



Human Optimization

Pod Club Discussion Questions



E12 The Art and Science of Personal Change: Overcoming Barriers to Become Your Best Self

Guest: Anni Shandera-Ochsner, Ph.D., ABPP-CN, Clinical Neuropsychologist & Medical Director of Joy at Mayo Clinic | Mayo Clinic Health System – La Crosse, WI

The three big questions explored in the podcast:

Question 1

What exactly is meant by self-improvement, and do we really need to try to change ourselves?

Question 2

Why is it so challenging to recognize our own shortcomings and develop an objective plan for personal growth?

Question 3

What practical actions can the average person adopt to create lasting behavioral changes?

Discussion Questions:

1. The podcast emphasizes the importance of understanding your "why" before embarking on any personal change. Describe your "why" for a specific area of your life you'd like to improve?
2. Dr. Shandera-Ochsner discusses how we tend to attribute our own mistakes to understandable circumstances, while viewing others' shortcomings as character defects. Can you recall a time when you experienced this cognitive bias, either in yourself or observing it in someone else? How might being aware of this bias help you in your self-improvement journey?
3. The advice to make initial steps "ridiculously small" and to use "habit stacking" was highlighted as a way to build success. What is one small, almost "ridiculous" step you could take this week towards a personal goal? How might you stack it onto an existing habit?
4. We might describe our multiple "selves" as energized Monday self vs. tired Thursday self. How do you currently consider these different "selves" when setting goals? What strategies from the podcast might help you better support your less-disciplined future self?
5. The podcast stresses the importance of accountability. Who in your life could serve as an accountability partner or support system for a change you want to make? How can you get that person on board with you plan?
6. A growth mindset involves expecting and embracing setbacks as part of the learning process. How do you typically react to failures or setbacks in your personal goals, and how might adopting a growth mindset change your approach to these challenges?

7. We should avoid copying someone else's "recipe" for change. In what areas of your life might you be comparing yourself to others in a way that hinders your own progress? How can you shift towards a more individualized approach?
8. Dr. Shandera-Ochsner explains that negative behaviors often serve an underlying purpose (e.g., coping with stress). Think about a negative habit you have. What underlying purpose might it serve for you? Select a healthier replacement to practice this week or month, and share your plans with your group.
9. Based on this episode, what is one small change you are going to make to help improve in this area. How are you going to keep yourself accountable to that and measure your success? (Be sure to keep it simple, start small, and make it very clear).