

**[00:00:01.560] - Wynne Leon**

Welcome to the Sharing the Heart of the Matter Podcast, where we bring you talented creatives who inspire you to reach your next level of personal growth.

**[00:00:21.130] - Wynne Leon**

I'm Wynne Leon, and in this episode, I'm with my co-host, Dr. Vicki Atkinson. And we are back with the esteemed psychologist and blogger, Dr. Gerald Stein. In this podcast, which is episode one of a two-part series, Dr. Stein walks us through his list, How to become your own best friend. This is one of our favorite essays from Dr. Stein, which is saying a great deal given the depth and breadth of his wisdom. He opens the list with a question, Who is the person closest to you? If we are going to be our own best friend, how do we start? Dr. Stein suggests we start by being good company. If we expand our interests, push our boundaries, and investigate new ideas, we can fill up from the inside out. And when we grow, we sometimes make mistakes. Dr. Stein beautifully expands on his instruction that mistakes are inevitable, master them. Please take steps to skip over their repetition. The next few instructions that Dr. Stein offers center around knowing our own place and value in relationship to others. His beautifully communicated points about having limits, becoming independent, and pursuing advice speak to the balance of knowing how to advocate for ourselves.

**[00:01:50.630] - Wynne Leon**

If we are truly our own best friend, would we stick out for ourselves more? I know one thing that my friends can consistently help me with is the timing of life. Dr. Stein exhorts us to be in the game of life and not to overthink. This jam of an instruction, especially paired with the others, speak of being active participants in the events of life. This is a great episode full of the warm and wise advice of Dr. Stein. He proves an excellent guide, passed the pitfalls and into the fullness of a wonderful life. We know you'll love it. And then come back next week for the second episode of being your own best friend. On a programming note, we will only be producing two more episodes in 2023 after this one so that we can take a break for the holidays. Enjoy. Hi, Dr.

**[00:03:08.630] - Wynne Leon**

Stein.

**[00:03:09.650] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Hello. Good morning.

**[00:03:11.330] - Wynne Leon**

So delighted to have you back. You are one of our favorite guests for all of your wisdom and stories, just bringing us to a better, lighter place. So I am really thrilled to be talking to you today about one of my

favorite of your blog post, and it's entitled How to become your own best friend. I was wondering if we could start by having you read that.

**[00:03:44.380] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Thank you for all the kind words, some of which might actually be true, some of which might not, but I will do my best. And I'm going to read these 30. Well, I'm not going to read all of them. I'm going to read a selection of the items from the blog post that you mentioned. They're all brief, and your audience and you can imagine follow-up questions to it. So the first one, be entertaining on your own. Inspect your personality and how you view the world compared to others. Seek new ideas and pass the unaccompanied time with enjoyment. Go places and do things beyond your usual comfort zone, including solo explorations, perhaps concerts, movies, parks, museums, and tours. Don't sit alone in quiet desperation. Expand on that a little bit and then allow you to go forward, of course. I think what people neglect to think about sometimes is that they don't recognize how to make themselves interesting. They don't recognize how to make themselves interested. And so we have this thing called boredom. The world is full of books, music, parks, as I said, museums, gardening, all sorts of things, newspapers, still, if you care to read about the day's news, just an amount of things that no one in a single lifetime could take in.

**[00:05:36.140] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

And I would also say that the danger for those who can't find things and who complain of boredom is what will fill the time in the absence of their choosing some things that would be interesting to them or make them interesting to others. And what happens, and I think most people have experienced it, but maybe not thought of it, is that gloom, doom, dystopia, whatever you want to call it, tends to sneak into your brain and percolate into your emotions. You need to fill some of that time because if you've got nothing, that will take over.

**[00:06:24.000] - Wynne Leon**

Right. Well, I love what you say about interesting and interested.

**[00:06:29.100] - Wynne Leon**

Those.

**[00:06:30.700] - Wynne Leon**

Two words, they hold so much of the magic of life. I think what you just said there, it really speaks to me of if we let the dust settle on us, we stop breaking out of our own mold and getting in our own way for discovering what's new and interesting.

**[00:06:57.090] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Absolutely.

**[00:06:58.300] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

It reminds me of my favorite word, and I hadn't really thought about this for a long time, my favorite word in French is. There is no place in our magical, wonderful, amazing world in our lives for en Nui. There's no excuse. Whether it's interesting being that way or being interested, there's no room for en Nui. There you go. That's my position.

**[00:07:23.750] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Well, I think it's a good one. I wouldn't want people to think they must be interesting or interested, but it is interesting to become that. It's interesting to find what you can in life that's buoyant and joyous and dark. And you have to look at where you are. And part of where you are is in a complicated place. Your Earth is complicated, so you can ignore the complexity and then who will want to speak to you about anything?

**[00:08:03.470] - Wynne Leon**

Well, I.

**[00:08:04.170] - Wynne Leon**

Hear this a lot from my kids, Mom, I'm bored.

**[00:08:08.000] - Wynne Leon**

I.

**[00:08:09.300] - Wynne Leon**

Find that it's an interesting amount of tension that they're experiencing at the moments that they say that. They want to be occupied by something and they haven't yet thought of what it is or who is going to provide it to them. On the times that I do it well, which is certainly not every time, but it's to help them find the next thing that they want to dig into.

**[00:08:37.610] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Yeah, good way of putting it. I think that your comment prompts me to remember something about teenagers, and I think it's important for all of us to know, but also that therapists in particular should know. It's that when a teenager is saying they're bored, sometimes what they're saying is, I'm sad. I'm depressed.

**[00:09:05.680] - Wynne Leon**

Yeah.

**[00:09:07.400] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

That manifestation of it and trying to give the feeling a name and something that's.

**[00:09:15.740] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Palpable.

**[00:09:16.660] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Discernible in some way.

**[00:09:18.450] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

And it's safer to say because that's not going to hold you up to judgment.

**[00:09:25.280] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Or.

**[00:09:26.380] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Any other negative comment. It's acceptable.

**[00:09:31.130] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

Yeah. Right. But when WWynne was talking about the kids, I think there are probably a lot of parents listening who think about their kids as wanting to be occupied and filled up from the outside in. Really, the best way to proceed is do it from the inside out. What interests you? What are you drawn to? But not thinking of it as something that you need to attach to but lean into. I think there are a lot of kids that still a lot has been written about this, the over scheduling. I think there are a lot of families that are still struggling with that, that more is better.

**[00:10:10.270] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

The.

**[00:10:11.320] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Last thing I bring up is that I think being a therapist, therapists are lucky in a number of ways, but in one sense they can learn a lot, not just about the psychology of human beings, but about the things that interest those people that we're serving. And if they're doing something that you as a therapist don't know much about, it's almost inevitable that you will learn about it if you're any good at your job. You develop a capacity to be able to talk to almost anyone, find something in them that they are captured by and that you are also captured enough to enter into a conversation.

**[00:11:06.330] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

Wow. And that was only number one on your list of 30 fabulous techniques, ideas. Yeah, amazing.

**[00:11:16.560] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

All right. So are we ready to go on the next one?

**[00:11:21.040] - Wynne Leon**

I think so.

**[00:11:22.000] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Sure.

**[00:11:23.260] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

I'm jumping around on the list since this is on a blog, and I will put it up so that people can read it for themselves. Mistakes are inevitable. Master them. Please take steps to skip over their repetition. This is.

**[00:11:43.630] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

One of my all-time favorites.

**[00:11:46.580] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

I don't know if I mentioned it, probably mentioned in some other blog I wrote, but I became friends with the Chicago Symphony's President for a number of years, Henry Fogall. He's still around, but he's retired now. Henry once said to me something that he obviously had said to other people, but boy, it captured my imagination. He said, I like to make new mistakes. I think there's great wisdom in that because the alternative is to keep falling into the same hole that you've been falling in for the last several decades, which never is a good idea. Vicky, you may know... You may know that old joke about falling into a hole or when maybe you know it.

**[00:12:34.620] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

Yes.

**[00:12:35.600] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Well, I'll mention it just because somebody might not know it. So you fall into a hole and it takes you a long time to dig out since it's a pretty deep hole and crawl out. Next day you fall into the same hole and you didn't see that one anymore than you didn't see the first one. Another day passes. You see the hole this time and you fall into it anyway. Another day passes. You're walking down the street and you see the hole, and this time you walk around the hole. And the very next day, and you may not be able... Maybe you can guess this, maybe you can't, is you walk down a different street.

**[00:13:29.150] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

There you go.

**[00:13:29.900] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Now, the problem for most people in some measure of their life and some almost specialize in it is that they don't recognize that either that they are the agents who can change which street they walk down.

**[00:13:48.510] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

But.

**[00:13:48.960] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Also that they have a pattern of falling into this particular hole or similar holes.

**[00:13:56.720] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

And.

**[00:13:58.080] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

So the thing that a lot of people don't, first of all, certain number of people will say it's the fault of X. X is the bad guy. My parents, my brother, my wife, whoever, or a particular political party or some other peoples are just bad and evil and they're doing this to me. I can say that people don't cause us a certain amount of trouble, but you have to also look at yourself and you have to look at patterns. It's unimaginable how many people I would ask questions when I was doing therapy of whether they had noticed any patterns that seemed within the first conversation we had already to be obvious. Too often we're captured by the routine of how we think about the world. And people don't, as a matter of course,

say, Okay, here is my dating history. And go down the list and think about all the people they've dated, whether they're similar or not, whether the outcome is the same or not, whether they've done anything that has contributed to this or not. Don't make those mistakes any more than you can help yourself. I was.

**[00:15:30.610] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

Just going to add on. Do you not find that sometimes people are drawn to those same streets, paths, finding the same holes? Because sometimes there's more comfort there and more familiarity. At least I know the hole I'm going to drop in. There could be bigger ones. It could be worse. There could be bigger boulders on the way. But that pit that I keep falling into, at least it's my pit.

**[00:15:57.880] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Yeah. What we're comfortable with becomes a danger, too. The world is not stationary, and the world is going to basically suggest to you or tell you in one way or another things are changing, and you must change to adapt to those things. But I think your point is very well taken, Vicki. People do want to stay safe. Most of us want to stay safe from something. And of course, there's plenty of danger in the world, so it's very important. But Freud was, as you know, the first person to think about these repetitive cycles. Nietzsche thought about them, too. This is not a new idea. I may not have any new ideas. But in that case, I think it's important to figure out who does have those good ideas. And in the case of old ideas, which Freud and Nietzsche haven't been around recently, so we'd have to say their ideas are old, it's good to get to know what they were thinking. They have a lot of application today. It troubles me that the classics are going out of favor even in some of the great universities of the world.

**[00:17:19.370] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Anyway.

**[00:17:20.110] - Wynne Leon**

Things that I love about number three is you say mistakes are inevitable, and then you say, Master them, which to me speaks of be comfortable making mistakes. You don't want to make the same ones, but be okay with the fact that you are going to make them.

**[00:17:40.670] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

I think that's a very good point. You don't want to punish yourself too much. You want to see it as a condition of life and a condition of curiosity and a condition of trying to develop who you are in these directions. Yeah, very good.

**[00:17:57.240] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

Because some of us cling to safety. I'm going to hold the guardrail because I know what that feels like.

**[00:18:07.240] - Wynne Leon**

It's one of those things, your comment on safety. We do need to do that some of the time.

**[00:18:13.570] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

But.

**[00:18:14.730] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

When it becomes the default decision or behavior of most or all of our actions, it's a different thing.

**[00:18:27.210] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Yeah. Wonderful.

**[00:18:30.610] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Anything else or, sure, we'll go on? I think.

**[00:18:35.010] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

We've got- Proceed.

**[00:18:36.180] - Wynne Leon**

Yeah.

**[00:18:37.150] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Good stuff.

**[00:18:38.160] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

This is next one. It's item four in the blog itself. Putting others first must have limits. Decency doesn't require one to be a human sacrifice. Self-compassion is not selfishness, but the foremost necessity of life. You can only be helpful to others if you maintain the strength to do good. Generosity and kindness are identical to placing yourself last in line. As a Christian colleague told more than one of her clients, get off the cross, we need the wood. Yeah, it's.

**[00:19:16.240] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**



So good.

**[00:19:17.040] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

It was quite startling when she said that, but she was talking about people who were bemoaning their fate and not taking the initiative that they needed to take in order to their lives. And they were stuck in a rut, a rut that they bemoaned. It's common to hear actually now the airline attendance statement when you're about to take a flight, most all of us who've been on recent flights have heard it. If you have someone who's dependent on you, a child or an older person or a disabled person, and they're with you on the plane and the oxygen mask come down, put on yourself first. You do that so that you're able to help yourself and to help the other person, because if you're gasping for air, everybody's finished.

**[00:20:11.950] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

Yeah.

**[00:20:13.000] - Wynne Leon**

This reminds me, and it's so good that it's within the title of how to become your own best friend, because it reminds me of a meditation where you sit and you talk to yourself as if the way you would talk to a friend.

**[00:20:27.980] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

And.

**[00:20:29.840] - Wynne Leon**

You replace that inner voice with, well, what would you advise yourself if you were your friend?

**[00:20:38.520] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Yes. It's actually something that sometimes you do as a therapist, too. You say, Okay, so what would you advise someone to do? And that can be enlightening because it changes the frame of reference entirely. They will sometimes come up with their own solution, and you desperately want, as a therapist, for them to come up with a solution that they don't have to hear from you first. If they take ownership of it, they're more likely to do it than anything you can say.

**[00:21:10.360] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

Yeah.

**[00:21:11.450] - Wynne Leon**

So it's a very good point.

**[00:21:12.990] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

Well, one of the takeaways for me about this because I have a number of people who continue to reach out to me about navigating elder care challenges and not falling into the slippery slope of assuming a martyrdom identity, but seeing yourself as someone who is a helper or a caretaker, but that can't be your sole identity. And so I think this is a tip that I could see resonance for a lot of people that are struggling right now to really take this to heart.

**[00:21:45.810] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Yeah, more and more people because of longevity. I would add one more thing before I proceed. That is that some people seem to have found a kick me sign and put it on themselves or others had put it on them when they were younger and they never thought to remove it or they didn't think they could. And if you portray yourself as vulnerable, weak, desperate, disabled, even if you are able.

**[00:22:21.070] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Then.

**[00:22:21.520] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

You're going to indeed, people will find you, they can sniff you out just like on the playground, and they're going to finish you off every day of the week.

**[00:22:33.780] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

They'll steal your lunch money. Absolutely. Until you fight back.

**[00:22:41.110] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

And.

**[00:22:42.210] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Learn that that sometimes by itself will turn them in the direction of somebody who's an easier mark.

**[00:22:49.350] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

So.

**[00:22:49.840] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Don't do that. Another form of human sacrifice.

**[00:22:55.930] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Right.

**[00:22:56.200] - Wynne Leon**

Which is such a great segue to your next item.

**[00:23:00.280] - Wynne Leon**

So where.

**[00:23:02.340] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Am I? It sure is. Right. And how does one do that? Number five.

**[00:23:07.460] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Thank you. Become independent, assertive, and the best available defender of your ground. If another must serve as your guardian, the guardian of your wellbeing, safety, security, your dependency will be like an Achilles heel, waiting its fatal arrow. Be the advocate on your own behalf.

**[00:23:32.180] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Yeah.

**[00:23:34.810] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

I don't know if there's a lot more to say about that. If you want to be dependent, then you put yourself in a vulnerable position. It's harder for you to be alone. It's harder for you to do things alone. One of the things that I heard with some regularity as a therapist and more often with women, I don't know if that would still be true today, day, but they were more inclined not to want to go to dinner or coffee by themselves than they were. I remember one woman who was a lovely person who was afraid of travel. She had a lot of interests, and I thought that she would find New York interesting. Finally, and I mean, it was many years, when she finally spent some time in New York, she was gleeful. It's like the most interesting city in the United States, maybe the world. And she just couldn't wait to go back.

**[00:24:44.530] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Oh, sometimes.

**[00:24:45.300] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

The things that we fear, once we master them, they inform us of a less suffocating boundary than we let them do.

**[00:25:00.050] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Right. Increasing capacity, taking small risks, but the world opens up sometimes.

**[00:25:07.810] - Wynne Leon**

It reminds me of a quote. This one reminds me of a quote from Elizabeth Gilbert that says, Stop wearing your wishbone where your backbone ought to be.

**[00:25:20.790] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Very good.

**[00:25:22.490] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

Yeah, I like that. Well, I'm going to announce in advance that of all these 30 tips, number six, the next one, if you were planning to navigate there next, Dr. Stein, is my favorite.

**[00:25:39.430] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Well, all right, let's navigate there. Pursue advice so long as you don't overdo it. Make sure of your advisors and how much to follow their suggestions. Yeah, advice. I think when you're young, in particular, you need guidance, and asking those questions is very important. Some people have it innately. I was just over at my grandson's house and two grandsons, and one is four. He is, by the way, as you know, he is married, and he's married for one of the two little girls. His brother mentioned the word Titanic, referring to the ship that was sunk, the unsinkable ship that was sunk, I think, in 1912. Leo, my grandson, perked up and he asked some questions because he had heard a little bit about it, I guess, from his brother. And then we got into a conversation about the Titanic and what happened to it and the iceberg and what is an iceberg. And he was asking me questions and I was showing him some photos and talking about it. So he seems to have built in the ability to ask those questions. Again, it goes back to the first item, to be curious, to be entertaining.

**[00:27:14.800] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

And the thing is, I think you want to get past it also. You want to get to a point where you're so insecure that you don't try things on your own after you've been shown some things, or maybe even that it seems similar to something you've done before. So you step a little bit further and try it on your own.

**[00:27:36.160] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

Yeah. The reason why that one jumps out at me, exactly what you said there, Dr. Stein. I love the Leo story and his inquisitiveness about the Titanic, but when I read number six, what I immediately connected with is that in my life, sometimes asking for input and advice, I've allowed that to be progress in disguise. I'm gathering information. I'm a big input person. I like assembling lots of details. But sometimes there's a little paralysis that comes when you have so much information around you, but then having that grit or the resolve or the ability to move forward and get past, which for me is often fear about making a bad choice, not making a fully considered choice. I think I'm in a better situation now than I have been at other times in my life, but that particular one about input overload and receiving a lot of well-intended input sometimes can backfire.

**[00:28:44.660] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Yeah, it's true. We do have to be careful about who and how much.

**[00:28:51.010] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Information.

**[00:28:52.010] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

We accumulate all the more now, because not all the information that we used to rely upon can be relied upon. And that brings up actually number 9 in the list of items. Don't overthink. Delay and avoidance offer no guarantee of improved decision making. If you wait until you feel right and ready, don't be surprised when speeding time stares down at you from a passing train with your opportunity aboard, the next locomotive to the same destination could be canceled. Is there knowledge you must first acquire? Begin then to obtain it instead of waiting for divine intervention. I'm not opposed to divine intervention. It just hasn't visited me recently.

**[00:29:45.390] - Wynne Leon**

Right.

**[00:29:46.910] - Wynne Leon**

And this.

**[00:29:48.160] - Wynne Leon**

Again speaks to agency. There's a thread through these of develop your own agency and your own willingness to pursue things. Yeah.

**[00:30:05.980] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

I think many people assume that they are being prudent, that they are waiting appropriately, learning more things, reading more books before they jump into the fray, jump into action. Actually, it's jumping into action before too long that makes you feel more ready the next time. And it's unfortunately reversed. And there's a joke that one of my patients told me, actually. And he said a guy goes into a bar and he's old friends with another fellow who's there, and he's complaining to his friend, and he says, I feel like 50 % of my sex life has gone down the tubes. It's not the same anymore. I'm not finding people. It's not what I want it to be. The friend listens carefully, and then he says, Okay, let me ask you a question. Which 50 % are you talking about? Thinking about it or talking about it?

**[00:31:20.520] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

There you go.

**[00:31:23.750] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

And this, of course, is the X rated version of your podcast, right?

**[00:31:33.720] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

At.

**[00:31:33.990] - Wynne Leon**

Least I can.

**[00:31:34.810] - Wynne Leon**

There's a phrase we never expected to hear.

**[00:31:38.540] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

Yeah, there will be no outtakes at the end. That's all there is. We're not holding anything back. No. But I love that because it speaks to, at some point, you've got to jump on the train, get your feet wet, get on with it, and be in the game of life.

**[00:31:55.860] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Get on with it for many reasons, including the fact that you do not have infinite time.

**[00:32:01.930] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Yes.

**[00:32:06.580] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Nobody at the end of the day says that they should have done less than they did. They said, let's say, various versions of I should have done X, I should have done Y.

**[00:32:21.960] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

Urgency is a real feeling that comes with aging. I'm learning that, but it's not a joke.

**[00:32:29.400] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Yeah, and I think that with respect to that, and I'm glad you brought that up, Vicky, you need to create an urgency that falls short of desperation so that you can enjoy whatever it is. It helps if you've already done some things, of course. If you've awakened to the shortness of the day when you're 70 years old, then you're more likely to be a little bit desperate than you were if you had figured that out at 50 or 20 or whatever.

**[00:33:03.910] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

Yeah. Wow. I always take notes when we visit with you, but that one just got a star, Vicky's note taking urgency, just short of desperation. Yeah. And that was just a throwaway win.

**[00:33:21.500] - Wynne Leon**

Dr. Stein, this is wonderful. We've covered about half of your list, and I feel wiser and stronger already. We look forward to coming back and talking to you about more of the list.

**[00:33:34.080] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Well, thank you. And I will look forward to it as well. Thank you both.

**[00:33:37.890] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

Thank you. Thank you.

**[00:33:39.600] - Wynne Leon**

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