

SECOND CURVE COACHING

The Yes I Wish I Could Bottle

A monthly series on health, fitness, and the second curve.

by Guy Mofley

My story starts with a warning.

Somewhere in my late thirties or early forties, I went in for a physical. My primary care physician told me I needed to lose some weight. My cholesterol was headed in the wrong direction.

Do you know what I did with that information?

Nothing. I filed it.

Not out of defiance. I wasn't angry at him, and I didn't think he was wrong. I had no category for doing anything about it. To understand why, you must know what I believed about health and fitness for most of my life: almost nothing at all.

A lifetime of coasting

I never liked sports much. I didn't compete, I didn't win, and I didn't particularly want to. When it came to my body, I coasted.

In Bible college, we were required to earn a certain number of cardio points every week. I took up racquetball to meet the requirement, and here is the part I had forgotten until recently: I enjoyed it. I had fun. Then I graduated, nobody required it anymore, and I quit, which tells you something true about me at that age. I could enjoy the work just fine. I had no reason of my own to do it.

My wife and I tried to lose weight several times over the years, and we succeeded more than once, through one interesting diet or another. Weigh Down and others like it. The weight came off. The weight came back. Up and down for years.

By the time I reached my forties, even that was behind us. I had made my peace. I had decided I was going to die happy.

I mean that as plainly as it sounds. Whatever size I ended up being, I was going out enjoying the food on my plate. That was the plan. That was the whole plan.

If you are reading this and quietly recognizing yourself in that sentence, stay with me. That was a settled position, not a struggle. I wasn't fighting anything. I had stopped.

Kent

I have known Dr. Kent Redfearn a long time. He was my youth pastor for a season, then my young adult pastor, and later, after my wife and I moved back to Alaska, he was my pastor. Then one of my dream jobs opened, and I joined the staff at Muldoon Community Assembly as the evangelist. Kent went from being my pastor to being my employer.

Around that time, Kent started talking about fitness in a way I had never heard before. Not weight loss. Not appearance. He talked about a fitness that would affect your spheres of living. The kind of fitness that would let you present your body to God, the way Paul puts it in Romans 12:1.

He also kept inviting me places. Our families would go hot tubbing together at the Alaska Club, the gym we all frequented. Then he got me lifting weights with him.

I want to be honest about my motives. I went for the fellowship. That was it. And the fellowship was sweet. I still have good memories of those sessions. But I never once looked at that life and saw myself in it. I wasn't planning anything. I certainly wasn't planning anything hard.

Kent was planting. I was just glad to be in the room.

Steve

Later, my company relocated me to Texas, where I was assigned to a new team leader named Steve.

Steve was an outstanding leader. He was also seriously fit. Six-pack, the whole thing. And he had a line he kept coming back to with me. Give it six months. Try something different. Push yourself.

He said it more than once. He said it like I was capable of it. I didn't act on a word of it. But I heard it every time.

That was the second seed. I had no idea it was a seed.

My brother

Then came the physical, and the cholesterol, and the filing of it away.

About a year later I ran into my brother at a work conference. We work for the same company. And he was remarkably thinner.

The story behind it was almost too ordinary. A few months earlier, he'd been out hitting garage sales with his family and found a copy of Tony Horton's P90X on DVD. He bought it. He and his sons jumped in. They got shredded. He looked better than I had seen him look in years.

Then he invited me to join him for a morning workout.

The yes

I thought about it for a day.

And then, for some reason I still cannot fully explain, I said yes.

I wish I could figure out what made that decision. I would bottle it. I would sell it. Honestly, I would give it away because that turned out to be one of the best yeses I have ever said in my life. Behind saying yes to Jesus and saying yes to my wife, it belongs on the short list. It made a difference.

I loved the program from the minute it started. I had no idea who this Tony Horton was, but I was about to find out. He was funny. He was thorough. He was easy to follow. I loved the routines almost immediately.

What I know now that I didn't know then

For years I told that story as though the yes came out of nowhere — a mystery.

Lightning.

It wasn't lightning.

Two researchers, James Prochaska and Carlo DiClemente, studied 872 people who changed a habit on their own. They found that before anyone changes anything, there is a stage they called precontemplation. Not resisting change. Just not considering it. And here is the part that explains my forties: people in that stage used the tools of change significantly less than people at any other point. Not because the information was bad. Because information is not what moves somebody who is not looking for it yet.

My doctor gave me accurate information. I had no use for it.

They also found the movement is not a straight line. People cycle. Which is a fair description of a decade of the weight coming off and coming back.

Kent had been inviting me into a gym for years. Steve had been telling me to give it six months. My brother showed up with a DVD he found at a garage sale. By the time that last invitation arrived, three different men had spent the better part of a decade working the same ground. I happened to be standing there on the morning I was finally ready to answer.

I can't bottle a yes. Neither can you. There is no way to manufacture the moment somebody decides.

But you can be in the line. You can be the third invitation, or the ninth, the one that finally lands. And you will rarely know which one you were.

Kent didn't know. He thought he was taking me hot tubbing.

Next month

I wish I could tell you that everything after that first workout was happily ever after.

It is nowhere near the truth.

Next month: the first challenge.

Reference

Prochaska, J. O., & DiClemente, C. C. (1983). Stages and processes of self-change of smoking: Toward an integrative model of change. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 51(3), 390–395.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.51.3.390>