



The Athena Wellness Podcast
Episode 003 – What Are the Athena Principles?
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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 helps women enhance their well-being and reimagine their current stage of life as a time of strength and reconnection with themselves.

Hello, and welcome to Episode Three. Today, I'll be providing an overview of the wellness framework I outlined in my book, *The Athena Principles, Simple Wellness Practices for Overworked Professionals*. It's a process I developed to help my clients get the same results I did. Whether it was transforming my out-of-shape thirtysomething self into an ultra-marathoner at midlife, or planning the transition from a corporate career to an entrepreneurial one.

I'll walk you through the thought process, including the tools, the Principles and the related practices. There's no need to take notes or to try to remember the Principles because at the end of the show, I'll tell you how to get all of this info in a PDF document, including a wellness action plan that you can customize for your needs. So, sit back, take a nice long breath to ground yourself in presence, and let's get started.

The reason I wrote the book was as a coach, I wanted to share my wellness methodology and philosophy. I feel better and I'm more fit in my mid-50s than I was in my mid-30s. And I thought it was important to share that my wellness journey was imperfect and it unfolded and evolved over years. I also wanted to show that it was possible to enhance wellness with small consistent steps.



The challenge in doing this was how to codify what I do in a way that a reader, no matter where you are in your wellness journey, can create a wellness practice that's tailored and unique to you. The book is designed to help readers reconnect with your mind, body and spirit by introducing simple wellness practices that I used when I was at my busiest and most stressed points in my corporate career.

The practices are designed to help you:

- Treat yourself with more self-compassion
- Uncover your deep soul level motivation for changing your lifestyle
- Show up for yourself consistently with optimism and enthusiasm
- Create a customized self-care plan, and
- Develop a support system for success.

It's a wellness guide meant to teach and inspire through story, my personal one, as well as the stories of other driven professionals who transformed their lives.

The core message of the book, *The Athena Principles, Simple Wellness Practices for Overworked Professionals*, is this: Reconnecting to our mind, body and spirit through the exploration of five Principles, which are Self-Compassion, Intention, Consistency, Growth Mindset and Accountability, and related practices that include writing, meditation, and positive action, leads to wholehearted living and optimized well-being. Readers discover what living wholeheartedly means for them, along with ideas to create a customized self-care plan that nourishes their deepest desires.

Sharing this message and these practices could not be timelier. Our personal and professional worlds have been up-ended this past year. We're experiencing high levels of stress due to the uncertainty, both individually and collectively. And we're being asked to address topics like human dignity, acceptance and equality.

We're looking for answers and I believe those answers are available to us if we can access our still point and look within to our Warrior Spirit. It's my hope that the wellness



suggestions and practices I'll share today will serve as medicine for you and for these times.

Let's start with a brief overview of each of the three Athena Principles components: Tools, Principles and Practices.

First, tools. Tools are used to assess your current state of wellness, provide clarity, track progress, and set new objectives. The tools provided include a Wellness Assessment and a Holistic Wellness Spectrum, which covers elements of mind, body and spirit and can be used to determine where to focus your wellness efforts.

Principles provide a solid foundation and serve as a guide for current actions and future decisions. The five Principles, as I mentioned, are Self-compassion, Intention, Consistency, Growth Mindset and Accountability.

And then there are the practices that aim to create good habits and increase well-being. The practices are writing, meditation and positive action and were developed to be accessible to non-writers and non-meditators, along with those who have established practices.

The methodology recognizes that wellness is a fluid process that thrives with a flexible approach. It regards wellness as a practice, honors and cultivates inner knowing, and provides accountability. It can provide you with a foundation for making change, a vantage point to help you see where you're working against yourself, and a scalable process that can help you grow and grow with you.

So, let's dive a little deeper into the tools starting with the Holistic Wellness Spectrum and Wellness Assessment tools.

The Holistic Wellness Spectrum is a broad inventory that can help you determine where to begin your wellness journey. It can be used repeatedly and is a useful tool to find



new entry points to further increase wellness once progress has been made in other areas.

The Spectrum is categorized in three sections. The first is Vitality and it includes a list of familiar exercise and nutrition activities. But it also includes recovery, energy management, stress management, and self-care. Vitality is where most people start when they think about taking positive steps toward enhanced well-being.

The next section of the Spectrum is Flow and it includes ideas for simplifying life routines, living intuitively and finding meaning and purpose. Areas include mindful consumption, morning and evening routines, intuitive living, volunteering, self-expression, aligned livelihood, and ongoing learning.

The last section of the Spectrum is Connection and it includes contemplation practices and ways of connecting in our relationships and community. Activities include spirituality, reflection, compassion, nature, meditation, deep connection, mentoring, celebration, and adventure.

The second tool is the Wellness Assessment, which is an orientation device. Think back to the last time you were in a large setting, such as an airport or a shopping mall. Most likely, there was an illustration depicting the layout of the environment and a red circle with the words, "You Are Here." The Wellness Assessment will provide a similar depiction of where you are in your wellness journey, and it can be completed in under five minutes. It's a simple evaluation used to rate where your current level of satisfaction is in each of the Holistic Wellness Spectrum categories.

These tools are effective because they give you clarity. They also give you a chance to reflect on why a particular starting point is best for you in this moment. For those under extreme work pressure for example, a good place to start to increase wellness may be to decrease stress, not add to it. In this case, focusing on quality sleep or stress



management will pay bigger dividends than adding the pressure of trying a new boot camp regimen.

Now let's move onto *The Athena Principles*. The word, "Principle" is defined as "a fundamental truth that serves as the foundation for a system, belief, behavior or a chain of reasoning." Here is a brief overview of the five Athena Principles:

- Principle 1 – Self-compassion: The care for one's own well-being in the form of self-acceptance and nurturing support.
- Principle 2 – Intention: Intentions help us aim, set direction and connect emotionally to what we want. It's the heart-based "Why" behind the urge to transform.
- Principle 3 – Consistency: This is the secret component to the whole equation. Consistency is how you choose to show up for yourself and stay committed and engaged throughout the process, especially during challenging times.
- Principle 4 – Growth Mindset: How you view the wellness journey will determine your progress and enjoyment. Applying a growth mindset where challenges are seen as opportunities will position you to move forward with grace and ease.
- Principle 5 – Accountability: A systematic way to check-in with what you commit to accomplish, celebrate the wins and compassionately adjust where needed.

Now onto the practices. As I mentioned, the three I included in the book are writing practice, meditation and positive action. If you're new to these practices, the good news is the time investment can be as low as you need. For example, you can start a writing practice just by making a short, bulleted list each day. Or you can start a meditation practice by taking a short mindful walk at lunch.

I'll give you an overview of each practice and its wellness benefits. Let's start with writing.



Why is writing considered a wellness practice? There have been numerous studies since the 1980s linking writing practice to a boost in immunity, cell revitalization and ease from depression. The most cited researcher is Dr. James W. Pennebaker, a professor at the University of Texas at Austin. He's written several books on the topic and is a proponent of what he calls Expressive Writing, a technique where the writer connects with the underlying emotion of a chosen topic.

He believes that writing is a powerful tool for healing and he stated that holding back thoughts and feelings can place people at risk for various levels of disease. And his studies have shown that regular writing practice can lead to less stress and better sleep.

I know that for many people, the thought of writing can stir deep-seated fears. But let me assure you, if you can write an email or send a text, you have the ability to write your way toward wellness. If you don't enjoy narrative writing, there's no worries, you can use your phone, you can use the note option audio video camera capabilities. If you're more artistic, you can use the writing practice as a time to doodle or sketch, paint or collage. If you want portable or virtual options, you can also use an online journal, some of which are multimedia.

While I sometimes use my computer and my phone to capture audio, pictures or notes on the go, when I'm journaling or doing this type of work, I usually write narrative, pen to page in my notebook. Over the years, I've found it to be one of the best ways to reconnect with my Warrior Spirit. It's been a private haven for exploring and learning what wholehearted living means to me and what steps I need to take to align with that ever-evolving vision.

You can think about your writing practice as a place where you can listen when life speaks, express anything without explaining yourself, explore who you are, capture your creative sparks and begin to reclaim the neglected parts of yourself.



By establishing a writing practice, you're creating a safe place where you can express your heart unapologetically. And you can begin to dialogue with the untamed territory of your soul, your Warrior Spirit.

Another practice I love to incorporate into my wellness routine is meditation. For those who don't meditate at the moment, I know the word can bring up images of people sitting on cushions for hours at a time. But for our purposes, it's to increase overall well-being.

I like to define meditation as an activity that helps center inward attention. It's a habitual process to bring your thoughts back to the present moment. It's a practice of awareness and perspective. It's not about stopping your thoughts and feelings, but observing them with curiosity and without judgment.

So why would we want to establish a meditation practice? There are scientific and medical studies that have shown that meditation can calm the nervous system and positively impact our mind, body and spirit by reducing negative emotions, managing stress and stress related illnesses, increasing self-awareness, decreasing emotional reactivity, and stimulating creative flow.

If you're new to meditation, remember, it's like learning any other skill. It takes practice and time to realize the benefits. Although it's been my experience to feel a sense of ease pretty quickly, you may find yourself choosing to take micro breaks throughout the day or pausing to reflect or breathe instead of reacting to a situation.

My favorite meditation practice is mindfulness. Simply defined, mindfulness is being aware of our moment to moment experience. It can be practiced in a number of ways, including focusing on the breath, a sound, a candle flame, or repeated phrase, while eating, or through physical movement, as well as self-compassion techniques, where we offer ourselves what we need most for our well-being in that moment, such as a pause, encouraging words or a few breaths with our hand over our heart.



The last practice I'll review is what I call positive action. And I love this practice because it gives us a chance to move closer to our wellness intentions and our desires in a hands-on way. Some of the experiential activities I include in *The Athena Principles* book include things like making wellness dates and creating a wellness reward system, activities that increase your energy level, and ways to emulate your envisioned future self.

Taking positive action in this way allows you to experiment with new ways of living and being. Researchers have shown that your brain creates positive chemicals when you try new things. As a bonus, I think you'll find a boost in your overall vitality as well as these actions tend to ignite healthy positive cycles.

And you may be wondering how to integrate these practices into your busy life. A great way to keep yourself aligned, on track and engaged for the long term is to establish and follow a workable morning and evening routine. I haven't met or read about someone I respect who doesn't have some sort of a daily routine, especially in the wellness, sports or business worlds. Once I understood that their lives were built deliberately, I began emulating their practices until I found a combination that worked well for me.

I keep my routine simple, with the intention of setting the tone for the day ahead, or preparing for a rejuvenating night of sleep. While the timing may be adjusted each day, I have certain practices that are always part of my day – mindfulness, writing, exercise, learning something new, and keeping my home and workspace orderly.

And finally, let me share some key takeaways of *The Athena Principles*. The first is that wellness transformation is like a slow-motion chain reaction. When you find ways to reconnect with yourself, you make better wellness choices to support the aim to live more wholeheartedly. That leads to optimize well-being. Again and again in the thousands of decisions you make each day, you will become more aligned with your deepest desires.



And as you move closer to those desires, the feeling of disconnect from your true self will fade in your rear view mirror, especially if you've been feeling empty, unfulfilled or depleted. You'll also become better at dealing with the source of the disconnect, whether it's work or relationship expectations, societal norms, over commitment, busyness or anything that requires you to hide, mask or numb your true self.

By prioritizing this quality time with yourself, your daily actions will come from a place of being deliberate and calm instead of from autopilot.

Becoming aware of what you feed your mind, body and spirit will tip the scale from doing to being and life itself will become your practice. At that point, you will have created a calm space in which to grow curiosity, enjoyment, appreciation, contemplation, connection, and inner exploration.

Wellness is a lifestyle – a way of living that incorporates nourishing and replenishing behaviors that contribute to your growth and well-being. A way of allowing your mind, body and spirit to integrate and use its universal wisdom to keep you vibrant.

It's my hope that *The Athena Principles* will help you reimagine your current stage of life as a time of strength and reconnection – and as a time to thrive. May you fall in love with taking care of yourself as this New Year unfolds.

As we wind down today's show, I'd like to offer this: Taking action to live your life as you define it is what it means to connect to your Warrior Spirit. And it's your ultimate act of power.

If you're excited to get started, or if I piqued your curiosity, as I mentioned, I have a tool that can get you started. It's a free PDF overview of *The Athena Principles*, including the Holistic Wellness Spectrum and an action plan that you can tailor. Just head over to www.athenawellness.com/actionplan and you'll be able to download it. I'll also put a link in the show notes.



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 enjoyed this episode and found it of value, please hit subscribe and leave a review. That helps others find their way to our circle and ensures you'll never miss an episode. And if you have a question you'd like addressed on the show or you just want to get in touch with me, visit www.athenawellness.com/contact.

Until next time, be well