of time, and they gain a feel for it. So like you can be data-driven and informed by evidence, but ultimately, like this is one of those prime things where you, you kind of have to go by feel, and the way to have confidence in what you're feeling is to do it over and over again and experiment. Um. There's a guy that trains at my gym who's training age is probably as long as he's been alive. He's been training since he came out of the womb, and just a phenomenal strength athlete. And he can feel himself just starting to get like the littlest bit emotionally down. And that to him is a telltale sign that he needs to deload. And for him, that D load is you just take everything down by one set. So if it's gonna be four sets, you do three. If it's gonna be three sets, you do two. That's it. You do that for a week. And then it comes back, and it sounds so [00:39:00] trivial, but he's like, I'm essentially reducing my training by between 20 and 25% over a week. And you still have momentum. You're still quote unquote, training hard. You're still in the gym, but you're also deloading. And then he comes back and he starts to feel sharp and like the sun starts to shine again and who knows what's going on in his body, but that's all it takes for him. But he got that because he's been training for, you know, God knows how many years.

Clay: Well, I think that's a great spot to end. Thanks to you for the wonderful questions. If you want to ask more questions, if you wanna ask a question for the first time, you can reach out to us. Uh, you can email at clay dot growth eq@gmail.com. You can call our voicemail at (646) 893-9503.

We are very grateful, thankful for. All of you for listening. We couldn't do this, uh, without the Growth Equation community. That's people in our academy. If you're interested in the academy, um, we will also put that in the show notes.

But it's all of you listening every week, uh, makes it very, [00:40:00] very meaningful and fun for us to come do this. So thanks so much. Thanks for the questions. Have a very happy Thanksgiving, and we'll be back next week with another episode. Until then, take care of yourselves and be excellent to one another.