



The Athena Wellness Podcast
Episode 010 – How to Create a Meaningful Practice
February 7, 2021

00:04

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 you live well and live long, so you can do the things that light you up with the people you love.

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Hello, and welcome to Episode 10. Thank you so much for joining me for this shortened Wellness Wednesday episode to help keep your Warrior Vibe high.

In Episode Nine, I talked about how to find meaning by asking the question: "When do I feel most like myself?" And I shared that when I asked myself that question many years ago, the answer was when I was writing. And what do writers do? They write. So, the real question I had to answer became: "How do I create a meaningful writing practice?"

And that's what I'd like to focus on today. We'll cover: What is a practice; Why we should practice; and How do we create a practice.

I think it's important to say upfront, you can create a practice around anything, anything you feel deeply drawn to. It can be walking or exercising if you feel your best when you're moving, food preparation if you love cooking, or meditation or visualization,



volunteering, photography, you can draw or paint. Some people play an instrument or listen to music or you can dance, practice gratitude or just be in nature. You can create a practice around anything that's your thing.

I'll use writing as an example throughout this episode because it's my long standing practice. But feel free to adapt just as you'd like.

So, sit back, take a nice long breath to ground yourself in presence and let's get started.

So let's start with what a practice is. When I was preparing to graduate from college and begin my corporate career back in 1986, I felt a palpable void. I was saddled with debt from financing my education and headed to Wall Street for a job and a world I knew little about. I felt robotic as I showed up each day and played a part I unknowingly created for myself.

There were lots of distractions to ease that uncomfortable feeling. New friends, lots of nights out in New York City and weekends away. My twenty-something energy was boundless. But I quietly yearned for something more, something true. I had always loved music, so I began studying the guitar. And I always loved to read, so I began exploring writing.

The first book I ever bought on writing was by Natalie Goldberg. It's called *Writing Down the Bones*, and I have it right here 35 years later. It sits in a place of honor in my writing room. The pages have yellowed and flipping through it today, all of the highlights and the pen marks I made back then are like breadcrumbs I left on a long-ago journey. Natalie gave me permission to, as she encourages, write the worst junk in the world. This wise teacher knew it wasn't *how* I wrote on any given day, it was *that* I wrote.

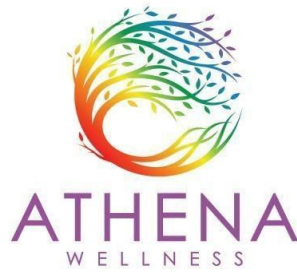


While my guitar playing has long since given away to writing, there have been other practices that I incorporated over the years, especially when I was on-the-go during my corporate career. There was a long period of time where I took one picture each day, when cameras were first incorporated into mobile phones. It was a quick way to capture something about the day that set it apart from all the others. During my Wall Street days, I would capture a line or two during my commute, scribbling some observation or insight, maybe a song lyric.

At its core, creating a practice is a method for showing up and connecting with yourself. You can think of your practice as an intentional way to bear witness to your life.

So why should we practice? Remember the Steve Jobs quote I shared in episode nine? He said: "You can't connect the dots looking forward, you can only connect them looking backwards. So, you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down and it has made all the difference in my life."

The reason why we practice is to learn how to trust ourselves. It's been my experience that by identifying when I felt most like myself and honoring that place, that writer self actually was my true nature, my center point, or as I like to call it, my Still Point, which is a place of calm and wisdom. It takes time to develop a deep relationship with this inner self, just like when you develop a meaningful, long-term relationship with another. And the means to develop that relationship, for me, has been through writing practice. Over time, I learned to trust my Still Point completely. And the more I trust it, I find I'm more willing to surrender to it and let go, which is the ultimate form of trust.



I'll share two more quotes from *Writing Down the Bones* which, by the way, I'll put a link to that book and to Natalie's website in the show notes. But these two quotes illustrate the benefits of creating a meaningful practice better than I can.

The first is from Natalie who said: "Trust in what you love, continue to do it, and it will take you where you want to go." The second is from her Zen teacher from the 1980s, Katagiri Roshi. He knew of her love of writing and was questioning why she showed up to sit in meditation each day. He offered: "Why don't you make writing your practice? If you go deep enough in writing, it will take you everywhere."

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So how do we create a practice? Here are some basic guidelines for creating a practice around your purposeful activity, whatever that might be. And you can use any or all of these that makes sense for you.

The first is Place. Determine when and where you'll practice. A place where you'll feel comfortable and that's easily accessible. A place you'll look forward to spending time. At different times in my life, that space was a chair in the basement with my guitar, or a meditation cushion waiting for me after work, or my journal that traveled with me everywhere I went. And these days, I turned a closet into a writing room with a little writing space and shelving that holds all my journals.

The next is Time. When will you practice? Five mornings a week for 20 minutes? On Tuesdays between three and four? On Sunday mornings for two hours? The timing is up to you as long as it's sustainable. Schedule it and show up with an open heart when it's time. The magic is in the repetition. And the honoring comes from building the habit.



The next element is Self-Compassion. Be kind to yourself. That can take the form of suspending judgment on your efforts, especially in the beginning. Starting in small time increments. And giving yourself space to experiment or just allowing yourself to dream.

Another element is Ritual. How can you make your space special? Some light a candle or play soft music. Maybe you say a few words or read something that connects you to your Still Point. Maybe you have a little intention space filled with some meaningful items or quotes.

As a closing ritual, I find it's helpful to end my session with some notes of what I'd like to work on next time. I keep a running list of topics, like an idea repository, in the back of my notebook. And when my session is done, if I don't already have an idea for the next time, I just scan the list. Then I schedule the session in my calendar with a note on what I'll work on. It gives me the feeling of continuity and I never have to face a blank page when I begin.

The last element is Community. It's helpful to find ways to connect with others who share a love of the activity you're practicing. It can be through an online community, a class or a retreat. And incredible closeness happens when people come together this way. The best friends I have today, I've met at a workshop or retreat.

Those are just a few ideas on how you design your practice. It's personal and completely up to you. Your practice is an investment in yourself. Experiment and amend as you continue to learn. Your practice will continuously evolve as you grow, opening new possibilities along the way. Most of all, keep a light heart and a beginner's mind. And don't forget to have fun.



I'll leave you with my favorite words of wisdom from Katagiri Roshi that are shared in *Writing Down the Bones*. They are: "Continue under all circumstances, don't get tossed away and make positive effort for the good."

10:21

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.

And many thanks to the listeners who have subscribed and left a rating or review. Not only does that ensure you'll never miss an episode, but it also helps others find their way to our circle.

And if you'd like access to 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!