



The Athena Wellness Podcast
Episode 240 – The Regret of Paths Not Taken
January 10, 2024

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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: Hello and welcome friends. Thanks so much for joining me for this shortened Wellness Wednesday episode, a little midweek boost to help keep your Warrior Vibe high.

We're about a week and a half into the new year and I'm feeling incredibly energized. So much so that I'm mindful about this enthusiasm when I'm interacting with others who are feeling less than stellar by the calendar change.

This positive propulsion has surprised me. I began the year empty – literally. As I mentioned last episode, I did a five day [ProLon](#) fasting with food program that renewed my body. But I coupled it with a media fast to still my mind. And that combination did wonders for me.



It gave me a renewed body, mind and spirit to welcome 2024. In past years, I greeted the new year with an armful of meticulous plans. But as this year began, I did find that nature indeed abhors a vacuum. Lightning struck within days and suddenly there were exciting professional and personal projects that began taking shape without me even trying.

As I reflect on this unusual start to the year, I realize why I'm feeling so engaged and I think the insight may be helpful for you. Here it is. Without realizing it, I stopped serving "the shoulds" and began investing in "the ideal."

[00:02:17] Let me explain. I recently found some findings researched by psychologist Tom Gilovich. A few years ago, he co-wrote a paper entitled, "The Ideal Road Not Taken," and I'll link that up in the show notes.

I was struck by his findings. Gilovich concluded that regret does not come from failing to satisfy obligations and responsibilities. Rather remorse stems from unfulfilled hopes and aspirations.

Gilovich also notes that there are three components that comprise a person's sense of self:

- The actual self, which includes attributes that you believe you possess;
- The ideal self, which includes attributes you'd like to possess, along with your hopes and dreams; and
- The ought self, which includes your shoulds, such as your obligations and responsibilities.



And where do we usually focus our New Year intentions? On the ought self - I ought to clean up my diet, I ought to get more sleep, I ought to go to the gym, I ought to be a better partner, parent, friend, and so on.

This is why we spend our time improving our actual selves instead of investing in our ideal selves.

I believe midlife is the perfect time to make adjustments to this equation. And let me say, I use the word *midlife* very broadly. It's somewhere between Gen Z and old age. It's a time in your life when you have experience, wisdom and the energy to implement change.

Let's take a closer look at the three elements of self with some helpful strategies for each.

- 1. The actual self.** Your actual self is "what is." A helpful strategy to work with the actual self is learning to accept all of who you are and celebrating it. So many of our blessings are disguised as everyday happenings that we take for granted, including our incredible selves. Think about the everyday miracles that happen without fail that go unnoticed, and how you've navigated your difficult life terrain over the decades. Take a few moments each day to honor all you've accomplished and experienced - all the things that make you, you.
- 2. The ideal self.** This self is your North Star. It can provide direction and motivation. What's helpful to look at here is the relevance of your hopes and dreams. Do your aspirations need to be updated? Maybe you wanted to be



a rock star in your 20s, but what you really want now is to be an entrepreneur, or an artist, or maybe you still want to rock out. There's no right answer, only the one that feels inspiring to you today.

- 3. The ought self.** This self is occupied with the things you feel you should do, or could do, or have to do. A useful strategy here is to identify the beliefs and influences that impact your ought self the most and change the narrative. Perhaps it's your own internal expectations, or those of our culture or your family, work, or social structure. It's been my experience that redefining your roles and responsibilities isn't a quick fix. But I've found that over time, self-compassion, which includes awareness, understanding, acceptance, and forgiveness, is a way to reprogram your inner story.

[00:06:41] Now that we understand the three elements of self a bit more, how do we find some harmony among them? The question I would pose is, "How can your actual self redirect time from your ought self to allow your ideal self to express itself a bit?" Put another way, "How can you begin to make investing in your ideal self enjoyable?"

Rest assured that a full makeover is not required unless you feel inspired to take some big actions. Small time commitments can go a long way to reshape your life. I believe it's how the most successful second chapters are created. One small step at a time allows your actual self to get the skills and experience and then invite your ought self to chill out a bit.



We're going to explore these themes quite a bit this year, giving you the tools you need to make choices that align with your ideal self, while keeping your life functioning as it transitions.

If you feel like you'd like to work with these themes, I suggest you get a small notebook you can keep with you and begin taking notes of the things that are resonating during your days. It's also helpful to keep a list of the things that don't feel great anymore.

This information will become a treasure trove providing clues on the way forward. What patterns are you noticing? What are some changes that are needed? And what are some experiences that you'd love to have?

This notebook, or even a dedicated note on your phone, becomes essential because these types of clues tend to come in the middle of other activities – in business meetings, while driving, brushing your teeth, cooking dinner, or traveling on an airplane. It helps to have one place to collect these seemingly random thoughts to study when you have a quiet moment.

These thoughts that you're capturing are pointing the way toward your future. Jotting them down is a way of listening and crafting your days in a way that will delight your ideal self. Ultimately, your actual self and the vision of your ideal self will begin to merge. And I think that has a lot to do with the way I've been feeling these last few weeks.



[00:09:18] If any of this feels overwhelming to you, consider taking some steps that won't require heavy lifting but will move you directionally toward your ideal self. Here are three suggestions:

- 1. Create a new list of aspirational experiences.** You can begin by looking for hidden remnants in your journals, old bucket lists, or abandoned passion projects. Then expand your daily awareness to catch some new glimpses of things that are making you curious or feeling excited to learn more. Keep in mind that these early hints are usually quite shy and tend to speak in whispers.
- 2. Pursue avenues of inspiration.** If you're feeling alone during this period of exploration, there are plenty of ways to learn more about the things that your ideal self finds engaging. You can seek out books, podcasts, movies, YouTube clips, stories of those who live in this new way. There are mentors and coaches and online communities and in-person gatherings. And don't forget online courses, weekend workshops, or resource lists to expand your horizon.
- 3. Learn to listen to and trust your ideal self.** This journey is one of seeking fertile soil to plant new seeds of possibility. The only way to find that field is to begin walking. And as you do, pay attention to what comes into your awareness. As you begin to pay attention to this inner guidance, you'll develop a relationship with it to the point where you begin to trust this inner compass as your only true source. Keep an open mind, a curious heart, and



be willing to learn. Inevitably, the next synchronistic stepping stone will appear just when you need it.

[00:11:31] As we bring this episode to a close, my question for you is, “What paths have you not taken?”

I hope you can see that this is the perfect time to invest in the things that breathe new life into your ideal self. It's not too late to craft a future that's aligned with who you long to be. Your unique adventure awaits.

If you're interested in exploring the themes we cover today and would like a guide for this soulful journey, please do reach out. I'll link up my [coaching page](#), [email address](#) and a link to learn more about the [ProLon fast](#) in the show notes. As always, I look forward to connecting with you.

I'll leave you with this parting wish: May you circumvent life regret by taking the path that thrills your ideal self.

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[00:12:33] 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.



If you'd like to access the show notes, have a question you'd like addressed on a future episode, or would like a transcript of this episode, visit www.AthenaWellness.com/podcast.

Until next time, be well!

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[00:13:35] [END OF AUDIO]