

## Ep #286: Re-Run: What To Do If You're Not Making Progress



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Jill Angie**

[The Not Your Average Runner Podcast](#) with Jill Angie

## Ep #286: Re-Run: What To Do If You're Not Making Progress

Welcome to *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. If you've never felt athletic, but you still dream about becoming a runner, you are in the right place. I'm Jill Angie, your fat running coach. I help fat women over 40 to start running, feel confident, and change their lives. I have worked with thousands of women to help them achieve their running goals, and now I want to help you.

Hey, runners. So this week, I am on the road with Andy, and we are taking an epic road trip from Austin to Philly, and we are stopping at four national parks along the way. The first one is Hot Springs in Arkansas, then Mammoth Caves in Kentucky, then New River Gorge in West Virginia, and then Shenandoah National park in Virginia. And we're also going to make a stop at Graceland in Memphis as well as the National Air and Space Museum just outside of Washington.

We're going to try to do the whole thing in four days. It's going to be a whirlwind. But I don't have time to record a podcast this week, so I decided this would be an awesome week to replay one of the most popular and useful episodes I have recorded to date, called What To Do if You're Not Making Progress. Because someone out there definitely needs to hear this episode today. And if that is you, feel free to shout it out on Instagram and tag me.

So, without further ado, here you go.

Okay, my friend, so today's episode is for you if you have ever felt frustrated because you're not making progress. Because that's what we're all supposed to be thinking about, right? When we start running, or we start anything new, we want to see evidence that it's working, that we're getting better, that we're making progress.

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And guess what? If you're not making progress, you feel frustrated, annoyed, and defeated. Like why even bother? If I'm not making progress, I should just quit. How many times have you said that? Maybe it's about running. Maybe it's about something else. You're like, "Uh, I'm not getting anywhere with this. I'm not making any progress, or I'm going backward. I'm getting worse." Right? That feels so awful. And it really does lead to quitting.

So, I was thinking about this the other day, and I was like, what in the actual fuck does it even mean to, and I'm using air quotes here, make progress? And why are we so convinced that we should always be getting better?

I mean, seriously, think about it this way, if you're running, you're taking one step after another. You're literally making progress. You're moving forward. But that's not really what we mean. We mean, oh, I should be getting better at running. I should either go faster or farther, or it should feel easier, or I should be doing longer run intervals or shorter walk ones. I need to see evidence that it is working.

So, personally, I think that this attachment to making progress is not super helpful. I mean, yes, it's totally fun to have all of those things happen, totally fun. But when we attach our enjoyment of running, our fulfillment of it, and our fulfillment within ourselves to certain outcomes, we miss all the best parts.

Like how good it feels after you've had a solid run. Or how much better your body feels when you're running regularly, or how a run can take your mood from stressed to relaxed in just minutes. I always say for me, running is like pressing control, alt, delete on my brain.

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And none of those things have anything to do with making progress. They have everything to do with being in the moment and enjoying the run without expectations. But that is easier said than done when progress is super important to you.

So when you have a defined endpoint in mind, like you want to train for a 5K, for example. Now, it does make sense to be looking for evidence that you're moving toward your goal. And every time you do a long run, or maybe you do the same run, and it feels a little easier, or you go a little faster, you're like, "Yes, I'm closer to my goal." And then you get to feel like you're doing the appropriate things to make your goal a reality. Like you're saying, "Okay, I see the evidence. I must be on the right path. I'm doing the right things."

But that's actually kind of misleading because, guess what, you are always making progress, even when you can't see it. So I just sent an email about this to my list, and this happened to me a few weeks ago, and it kind of blew my mind.

So I got really serious about my pull-up goal earlier this year. So I have this goal to do an unassisted pull-up. And I'm not saying I need to get there within a year, but I've been kind of saying it for years, and this year I was like, "All right, I'm actually going to get serious and make it happen."

And so one of the things that my trainer has me doing, she has me doing a lot of things. A lot of different types of movements to build up my back strength, my arm strength, and my core strength. But one of the very specific pull-up-related things that she has me doing is just hanging from the bar.

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And the purpose of that is to work on my grip strength so that my hands, the muscles in my hands, are also coming to the party, right? Because you could have the strongest back in the world, but if your fingers are literally too weak to hold on, it doesn't really matter.

So we've been doing this hanging. And she started over the summer, and I shit you not, for the first several weeks, probably two months, I'd hang for like two to three seconds, and my hands would just literally slip off the bar. It wasn't like, "Oh, this is hard. I can't do this anymore." They just wouldn't hold on. They would just slip off after like three seconds, and I didn't have control over it. And I'll tell you, I was feeling very frustrated with that.

I'm like, okay, I'm doing all this stuff. And I don't see any evidence that it's working. Why am I even doing this? And I had all the thoughts like, well, obviously, I'm too fat to do an unassisted pull-up. It's going to take me ten years to do one at this rate. I'm going to have to lose 50 pounds if I ever want to do it. I'm weak. I'm not trying hard enough. And my favorite, which I've repeated to my trainer multiple times, I'm like, well, if I ever have to hang from a cliff, I'm clearly going to die.

So I made that circumstance of me hanging for a few seconds at a time without any increase in that amount for several weeks mean, well, clearly, I'm a total failure, right? I missed all the other stuff that I was doing. And I put all of my belief in my results on hanging from the bar. But guess what, I mean, I kept doing it because I was like, well, maybe I'll get better, I don't know.

So I kept doing it. And then, one day, I hung for five seconds instead of three. And I mean, that's almost a 100% increase in time, right? Three seconds to five seconds. And then the next week, I hung for seven. And

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then I made it for 10 seconds because all of the stuff that I was doing in my training sessions was finally coming together.

And then, two weeks ago, I hung for 30 seconds at a time, four different times. A total of two minutes of hanging at the end of my training session. And it happened really fast, right? For the first few months, I couldn't do more than three seconds. And then it took maybe six weeks to go from three seconds to 30 seconds. It was not linear at all. It was flat, flat, flat, flat, and then boom, this huge jump in my ability because I was making progress the whole time, even though I couldn't see it.

And that really blew my mind. So the first thing I want you to absorb from this podcast is that even when you can't see it, you are making progress. Maybe you're not getting visibly faster, but you're becoming a super consistent runner. And that is progress because that's something that's going to serve you way down the line.

Or maybe you aren't going any farther during your regular 30-minute run, but you're building up muscle and bone strength that's maybe invisible to you. But hey, you fall down the stairs one day and don't break an ankle, you'll be like, "Oh, all right, I get it. I see why I was doing all that consistently. Because there are other byproducts of that work that really serve me."

So I want you to think about driving from New York to Los Angeles. Okay, so there you are in New York state, New York City. Maybe it takes you a few hours to get across the bridge. But you're in New York City, you put the destination in your GPS, and then you just start following the prompts. So turn left here, turn right here, merge, blah, blah, blah.

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And at some point during the journey, maybe it says it's going to take you five days to get from New York to LA or however long it's supposed to take. And at some points during that journey, you're going to be pointed south instead of east or west. You're going to be pointed north instead of west. You might even be pointing back east at some point if you look at the direction your car is driving relative to your destination.

But at no point do you say, "Oh my god, I must be lost because I'm driving south right now instead of west." You're like, no, that's part of the plan. That's the way the roads are, and if I stick with it, I'll get there.

And yeah, there might be some traffic jams or construction delays along the way. Or you might decide to spend a few extra days in Kansas checking out the big ball of twine. Or you might even decide to take a giant detour down to Houston to check out the space center because that's what I would totally do.

But you never say like, "Fuck, here I am in Houston. I guess I'm not making any progress." Right? No, you trust that the GPS is going to get you there eventually. And maybe it takes longer than expected, or maybe Waze finds a super-fast route that takes three hours off your drive time. But as long as you're on the road, you know you're always making progress toward your goal.

So I want you to look at your life goals the same way. Okay, progress often shows up differently than you think it should. Success is never, ever a straight line. Oh, and comparing your success and your progress to someone else's, please don't ever do that because you're not the same person. And even if you're putting in exactly the same amount of effort, it's never going to manifest in exactly the same way.



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Now, that's not to say that you don't check in every so often and see how far along you are. So to use our road trip analogy, if your GPS said it was going to take five days to drive across the country. And you've been following the instructions doing everything that it says, and it's three weeks later, and you're still on I80 in Pennsylvania, trying to get through all the construction.

Well, yes, it might be time to evaluate whether the route you've chosen is a good one given the current conditions or if it's time to make a tactical detour to a less congested road. Or maybe you decide I'm just going to stay the course. It's going to take longer. I know I'm going to get there eventually.

But what you're not going to be doing on that road trip is checking your GPS every 10 minutes to see how much longer it's going to be to get to LA. You've all been in the car with that person who's like, "Are we there yet? Are we there yet?" You want to smack them. So there's a balance.

If it says it's going to take you five days, you might check the time. I don't know, every four hours. Am I still on track? Am I still where I thought I should be? Is this an expected detour? You'd evaluate, but you wouldn't be evaluating every 10 minutes. Maybe you'd even do it once a day. And then the rest of the time in the car, you would just enjoy the journey.

Okay, so here's the thing, this is what you should be asking right now, how do I enjoy the journey of running if I'm not making obvious progress? And for those of you who are like, "Fuck progress, I don't care." You might be confused. But for those of you that consider yourself goal oriented and say, "I always have to be moving forward," you're like, "I don't know what you mean. How do I enjoy the journey if I'm not making progress?"



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Here's the thing, you guys, when you believe that making progress in running, however, you define progress, is the thing that makes you feel proud or happy or fulfilled or motivated. If you believe that progress is the reason you feel those things, well, then you are screwed, frankly.

Because if the progress, I'm using air quotes again, doesn't happen the way you think it should, you don't get to feel those emotions, right? You're like, "Well, I have to be making progress." Maybe it's getting faster, "I have to get faster as a runner so that I can feel proud." If you don't get faster, you're like, "Well, I guess I can't feel proud."

And that's bullshit, right? But it does, it leads to quitting. Or here's one of the worst things it leads to, over training because you're thinking, "Oh, I'm not doing enough. I got to do more." And then you get injured, which of course, means taking a break, right? And then your brain is like, "Oh, look, I had to quit."

So believing that progress is the thing that makes you feel proud or happy or fulfilled or motivated that's not super helpful for you. But what I've noticed about humans is that most of us have this weird belief. We think I have to be moving forward all the time. I have to be getting better, stronger, faster, have more money, get promoted, move forward in my relationship, all the things. I have to follow the path.

Not all of us, but many of us. We need to be going somewhere. And why? This is a serious question. Why do you think you need to be making progress, going forward, and getting somewhere? Really think about it. Because I bet you're scratching your head right now going, "I don't know why; I just need to."

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And you might say, "Well, it's just I'm a goal-oriented person." Okay, no, no, when you say I'm a goal-oriented person, what you mean is you have the belief that achieving goals is what makes you happy or gives you a purpose. All right, so you have a thought error believing that the goal, the circumstance, or the result in your model is what gives you the feeling.

So it's just a thought error. But it's not your fault that you have that belief because we are socialized to think about achieving milestones in our lives. We graduate from school. We get a job, we find a partner, we get married, we buy a house, we have kids, and we move up the ladder at work. Then there are grandkids, right? Like all the things. And it's all like, Okay, what's the next step? I've done this. What's next? What's next?

And I'm not here to say that it's either good or bad to want to move through your life in this way. I, for sure, have had elements of that in my life. But I do think the problem with that belief system is that it can spill over into activities where it doesn't necessarily belong.

We start thinking that everything that we undertake should be a progression. But actually, I think it's really powerful to engage in an activity without ever expecting to make progress. Especially if it's an activity, you're getting something out of, right, that you can just practice.

Think about a yoga practice, right? When I used to do yoga, I don't do it as much anymore. But when I used to do yoga frequently, one of the things that I learned from yoga was the concept of a practice and the concept of non-competition with myself that I would just show up to the mat and have no expectations and just do my practice.

And yes, some days, I could get deeper into a bend, and other days not so much. And then maybe there were some poses that I was like, "Okay, I'm

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going to deliberately go out of my comfort zone on this pose a little bit.” But it was never with the judgment that I’ve got to be moving forward in my yoga, ever. It was just like the yoga, the act of doing the yoga was the reward.

So being able to engage in an activity without expecting progress, just practicing it without the intention of improving, but with the intention of enjoying it and getting other benefits, is so powerful. And I mean, yeah, when you practice something over and over, you will usually find yourself improving because you’re being consistent. But instead of making improvements, the end goal, the practice, the activity are the reward.

And I think, especially as runners, I think it’s hard for us to kind of wrap our heads around that because there is a competitive side to running in racing. Even if you are not necessarily somebody who says, oh, I’m super competitive. Maybe you don’t consider yourself a competitive person, the way the sport of running is structured, there’s a winner, there’s a last place.

And so I think it is a little bit of an effort for runners to dissociate themselves from that belief that running is about making progress, you know, going from a 5K to a 10k to a half marathon to a marathon or getting faster or setting a PR once a month. It’s sort of baked into the sport.

And I think one of the most common questions I get asked as a running coach is, “Okay, I’ve done a 5K. What should I do next?” And I’m always like, I don’t know what should you do next, right? There’s no rule book that says you have to do it a certain way. But we have this belief system, and then I think the sport of running kind of triggers that a little bit more because there are milestones. We have this belief system that there’s a path that we should be moving along and that if we’re not moving along that path, we’re somehow doing it wrong.

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But if you can release all of those expectations and beliefs, it can be a very, very powerful thing. So let's dig in a little bit into why making progress might matter to you, especially if you don't have a specific goal attached to it, like a 5k or a half marathon. If you're like, "I just want to be a runner. But I got to make progress." If that's you, let's dig in.

And obviously, this is a question that only you can answer. But I want you to really kind of noodle on it, really dig in, because I'm going to give you a few things that I think maybe going on. And if you resonate with them, great. If not, keep asking yourself the question.

So the first is it might be because you think that achieving goals is the key to happiness and that without achievement, without constant achievement, you can't feel proud. And that's actually inaccurate. Right? Because the goal doesn't make you feel anything. It is your thoughts about the goal.

So notice that goal happens. You achieve a goal. That's your circumstance. And then your thought is, "I did a great job on that." Or, "Look at me. I'm a real runner." Whatever the thought is, and then you feel proud. So those thoughts are actually available to you with or without the goal.

It might be because you are seeking approval from other people. Right? And we do this. I've done this in my life. You want other people to know you're good at something, that you're working hard, or that you're making progress.

And I know lots of you have friends and family that are like, "Oh, okay, so you're a runner. So how fast can you go? How fast is your 5K time? Can you do a half marathon yet? Did you win your marathon?" You do a 5K, and they're like, "Did you win your marathon? How's that little running thing going?" We've all been there.

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So you might think that you need to make progress in your running practice so that you have legitimacy in other people's eyes. And, of course, people are always going to have their shitty opinions about you whether you win the marathon or whether you come in at last place. Getting other people to think you're a legitimate runner is not your job. Their opinion is none of your business. Okay?

Now, you may have this belief that a lot of us have that the point of doing anything is to get better at it. Why would I bother doing anything if I can't be good at it if I can't make progress? And again, spoiler alert, this is not a universal truth. It's just a thought you have. You share that belief with a lot of other people. You've been socialized to think that, but it's not true. It's just a belief.

And just to break your brain a little bit, there are a lot of things in life that you actually don't worry about getting better at. You just do them. And you don't really care about getting super proficient, right? Do you ever think, oh, I really wish I could get better at making the bed? I'm going to work on making my bed so that it's absolutely perfect every day." No, I mean, maybe some of you do. But most people are just like, "All right, beds made, moving on."

Or do you ever think I really wish I could get better at brushing my teeth? Or chewing my food? Or pouring a glass of water? No, you do those things every day. You don't give a shit if you're really good at them or really bad or making progress. You're like, I've achieved an adequate level of proficiency at this task. And that's good. Moving on.

So there are plenty of things in your life that you're actually okay with not getting better at. So the million-dollar question is, why is running any different for you? Okay, so again, dig deep and find out what is going on. If

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you are somebody who's like, I'm not making progress, and it's driving me crazy, or I'm feeling really bad about myself, these are the questions you should be asking.

And again, I'm not saying it's wrong to want to make progress. I'm speaking to you if you are feeling frustrated or disappointed about not making progress, and you're thinking, "Oh, I should quit running," or, "there's something wrong with me because I'm not getting better."

If you're not making progress, and you're like, "Okay, so what?" Just rock on with your bad self. But if it's driving you crazy, you're feeling frustrated, you're thinking, why should I even bother? These are the questions you should be asking yourself.

So part of the problem with the concept of making progress is that we don't actually define what that means. Right? It's really easy to say we're not getting anywhere when we aren't actively looking at the facts of the situation, or we're not giving it a long enough time to actually see anything.

If you're driving from New York to LA and you're just driving but not actually looking at the distance you've gone, you're like, "I don't know, it doesn't feel like I'm getting anywhere. I'm still driving through cornfields. Obviously, I'm not getting anywhere." But meanwhile, you've driven 400 miles. You have to understand what does progress mean and then give it a hot minute to see the evidence of it.

So once you understand why it's important to you to make progress, and you've decided, I still want to chase some progress. Okay, give yourself a definition. Does it mean that in a month's time, you can run a mile faster than you did before? Or that this month you completed 80% of your scheduled workouts as opposed to 70% last month? Decide what progress

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is before you say you're not getting anywhere. Put some parameters around it so that it is as measurable as possible.

I love using my Garmin for this purpose because it records everything about my run. So I can look back three months and say, "Oh, look, my average heart rate is lower now. Or my pace on my standard three-mile route is two minutes faster," whatever. Or I can also see nothing has changed in three months. But guess what? I've been inconsistent. I've only done about half my training runs. So I'm not making progress, but I'm maintaining my fitness.

So give yourself some data so you can evaluate. And also, this is the other thing, please don't look for progress from run to run. Give it a fucking minute, my friend. Check-in once a month, maybe even longer, because even though you are always making progress, and you are, sometimes you can't see it. And if you can't see it and you're like, "I'm not making progress," again, that leads us to quit. It's normal for things to take time. It's okay. It's part of the process.

Now if you've been working at the same thing for six months straight with consistency and diligence, never missing a workout, doing everything your trainer says, and you're noticing zero difference, you've looked at all the data, and you're like, "there is zero difference," then yeah, maybe it's time to switch things up, okay? But otherwise, let yourself find joy in the work, in the activity, rather than expecting the evidence of progress to bring you that joy.

So, I've got four questions that I want you to ask yourself to get you kind of thinking about this topic a little bit deeper. And they're going to be in the show notes as well. But you can also go over to the show notes and get the questions. You can go to the transcript of this episode, print that out, and



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get the questions, or you can just pause and write them down when you get a chance.

But here are some questions to get you thinking a little deeper. Number one, why does making progress matter to you? Okay, why does making progress matter to you? Number two, when is it worth doing something even if you don't get better, even if you don't see progress? When is it worth doing something even if you don't get better?

Number three, what do you make it mean about yourself if you're not seeing evidence of progress? What do you make it mean about yourself if you're not seeing evidence of progress? And number four, what are other ways to assess your progress? What are some other ways that you can look at what you're doing and find evidence of progress?

Again, these questions are going to be in the show notes. But I encourage you to really think about them. Maybe even get out your journal and write down the answers and see what you come up with and see if it shifts anything in your mind.

Real quick, before you go, if you enjoyed this episode, you have got to check out Run Your Best Life. It's my monthly coaching program where you will learn exactly how to start running, stick with it, and become the runner you have always wanted to be. Head on over to [runyourbestlife.com](http://runyourbestlife.com) to join. I would love to be a part of your journey.