

Jonathan: Hey what's going on? Jonathan Bailor here and we are back with Wednesday Vail, Master SANE Certified Coach. It's so exciting, I feel intimidated being here.

Wednesday: You make it sound more exciting, I think, than it is.

Jonathan: We are rockin' and rollin' here. Wednesday has been doing some amazing work, as has the entire SANE team, working on some SANE psychological help, because we know that just knowing what to do is not enough. We have to be able to put what we know into action. What we're doing here today is, Wednesday said, "Jonathan, I have some questions for you." And I said, "All right, Wednesday. I don't know if I have some answers for you, but regardless, we should record this, because I really think that getting a deeper and behind the scenes look at these SANE psychological principles really makes a huge difference, and in a lot of ways, is the piece that has been missing.

We see all these top ten lists, we see all this - eat this, don't eat that. But we know that food and body and health - these are deep psychological topics that are about so much more than just, eat one less almond per day and you'll magically lose 35 pounds. That is just not giving this issue the respect and importance that it deserves. So, that is what we're doing here today, unscripted and behind the scenes. Wednesday is Katie Couric-ing me right now, so we'll see how this goes.

Wednesday: I love everything you just said. It's not just about the food, and that's what we're talking about here today.

Jonathan: What *are* we talking about here?

Wednesday: We're talking about habits.

Jonathan: Habits, okay.

Wednesday: Habits are kind of one of those funny things, because it's almost like we don't have control over what we're doing. At least, at first that's what it can seem like. So, I stress all the time when working with people that we need to build awareness first, because it *is*

scary, we do feel out of control, when we don't have awareness of the situation in our minds and our bodies.

Jonathan: Yes.

Wednesday: So, I like the work that we do identifying the cue, the routine, the reward – breaking it down, not scary, very simple. But breaking habits is very difficult, and we hear all the time, “I meant to, but... I tried, but I ended up doing (blank) anyway.” So, what are some techniques, or maybe things to avoid, when trying to start a new habit, or changing that routine portion of the habit?

Jonathan: The good thing about habits is there is so much science here, so much evidence, and the one thing that we know without a shadow of a doubt – just like we know that, for example, starvation makes you fat, we know that as a fact now. No question about it, it destroys your metabolism and it predisposes you to gaining infinitely more fat in the future.

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We know without a shadow of a doubt that trying to will, just to brute force change something in your life is the most ineffective strategy you could ever take. It's a little bit like starvation for your brain. You're literally trying to say, “Just don't eat chocolate cake. I force myself to not eat chocolate cake.” We talked about this in the other videos a bit, that when you tell yourself, “Just break this habit,” and you're focusing on the negative, you are literally telling your brain to think about nothing else than the thing you are trying to avoid.

If you want to make it hard to change your behavior, what you want to do is constantly have your mind think about the thing that you don't want to think about. It's going to make it nearly impossible for you. You're going to have to white-knuckle your way through life, which is no way to live. I would argue that that is a bigger failure than not actually having had the change happen, because you're going to wake up one day and think, “Why did I spend the last 12 months on this ridiculous stuff while life passed me by?”

Wednesday: And habits aren't bad. We don't have to manually control everything in our lives.

Jonathan: Absolutely. The number one thing we have to look at is, when we want to look for habit change, it's not about willpower and stopping certain habits. It's about using principles of substitution to say, "What are our current habits, and how can we tweak those habits?" Go to where we are and say, "Understanding what I know now, knowing what I know now, knowing where I want to be, what are my current habits and how do I slightly tweak them or make substitutions, and then gradually develop new habits?"

Wednesday: If the substitution isn't a good match, your brain will rebel.

Jonathan: Exactly.

Wednesday: And that's probably what's happening in these situations.

Jonathan: Yes, and let's be clear. Saying, "Don't eat sweets, and the substitution is nothing," that's not a substitution. There has to actually be a substitution. If you are used to a dopamine rush in your brain after you eat a meal, that usually comes from eating sweets, and to say that my new habit is to not do that, isn't a habit. You can't have a habit of doing nothing. That doesn't even make sense. A habit is to do something. So, instead of that, you might say, "My habit is, I'm used to feeling a good, nice sensation after I eat dinner."

So, what we have to figure out is something that isn't toxic and addictive that you can do after dinner so that you can have that same experience. I don't know what that is for you, specifically, but I can tell you without a shadow of a doubt, the one thing that it isn't. What it isn't is, just doing nothing, just saying, "Just give it up and fight your way through it." That cannot work.

Wednesday: Definitely being more aware and mindful of really, what a cue is, and specifically, what the reward is, so you can identify the substitution for the routine.

- Jonathan: To even be conscious of what you just said is a huge step in the right direction, because if what you're doing is counting points, and you hit your point goal, there is no concept of habits and changing my behavior and learning new skills. Sure, you white-knuckled your way to eating whatever, 15 points, but what are you doing? If you were in a certain mental state, if there were these feel-good hormones of serotonin and dopamine and oxytocin in your brain, and you just say, "I am going to just not have those," your brain is going to rebel and say, "Forget this. I don't want this." So, you must find other mechanisms to achieve that same brain state, just not through sugar and processed fat and processed carbs.
- Wednesday: And you're not a failure if the habit doesn't stick, you just need to try something different for the routine.
- Jonathan: Absolutely. And you need to give yourself time. Habit, by definition, takes time.
- Wednesday: Let's get into the habit of asking more questions. Do you like my segue?
- Jonathan: I do. Very good, very good.
- Wednesday: This kind of goes into that similar idea of failing at changing my habit, or starting new routines. Some people will start their new habits and see a lot of success - it's working great for them, they're feeling better, it's coming automatically, and then it seems, almost out of nowhere - wham! The old habits are back. Usually we see this in times of stressful situations, increased vulnerability. So how can we protect those new routines, even when life happens?
- Jonathan: You're spot-on, that the trigger - anytime we're trying to take on a new routine, or substitute an old habit with a new routine, there is some willpower involved. This is another one of those paradoxes where willpower is an inevitable component, but we need to use it strategically. The beauty of the habits is the amount of willpower you need gets less and less and less over time, whereas when it comes to starvation and deprivation, you might be able to eat 1200 calories for one day. The second day is harder. The third day

is harder. The fourth day is harder. The fifth day is harder, and after about 16 days, you feel like, “Forget this, I’m done.”

Whereas, 16 days of a new habit, that habit is getting easier and easier and easier. But during that time period, while you’re establishing the habit, willpower is involved, and if something very stressful happens, your willpower, just like your energy, just like anything else, is getting sucked away and diverted to that other area. So, one, it’s going to be harder to keep the habit in place – period.

Awareness and being able to avoid what is called an amygdala hijack, or something very stressful happens, having a written plan for, in the past when something happened I would run to the cupboard and grab a bag of cookies. Even if you could have a sign on the cupboard which is like, “In case of emergency, break glass,” like if you see this you might be in a state where the amygdala part of your brain is making you feel very panicked, and something that is going to interrupt your pattern, something that is going to allow you to just for one split second shift from a panicked state of, just do whatever, to a more conscious, self-aware state, where you can make a decision.

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And if the conscious decision you make is, “Look, I’m either going to have a nervous breakdown, or I’m going to drink this soda,” it’s probably better to drink the soda than it is to have a nervous breakdown, because being there for your grandkids doesn’t matter if you’re not here tomorrow. At the same time, we do want to give you the tools necessary to, whenever possible, bring awareness to the situation. For example, if someone throws – this is going to sound like a weird analogy – if someone throws sand in your face, you don’t have to think, your eyes just close. You could train yourself – this is not a good idea, but you could train yourself to not have your eyes close if someone threw sand in your face. It would be very, very difficult, but we’ve seen some of the crazy things people do.

Wednesday: Oh gosh.

Jonathan: You need to give yourself the awareness and the permission to, when life throws metaphorical sand in your face, it just shuts down. It just reacts and it just closes off to any new opportunities and says, “Go back to my instincts.” My instincts might be, “I’m feeling stressed, I need more dopamine in my brain. Eat sugar, because I know that is going to put more dopamine in my brain.” Anything that you can do to interrupt that pattern, and using physical cues in your environment – like even signs.

For example, if someone has challenges with alcohol, people will say, “Don’t keep alcohol in your house.” Just don’t, because it is very difficult to stay in that panicked state if you have to get in your car, drive, go to the liquor store, come back home, open it. So anything you can do to bring awareness, and also to just make it physically harder for you to not have awareness. If you, for example, have a bowl of candy sitting right in front of you, it is a lot harder to bring awareness to that situation because it’s right there, than if the candy is not in your house and you have to drive all the way to the store to get it.

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Wednesday: That’s a great technique – physical space, to give us mental space.

Jonathan: I love that. That’s great.

Wednesday: I think that ties into my next question. We all have habits we want to change, obviously. We want to turn maybe harmful habits into healthier habits, and none of us are perfect. How do you prioritize which habits to tackle first? Progress versus perfection – we can’t change all our habits all at once. That would be too overwhelming.

Jonathan: There are two approaches. You have to pick which one works best for you. One is just, which do you have the most energy for? Honestly, if I were to say to you, “I would like for you to try to eat a serving of nutrient-dense protein with lunch every day. Try to do that.” And you say, “Well, I’m a vegetarian. I get it, I could have rice protein and pea protein, or I could eat eggs, but I just don’t – but those SANE smoothies – my buddy has been talking about the Vitamix and I’ve been kind of curious about that.” That’s one, it’s just which do you have more energy for, and go for that one.

Another approach, if you're more of a pragmatic person, would just be to say, "Tell me which one is going to give me the most bang for my buck," and the one that is going to give you the most bang for your buck, without a shadow of a doubt, is eating more non-starchy vegetables.

Wednesday: Yes.

Jonathan: So, any habit that you can say – whatever it is – I have the habit of going to the grocery store and filling my car with vegetables – period. So, a very simple habit is, do not leave the grocery store without an abundance of vegetables. Then, whether it is steaming them, or sauteeing them, or blending them, or chopping them, or snacking on them – any habits that you can put in place to get them with breakfast, with lunch, with dinner, and then even as snacks in between.

The one thing that no one talks about is vegetables, and the one thing that everyone agrees about is vegetables, and the one thing that nobody does – the average American eats zero servings of green vegetables per day – is vegetables. So, do what you have the most energy for is approach number one. Do anything you can to eat more vegetables is approach number two.

Wednesday: I love that. It reminds me of when I'm working with people and they say, "Oh, I'm eating SANE desserts every single night because I used to eat a sweet every single night. Is that too many SANE desserts?" And I say, "Well, we can look at cutting back on the SANE desserts later, but right now, changing the habit of eating sugar to eating something SANE – that is huge. Keep doing that.

Jonathan: Absolutely. That is, I think, a great example of where people might get the energy from, because when they see, is making an inSANE ice cream to a SANE ice cream going to give you the biggest metabolic result you could ever imagine? It's going to give you some pretty awesome metabolic results, but first of all, it's going to be delicious. Second of all, it's going to show you that you can still have your cake and eat, too, literally. You're just making the cake with almond flour and xylitol, and you're learning that kind of stuff. Then you might say, "You know, those vegetables – all right,

I'll do it now," because you've got some success underneath your belt.

Wednesday: Tie a knot into success.

Jonathan: Success – I love it.

Wednesday: One more question. In my experience, and I'm sure other people's experiences, too, the habits that are most difficult to identify are those habits that aren't physical actions. It's not reaching for the candy bowl. It might be when I encounter a situation – I say this thing in my mind, and then the reward might be a negative reward and a negative feeling, or something like that – feeling bad about myself. So, how can we begin to build more awareness around these harmful habits that we can't even see?

Jonathan: That's a good question. She Katie Couric'd me! I knew it!

Wednesday: I ended with the hard question.

Jonathan: She ended with the hard question. Can you please repeat the question? I'm going to phone a friend. One more time. Give me the question one more time.

Wednesday: I find that it is easier to change physical habits – I notice I'm eating candy after every meal. There are habits that happen only inside our brains, so we can't see it. How can we build more awareness around those habits, because they are harming our progress and our results?

Jonathan: Write them down. The reason I don't have a good answer for this is because I never actually thought about that specific version of the question. It's a fantastic question. It's why we're recording this. We have to bring awareness to it, and the only way – your thoughts – I forget who said this, it may have been Albert Ellis, or someone else – I don't know who said that we tend to think we control our thoughts. If you think you control your thoughts, try to not think for the next five seconds and see how that goes.

The other way to think of your thoughts is more like you think of your senses. If you look at a flower, you can't choose to not see it. Your eyes will take in the information. If someone sprays air

freshener in the air, your nose will take in that scent. You can't *not* smell it. If you do something and it doesn't turn out the way you wanted it to, your brain will – you don't have anything to see, or smell, or hear, but your brain will say, "Hmm, that didn't work out the way I wanted it to." So your thought is almost like seeing, smelling, hearing. Things are going to happen.

Wednesday: It's an automatic response to a cue.

Jonathan: It's an automatic response to a cue. But we can, then, as humans – the amazing, unique ability we have is something called metacognition, which means that we can think about our thinking. A dog thinks, but it does not have the ability to think, "What did I just think about, and is that thought the most productive thought that I could have right now?" The way we can do that, the way that we can most easily start to metacognate and bring awareness to our thought process is by taking our thoughts out of our head, because you can't – 875249547 – what did I just say? You can't remember that many things. Your brain cannot hold that much information in it in a short period of time.

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So, if you do something that is not according to plan, and then you start to feel something, this is where your SANE journal comes in. You need to write down – "What am I feeling? What thoughts are coming through my mind?" This is not something that I can answer in five minutes on this video. There are people who do this – cognitive behavioral therapy, rational motive behavioral therapy – there is a lot that goes into this, but none of that can happen without awareness of your thoughts. The number one thing you can do to bring awareness to your thoughts is to make your thoughts not just thoughts – make them something that is written down or typed out on paper so that you can examine those thoughts and then think about them and say, "Is this thought helping me or hurting me?" But it is very difficult.

For example, try to do it in your brain right now. Try to think a thought. Maybe for me it is something like, "I don't like how shiny my forehead probably is right now." Not a huge deal, it's not like, "Hey, Jonathan, we need to go see a psychotherapist because you should love everything about yourself. It's fine, my forehead is

shiny. Whatever, it's all good." But I cannot think about my forehead being shiny, and how I feel about thinking about my forehead being shiny, at the same time. I can't.

Just like we think we can multi-task. You can't. What you're doing is one task, and then switching to another task, and then switching back. So, if you ever want to bring awareness to your thoughts, if you ever want to have any hope of doing what you asked, which is, "How do you change your mental habits?" You have to know what you're working with.

Wednesday: That's so cool, too, because you're taking something very cerebral, and you're actually making it a physical habit. "Now this thought comes up, and now I write it down." It's easier to change something physical than something that's just flitting around inside your head.

Jonathan: And to take that even to another level, I love how you made it physical. If you want to have a lot of fun, then one of the techniques we talk about in other videos is, imagine, that statement that you just made to yourself, but even reading it, and almost imagining that you didn't write it.

Myself as an example - "You have a shiny forehead, Jonathan." And then I thought of someone who I wasn't a huge fan of. If they wrote that on a slip of paper and handed it to me and I read it, I would think, "Okay, whatever. It's not a big deal." But when I say it to myself, I think something different.

So by physically creating it in the world, you can also then get into the arguing with yourself, the thing that we talked about before, because it is very hard to maintain the thought in your head, and then argue with it at the same time. You will get confused and you will think, "What was I doing? Why did I come in this room, anyway? What's happening?"

Wednesday: And that goes back to creating the mental space.

Jonathan: Yes, exactly.

Wednesday: Well, you did fabulous, Jonathan.

Jonathan: Well, I think it was a joint effort on that one.

Wednesday: I did help you a little bit.

Jonathan: Well, thank you, thank you. I appreciate that.

Wednesday: Well, everybody, I hope, despite my shiny forehead – no, just kidding. I'm going to go write this down! No, just kidding.

Thank you so much for joining us today. We will be back with more behind the scenes SANE psychology questions and answers soon. Remember, stay SANE.