

The Quest4Life Podcast Show Notes:

Season #3, Episode #30: Principle Over Precedent

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“Stare decisis” is the legal principle of determining points in litigation according to precedent. Said differently, stare decisis is the doctrine of precedent, under which a court must follow earlier judicial decisions when the same points arise again, which is the preferred course because it promotes the evenhanded, predictable, and consistent development of legal principles.

In English, stare decisis means to “stand by things decided” and when a court faces a legal argument that a previous court has ruled on with the same or closely related points or issues, then the court will make their decision in alignment with the previous court’s decision.

Precedent is an earlier event, action that is regarded as an example or guide to be considered in subsequent circumstances that are similar. Precedent serves as criterion people use to make decisions about future situations.

A principle, however, is a fundamental truth or proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or behavior.

What you should know is that choosing principle over precedent gives you a better shot at level-up your mindset to achieve peak performance in all areas of your life, particularly the relationship with yourself.

The Power of Precedent

Think back on when you successfully navigated a conflict with someone at work, with a friend, or with a romantic partner.

What did you do that worked?

More specifically, what did you learn about your approach and what were the reasons why it was successful.

In some cases, you learned that taking a position of observation and listening intently to the other person help de-escalate the conflict.

In other cases, you learned that connecting with them on an emotional level by relating to their experiences worked.

Still other cases, you learned that making a persuasive argument grounded in facts served you well.

Lastly, you learned that simply shutting up long enough to not say something stupid was the best course of action.

In any case, what you learned established precedent for navigating conflict with that individual and the next time you engage in conflict with them, it's very likely you tap into that precedent.

This example illustrates the power of precedent in a favorable way.

Now, think back on a time when you established a precedent as a coping strategy.

What were these coping strategies for you?

Binge-watching Netflix?

Snacking too much on sweet treats?

The time bandit of social media scrolling?

Whatever the coping mechanism, one of the first things you must account for to understand the power of precedent is how the brain works.

Every time you find satisfaction with something, your brain receives a squirt of dopamine, which is a chemical released in your brain that gives you a temporary sense of pleasure. It's relatively short-lived, but it also serves to give you motivation to continue doing the thing that gave you the sense of pleasure, like binge-watching Netflix or snacking too much on sweet treats or scrolling on social media.

Put simply, the satisfaction you gain, and subsequent motivation, creates a powerful precedent in the form of addiction.

Oh, and this is the same thing that happened when you established precedent by successfully navigating conflict with a co-worker, friend, or romantic partner.

Now, when it comes to the precedent in your life, you must acknowledge that it's a "reactive" way to live.

In effect, you become a prisoner of the moment, trying to tap into those things that provide some semblance of relief, some temporary pleasure that helps to alleviate whatever you're going through at the time.

And here's the rub: Most of the time, you're not conscious as to why you're engaging in those specific behaviors. You simply engage in behaviors you know will elicit a desired outcome, which is either temporary relief, a temporary sense of pleasure, or both.

What follows are 4 approaches you can employ to live a principled life, a life grounded in principles.

#1: Honor Yourself

You are an intelligent, capable person who, when you argue for your own potential, is freakin' unstoppable. Unfortunately, far too many people fail to honor themselves by arguing against their potential (Check out Season #3, Episode #26 of The Quest4Life Podcast – “Arguing Against Your Potential”).

But if you commit to argue for your potential, one of the first things you're committing to is to respect yourself, which is inextricably tied to how you view your own self-worth.

Another way to honor yourself is to accept your insecurities, weaknesses, and fears. By doing this, you honor yourself by acknowledging your whole self, that you are an integrated being that doesn't delude yourself by living behind a mental façade.

The key here is to not live in accordance with your insecurities, weaknesses, and fears whereby you allow the voice in your head to dictate your life. Honoring yourself acknowledges your shortcomings while simultaneously working to overcome them.

#2: Live a Healthy Life

Building on the idea that you are a whole, integrated being, living a healthy life requires integrated living physically, psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually.

To the best of your ability, finding a healthy way to balance each of these elements of health – physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual – gives you a shot at living a joyful, fulfilling life instead of being mired in constant pain and suffering.

Physically, everyone knows that, at some point, our bodies will break down. They age. They decay. This is the unfortunate reality of the human condition. The goal is to push the “finish line” back as far as you can by maximizing your physical potential.

Psychologically, considering the stories you tell yourself is extremely important. If you believe you're no good or not worthy of love and acceptance from others or will fail at the next new thing you try, guess what? You're right.

“Whether you think you can or think you can't, you're right.” -Henry Ford

But, when you change the conversations you have with yourself, when you rewrite the narratives you tell yourself, such as thinking about any experience as a way of learning something new or thinking about a new situation where you simply want to take in all the information, you open yourself up to novelty, which begins rewiring your thoughts patterns (Check out Season #3, Episode #28 of The Quest4Life Podcast – “A Beginners' Mind”).

Emotionally, you need to take stock of what emotions add productive value to your life and the emotions that don't.

Remember that “emotions” are the chemical cocktail that your brain releases when it perceives a threat or observes something that's out of whack with your preferences. What follows are the physical sensations that accompany the emotions. We call those “feelings.”

The trick to achieving emotional stability is to be self-aware enough in the moment to understand how the physical sensations are making you feel and what you can do to ease them, such as fear or anger.

Similarly, recognizing the physical sensations that bring you lasting joy and fulfillment must be accounted for so you can replicate more of them, provided, of course, that they add productive value to your life rather than detract from it.

Spiritually, each of us are beings that have a higher purpose, and our assignment is to tap into the part of us that which is God, Spirit, Source, the Universe, or whatever you want to call it. And, by doing so, we can elevate our individual consciousness so that it elevates the collective consciousness of humanity.

As you can see, maintaining a balance between each of these 4 aspects of living a healthy life – physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual, requires intentional living in each area.

#3: Face Your Fears

As previously mentioned, the need to acknowledge your fears as part of honoring yourself and to not let your fears dictate your life because, when you're living in fear, you are captive to the fear. In those moments, your fear limits your success and potential.

Said differently, your fears will always argue against your potential rather than for it.

You're trapped in toxic emotions that won't serve well.

Ironically, nearly all psychological threats – those things we believe to be threats – never come to fruition. We build “worst case scenarios” in our mind because we are afraid of an outcome that isn't likely to take place in the way we envisioned, if at all. By facing your fear, however, the goal isn't necessarily to become less afraid but rather the goal is to be a little more courageous. And by choosing – and it's a choice – to demonstrate more courage in the face of fear, you honor yourself.

By being more courageous, you show yourself love and compassion and you'll be amazed with what you can accomplish by breaking the chains associated with your fears and creating new neural pathways toward the things that allow you to live a principled life.

#4: Learn from Your Mistakes

This one is fascinating from the perspective because mistakes provide an extraordinarily power precedent in your life.

If you're like most people, once you acknowledge that you made a mistake, the last thing you want to do is repeat the mistake.

You see, mistakes cause pain, whether it's physical, psychological, emotional, or spiritual. This can take the form of causing pain to others or pain to yourself.

So, by learning from your mistakes and committing to living according to principle of "do no harm" followed by the principle of "do good by yourself and by others," you set yourself up to live intentionally rather than in a reactionary way, which is way more gratifying and fulfilling.

Final Thoughts

Consider reflecting on how you can integrate each of the 4 approaches mentioned into your daily life.

Ask yourself...

"To what extent do I live my life by precedent rather than by principles?"

"Are there precedents that are no longer serving me?"

"What if I committed to living by my principles, living a principled life in every situation rather than simply deferring to the things I've always done or how I've always done them?"

From there, reflect on what it would look like for you to honor yourself, to live a healthy, balanced life, to face your fears, and to learn from your mistakes.

As with anything, the goal isn't to be perfect or to arrive at a singular destination but rather to be fractionally better today than yesterday and to let principle triumph over precedent.

Doing this, no doubt, will improve your life, your relationships with others and, most notable, your relationship with yourself.

As usual, it's food for thought, Fellow Questers.