

Ep #142: The Truth about Coping Mechanisms



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With Your Host

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If the only way to know to destress is to go out for a run, and then suddenly you're injured and you cannot run, what are you going to do? You're in trouble then. I have seen it happen to a lot of runners. Their coping mechanism is taken away and they just lose their shit.

Welcome to *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. If you're a woman who has never felt athletic but you still dream about becoming a runner, you are in the right place. I'm Jill Angie, a certified running and life coach and I teach women how to start running, feel confident, and change their lives, and now I want to help you.

Hey rebels. How are you doing on this fine day? I'm always wondering what you're doing when you're listening to this show. Are you running? Are you driving? Are you sneaking a listen while you're at work? Wherever you are right this minute, I want to say thank you for listening. Thank you for allowing us to be besties for 20 minutes or so and for allowing me to sort of chit-chat in your ear about whatever I'm passionate about each week. It means a lot to me.

And you know what else would mean a lot to me? If you went over to iTunes or wherever you listen to your podcasts and just leave a review for the show and why the show means something to you. It'll help other people like you find it. It'll help us spread the word. And you get to express yourself as well.

So this week, I want to talk about coping mechanisms. And this is actually something I've been meaning to cover for a few months. And given the current state of affairs in the world, I think this is actually a good week to sort of dive into that topic.

So what do I mean by coping mechanisms? Well, any action that you take to help you deal with your emotions is coping. And you might think coping is really something that you have to do when you're in a situation, or you might have to cope with somebody else's behavior, but in fact - well

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actually, the dictionary definition is to deal effectively with something difficult.

But actually, those things, situations and people's behavior are simply circumstances in your life. And circumstances are only difficult if you believe they are. They just are there, and then you have thoughts about them, and those thoughts create feelings, and then that is where the "coping" becomes necessary.

Because my friend, most of us, myself included, don't really like uncomfortable emotions. And we just sort of want to get the fuck away from them as soon as we can. For example, you may have been staying at home with your family, aside from maybe going out to the grocery store, let's say for the past seven weeks.

So that is your circumstance. And you may have some thoughts about that, like, "If I have to spend one more minute stuck at home with these assholes, I'm going to lose it." And when you think that thought, you have some feelings. And we all know they are not warm and fuzzy feelings. They are sharp, stabby, angry feelings.

And those feelings don't feel good and your first instinct is to try to fix it so you don't have to feel them anymore. And that is what I mean by coping mechanisms. These are actions that we take to avoid feeling something uncomfortable like drinking a glass of wine, or eating a cupcake, or going for a run, or scrolling through social media, shopping on Amazon, reading a book.

I like to call these things buffers because what you're really doing is putting a buffer between yourself and your uncomfortable emotions. And it makes sense, right? Running can get rid of negativity really fast. It is the ultimate stress-buster.

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The problem is when you're done running and all those endorphins fade away, you're still kind of left with those same old thoughts that caused the feelings in the first place. So running is a temporary fix. It's just like wine and chocolate and online shopping. It just happens to be better for your body.

So trust me, I've tried all the buffers. I've tried them all. And buffering, which is the act of using a buffer to distance yourself from your emotions is a temporary solution. And buffers have consequences like feeling gross after drinking a bottle of wine to forget your problems for the night, or a huge credit card bill, or having to stay up late to get your work done because you were binge-watching Netflix all day long.

And raise your hand if that is you in this new work from home environment. You're home all day, you're feeling stressed because you have thoughts about being home all day, so you're binge-watching Netflix instead of getting your work done, and then you're up until midnight to kind of catch up so that you're not behind the next day.

That's a classic buffering situation. Now, if you think about running as a buffer, you might say, "Hey, running to avoid my emotions has no negative consequences." And I will agree that running is a beneficial activity. For sure, it's so, so good for you. It doesn't have consequences like feeling shitty the next day with a hangover, or overspending outside of your budget.

But here's the deal. The result of not finding a way to handle your emotions, aside from a buffer, means that if that buffer is taken away, you're screwed. So if the only way you know to destress is to go out for a run, and then suddenly you're injured and you cannot run, what are you going to do? You're in trouble then. I have seen it happen to a lot of runners. Their coping mechanism is taken away and they just lose their shit.

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They're angry all the time, they're frustrated, they're complaining, nobody wants to be around them, and then they're reaching out for all the other buffers and they're saying it's because they can't run that they're overeating or it's because they can't run that they're overdrinking. They say the reason they feel so stressed is because they can't run to burn off the crazy.

And I think it's because they haven't learned how to manage their thinking so that they don't have any crazy to burn off in the first place. Now, I'm not saying you should never ever drink wine or eat chocolate or go online shopping or even go for a run when you're upset. We're all going to do that sometimes.

But I want you to know, just be really, really aware that truly, buffers don't help you. They mask the issue, and that issue is going to be there again as soon as the endorphins fade, as soon as the cupcakes are eaten, as soon as the Amazon order is placed because you guys really, online shopping is a buffer until you hit the buy button. And then the buffer is gone.

And then by the time the package arrives, you've totally lost interest in it, or maybe you're excited about it, you open the package, and then okay, right? So as a buffer, online shopping is the worst. But what happens after those buffers are gone?

After the endorphins are gone, or the sugar rush is gone, that momentary hit of pleasure that you felt, you felt that rush of dopamine or endorphins and it feels really good in the moment, and then once it wears off, you're right back to where you started because you're still thinking the thoughts that make you feel the emotions in the first place.

So I want you to take a moment right now and really think about all the buffers that you have in your life. What would you be left with if you could no longer pursue those activities? You could no longer scroll through Instagram when you're bored, no more binge-watching Netflix when you're

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trying to avoid work, no more chips and salsa when you're stressed out, no more sugar when you're feeling lonely, no more smoking when you're agitated if you're a smoker, no more coffee when you're feeling exhausted.

Coffee, you guys, is a buffer. Imagine your life without those things and what would it look like? What do you think your prevailing emotions would be if you took all of your buffers away? Would it be frustration or stress or loneliness or anger?

So really think about it. If you couldn't do all of those things that you do to manage your emotions on a daily basis, where would you be? And now, I want you to understand - this is the big sort of a-ha takeaway. Those emotions are always there. You are just working really hard to ignore them by managing them with your actions.

Those emotions don't just happen to you though. They don't just come out of the sky like rain. They are coming from your thoughts. They are coming from within you by how you are thinking about yourself, about other people, about your circumstances.

Your job, your marriage, your house, your bank account, your weight, none of those circumstances create your emotions. You do, by what you think about those things. So those things are never your problem. Your problem is always the way you are thinking about them, and that thinking creates emotions and the emotions, if you don't like them and you're trying to avoid them, that's when the buffering comes in.

You guys, buffers are expensive. They're expensive financially, physically, emotionally, they can ruin your health, your bank account, your relationships if they're taken too far. Think about somebody who gets addicted to some kind of drug because they need to escape from their life and that drug ends up destroying their life. That's a buffer, right?

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Instead of - that's sort of an extreme example, but online shopping is a buffer the same way that heroin is a buffer. It's just maybe a little more socially acceptable. Now, I know most of you probably do not buffer to the point of financial ruin or destroying your health or your relationships.

But I suspect there are things in your life that you wish were just a little better. Maybe you'd like to just have a little more of a cushion in the bank, or maybe have some more energy, lose a little weight, have a closer relationship to your spouse.

And all of those things are results that you want and you think if I have that result, I will feel better. It's not how it works. Those results that you want come from actions. Like saving money instead of spending it, or going to bed earlier instead of lying in bed for three hours scrolling through Facebook. They come from the action of connecting and spending quality time with your spouse instead of sitting on opposite ends of the couch with your faces in your phones.

So those actions that you take to create the result of having more connection or losing weight or having more money in the bank, those actions can't happen when you are buffering. Buffering is the opposite of those actions. Those actions happen when you have the emotion of determination or calm or confidence.

Those emotions drive action that give you results that you want. Emotions like anger and loneliness drive you to buffer. Buffering is you running away from those feelings and taking actions to disconnect from them. And those buffers become habits because they're easy.

The reason buffers work so well is because they are actions that give your brain a hit of dopamine in the moment and sort of flush away negative feelings. And so things that are very addictive like smoking, like coffee, like drugs, like online shopping, like Facebook, like sugar, those things become buffers for us because they're easy.

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They give us a quick hit of pleasure and humans are pleasure-seeking creatures. So then they become habitual. But the problem is that shopping on Amazon does not make you any less lonely. If anything, it makes you more lonely because then you got less money to go out and do shit with your friends.

So what are you supposed to do? So my friend, like I say every week in this podcast, your thinking is the key to everything. Believing your boss is an asshole makes you feel angry. The problem is not your boss. It is your thoughts about your boss. And since you cannot punch your boss, you have to find another way to handle that anger.

And if you're thinking, "My boss is such an asshole, he drives me to drink," we've all said that. I've had a boss like that in my past. Totally have said that, but no. Your boss doesn't drive you to drink. You are driving yourself to drink because you believe that shitty thought, "My boss is an asshole."

"My boss is an asshole" is a thought. It's an opinion. It's never ever factual. There is also no upside to believing thoughts like my boss is an asshole. It makes you angry and then you buffer. Now, I'm not saying you need to just start believing your boss is an angel suddenly.

But for sure, you can stop repeating in your mind that he's an asshole. How about, "I have a boss who does things I don't agree with?" That's something you can believe, right? It's way calmer than my boss is an asshole. So you guys, watch your thinking and ask yourself, does believing this thought help me? Is believing this thought advantageous to me?

Believing your boss is an asshole, no upside to that whatsoever. Even if it's true. Even if there was some categorical way that we could say these actions make somebody an asshole, even if that existed, still doesn't help you to believe it. It is a useless wasted thought.

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So watching your thinking, when you have a desire to buffer, what are you thinking and ask yourself, does believing this thought help me? If the answer is no, you got to work on thinking differently. And here's the other thing about buffers. We get them sort of linked in our mind to certain situations.

Like your boss says something you don't like, it starts out with you thinking, "Guy is an asshole, he's driving me to drink. I need a drink to cope with this." But then eventually, your boss does something you don't like and you immediately think, "I'm going to happy hour tonight." You cut out that middle part.

Or your kid throws a tantrum and your immediate thought is, "I'm going to go eat a Snickers bar in the bathroom so I can get some peace for five fucking minutes." It becomes Pavlovian. A circumstance happens and you find yourself taking an action and it almost seems like the thought and the feeling aren't there.

But they are. They've just been automated in your brain because you had that circumstance, thought, feeling, action cycle happen so much that your brain is like, "Oh, we do this a lot. Let me automate it so we don't have to waste any brain energy on it."

So you stop having conscious thought about those things after a while and it seems like the situation is causing the behavior. So this is your wakeup call right here and now. I want you to make a list of all your buffers and when and why you use them.

And then the next time you want to eat Cheetos or scroll Instagram when you're bored, whatever it is, I want you to stop and pause. Ask yourself, what problem am I trying to solve with this activity? And seriously, that question is everything.

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What problem am I trying to solve with this activity? Because if the problem is stress, food and alcohol and online shopping are not the answer. They're really not. Food doesn't fix stress in the long-term. It might fix your stress for five minutes, but then you're stressed because you overate.

Alcohol might fix it, but then you're stressed the next day because you're hungover. So really, food and alcohol and online shopping are not the answer to stress. Food is the answer to hunger. That is it. Online shopping is the answer to, oh look, we're out of cat food. Or oh look, I need a new dress to wear to this wedding or something.

Again, if the problem is loneliness, food and alcohol and online shopping, not the answer. So once you can clearly see the problem that you're trying to solve, you have to find a solution that fits the problem. Not a solution that gets in between you and your emotions. That's almost always going to start with your thoughts, my friends. Got it?

Alright, that it is for this week. I love you. Stay safe. Get your ass out there and run and I will see you in the next episode.

Oh, and one last thing. If you enjoyed listening to this episode, you have to check out the Rebel Runner Roadmap. It's a 30-day online program that will teach you exactly how to start running, stick with it, and become the runner you've always wanted to be. Head on over to rebelrunnerroadmap.com to join. I'd love to be a part of your journey.