



DANNY LENNON:

Shannon, welcome to the podcast.

SHANNON BEER:

Thank you for having me.

DANNY LENNON:

Let people know a bit about you, what you're doing, what you're up to, and anything else that might be kind of relevant.

SHANNON BEER:

Sure. So I would describe myself as a nutrition coach, working online at the moment and kind of floating around from place to place. And I really like to help people to change their nutrition behaviors in a way that benefits their overall life. I think that's kind of relatable to some of the things that we're talking about today. And I've recently been working with Dr. Gabrielle Fundaro, and we've conceptualized an approach to coaching that we've called Comprehensive Coaching, and have been recently doing a lot of work around that with some webinar series, and we have a community group to try to help bring our approach to coaching to a wider audience, and it's an approach, let's say, that kind of considers the individual where they're at right now and the things that are important to them and how that relates to changing their nutrition behaviors. So we've got a little model that we've been working on and we're really happy to push that and to see where we're going with that just to kind of bring

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a different approach, I think, to changing behaviors with the approach we take with our clients.

DANNY LENNON:

And, of course, we've had the pleasure of being able to chat quite a few times in person at various events and so on, and I think it was maybe 2017 when we first met in person. And then, since then, obviously, we've been able to chat at various different events, and it's been interesting to see the work you've put out over that time. So I was thinking maybe to start this, a concept or a kind of term I've heard both of you use is related to Flourishing Health, and how that can be almost like a place to orientate towards in determining how to help people – can you maybe just describe what that means to you?

SHANNON BEER:

Yeah. So Flourishing Health is a broader conceptualization of health that expands far beyond just the physical domain, and I think it's really important for us to have an understanding of what health is, what that looks like, how we can strive towards it, how we may want to measure it, and Flourishing Health is kind of the current definition of health that I've been working with. I've been thinking about this a lot. I actually think that you put out a podcast maybe a couple of years ago about a conceptual framework for health. So I've kind of been thinking about what health could be since then, and course, I work with clients who come to me saying that they want to improve their health, so what does that really mean and what does that look like, and more importantly, what does that mean to you, and what does that look like to you, the person that I'm working with? And I came across the concept of Flourishing Health, and I read a couple of papers by Vanderbilt, one in 2017, one in 2019, and he has this concept of health that, again expands beyond the physical domain, and that is more of a multi-dimensional construct. So he talked about happiness and life satisfaction, physical and mental health, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, close social relations, and then financial and

material stability as a means of securing those other five domains of health.

And I think when working with someone to change their nutrition, to change that training, we are often very much focused on the physical domain of health; and I think we can tend to look at things from a slightly Cartesian lens of like mind-body dualism, which can be problematic in the sense that I consider and I think most people with an understanding of biology and psychology which considers the brain and the body as distinct but indissociable organisms, you can't consider one without the other, and I think we tend to, when working with someone and looking at that data, looking at macros, bodyweight, height, etc., we can very easily look at someone abstracted from the context of their life. And I think, if we're looking at things that way, we can tend to reduce health to those measures, which I think is pretty problematic.

So Flourishing Health then is a far more broader concept, and it's not to say that we have to interfere with everyone's, you know, all these different domains of health, but just to consider that the changes that we're making regarding nutrition and training may affect other domains of someone's life; and if we're making these changes, they should support these other domains or at least not interfere with them. So that could be one's social relations, their financial health; also, I think, having an understanding of why someone's doing something is quite important to them. So there has to be a meaning and a purpose behind it. So having that idea of Flourishing Health, I think just gives us something to orient ourselves towards and informs a lot of the approaches that we take with changing someone's nutrition.

DANNY LENNON:

Yeah, I find that so impactful, because it's quite probably easy for someone to take a moment and think through some examples where you could change someone's diet that makes it more nutritious, or someone loses bodyweight, or

someone starts doing more activity, but in a context where they're not actually any happier as a human being or it's detrimental in some of these other areas you mentioned. So can we really classify that this person is now healthier if we are considering this kind of rounder sense, I guess. And so, related to that, I kind of wanted to ask about that initial point where people are seeking to make a change and seeking to become healthier or seeking to have any goal that relates to wanting to change the nutrition essentially that they may come to you for, and those different things that may be are motivating or driving them to make change. And I just wonder how you think about this, in that, is there a distinction between drives or motivations to change that are potentially beneficial versus ones that are detrimental in terms of how people are framing what is their reason to change?

SHANNON BEER:

Yeah, for sure. I think someone can, there can be a number of reasons why someone may want to make a change. And in the context of nutrition or weight loss, it's very common for people to want to change their body to, quote unquote, improve how they look to increase their confidence and feel better about themselves. And appearance related motivations tend to increase or be associated with an increased risk of developing pathological eating behaviors, and more instances of disinhibited eating, and they're less likely to lead to long term changes. So you see people who are stuck in like a cycle of dieting where they will restrict-overeat, restrict-overeat and perpetuating that cycle tends to make them feel pretty negatively towards themselves.

I think it's important to realize that the majority of people tend to, at least the people that I work with, they tend to come from that place and I think it's perfectly reasonable to, and understandable, as to why someone may want to improve their appearance. But what we see is that health related motivations for change tend to be associated with more adaptive, more sustainable, long-term results. So one of the, I

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guess, primary messages of the comprehensive coaching approach is that we don't have to choose between aesthetics or health. I'd say that it's difficult to classify one motivation has been inherently bad in every circumstance, and that we should all be aiming to improve our health at all costs. I think understanding when someone's at the meeting and where they are, which is likely to be fueled by appearance related concerns and helping them to shift to more broader forms of motivation, that includes thinking about their health as well. So we're trying to broaden someone's understanding of what it means to make progress and considering, as you said, those upper domains of health, in addition to the changes that they may want to make to their physique. And that should be, it tends to be associated with better long term outcomes.

DANNY LENNON:

And that seems like there's some ability to take an initial goal that someone has in mind and maybe talk through that in a way that is amending that or slightly altering that into a way that may be more productive. And so, when we think of goal setting, and that initial point where maybe someone comes to you that they have a specific goal or they've identified something that they're going to change, usually, that's on the basis of they've identified themselves some sort of problem, quote unquote, that they're then trying to fix with this solution. And I'm just wondering, when is it the case that people maybe have mis-analyzed that problem, are we often focused on the wrong thing that we have a certain goal, but maybe not particularly for the right reasons, or for maybe, we can't even articulate a reason why, we just presume this is the goal we should have, how do you think about that goal setting process and how do you think about making sure that what we decide to target in the first place is actually the right goal?

SHANNON BEER:

In general, as humans, we're not very good at knowing what we want, and we're not very good at predicting how we may feel when we achieve

something. And when it comes to goal setting and the approach that we may take with a client, I think we have to be careful about really considering why someone wants to change and what they actually want to achieve. And if you look at the way that counselors or therapists work, they actually would do something that's known as case conceptualization before working with a patient, and they have like a five-P's approach to understanding the client and the problem that they're facing. So these P's would stand for, firstly, what is the presenting problem; secondly, what are the predisposing factors that are increasing the risk of the problem, what are the precipitating factors that are indicating the presence of the problem, what are the perpetuating factors that are keeping the problem going, and then what are the protective factors that would reduce the risk of the problem, what are the strengths that the person has. And we've, Gabrielle and I, have kind of taken that and removed it from the therapeutic context and putting it into the context of coaching have come up with the "Five F's". So what is the focus, what does the client want to achieve here; what is the foundation, so how have their experiences shaped their current attitudes towards themselves and towards their nutrition; and what is the final straw, the recent events that inspired them to want to make a change; and what are the next one to be feeding stocks, and what are their major obstacles, and why are they are here right now; and then what are their fortifications, what are their strengths, their skills, the expertise they have to bring to the process.

And I think taking time to do that, to really understand what it is that someone is facing, what they're struggling and what they're really wanting to achieve, is really important to do before you even set any goals, because someone comes to you saying, I want to lose some fat, here's my height, here's my weight, you might ask them questions about their activity levels or maybe what foods you like eating and then it's like, here you go, here's your macros, here's a

meal plan based on some foods that you enjoy, off you go. We haven't really stopped to consider whether that's really an appropriate approach, and whether weight loss is an appropriate goal. I think if we're asking these questions and we're getting a great understanding of the person that we're working with, then we're more likely to discover those insights that will help us to determine the best approach for that person. And I've worked with the number of people who come to me wanting to lose weight, and then a few weeks into the process, we've got a different goal, and so actually, I've realized that I don't really enjoy tracking my macros, and I'm getting a bit caught up in all of this, and I'd just like to take some time to focus on learning how to eat without having to feel like I need to track everything, that's the new goal now. And if we're too caught up on, well, you told me you wanted to lose weight, we can't work on this, it doesn't offer any room for pivoting any flexibility there. So I think understanding the person and being flexible in the approach that you take, and really being mindful of the entire process, I think is important to discover what it is that someone really needs, which might not be immediately obvious.

DANNY LENNON:

Related to that one of the things I know you've written quite a lot about is finding someone's values or what things kind of connect to their own identity that may then fit into making more appropriate goals, and I think, like, establishing values is something that doesn't come easy to many people or maybe they just haven't been able to put the specific targeted thought into that, and it can be a difficult process to work out what they are. How do you try and talk someone through that or what advice would you have when someone is trying to establish what really are my values that go beyond this kind of surface level goal that I may have identified?

SHANNON BEER:

Yeah, so values can be described as qualities of our behavior, like, how we would like to act on an ongoing basis, and the type of person that you want to be. And values can be really useful

in guiding the goal setting process, because goals can act as checkpoints. And if you're thinking of values as the direction that you're heading towards, goals can be perceived as checkpoints along the way to make sure that you're living in accordance with those values. And I think, as you said, it can be really difficult to actually think about who you are and what you want to stand for and how you'd like to behave. But I think it can be a really valuable exercise to go through. Some of the common values that some of my clients have identified have been things like flexibility, self-awareness, kindness even, and that can relate a lot to the changes that you're making this change in nutrition. Someone recently is talking about her value of kindness, and she recognized that it's far easier for her to be kinder towards other people, and then when she feels like she's not meeting her own expectations, which could be in terms of progress, she can be very critical towards herself. I think that that's a fairly common one. So knowing that this client's identified that, oh this is my value of kindness, and actually not living in accordance with that value when I'm being very critical of myself.

So that's just, it kind of brings more insight and awareness into our behaviors, and I find that they can be really useful when someone is feeling demotivated or overwhelmed at the change that they have to make, which can actually be quite common. It works with a number of people who feel like they can't change. I've been this way for a long time, and if I'm focusing on this, like, goal physique, I've seen so far off, and there's so much work that has to happen between now and achieving that physique, and the focus on that outcome then is very difficult to be happy with yourself until you reach that point, at some point in the future. And it can be very overwhelming and people don't know where to start. Now, with values, one of the most beautiful things about them is that you can choose to act on your value in any given moment. So every time you choose to make a nutrient dense food choice, you seem to be

acting in accordance with your value of self-care. And when thinking about it that way, it kind of brings more significance to the choices in the moment, which I think can help people to really see the progress that they're making.

And there's also a number of ways that you can act in accordance with your values. So this takes the value of self-care, for example, that could be you going to the gym, doing your training, it could be the food choices that you're making, it could also be chilling out after a long week, talking to a friend. There's so many ways that you can act in accordance with your values, but even if you fall short of one of your expectations, I ate something that I rather wouldn't have eaten, well, that's okay, because you can still engage in that value by doing these other actions that you've identified would move you closer towards that. So I think it's a really useful way of helping someone to navigate their process and their understanding of success as well. I think it's more realistic and more tangible almost.

DANNY LENNON:

There's a couple of elements that I really like. One is that it gives that ability to continue orientating towards that goal in times where maybe motivation is down, or it just reminds you of why you're doing it, because oftentimes, when things are difficult or something external in life comes up, we can be like, what am I doing this for, what's the point, and having a strong value seems a way to remind us and orientate us back to that. And just when you were talking about that beautiful element of values being that in any given moment, you can decide to act in accordance with them, so you don't have to have this focus on whether you achieve the set outcome yet or not, in any moment, you can go back to it, it actually reminded me of something I think I heard maybe Sam Harris say in one of his lectures. He kind of talks about the kind of feeling of regret we have is those moments when there's a disconnect between the person we want to be or know we can be versus how we currently are; and as opposed to letting that regret manifest negatively, you just use that to bring

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yourself back in line with acting in that moment, like the person you would like to be. In other words, acting in line with those values that you find important. In any moment, you're free to start again. So it doesn't matter what has happened even up to this very second, you can start again in that moment, which is quite empowering, as opposed to, I need to wait to a certain time point to see if I've achieved, quote unquote, some sort of goal.

SHANNON BEER:

Yeah, that's exactly, yeah. And I think another thing about the values is that they're more flexible than goals, and we may find that sometimes we've set ourselves these goals that are no longer in align with the person that we want to be or how we'd like to behave. For example, you may set yourself some training goals, because you have this value of challenge, and you really want to push yourself in the gym. Now, those training goals might be, depending on how they've been set, they might be something that's not quite appropriate, if there's something that you don't have a great understanding towards. It might be, oh I just need to train super hard every single day, because I like the challenge. And it can very easily slip into potentially, like, the function of that goal may change. It could be turning to something quite negative, and no longer support the value of the person that you'd like to be. So values also allow us to pivot and set different goals, rather than being, I've told myself that I'm going to achieve this; or I've told myself that I need to lose X amount of weight. Actually, if you realize that, oh, hang on a minute, these weight loss goals aren't serving me in the way that I thought they were, then you can stop and choose a different course of action, and it will bring you closer again, but always orienting towards that person that you'd like to be.

DANNY LENNON:

Like, it does bring your individualness as a person back into focus, because oftentimes, I think, we can default to what other people see as appropriate goals or how they're acting, or we

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kind of don't understand how they're able to be this like super motivated, and we can't. And I think, like, training is a great example, if you are to go on what other people have in mind as what is important to them about training or the things they get excited about by training, and that is their kind of driving force behind it, and then you don't feel that degree of excitement at certain time points, but you're still trying to use their goals, that just seems like a way that's not going to be very productive; and it can often lead to people feeling negative about that, I guess, versus thinking about what is the valuable thing behind training for them as opposed to training in a more general sense.

SHANNON BEER:

Yeah, exactly, like, our context is always changing, our lifestyles are changing, our priorities may shift and change over time. So we should be able to be flexible in accordance with that, and if, like you say, you're stuck on what other people are doing or comparing yourself to what they think is important, then you may kind of lose touch with the person that you want to be. So always bringing yourself back to that, as things change over time, I think is quite important.

DANNY LENNON:

One of the things I found really interesting within the framework was the ability to take some of the evidence based concepts from psychology and translate that into maybe ways that are usable in a coaching context, and so one of them being Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. Maybe could you explain, first of all, just some an overview of what that is for people, but then how you view that coaches or maybe even people that are coaching themselves can take some of those principles and apply them in a non-therapy setting, non-psychology setting, like, how can we take some of those principles and use them for ourselves, I guess.

SHANNON BEER:

Yeah, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy is a mindfulness based third wave behavior therapy, and it kind of acts on the assumption that life is richer and more meaningful when it's

guided by behaviors that are in line with your true values. Now, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy has a lot of application outside or therapeutic settings. I think they're starting to refer to it as Acceptance and Commitment Training when used outside of that context. And it's based on the – there's two major components, acceptance and commitment. I'd like to quickly define acceptance, because I think that there tends to be a little bit of confusion around what that term really means. I think we can often misconstrue acceptance as passivity, whereas acceptance doesn't mean giving up, not wanting to change – just taking things as they are, accepting it and not doing anything about it. Acceptance actually is a necessary component of changing, it's a precedent for change because you can't change something if you're not aware of the problem.

So, for example, with eating behaviors, a lot of people, it's very common when talking to someone, what do you think is your biggest barrier right now. I don't know how to be really healthy, I don't understand why I can't lose the weight. And it can be very difficult to want to open up to someone, and to say, I'm really struggling with being able to control my nutrition. They may feel a bit of guilt and shame around that. They may even experience stigma in relation to their weight, which makes it very difficult to face the circumstances and what's actually going on. And acceptance then would be conceived as like the opposite of avoidance. So you have to face something to know what's really going on before you can change it. You need to understand what's happening. If you take the example of someone trying to save money, but refuse to look at where they're spending their money, what's coming in and what's going out, it's very difficult to be able to save anything, because you don't really know what's going on. So acceptance then would be getting in touch with reality, and would be the thing that needs to occur before we can make a change. And that's where the commitment comes in, taking

action that is aligned with the person that you want to be.

So with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, the goal is to enhance psychological flexibility, which is someone's ability to be present, open up, and do what matters – essentially, how do you respond to changing circumstances, uncertainty, setbacks, those sorts of things, and there are a number of processes that go into that. So you've got the acceptance component, diffusion which is where you learn to see your faults for what they are. And this is something that I think is very practical for nutrition behaviors, and the thoughts that people have around foods or even themselves, like, their thought of, I failed because I haven't stopped the deficit this week or whatever, I have one thing that I thought was off plan and I feel like I've failed. It's normal for those faults to arise, it's normal for negative emotions to arise. And if we can learn to see our faults for what they are, which is just faults, not facts, not literal truths about how we should behave, we don't have to respond to our thoughts in a way that we're not being pushed around by them. We can learn to detach from them. And even if we believe them or not, it's not about questioning. So this is a difference between an acceptance based approach versus a cognitive behavioral therapy where you would question the rationality of your thoughts and potentially reframe them.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy takes a slightly different approach, where we are just asking if my believe this or if I let it dictate my actions, is that working for me, is that useful for me, is it moving me closer towards the person I want to be. They are some thoughts that people might have, I want to be able to make this change because I failed so many times in the past. Well, that could be quite difficult to try and challenge. What's the rationale behind that? Well, I actually have failed a number of times, in my opinion. Okay, this can be quite tricky to try and change how someone's feeling about that. Rather, we would ask, well, okay, it's completely

reasonable for you to feel that way. But if we accept that for the literal truth, what does that mean for you, where is that going to lead you? You know, are you willing to experience those kind of negative emotions that may come along with that and still take committed action towards the person that you want to be? And so I think it can be very useful in that respect, because we're not assuming that everyone's going to be super happy all of the time, and life's just full of laughs and whatever. It's about accepting things as they are, and then taking action towards that. I think increasing someone's psychological flexibility is quite useful, especially regarding their attitude towards food and towards themselves.

DANNY LENNON:

I'm glad you clarified what acceptance means in this context, because, as you say, sometimes there can be a negative reaction to that word, as in, that just means I'll just accept things how they are, and that's it, as opposed to this deeper meaning. One of the things that may be connected with that that I wanted to ask about was, and you kind of mentioned that sometimes there are barriers that we may be aware of or maybe initially people are unaware of, and it's clear, I think in trying to achieve any particular goal, that momentum plays a large role in that. And when momentum is rolling along nicely, that everything is great, but there are certain obstacles that we maybe don't see coming that can interrupt that. And so, I'm wondering, in terms of ways where we can take actions and behaviors or set ourselves up in a way where we perhaps are less susceptible to obstacles knocking us off course and preventing us from making momentum, how do you think through that problem of knowing that momentum is important, but that inevitably, external obstacles come up in life, so how do we kind of marry those two concepts to make sure we can best account for that?

SHANNON BEER:

Yeah, we can do that in two ways. So first thing would be to plan for obstacles when we can. So essentially, when goal setting, asking someone

you set this goal of, say, going to the gym three times, you know what day you're going to go, you know what you are going to do when you go there. Do you perceive any barriers that might get in the way of doing this? And it could be, oh yeah, actually, I know that Tuesday's a massive workday for me, so it's probably not realistic for me to aim to go to the gym that day. So potentially, I'm now going to change the goal and I'm going to put a more realistic time for me. So we can plan for obstacles to some extent, and it's very useful to do that when goal setting. But then, as you say, there will be circumstances where there are things that we can't predict, and one's ability to respond to setbacks is going to be something that massively influences the success of the results that they get, because it's not about having a perfectly smooth journey, it's about being able to pick yourself back up when you face a setback. And this could be down to the way that you talk to yourself in response to setbacks. So most people find that when responding to a setback, they can be pretty critical of themselves, and we tend to think that that might be quite useful, you know, if you just talk, say some things really high standards, berate yourself when you don't meet up with them, that seems to be the standard approach.

Most people would find that it's actually not that helpful. I've asked people before, what does that, how does that make you feel, do you feel more motivated to reach your goals if you're talking to yourself in that way. If so, then awesome, potentially that's working for you. But most people tend to find it actually just makes them feel worse. They may even kind of feed into those like self-sabotage type behaviors, where I've ruined it already, I'm useless, I may as well carry on now, and then to only regret that later. Whereas compassion then is what seemed to be more of an adaptive response. So it's where someone can recognize that everyone makes mistakes from time to time, and that's perfectly normal. It's about treating yourself with kindness as well in response to that. So potentially, yeah, maybe I overate today, but you

know what, I've been doing pretty well up until this point. It's not how I would like to behave on an ongoing basis, but that's fine. I can just choose a different response next time. You can see how that sort of response is far more adaptive than saying to yourself, you're so useless, you've ruined it now. And in that piece then, so someone's ability to talk to themselves in a way that's kind, that recognizes that there are really human, could be a more adaptive self-regulation strategy, in response to a setback.

So I think it's really important for us to be able to encourage people to know that it's not going to be perfect every week, and that's okay, it's not necessary to get the result that you want and to expect a setback every now and then. And as long as you're able to pick yourself up, then that's kind of all you need to be able to do. It's not about avoiding every possible obstacle, because that's not possible, that's really unrealistic. So, yeah, helping people to respond in that way, and I think that also comes down to having realistic expectations, realistic standards of success, which, I guess, relates back to the idea; what does it really mean to you to be successful.

DANNY LENNON:

And it kind of feeds into, I think, earlier, one of those kind of five F's that you mentioned, was fortifications, and to some degree, that seemed to relate to cultivating some self-efficacy, which is, it's similar to maybe what we've just discussed, of avoiding this kind of self-critical nature. With something like self-efficacy, which we see associated with a host of positive outcomes and things, I think this is also another thing that can be quite difficult for many people to cultivate, even when we recognize this is important. How would you advise people to be able to kind of tap into that and be able to cultivate more self-efficacy?

SHANNON BEER:

I think a general answer would be that when it comes to increasing your self-efficacy or your confidence and your ability to make a change, is to start small. A lot of people, I think most

people when it comes to goal setting, it's like, right, I'm going to make this change, I need to overhaul my lifestyle, I need to change this, this and this in order to get results, which is pretty hard to maintain. And again, in response to a setback, people often feel demotivated. So self-efficacy can be enhanced by setting goals that are challenging, so this is a point that's sort of debatable when it comes to nutrition related changes. But the goal is that there's a theory of the zone of proximal development that says that it's going to be something that's a little bit challenging, but not too hard, that you don't feel like you can do it. So to have a goal that is challenging enough to give you something to strive towards, but also is something that you feel capable of achieving, so when setting goals with a client, asking them what change would you like to make, see what they offer up, and then how confident do you feel about achieving this change. And if they're not very confident about achieving that change, then you may want to break that goal down into smaller steps I'd like to increase my physical activity levels.

We can see that from the data I'm only reaching, say, 3000 steps a day. Well, jumping that up to 10,000 or some other, like, arbitrary number, might be a little bit too much. It's not something that someone feels confident they're able to do. I've got a lot of other things going on, I don't have that much time to focus on this right now. So breaking that down into something more manageable, okay, maybe I can't do 10,000, but I could potentially do 5000. I feel pretty confident about the fact that I could do 5000 steps. Also, start there then. Giving them something to focus on, but also something that they feel like they're able to achieve, because confidence is built up through small successes, which snowball over time, and that leads to greater changes. You don't have to do everything at once, and I think that's something that's really, really important and really crucial. And that's why I guess it's really important to ask your client or whoever it is what they think that they can change first, what's the biggest thing

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getting in their way what they feel most confident and able to detect change right now. I think that that's something that we can often miss when just working with someone, cool, here's all these things, ticking the boxes with steps, ticking the boxes with training and eating these foods, sticking to these numbers. And maybe I don't feel ready to do all of that. Well, do I actually need to do it right now? I think that's the point that we can tend to miss.

DANNY LENNON:

And so if we talk about nutrition, specifically, I think one of the things I really liked about some of the frameworks you have is this avoiding seeing one potential strategy or intervention as better than all others in all contexts, and, in fact, finding a way to have them all within an umbrella that they can be used in different contexts at different times. And you use this idea of intentional eating, and you have each of these kind of different potential strategies kind of plotted across this spectrum. Can you maybe introduce people to that, and then that kind of can set the stage for some specific things?

SHANNON BEER:

Most of us, especially listeners of this podcast, would be fairly familiar with the concept of nutritional agnosticism, but it's not something that we tend to state as an attitude we have towards eating behaviors. So the spectrum of intentional eating is an agnostic approach to eating behaviors. So there's not a one way of doing things that's better than another. There's just maybe more or less appropriate approaches for a given person in relation to their goals right now and the context of their lifestyle. So we kind of envision a spectrum of different behaviors, and if you imagine like a quadrant, so in the top left-hand corner, you've got a mindful approach to eating, you're using more internally regulated cues to eat. On the right hand side, you have a structured approach to eating which could be this is where something like micro accounting would come under that, which is more externally regulated and quite efficient for, say, weight modification or performance related nutrition goals. And then in the bottom right

hand corner, we have a more mechanical approach to eating, which is, again, externally regulated, and this would be more so appropriate for a more rehabilitative approach to weight modification, for example, someone who needs to gain weight. In the bottom left hand corner, we have intuitive eating, so again, the more internally regulated, weight-neutral approach for the rehabilitation of eating behaviors. With this kind of spectrum, on the left hand side, these are more self-reliant internally guided approaches, which could fall under the bracket of being a weight-neutral approach that could be more of a sustainable option. And on the right hand side, you may consider those to be more coach-reliant, more external, more structured and efficient for weight change.

Now, the thing that ties them all together is no matter what approach you're taking, it should be an informed approach, so you understand that the benefits and the rationale behind that approach, and it should be intentional. So it's a choice that someone actively engages in, and that's down to the individual, it's not for us to have, well, I have a preference, I have a fancy spreadsheet that works for this, and this is what you're getting kind of approach. It's so what do you need right now, and what's the most suitable thing for us to do. And there's a number of different ways that you can regulate your eating behaviors. It doesn't have to just be one thing. And I mentioned that we are tracking a lot, not because I think it's bad or anything like that, just because it tends to be a default. I think if we're defaulting to anything, then we're not considering the individual who's in front of us, and we shouldn't have a default, we should just have different methods. And if you're only working with one method, and you like to work with that method, I think that's fine. But I think you should be able to recognize when it's not appropriate for the person who's coming to you and be able to say, sorry, I only work in this way, I think you'd actually be better off with someone else. So it's not to say that you have to be able to

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offer all of these things, but just to be aware that whatever you are offering should be appropriate for who you are working with. And if you want to work with different people on different goals, then I think we need different approaches, we need to be able to work with different approaches.

DANNY LENNON:

Yeah, it's having a kind of full understanding of what each of those things entails that you can then make that best decision of when it would be used, and that can obviously be between different people, it can also be for the same person, like, the idea that I like of the visual you have of the spectrum is that you can literally imagine that as a dial that you can slide between at different points where, yeah, maybe someone does have a specific weight loss goal, now that needs to be efficient, maybe they compete in weightlifting or powerlifting, for example, and so, that may necessitate a slightly different approach for certain number of weeks. But then the rest of the time, there's going to be a focus on the other end of the spectrum, and so, it takes away this arbitrary good versus bad or which is best and which is the worst, and then instead views it in a more holistic sense, I think, which I find really useful. And of course, then for any of these particular interventions, how someone views them has perhaps just as much relevance as what the actual intervention is. So like you mentioned macro tracking, one of the things I talked with Jake Linardon is about someone could use that strategy in a very rigid way, someone else could also use it in a very flexible way, given that dietary restraint as a cognitive process as opposed to what the specific intervention is. So I think just being aware of how different people will respond to these may seem more suitable, so I just really like that there's this ability to put all those things under one bracket.

SHANNON BEER:

And I'm quite fortunate in that a lot of the people that I work with, I've worked with for a decent period of time, and we've been able to go through like these different stages. So I find that

that's something that's been quite common to me is people often start working with me with the expectation that they have to do a certain thing to get a result; I have to track in order to be aware of what I'm eating. Whereas when they're able to explore different options, they are then making active choices, and not choosing to do something because they feel compelled to or it's the only way that they can do something. They've now chosen it because they actually want that approach, and allowing someone or facilitating someone's ability to, yes, I'm going to stick to – I'm going to do this approach for now, and actually, now I recognize I'm going away on holiday; and it's not quite appropriate for me to be doing this approach anymore, so I'm going to focus on some more internally regulated ways of eating. And even doing things like non-tracking weeks just to make sure that someone's not developing, say, a tendency, a dependency on one given approach. That has worked for me up until this point. Now, I'm kind of feeling a little bit attached to that. Now, I'm going to continue on because, well, I can do it. But now I'm getting more and more, kind of stopped and fused with that approach. So I think regularly encouraging someone to take breaks and trying different things, when it's appropriate, just, I think acknowledges, again, that priorities change, goals change, and we want to be making active and informed choices at any given moment. And the more capable we feel of regulating our intake in different ways, then that is quite empowering, because, as you say, it's not the methods, per se, that's good or bad; it's our attitude towards the things that we're doing that are the really crucial thing. So yeah, having the ability to choose from a range of options is useful for you increasing someone's autonomy as well, I've actually decided that this is what I want to do, and increases their confidence. And I think when we're talking about nutrition related change, in particular, those internal feelings of control, the ability to be flexible and adaptable, is really important for promoting sustainable changes.

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DANNY LENNON:

Shannon, I've jumped around quite a lot and opened quite a lot of loops throughout this conversation, and each one of those could probably be something we could spend dedicated time talking about. So before we finish, is there anything either that we haven't got to that you'd be particularly interested in bringing up to people, or is there any of the concepts that we have opened that you want to tie up together or kind of conclude in some way that we've maybe left a bit open?

SHANNON BEER:

So I've been doing some mentoring calls with coaches recently, and a few common questions have arisen in relation to the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, the processes, and also the use of values and values identification; and people have asked, when do I use values with someone, when do I get someone to do this, when can I teach someone this. And I think that's the wrong orientation to have. When considering all these things, it's not like you have to use them on people, and you have to apply all these things at once, they're just tools that we can use when it's appropriate. So I think always asking yourself what does this person need, what does this person want, and what is useful for this person right now, so in the context of the values clarification, it's not necessarily something that you have to say when you're signing someone up. Right? Why do you want to change? Oh and also name three values that are important to you? It doesn't really make any sense. It kind of falls short. If you think that it would be a useful approach for someone, then that's your kind of answer to when should I use it, how should I use it, and what do you actually want to use it for. If someone's struggling with motivation, then potentially, yeah, that's the great time to bring it up. So it's not about forcing people to do something, but just knowing what do I want to help this person with or what do they want help with. And with the values, I think, just that one in particular, because it's something that's come up a few times recently, is helping someone to see how that may be in service of their goals. So asking, well, it sounds

like you're feeling a little bit demotivated right now, do you completely understand, this goal is really important to you – would you like to learn a little bit about other sources of motivation, you know, how we can broaden your idea of success? And then if a client's happy and interested in doing that, then you could go into the values setting kind of work. So just really knowing the purpose behind each thing and when it may be useful and when it's not is really important, but also knowing that you're not trying to get anyone to do something.

Another thing is, I also get a lot of questions, like, how do I help my client move away from macro tracking, I don't think it's something that's good for them right now, how do I help them move away. Or, how do I help them to enjoy themselves at social situations, I think they're quite worried. We can't force anyone to change. We can create conditions that allow changes to occur. We can evoke insight and encourage different perspectives, but we can't force an outcome. So although it's coming from a good place, you're not going to have much luck trying to get someone to move away from macro tracking, trying to get someone to stop dieting and go to maintenance. It's about what is the problem for this person right now, and what are they willing to do. If someone's tracking macros, and is finding it that it's a little bit invasive, but are struggling to stop, there's also a reason why they're struggling to stop. It may be that they get a sense of control from it. Even though there's downsides, there's going to be a positive as well, which is why they keep the thing ongoing. So trying to force someone to do something that they're not ready for, even if it's coming from a good place, is not going to be a good approach.

So I think just always focusing on your role as being a facilitator, someone who can evoke insights and create conditions to allow someone to explore different options, that's how I think we can achieve the positive results in the long term. I've had people who have come and want to focus on fat loss, want to track, and all the rest

of it, I've had my hesitations, but have met them where they're at, essentially. And then when the time comes, if you're creating those appropriate conditions, and someone knows that they've got choices and options, they tend to find out what's best for them, they're the ones with the insights and the idea of what's important for them. So focusing on if you've got in your mind, how do I get my client to do this, then it's not a client centered approach, even if it's coming from a good place. So I think that's one thing to bear in mind with things that we've spoken about.

DANNY LENNON:

Like you say, even when it's coming from a well-intentioned place, it's almost this omnipotent feeling that this person hasn't voiced this to me, but I still know what is best for them, and they should be doing this. And, like you say, even if there's maybe some truth to that, and of course, there's insights and things, coaches can see from an objective sense that maybe others can't, but if that's divorced from how someone is currently feeling, it's probably not going to be that useful. And I think probably a lot of it can only emerge through that coaching process, and as maybe that relationship builds. And you give a great example with the values that it's probably not going to be productive that as someone first comes to you, you say, hey, write down three values. Number one, it's really difficult to do. But two, it may not have the same impact as if, through conversations with your client over time, and as you're kind of talking through how things are going. It almost kind of emerges from those conversations what they may be value, and then you can kind of highlight that to them in a more productive way than this kind of arbitrary exercise because you feel you need to. And so it seems like the thing that ties those things together that you've discussed is that this isn't something that you are doing to someone and use the word you're facilitating, you're acting as a facilitator, and I think that's the perfect way to put it, as opposed to this is someone that I am doing this coaching thing to this is someone that I am applying certain things

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to, as opposed to here's tools that may help me in that facilitator role, I guess.

SHANNON BEER:

Yeah, and I think that's, of course, really beneficial for the clients. But I think it's also beneficial for a coach. For example, I was having a discussion recently, and a coach was saying, we've been trying to highlight all of these other signs of progress, but my client is still hung up on the scale weight, how do I get them to not be too concerned about that scale weight. And the coach was feeling a lot of concern for the client. I think you can, when working with a number of people, you can get really caught up in that, because of course we care about our clients, we want them to do well, but also places a lot of burden on the coach. This client is still a little bit concerned about their scale weight, this client is still struggling with this. I feel like a terrible coach because we haven't achieved this outcome. Whereas if you're thinking about creating the conditions and facilitating change, it's about knowing that different people take different lengths of time to see something. So although we would love to encourage our clients to move away from refocusing on the scale weight, there are certainly things that we can do. If you focus on the outcome, if I'm waiting for the day that my client's not concerned, then again, that's quite difficult for you as a coach. Whereas if you're thinking, well, I'm playing my role here by highlighting all of these other signs of progress, celebrating my client's strengths, encouraging them to think about things that their body can do or whatever is the approach that you're taking, and you're focusing on those things, then that helps to ease the burden as well. So it's useful for a client, because they're the ones who are directing their own change; but it's also useful for a coach to shift some of that burden, which I know gets very easy to get caught up in all of that as well.

DANNY LENNON:

I feel like we can only scratch the surface of some of these ideas that we could stay going for longer. So for people listening, Shannon, where can they find you on social media, on the

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internet, any of the work that you've published, where can they find any of that?

SHANNON BEER:

Probably the best place to find me or the easiest places are on Instagram, so that's at shannonbeer_. And also my website, which is shannonbeer.com, that's where I post the majority of the articles, so you can read about Flourishing Health, the setting values; also acceptance of cravings is one that I've done recently, it just kind of relates back to some of the stuff we touched on. So those would probably be the two primary places and the easiest place to find me.

DANNY LENNON:

We'll end on the final question of the podcast as usual. And this can be to do with absolutely anything. If you were to advise people to do one thing each day that would have a positive impact on any area of their life, what might that one thing be?

SHANNON BEER:

Maybe to tie in with the discussion that we've had is to think about what's meaningful to you and not what other people think is important, you know, it's nice to take opinions into account, but to think about what it really means to you to live a meaningful life and what actions you can engage in that reflects that. I think that's one thing that we can all benefit from doing regularly, so I think it's something that we can often lose touch with, and it's quite difficult to do. It doesn't come naturally, so taking the time to think about what's meaningful, and then orienting yourself towards that, I think is probably one thing that we would all benefit from.

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