



PYT Weekly Training & Support

Lesson #52

Identifying & Eliminating "Learned Helplessness"

by Jim Katsoulis

Welcome to this week's lesson. What I want to talk about this week is something called "learned helplessness." I've kind of known about it but I just read about it this week, and it was explained in such a unique and succinct way that was really, really helpful to me.

Basically, this idea came out of a set of experiments with dogs where, long story short, they took one group of dog and they put them on a floor that would give them electric shocks, but they could stop the electric shocks if they hit a lever.

Then, there was another group of dogs, though, and there would be electric shocks but there was no way for them to stop it. They could hit the lever and it did nothing. So, they would basically just have to accept it.

Next, they'd put them in the same thing but this time, all they had to do ... they put a very low partition that they had to step over to get off of the floor, and they administered the shocks. And when they did this, the group that had the lever and had some control over the pain initially stepped over the partition. The group that had no control over the shocks initially did not step over the partition even though it was easy to do.

So, understand this idea that because they had been an experience where they had no control over their environment, they had to learn to accept that helplessness. And even when they were put into a situation where they could easily get themselves out of it, they didn't do it because they now had this mindset that that was their reality. They couldn't change it.

And so, again, this is something that is called "learned helplessness," and this is an experiment that's been done over and over again with different animals and with humans, in ways; and it comes out to have the same results over and over again.

Why does this matter? Because if you've had any experience trying to lose weight and you failed, it starts to feel like you have no control over it; you start to feel helpless. But the truth is that it was the way in which you were doing it. That's the problem, not you!

Don't be like the dog that thinks, "Well, there's no way this is ever going to change; it must be me." Instead, be very aware that it's situation-specific. If you're trying to lose weight, it's method-specific; it's not you. So, if you've tried things before and it hasn't worked, it's because of the method, not because of you.

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That's a very, very important distinction to make because if you get yourself caught in this learned helplessness loop, what it starts to move into is depression and other things like that; and it's going to sabotage your results; and it does it in a very sneaky, subtle way that you almost can't combat.

So, what I want you to do is when you're looking at the ways in which you're looking to get results, if it's not working for you, I want you to change what you're doing, not put it on yourself and not to think, "Oh, it must be me, I'm the problem." That's just one more example of that.

Now, I've talked about this before but I want to reinforce this idea that, oftentimes, what people have done in the past to lose weight is dieting; and this is, often, what all people know; and, again, it's reinforced continually in society and in our culture.

But the thing with dieting is that even though the diets may be different (they may have different specifics – low fat, low carbs, high protein), whatever the specifics are, the generalities are the same where it is deprivation based, where it's very difficult to maintain, and where it's not enjoyable.

So, the basic parameters of a diet are the same even though the specifics may be different; and this is important because it can give the illusion of being different but they're all diets; and so, they all create the same ultimate result.

So, what you want to do is – remember, get yourself out of the dieting mindset. Get yourself out of the extreme exercise mindset where "I have to go to the gym" or "I have to lift weights" mindset, and get yourself into truly thinking about other options.

When you can identify and understand learned helplessness and what that feels like, then what I want you to do after this is to take a little bit of time here and think, "What routines have I been having where I pretty much expect that it's going to fail and I pretty much expect that I'm not going to succeed with it?"

That's what learned helplessness feels like in action. You want to identify those things and then begin asking yourself the question, "What other things can I do that are truly different?" You'll know you're on to something when you start to feel a genuine sense of excitement or motivation.

So, again, with what you're doing here with this program, it's not just the specifics. I mean, you're not [inaudible] **04:57** here what telling you what to eat and how to exercise because those things are very much an individual process. Each person is different for what's going to work for them.

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So, what I'm talking about a lot of times are the bigger things, what's going to work for you and how to figure that out; and the other part of figuring that out is also recognizing what hasn't worked for you and what's not going to work for you. That's just as valuable.

So, I want you to think about this learned helplessness when it comes to your weight, when it comes to your body, when it comes to your eating and exercising; then you can take this in any area of life you want. But when it comes to these specific areas, what have you kind of just accepted that you're going to fail at or you've accepted isn't going to work?

Question that and identify those things because if you can figure them out and if you can identify those things, then you're that much closer to flipping it around. Then, you can say, "What other things can I try? What are some other options? What are some other methods I could do that might work for me?"

And as you start doing that, again, it's just going to make the whole process much easier for you. And so, you get yourself out of that because learned helplessness is like a pair of glasses; it colors everything you see in terms of weight loss or whatever specific area of your life.

So, we want to get that off, start feeling successful and start realizing that you do have a choice; and you do have the ability to choose and decide what's going to work for you.

So, I hope this helps you out. It was a profound idea to me. I've kind of known about it to a certain degree but not in these exact terms and I liked it.

So, I know that I found for myself some learned helplessness things that I've been doing, and I've just kind of accepted that it's just the way it is. And I re-questioned it and that's not the way it is. There are choices; there are options and alternatives.

So, remember that. There are always options and alternatives. And the ultimate gauge if it's right is if it works for you, if it's enjoyable, if you like it, and if you can do it for a long period of time.

These are the criteria you want to use to decide what you're going to do. So, think about these things. Take a little bit of time right now and think about it, and I'll talk to you next week.

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