



**The Athena Wellness Podcast**  
**Episode 154 – The Real Path Approach with Jonathan Varkul**  
**October 5, 2022**

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**[00:00:05] Kathy Robinson:** Welcome to The Athena Wellness Podcast, the show that invites you to take a seat around the community fire and listen to stories that inspire. I'm your host, Kathy Robinson, author, coach and founder of Athena Wellness, a company that's dedicated to supporting you on your journey to live more wholeheartedly.

**[00:00:30] Kathy:** Today's episode is brought to you by The Athena Wellness Academy, your resource for wholehearted living.

The Academy's featured offering is an online course called, *From 'Type A' to 'Type Be,' How to Mindfully Descend the Corporate Ladder and Invite What's Next*. This course is perfect for you if you're contemplating or navigating a professional transition, and it's available as a self study or with a small cohort of students facilitated by me, Kathy Robinson.

To learn more, I invite you to go to [AthenaWellnessAcademy.teachable.com](https://www.athenawellness.com) or click on the link in the show notes.



**[00:01:21] Kathy:** Hello and welcome. Thanks so much for joining me for this shortened Wellness Wednesday episode, a little midweek boost to help keep your Warrior Vibe high.

Today, I'm joined once again by facilitator and coach, Jonathan Varkul. During this discussion, Jonathan shares his framework, the REAL Path Project, that incorporates spiritual elements such as awareness and expansiveness to the strategic thinking process.

And now onto the show. I hope you find this conversation insightful.

**[00:01:57] Kathy** Once again, I'm joined by facilitator and coach, Jonathan Varkul. Welcome back, Jonathan.

**[00:02:03] Jonathan Varkul:** Thanks, Kathy.

**[00:02:05] Kathy:** What I'd love to explore is, I know you have an approach called REAL Path Project and I found it really fascinating when we were chatting, so can you tell us a little bit about that and the framework that you use?

**[00:02:19] Jonathan:** Sure. It started out many, many years ago when I started doing the coaching I do. And I went to all marketing people to give me advice on how I can sell what I do. Most people wanted me to somehow define the process of what it is that I take people through in the work I do.

"Define your process," and I kept saying, "I don't know what it is. It's like I just do this thing that comes naturally to me."



"Listen, I can tell you, Jonathan, that if you take the time, you can actually figure it out and work through what it is you actually do with people."

So the REAL Path Project is a little bit of a framework, or the how-to of what I do in the work with other people and an easy-to-understand way of looking at things. It breaks the world of information down because if someone's sharing information with me, it breaks it down into two dimensions. Just easy to understand.

The two dimensions are: the thinking dimension and the sensation dimension. Every piece of information I receive, I receive it at the intersection of those two dimensions. So it's like a matrix, like an infinity matrix of just horizontal lines and vertical lines, and we are at an intersection point.

Now, the horizontal matrix, which is the thinking dimension, is being on the floor in a house or in a mall. If you want to go to a store and they say, "No, if you go to the right and then make a left and then make a right again, then you'll see The Gap. It's right over there, and so you can get there."

That's how we think. If I buy this on Tuesday, then I can open it on Wednesday, then I can make it for lunch on Thursday. If I get off the highway now, I can find the right variety store to get the ice cream that I saw that was on the billboard and I can get to eat it.

Thinking is very important because it allows us to get somewhere. And we travel in our thinking brain, like we travel along a horizontal floor of a building.



**[00:04:21]:** The sensation dimension runs vertically. The sensation dimension has nothing to do with thinking; it's just everything to do with sensations. The types of sensations we experience are either elevated or they're more subtle, they're not as elevated, they're deeper. When sensations are elevated, we rise up the vertical. When they're not elevated, we drop down. It's that simple. There's days when my football team scores a touchdown, I elevate on that scale. That's all it is. So not good or bad, just elevated, not so elevated.

What's interesting is that when I elevate on the vertical sensation, the level at which I'm intersecting my thinking changes. In other words, I'm now on a different floor, it's like taking an elevator. All of a sudden, the thoughts that are available to me at that elevated level are obviously going to be different thoughts that are available at a different level of the vertical.

When someone tells me something, it may in some way, activate me information-wise that shoots me up the vertical and now my suite of possibilities as far as how I interpret what they're saying, what I see as the problem, how I'm relating to it, is available to me, but only at that level of vertical due to the information that I'm trying to process at that vertical. In other words, until I process my way vertically down, I can't access thinking at a deeper level.

This is fun to understand that actually the type of thinking we may want to access in moments where we just can't see a solution is possibly residing at a deeper level of the vertical. The problem is, we can't think our way there any more than if I'm on the third floor of a building and I'm trying to get to a store that's on the first



floor. No amount of wandering around the third floor is going to get me there. I've got to get into the elevator.

And the cool thing about an elevator is I don't have to do much. I don't have to walk around the elevator. I just let it take me down to the-- I have to trust that the elevator's going to take me there. When I get out there, I can walk around.

That's the first piece is understanding those two parts and the different parts of our brain and how our thinking is affected by that and what people can do to relieve themselves of whatever preconceived notions they have and become more aware of the dimensions of the vertical.

So the first thing to notice is when is it relevant that I should be in touch with the vertical? Because most of the time, I'm thinking. If I'm in a meeting, I'm busy thinking. And the truth is, it would be optimal to be as much as possible because the vertical dimension is more like the roots of a tree. The horizontal dimension is more like the branches and the leaves. If it's winter, then the leaves fall off. If it's summer, then the leaves grow. But the truth is what happens is if I take the roots out of the ground, if I pull the tree out of the ground, nothing happens. So the vertical dimension that actually anchors everything.

But our awareness of it in terms of when it is relevant is typically when we're experiencing one of either agitation, constriction, tension, euphoria or disassociation, but typically one of those. It's a nice acronym, ACTED.



**[00:07:51]:** So, if you're being acted upon, in some way, then it would be useful to notice it. Because if you don't notice it, what you may not be aware of is that the thinking that you have is elevated in some way because it's been driven by a nervous system that's producing that type of thinking. What we want to be able to do is be aware of it and then reduce our elevation in the vertical dimension.

And so the REAL Path Project is to Recognize the two dimensions of information, Engage with both dimensions, Assess from a new perspective, and then Let go of old patterns. That's what the acronym for REAL stands for.

But what is so interesting about it is that it's out of the idea that when one is activated by one's nervous system and your nervous system is either agitated, constricted, tense, euphoric, or dissociated for that matter, there isn't a physical threat in the space that you're in to your life in that moment, then you're actually at odds with reality. Because the only reason for your system to be reflecting any tension is because, at some level, even subtly, it believes you are under some physical threat to your body.

We didn't normalize this to believe that actually, "No, it's perfectly reasonable because the way the person said it to me with the tone they said it to me and what they implied was they're threatening my job and, therefore, I should be tense." And the truth is, yeah, I understand that it feels scary to have your job threatened.



But technically speaking, this is technically, it's not a threat to your physical being. Even being out of a job, even a cancer diagnosis that you might die in six months' time – right now, it isn't a threat to your physical being right now. So technically, there's no reason for it.

It's actually possible, if you're a Zen master maybe, to expand one's relationship with the world where one isn't actually affected physically in that way, where one can actually do something about it because that's all you can do.

If, in fact, you are in physical danger and actually you do need those chemicals in your body, there's a good reason for you to be agitated, constricted, tense, euphoric, or dissociated if, in fact, there is a real threat.

The first step is to look around and see if you're in the business meeting and you're feeling threatened, first look around to see if you are actually threatened. Because if you actually are, and there's a lion there or someone's holding an ax or a gun, then makes perfect sense, no need to be traveling down the vertical at that point. The truth is you won't need to worry about it because when it's actually happening, it takes over. That's why it's a brilliant system.

But the system that's designed to save our life in one moment is actually also designed to make us stupid in another situation. Because if, in fact, we need all our systems to save our lives, we can't be giving any other parts of our system around higher thinking and I wonder what we should do about that or whether it's going to



hurt their feelings or if that's even the relevant thing to be questioning. I shouldn't be allowed the capacity to go there because I'm fighting for my life.

So if, in fact, our bodies, at some level, are tensed, even mildly, at some level, we are at odds with reality because, at some level, our system is narrowing against a reality that you're actually okay and believing something else. We're at odds in some way with that reality.

And so that's why the REAL Path Project, in addition to having a nice acronym, is all about helping people align with a more accurate reflection of reality. If they do that, then you're a fastball hitter hitting a fastball rather than swinging at something you think is there.

**[00:11:44] Kathy:** Right, right. There is so much there, and it ties in beautifully with what you were talking about before on this balancing of energy. It starts with this level of awareness. If there's some way we can quickly assess in this moment – “Is everything okay?” then we can determine what level the elevator needs to be most effective in that moment.

Where my mind went, when you were talking about thinking and sensation, was to what effect does positive energy have on this? But to your point, with elation or euphoria, it's still activated thinking.

And so it comes back to this: “Where is the stillness?” Where there's stillness, there is expansion. It feels like the more I can assess in my day-to-day with what feels like normal but is really prolonged stress response, if I can be aware of that and at





least see where I'm operating, even if I come down a level or two, that constriction eases and I have a better response to what is in front of me and I can address it accordingly. Is that fair?

**[00:12:59] Jonathan:** One hundred percent! You're giving yourself extra inches that you never had before. And if you build up the capacity to keep expanding those inches over time and you do this, think of the yards and football fields of space you will gain over ten years.

So think of what wisdom will emerge out of you if you practice that over time and the capacity to be able to guide and lead other people if you're able to do this for yourself. That's not a short-term thing. It's being in the process of allowing one's greatest potential to emerge over time.

It's an infinite game. This is until the day you die. You'll always be able to expand into more and more of yourself and not worry about, "Well, I'm getting with retirement and my body's not as strong as what it is. I feel like I'm diminishing." It's actually counter to that. It's actually, we are expanding more in terms of our capacity to be able to show up in a particular kind of way and offer wisdom in a moment that other people haven't yet developed the capacity to do.

It's a wonderful tool to lead to the fulfillment of one's life over time when the other faculties and other aspects for ourselves would look and say, "Well, you're diminishing over time." This is something where we could actually constantly evolve.



**[00:14:21] Kathy:** This is just wonderful. Thank you so much, so useful. I can't wait to start experimenting today with this technique.

Thank you so much again, Jonathan, for your time. I will put your information in the show notes. We appreciate everything that you've shared today. Thank you.

**[00:14:40] Jonathan:** You're welcome. It's been wonderful being here.

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**[00:14:45] Kathy:** Thank you so much for joining me today. I know there are many ways you can spend your time. Thank you for choosing to spend it with me. Until our paths cross again, be kind to yourself and show your Warrior Spirit some love.

If you know anyone who could benefit from today's episode, please pass it on. And many thanks for supporting the show by subscribing and leaving a review. It means a lot and it helps others find their way to our circle.

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Until next time, be well!

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**[00:15:47] [END OF AUDIO]**