

Where Do I Go From Here? Self-Determination Theory—Kori L. Propst, MS

“I really feel like I’m running a marathon now,” she explained. “When I started prepping for my first show I was going at 110%. That, now, I realize, was like starting off too quickly out of the gates. With my second show I slowed down and paced myself. Now I feel like I can do a third and be okay.” What is it that pushes us in to a place of insight? When we feel as if we’re drowning? Who or what gives us the strength of mind and body to keep pushing when we’re exhausted but the prudence to know when to slow down, when to change course, or when to stop?

Having just come back from the NE Classic, I am filled with thoughts now on my experience sitting at the judge’s table. What a vastly different perspective I was given! I sat back, and while not relaxed because of the caliber of athletes and just the sheer volume at this show, I had the opportunity to witness a myriad of emotions up close and personal. The judges really can see a lot from their vantage point below the athletes. And being a bodybuilder as well as a therapist, I felt fortunate to be so close. What I saw ran the gamut from sheer delight to absolute fatigue, all the way to relief and then fear. For many of the athletes, as they took the stage I was curious as to what lead them there. I wondered how they would describe their prep experiences, and I pondered whether many of them would choose to continue. For quite a few of us, the end result is the determining factor in the will we decide to exert toward our continuing efforts and whether we view the costs being worth the experience. Win or lose some of us just eat up the fight, the challenge, the path leading to the stage. Others, without a win, will drive themselves crazy, searching for the next strategy, the next plan, the next pill or potion, the next nutritionist or trainer, the next surgeon....get the picture? Rather than focusing on what has been gained and what they can take away in triumph, they extract nothing but failure. No first place equals no place at all. Lost. Drifting. Is this insightful? Self-determined? I won’t presume that these athletes aren’t creative thinkers. They’d have to be in order to develop a new game plan for the win every time. I am suggesting, however, that there can be more to an athlete’s goals than the end result. We are in a sport that is clearly subjective. I’ve been placed 6th by one judge and 1st by another in the same show. Will we let others determine whether we need liposuction around our glutes and midsection or will we determine for ourselves that perhaps, if we’re thinking this way, we have lost the meaning of the sport?

Self determination—these words imply a personal decision making process, one that we can control. The process focuses less on extrinsic values, and more on internal levels of motivation. Rather than competing for a pro card, an extrinsic reward for example, we might compete for the personal values and meanings we autonomously determine are involved in the sport. When you make a choice, you may go into it with a well thought-

out weighing of the costs and benefits. You may make it spontaneously. You could even get the opinions of others and base your decisions more on how others feel rather than how YOU do. Ultimately, however, YOU act. Ever asked yourself before you decide on something how you might feel after-the-fact? My client I illustrated at the beginning of my article sure will from now on! It may take a negative experience or two to get in touch with yourself enough to realize that you do have the power to change your behavior and approach situations differently, but the beauty is that power is always there. A choice exists, every time. Insight comes from our ability to be present in our experiences, to examine everything they have to offer, to be able to sit in the sadness but still see the wonder, to walk off the stage with a 5th place trophy or none at all but understand and admire what you did to get to a place that few people ever will!

I watched competitors jump for joy on that stage. I watched them smile in disappointment at a defeat but walk off the stage with grace after congratulating their fellow athletes. This athlete may determine that he needs to take a break from competing to regroup and focus on the other important areas of his life- his kids, job, whatever. He could write down the empty and self-deprecating thoughts filling his mind after taking less than first, whether they be things like, “here we go again” or “I’ll never win” or “this isn’t fair” and recognize that they’re leading him down a slippery slope of depression and unhealthy isolation, choosing to set goals around bettering his posing, practicing for a certain amount of time per day, or even thinking more positively. And yet another choice would be to throw his passion into something different. Again, choices abound. We often avoid taking the time to look at them though.

Each athlete on the stage this past weekend did something amazing. I saw this. Did every one of them see it? Probably not. Some walked from the stage feeling dejected and worthless, some thrilled and thankful, others worried about the next thing to come. Will they acknowledge and move on? Will they ruminate and move into a downward spiral of negativity? It’s their choice! I encourage you to ask yourself for what reasons you’re moving, striving, and gunning. If you’ve felt like you’re spinning your wheels, if you’ve felt as if you’re stuck in quicksand, or if you’re sick and tired of being sick and tired, it’s time to reassess YOUR meaning. And I’m always here to help.

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