480: Backwards Progress

Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Jody Moore

480: Backwards Progress

We all know that we're not supposed to compare ourselves to others, that the only progress that matters is our own progress, and we're only in a race against our former selves. But what about when we go backwards? What about when our former self was ahead of where our current self is? How do we not get so discouraged that we just want to give up? This is *Better Than Happy*, episode 480, Backwards Progress. Let's do it.

This is *Better Than Happy*. I'm your coach, Jody Moore. And on this podcast, my objective, just so we're clear, is to change what you've been taught and have likely believed about yourself up until now. Here's what I believe about you. I believe that what you think is real is mostly imagined And what you imagine is actually creating what's real. I believe that in the ways you desire to achieve, you 100% have the capacity to succeed.

And finally, I believe that joy, love, and miracles are your God given natural state of being. And any time you feel far from them, the way back is much simpler than you think, but that's about to change. Are you ready? Let's do this.

Is it Backward Progress or Backwards Progress? I don't know. I'm sure somebody will email me and tell me the correct way to say it. Either way, I hope that you know what I'm talking about. And this is a concept that I've been thinking about for a long time and have lots of ideas I want to share with you because I think it's kind of a game-changer in terms of the goals that you're trying to accomplish now.

Before we dive into it, I'm going to be teaching a free workshop coming up and it's called How to Be Your Own Best Friend. Sounds intriguing, right? I want you to learn how to have a close connection with yourself like you would with a best friend. So I use that term best friend on purpose because to me it kind of implies somebody that we know so well.

We've seen them at their best and we've seen them at their worst and we love them because they're amazing and good. We love even their faults and flaws and we know that they have them. We don't ignore those. We

also can say really honest tough things to our best friends sometimes like, “Hey, what's going on, dude? You got to turn it around. This is not okay. I'm worried about you,” or “You're capable of better,” right?

So that's the kind of relationship I want you to have with yourself. And I'll just tell you that I want you to have that with yourself because I really do believe that 99% of the problems I coach on come from this problem that if we genuinely had a deeper connection with ourselves, everything else gets easier.

So I thought, let's teach it for free. And if you want to register, you head to jodymoore.com/friend, because remember, this is How to Be Your Own Best Friend. So again, jodymoore.com/friend.

Now listen, one of the things I want to say about this free workshop, because I do these from time to time, I do send out a replay, but I feel like in today's world, we're all so quick to sign up for things because we're like, “Oh, I can't be there, but I'll just get the replay.” And then we never go listen to replays and then we just are building up this sort of library of clutter, digital clutter. And I don't want you to do that.

I actually want you to just sign up if you can come live. I am going to send a replay out, but unless you're just really committed, like, “I'm going to watch it that day,” then I would recommend for your sake - it doesn't affect me at all, but for your sake, do yourself the favor of blocking this out on your calendar and really come and participate because that is how you will get the best result and make the progress I want to offer to you. Okay, so anyway, all the details are at jodymoore.com/friend, the date and time and all of that.

Okay, so let's talk about backwards progress for a moment here. So I first heard, I think it was Elizabeth Gilbert talking about this years ago in one of her TED talks where she talks about her book Eat, Pray, Love that was a huge hit, huge success, after lots of years of writing and trying to publish and have a bestseller.

480: Backwards Progress

It was huge. And the pressure that she felt after that on the next book that she was to write, like she just kind of knew, first of all, she wrote an amazing book, but also a lot of things aligned to make that the bestseller that it was. And that likely she wasn't going to just recreate that with the very next book. There was a good chance that this book was going to perform not quite as well, at least as the last book.

And she really wrestled with that being okay. How could that be okay, right? Especially because she'd been working on this goal of being a successful author for so long. And I thought, “Oh yeah, that's fascinating.” I hadn't really put myself in that position because I hadn't achieved that level of success to where it's probably not just going to be recreatable every single time. What must that feel like?

I think, you know, movie stars, celebrities go through this when they have a big blockbuster movie or something and, you know, there's a good chance that future movies, not every one of them, is going to be a blockbuster. How do you feel okay about that?

Kevin Hart talks about this. I love Kevin Hart, you guys. He's got a really foul mouth, so you may not want to read his - he has some really funny, awesome, insightful self-help books. I like them, but full of language, forewarned. Anyway, in one of his books, he talks about, he calls it the “can't-go-backwards monster,” and kind of describes this like being really successful as a comedian and actor and everything, and this part of our brains that's like, “Well, we can't go backwards," especially on something we've been working on for such a long time, that even if the progress was slow, it was forward and up and to the right in small increments. And maybe we did go backwards a little bit, but not like a huge dip backwards, right?

Mostly forward up into the right progress. And then to have that reverse all of a sudden, especially once you are successful, you know, in front of a lot of people's eyes, or at least in your own mind, we can't go backwards, what? And anyway, I just, I think about that a lot.

480: Backwards Progress

And I am not, you know, trying to be that level of celebrity, and maybe you're not either, but still with regards to our own goals, the things we're working on, I think we've all experienced this or we will at times. And so I want to speak to it and I want to kind of equip us so that we don't just get overwhelmed and give up when that happens.

So first of all, I like to just remind myself that it happens for anybody trying to pursue something that's difficult. And what makes goals really fulfilling and rewarding, or I'm going to call it goals, but whatever you want to call it, projects, evolution, growth, what makes those kinds of things really satisfying and rewarding and fulfilling and creates what I like to call joy is the fact that it's difficult, okay? Things that are easy to do are not very rewarding. They're just not. It's not like you shouldn't do easy things. I'm all for doing easy things.

But the things that really are rewarding, that really build our confidence, that really feel fulfilling, that really light us up in the world, are things that by nature are difficult to do. They probably take a lot of time because they probably take mastering a lot of different skills. They probably require a lot of trial and error. There might be people giving us advice about how to do it, but ultimately we have to figure out our way of doing it. We have to learn to do it by doing it. And so it takes a long time, it's difficult to do, that's what makes it rewarding and fulfilling in the end.

And anything that's rewarding and fulfilling is going to not always be a hit, not always be a win. So I sometimes like to remind myself of that. If there is anybody that we could point to and say, “No, that person won every time and they just kept getting better and better and better,” it's the kind of task or goal that was easy, at least for them, to accomplish, or they simply quit while they were ahead, which is fine. There's no shame in that.

I'm just saying there's no such thing as a person who can continuously improve up and to the right without any stepping back. Maybe Jesus Christ, maybe the Savior who's perfect, right? But the rest of us, it's just not even an option.

480: Backwards Progress

So first of all, just keep some perspective on that. But then there are three things that I want to offer you today to consider in your own mind when this happens, if this happens, when you achieve success and then you fall backwards.

So the first thing is this. I want you to ask yourself, what is progress? What are we even measuring? What is the outcome we're trying to create and why? And do we like our reason? I'm kind of astonished at how frequently I do this myself and I see people do this all over, right? People on social media, people doing podcasts, people starting organizations or launching events or trying to lose weight or get healthy or whatever.

We just randomly pick these outcome goals that we're shooting for without really stopping and asking ourselves, “But is that really what I want to create?” So for example, when I work with coaches who are building new businesses, they often look at their revenue goal. And I'm down with that, that's great. That could be the outcome that you want to measure or number of clients, right? Something like that, that's really quantifiable and easy to measure. Great, no problem.

And for many people, that is the right metric. Many people building businesses, revenue, clients is going to be the metric that tells us whether or not what we're doing is working. Of course, along with impact, are we creating success for our clients? But I would assume that growing revenue and clients is going to be really difficult if you're not truly creating impact. So those are the things we're looking at. Okay, great.

But sometimes I like to pause and ask a coach like, “But is that really the goal? Is making more money and having more clients the goal?” Sometimes it is. Other times it's, "No, I like the number of clients I have right now. Maybe I actually just want to maintain clients and have a better work-life balance and not work so many hours. I want to learn how to not be grinding so hard, how not be doing everything myself, how to delegate some things or hire staff or whatever that's going to look like.”

480: Backwards Progress

So I just think first of all, whatever the progress is, whatever that like I said, that line that goes up and to the right, then we're just like, “I have to keep going that way.” Is that even what you want to be the most important metric? Just make sure you pause and question that, okay?

Even once you figure that out, what else is included in progress? That ultimate outcome, the number on the scale, the dollar sign on your P&L report, those kinds of outcomes, we tend to put way too much emphasis on, and this becomes problematic. This creates problems for us, right?

So progress in my mind is so many things. In fact, progress is the only option. It is impossible for you to not be progressing if you are trying to achieve your goal. So let's say you are trying to lose weight. Let's just go to an example with food and bodies because we're kind of getting close to the tail end of Make Peace with Food right now. Let's say you're trying to lose some weight or you're trying to just change your eating habits so that you can maybe gain weight or lose weight, whatever, okay?

So then the scale becomes the main outcome that we put our emphasis on, all right. But what are all of the other things that we could consider progress along the way? First of all, a lot of people say, “Well, take photos and take your measurements because that's progress too,” but I'm not even talking about that. I'm not even talking about your body changing.

I'm talking about progress in the form of something you figured out that doesn't work. I'm talking about progress in the form of discovering foods that you like that are easy to make that you hadn't considered before. Or that you are not a morning exercise person and that if you're going to try to exercise first thing in the morning, that's always going to be a challenge most likely for you unless something drastic changes or you change something.

I'm talking about people that you meet. I'm talking about little things that you hear or learn, little insights you have, little bits of awareness that you might hear from other people or you might notice with your own self. I'm

talking about a connection with yourself. I'm talking about actually trying something and gaining the skill of not giving up even when it doesn't come as easily as you thought it would.

I'm talking about increasing what I've heard call it the "stick-to-it muscle." The stick-to-it muscle is a muscle or a skill that you can strengthen. The way you strengthen it is by just keeping on sticking to it, and it's easy to stick to something that's working really well. You'll increase it more when you stick to something that isn't working or creating the ultimate outcome that you're trying to create.

So do you see why I say the only option is progress? There's no such thing as not progressing. That's why I call it backwards progress, because it's still progress even if you, let's say, lost weight and then gained it all back, or gained back more, more than you had when you started. You still learned so many things that could be useful going forward.

I don't know about you, but I've been in that exact scenario before. And still, the next time I decided, “Now I'm going to lose some weight,” I'm just adding to what I learned before. I learned how to lose the weight, and then I needed to add on how to keep it off. And I don't know how many times I will have to go through that process before it becomes a lifelong change. But every time I go through it, I get a little bit closer, okay? So there's no such thing as going backwards.

There's just backwards progress, meaning the end outcome, the one metric that we decide is the highest priority might go the opposite direction, but there's still so many things we've learned along the way. There's people that we've met. There's, I mean, I could go on forever, right? So just be careful about oversimplifying it down to one simple metric.

Okay, the second thing is I don't want you to even use, and I sort of alluded to this in the first thing, I sort of gave it away, but I want to emphasize it. I don't like to actually even use the word backwards, okay? I like to remember that it's all forward. It's just not always forward and up.

480: Backwards Progress

Sometimes it's forward and down. Do you know why? We don't have a time machine, okay?

So sometimes people say things like, we do this even in a positive. In other words, people say, “I'd like to get back to the weight I was before this baby.” Or “I'd like to get back to making the money I was making in my corporate job. I'd like to go back to that.” And I always say, “Wait, why are we using that word back?” Because we're not going to go back to anything, we're only going to go forward.

We don't have a time machine and I don't think going back is necessary because if we go back to the way you were, the money you were making or whatever, then we're going to be back where we were without the learning, the experience, the knowledge, the progress that has come from then until now.

So we're going to go forward maybe to the weight you were before the baby or the income you were at at your previous job. But we're not going back to it, we're going forward to it. Now a lot of people think that's just semantics. And they're like, “Yeah, yeah, that's what I mean.” But it matters.

Because if we're trying to get back to something, the way that your brain will try to sort through it will not be nearly as useful as if you say, “I'm going to go forward to this point.” Forward means different than what we did before. We have to be seeking for different, or we're going to end up right back where we are, right? Forward implies that nothing's gone wrong. Forward implies momentum that's useful, especially with weight.

People are like, “Well, my whole life I weighed 140 and now I weigh 175.” And I'm like, “Wait a second, your whole life you weighed 140? Like you came out of the womb at 140? Wow, your poor mother." And in their minds, they just have this set point that they're stuck on. And that's a problem. We have to think about the future. We have to think about who you're going to be going forward. So there is no such thing as backward, it's always forward.

480: Backwards Progress

Okay, third and finally, when that, again, end metric, ultimate outcome indicator has gone down instead of up, or up instead of down, based on what you're trying to do, I want you to ask yourself, what do I want to make this mean? This is where we get into the most trouble and why people get so overly frustrated and stuck.

So first of all, these are some of the most common things I see people make it mean. There's two things I think that are super problematic. The first one is some version of, “I knew this couldn't last forever. Time's up. That was fun while it lasted, and now it's over.” And often it's followed with, “I knew it. I suspected it. I guessed it. I knew this was going to happen,” right?

So I hear people talk a lot about that whole like waiting for the other shoe to drop kind of feeling when things are really good and they're succeeding, and they're like, “This can't last forever.” And then something changes and they're like, “I knew it. I told you so,” they say to themselves.

Maybe they didn't know it, maybe they didn't anticipate it, but it's usually a version of that time is over now and this is the new reality. You can make it mean that if you want, but you'll probably be discouraged, you'll probably give up if you make it mean that.

The second thing I see people make it mean, they let it reinforce the imposter syndrome that they may have had either all along the way or at least in the beginning. So for example, if they're really successful, you know, as an author, their book becomes successful and the whole while they were uncomfortable or at least in the beginning thinking, “Oh gosh, I hope people don't find out. I don't really know what I'm doing. I think I might have just gotten lucky here.”

Then when the next book isn't as successful, they feel a lot of embarrassment and shame, and this wanting to hide. Like, “Oh no, now people are going to see that I was just pretending, right? I was pretending

to be someone who was successful, and it happened that I achieved some success along the way, but it wasn't real, it was all pretend."

So those are the two most common things I see happen. So if you're experiencing any one of those, you're normal and healthy, but it's all just stories in our heads, right? None of it's true, and yet it is true. We can prove it true. Nobody knows what they're talking about. No matter how successful anybody is, we're all just making it up.

We're all just pretending. We're all worried it's not going to last or maybe we don't think about it. We have other things we're worried about. Like that's just the nature of it. You're not unique in that way. Good news, okay? So instead of making it mean something heavy and dramatic like that, let me give you some alternatives.

First of all, it's really important to allow yourself emotions like disappointment. You might be disappointed, you might even be discouraged, you might be frustrated, that's okay. I'm not talking about skipping over that and pushing it down, but I would recommend that you lighten up around it a little bit. Don't make it so heavy and dramatic. It doesn't need to be embarrassing, it doesn't need to be this big existential, "See, the market or this industry or myself, I'm not that kind of person." Ease up on the drama a little bit.

I like to watch out for dramatic thoughts like that with my clients. They're like, "I just knew I wasn't the kind of person who could do this." I'm like, "Whoa, settle down, sister. What does that even mean? Who's the kind of person who can do this?" Like it's just so grandiose, these tragic thoughts we have.

So I'm not talking about indulging those. I'm just talking about like, "Huh, that stinks. I really wanted this to keep progressing up and to the right and sucks when it doesn't. It's kind of discouraging. I'm kind of frustrated, but all right, I'm just going to take a deep breath, be kind of discouraged. I'm just

going to be with this and let myself be bummed about it, but not get all tied up in my head with drama over it." Are you with me?

Because what you could choose to make it mean is that this is a sign that you're headed towards something pretty awesome. Because like I said in the beginning, the things that are awesome, the things that make a significant impact in the world or even just significantly change us and evolve us and are super rewarding, super fulfilling, super fun to do, are difficult to do. And the only reason things are difficult is because they're difficult. Because there's resistance, because it's challenging.

So this resistance that's now won, right? Sometimes we beat resistance and sometimes it beats us. Or sometimes we overcome challenges and obstacles and sometimes those obstacles and challenges overcome us. Those things are a sign that we're headed the right direction.

So for those of you that are members of the LDS church like myself and you're familiar with the Book of Mormon, one of my favorite stories in the Book of Mormon is the brother of Jared who is - he and his people are sailing to the promised land. Doesn't that sound amazing? Now who doesn't want to go to the promised land? Who doesn't want to sail to the promised land? Except, let me tell you what this cruise was like, okay?

They had to build these barges that were airtight. There was no light, no air. There's a whole other component to this story about faith and communication with God and inspiration and all that that I won't get into. My point is that God says to them, "Yeah, you're going to be sailing on stormy waters. There's going to be storms and winds and waves and it's going to toss your ships about as you sail to the promised land." And he says, "But I've prepared you for this journey and I will continue to prepare you to make it safely."

Okay, so this is what I'm talking about. When we're going to the promised land, there's storms. Why do there have to be winds and waves and storms? Why can't it just be like a nice sunny smooth cruise ship to the

promised land? I don't know, except that I think that the whole point is to survive the storm. I think that's the whole point of trying to get to the promised land. I think the promised land isn't the thing.

I think it's the journey and overcoming the waves and then the relief that we feel once we do that is what it's all about. Okay? And we've been prepared and we're continuing to be prepared. Sometimes the storm is preparing us for a future storm. A bigger storm that we're going to come to contact with, okay?

And so again, I like to be like, “Wow, I must be on to something really big” because the resistance here - and resistance can be literal external obstacles or it can be just within me, these feelings of, “I don't know if I can do this.” Either way, it's a sign that I'm headed to the promised land.

The last thing I would offer you to consider, and these are just some thoughts that help me, is I just remind myself that doing hard things is hard. It is, right? It's sort of a version of what I just told you about resistance, but I just go, “Yeah, doing hard things is hard.” And doing hard things successfully is even harder. Sometimes I try to do hard things and it's not successful and that's hard. But doing hard things and then getting to success is even harder.

So it should be hard. And then I remind myself that doing hard things successfully on a consistent basis is the hardest because doing hard things successfully every single time is impossible. Let me say that again. Doing hard things successfully on a consistent basis is the hardest because doing hard things successfully every single time is impossible.

Do you know what I mean? Like doing a hard thing successfully one time is pretty hard. But I could do it one time, pat myself on the back, give myself a high five, collect praise from everyone around me, and then drop out of the game. And sometimes that's what I choose to do. Sometimes that's what we want. No problem there.

480: Backwards Progress

I'm not saying that's the wrong thing to do. I'm just saying that's easier than doing a hard thing successfully and then attempting it again and achieving success consistently because there will be ups and downs. Consistency by nature means a good portion of the time but not all the time and it's those times when we don't get there that we have a choice to make. Am I going to get discouraged and give up and believe that the shoe is dropped and it's just over now or am I going to keep going?

The way that I keep going is that I remind myself that myself, my goals, my journey of trying to lose weight or get healthy, my business, anything else that I'm trying to do, anything else that matters to me, that's challenging, that takes work, is less like a graph that goes up and to the right, like I wish, and more like seasons. Okay?

So I like to picture still a graph that's going up and to the right, but it's spinning and it's dropping up and down in seasons. In other words, I am still, remember, there's only progress. There is always progress. So I am always going up and to the right. But it feels like I'm dropping down because I'm spinning as I go, like seasons.

Summer, everything's light and fun and exciting and it's working well. And I'm feeling really good about myself because I got some instant wins and that was awesome. But inevitably after summer comes fall, and in fall everything starts to cool off a little bit and the days get a little bit shorter and the wind picks up a little bit and the leaves on the trees start to die and that is when we run into some struggles. Things get a little bit harder. The easy parts of this goal we've kind of attacked and now we're left with some of the more challenging things and that's difficult, right?

And after fall comes winter when things are really cold and the days are really short. We have a lot less sunlight and the ground is frozen and the plants are dormant and the animals are hibernating and we're wondering when it's going to end and it feels like it lasts forever and that is when things get challenging and things aren't working and we try again and it's not working. It feels like it goes on way longer than it should.

480: Backwards Progress

But after winter comes spring. And in spring, it starts to warm up, we start to get more sunlight. But what I love about spring is spring represents new life, new birth, new flowers blooming, baby animals being born. That is when you literally become a different version of you. You stop fighting through winter and you give in and simply evolve. And you become more knowledgeable, more skillful, more patient, more refined, more confident, and that's when we end up in summer again.

Seasons, my friends, not a linear up into the right graph. It's okay to go backwards. You're not comparing yourself to your past self in just in terms of the basic outcome. You're simply asking, “Am I continuing to move on and can I do it with kindness for myself?” Because I do believe that the lessons you need to learn, you are already learning. I don't even think you have to stop and assess them in most cases. They're already coming with you.

All right, thanks for joining me on today's episode, everybody. I'll see you next time. Have a beautiful week, bye-bye.

If you find the podcast to be helpful you’re going to love The Lab. In *Better Than Happy*: The Lab we experiment with applying all of it in your real life. Whether you’re in the middle of a challenge and ready for some relief or you’re ready to commit to pursuing your dream goals and making them a reality, come join me in the lab at jodymoore.com/thelab. That’s jodymoore.com/thelab.