

## **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. I'm Wynne Leon and in this episode, I'm with my cohost, Dr. Vicki Atkinson. We are back with the esteemed psychologist and blogger, Dr. Gerald Stein. In this podcast, which is episode two 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, giving the depth and breadth of his wisdom.

In last week's episode, we covered items focusing on expanding our horizons to become both interesting and interested, making mistakes, self-compassion, advocating for ourselves, and not overthinking things. We continue in the vein of standing up for ourselves with, do not explain, excuse, or apologize because you believe someone else expects this. Dr. Stein walks us through this difficult but essential practice of being secure enough to stand our ground and also to say no.

One of my favorite phrases is from Roche Joan Halifax: Strong back, soft front. In that vein, we move to talk about Dr. Stein's instruction that we allow love and kindness to emanate from our beings.

This is one of my personal favorites because I spent years surfing in my father's wake of goodness. When we do the work to see others around us like grocery clerks and people we pass by and greet them warmly, we not only change the tenor in the air, but on ourselves as well. Dr. Stein tells us to hold on to old friends. We know that Dr. Stein has done this because of his wonderful story he told on a previous podcast about the accidental philanthropist. This involves staying in touch with a core group of friends from high school. As the saying goes, one cannot make old friends. And friends are always a benefit when we face disappointing and hard times.

But Dr. Stein also explains that another way through is understanding that we'll likely return to our set point after experience, misfortune, and unhappiness. Dr. Stein says, Overcoming hardship will require a great deal of strength and willpower, but it's known we will return to our set point. This is a great episode full of the warm and wise advice of Dr. Stein. He proves an excellent guide to pass the pitfalls and into the fullness of a wonderful life.

We know you'll love it. And if you haven't already, read Dr. Stein's complete list, including my personal favorite, number 29, empty your being of all your power, imagination, and grit. Use it up. Also, go back and listen to the first episode of being your own best friends, if you haven't already. On a programming note, we will only be producing one more episode in 2023 after this one so that we can take a break for the holidays.

Hi, Dr. Stein.

## **[00:03:39.920] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Hello. Good morning.

**[00:03:41.640] - Wynne Leon**

Vicki and I are so delighted to have you back with us again. Can you please continue with your wonderful list?

**[00:03:48.080] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

This is one of my favorites, too, actually. Do not explain, excuse or apologize because you believe someone else expects this. Such as betray insecurity. Discover when to wait and how to say no. And I have a couple of stories about this, too. One is actually happened when I was a graduate student of Northwestern. And I guess these guys don't come around anymore, but it was a traveling door to door salesman, and he was selling magazine subscriptions. So I let him in and he showed me the list of magazines. And I was overly polite and deferential to him, but I didn't want to buy a magazine. So at the end of perusing the list, I said, Well, there's nothing here I want, but it's too bad you don't have sports illustrated. If you had sports illustrated, I'd buy that. Oh, I can get that for you. Well, I was stuck. I'm not buying a magazine. I would have... I would have taken the subscription for free, but I didn't want to buy it. I was a poor graduate student. So in a way, I didn't owe him anything. I should have said no. Well, I didn't make that mistake twice in my life.

**[00:05:20.360] - Wynne Leon**

That's great. A glancing reference to item number three.

**[00:05:27.390] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

Absolutely. Yeah.

**[00:05:29.570] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

One of the difficulties of apologizing, when you make an excuse, let's say somebody invites you to a party. You don't want to go to the party. Now, sometimes it's good to go to parties if you're introverted. A lot of reasons to be good, even if you don't want to go. But let's just assume it's not an unreasonable decision. You want to go to a party and so you say something like, Oh, Jeez, my car is broken down and I can't possibly get, Oh, Steve can pick you up. He'll take you. Then the other version of this that's also trouble is those people whose insecurity is betrayed by saying, a serial, giving serial explanations and excuses. The car is broken down and I don't have the right clothes and I've got a hamstring pull. With each additional excuse you make, your credibility gets reduced, and it becomes clear to the other person that there's something else going on and they're just getting sick of you by then. You don't owe the world excuses as a rule if you can just stand there and allow the time to move on and them to accept the fact you're not going.

**[00:07:04.290] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

It's not that there aren't some people you would like to give excuses to, but as a rule, you have to be careful of it for the reasons I've outlined.

**[00:07:15.360] - Wynne Leon**

I've shifted at some point to not saying what I won't do, but to offer what I will do. So if I say I'm not going to come to your party, but I'd love to meet you for lunch, if that's what works better for me to say, That doesn't really work for me, but here's what does. Then it puts me in the frame of mind of having to come up with what I really want.

**[00:07:47.460] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Right. What happens when you never want to see the person again?

**[00:07:54.060] - Wynne Leon**

That's.

**[00:07:55.400] - Wynne Leon**

A different one.

**[00:07:57.300] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

Well, maybe that plays into one of the things that I've learned to do that's a spin on what When just said is learning that no is a complete sentence, which is really hard for me. I can buffer that a little bit with, No, I'm so sorry, I can't. Then you just let it sit with a little bit of an apology.

**[00:08:17.910] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

And.

**[00:08:18.460] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

That's it, right?

**[00:08:19.720] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Good ideas. All right. Number 11, do not worry much about what others will say about you privately. They tend to be preoccupied with their foibles, not yours. As Marcus Aurelius wrote, I have wondered how it is that every man loves himself more than all the rest of men, but yet sets less value on his own opinion of

himself than on the opinion of others. I guess the thing that comes to mind about this involved a cousin of mine and her mom, who'd been battling cancer for years, died. And my dad and I went over to visit her and her father and give our condolences. And I was, I don't know, a teenager. And in the course of my conversation with her, she was just about my age, I said something that you should never say when you're trying to give consolation. Because we were talking about a particular thing that happened to one of us. And I said, Boy, that's a fate worse than death. And then the second after I said it, I wanted to suck it back in. But you can't do that. Years later, she eventually left town, and years later I was with her.

### **[00:09:49.730] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

And for some reason I thought about that. And it had been troubling me for many years, decades, literally, that I said that. I asked her about that, and I reminded her of what happened. She had forgotten all about it. I think it's an important thing to remember. It's not to dismiss the lack of wisdom I exhibited by saying that. It's to recognize that you may or may not have caused the dreadful injury that you think. She did not, at the time, look like it bothered her a great deal. It may have bothered me more. I mean, in the big picture, the death of her mother was the issue, not what my idol and inappropriate comment. And I'm not trying to minimize. I would hate to do that again. And so far, so good. But I do think that we have to recognize that there is a limit on what you're worried about, both about yourself, especially about what other people say about you. And some people's opinions of you are irrelevant. You're going to get some backlash to who you are if you stand up for yourself, if you represent something worth fighting for. It's going to happen.

### **[00:11:29.920] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

There's so much to consider there about without getting too political or overly cultural, but the need to engage in a little absolutism if your intent wasn't to harm or offend, but still words have such power. I am aware of some folks in my life who are almost afraid to communicate sometimes around certain social issues, things that are tinged with a lot of emotionality because they fear that they may not say it quite right and not wanting to offend. Does that make sense?

### **[00:12:09.190] - Wynne Leon**

Absolutely. And just to give you one other anecdote that I think could round out the subject. I worked for a fellow psychiatrist for a while at a private psychiatric hospital, Forest Hospital in Chicago, and he was my supervisor. He asked me, and you probably read about this since I wrote about for the blood, he asked me to go to a meeting that he couldn't attend. And he was a guy who had a strong personality and who said things that were a little bit off the wall, sometimes more than a little off the wall. So the received opinion about him was not always applause. In any case, I went to the meeting for him, and people did comment on him and say a few things about him that were not laudatory. I returned and he wanted to know whenever we met again, what happened. I let him know that some people had things to say that were negative about his opinions. And his words were, if I can remember them precisely, Oh, yes. A big tree casts a long shadow. I thought two things about this. Number one, yes, you are full of yourself.

**[00:13:37.500] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

Mr. Bigtree, yes.

**[00:13:39.630] - Wynne Leon**

Number two was he was absolutely right. If you want to be if you want to fade into the woodwork, no one is going to ever say, well, they may say some bad things about you, but you're going to avoid some of those bad things you're afraid of. If you want to be a man, as they used to say, which now applies to forceful women too, then you're going to get some.

**[00:14:08.210] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

Yeah.

**[00:14:09.520] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

But this also seems to me to speak of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation. If you're always motivated by what people will say about you, whether it be good or bad, then you're going to be buffeted by the winds as opposed to saying it in true course.

**[00:14:32.370] - Wynne Leon**

And I think you're not going to be authentic.

**[00:14:34.320] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

I.

**[00:14:35.020] - Wynne Leon**

Think authenticity is a much discussed topic, as we know. And some of it is essential and some of it is, I think, goes sometimes too far. But I think, again, if you want to be who you are, then you have to say who you are. You have to represent those things that matter to you when it is not going to cause you to have somebody shoot you, which is another difficulty these days. I think we have a little perhaps too much license on the one part to say outrageous things and danger on the other part. People who don't like what you say will take action against you and formable action.

**[00:15:26.430] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Yeah.

**[00:15:28.620] - Wynne Leon**

I.

**[00:15:30.200] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

Think we're surrounded by folks that, to Wynne's point and yours, Dr. Stein, that you're having that internal compass about who you are, what matters, your identity, your purpose, your gifts, your flaws, the misgivings that you have, getting connected with that as much as possible so that you're not bounced around by when saying the prevailing winds. They like me, they don't like me. I'm good today. I'm not good the next day. You need that foundation, and it can be a difficult thing to achieve and then maintain about who you are and what matters and what you'll speak to and how you'll do it.

**[00:16:11.760] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Yeah. If I expand on that a little bit, the idea of dating, I've known men, some who I've known in casual friendships, some who are my patients who essentially lived their whole life in fear of not being able to say the right thing to a woman they wanted to go out with. I remember for myself the first time I wanted to call a girl for a date when such things happened. Asi suppose, I was to texting them or something, I sat in my room at home, this was when I was in high school, and I sat and I looked at the phone. And I sat and I looked at the phone and I sat. I had been gone for a while. Well, I eventually did. And she was fine and we went out on a date. But come on, get over it.

**[00:17:12.450] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

You.

**[00:17:14.080] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Don't want to live this way. You should live this way.

**[00:17:18.010] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

No, because of the urgency, which we have discussed, right? Absolutely.

**[00:17:24.690] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Number 13, you especially appreciated this, Wynne.

**[00:17:28.530] - Wynne Leon**

I did.

**[00:17:29.910] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Allow love and kindness to emanate from your being. Live with both intelligence and an open heart. Those different from you also find existence challenging.

**[00:17:43.160] - Wynne Leon**

The reason I love this one so much is that I used to, I used to sail in my dad's wake quite a bit. We would go to the hardware store because we were working on a project. As a person, he did this. He allowed love and kindness to emanate from his being. Whether we were hiking or we were at the hardware store, or we were at a group of friends, he just was so open hearted that he got this response. So as the person sailing behind him, I could see this response that he created in others was just this easy to ride flow. And until you see that, you don't realize how much of a response it is that people are giving to you to what you're putting out.

**[00:18:37.420] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Yeah, I think that's absolutely right. I've seen it even in places like department stores and grocery stores, where you don't see the person, the checker, let's say, the sales associate, as an object who has no name, even though they have a name that's emblazoned on their chest or on whatever they're wearing, and that they are ignored by you. But if you engage them, smile, if you call them by name, you can transform the situation in a moment.

**[00:19:21.790] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Yeah.

**[00:19:22.360] - Wynne Leon**

And the most dramatic example I ever had of that, which is just one example, it's not your father's enormous presence. It helps to be a preacher, I imagine you have to have a big presence. Certainly the people that I, the clergymen that I treated from a variety of backgrounds, they all had a good presence. I don't have a lot of trouble, actually, the ones that I'm talking about.

**[00:19:53.390] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Because.

**[00:19:54.330] - Wynne Leon**

As soon as you have that, people will follow you.

**[00:19:59.600] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Right.

**[00:19:59.850] - Wynne Leon**

They think you've got God and your presence behind them. But in this case, the woman's name was Beatta, and she looked like a truck had run her over that day. She had no life in her. She was going through the routine of processing whatever was on the cart, in your cart, to check out. And I saw the name, and I'm pretty good with pronunciation most of the time. And I said, Good morning, Beathe. She transformed in a split second, and I was the first person that she encountered doing that job who hadn't gotten her name right. It's so easy. And in fact, makes you feel better to do it. It does.

**[00:20:51.720] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

Yeah.

**[00:20:52.520] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

It really does.

**[00:20:54.950] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

See me.

**[00:20:56.740] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

See me.

**[00:20:59.040] - Wynne Leon**

Absolutely.

**[00:20:59.680] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

That's a good one.

**[00:21:01.550] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Oh, this is a good one. Number 18 is Misfortune and unhappiness will be overwhelming at times. Most of us eventually return to our usual level of wellbeing to our set point. And this is not... People conventionally believe that if you can overcome hardship, you are doing it because you have an enormous willpower. Usually that. And it's quite extraordinary and outside of the bounds, especially if they have not encountered anything as large as what they consider you've gone through. And while there's great truth in having that strength of character, there's also one thing that people don't consider, and it is that, and



psychologists have a lot of data on this, we adapt. And Daniel Kahneman talks about it, other important psychologists talk about it, that after a time, human beings adjust and go back to their set point. A set point is our normal or regular level of being in terms of life, satisfaction, happiness, et cetera. That's why you can win the lot. That's one of the reasons why you can win the lottery, and at a certain point, you come down from the high. It's also why if you're defeated, you will usually come back, unless you have successive and unending defeats, you'll come back to the point of saying, Okay, that was yesterday, and I feel better today.

**[00:22:39.310] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

And it's a matter of feeling. The best example I can give of it is, unfortunately, something I went through. It happened what? 2019? Okay. I am still a big fan of classical music and have been so since I was about 16 or so. Well, in 2019, on June the 10th, not that it matters to me, but on June the 10th, 2019, I had to go to ENT, actually, which I wanted the wax in my ears to be cleared out. I felt a occlusion, and it happened occasionally, and I've gotten it taken care of. But apparently technology had moved on from the way that it had been done. You can have a water sprayed into your ear, and that will often do it. And of course, there are other things you can use at home. But the ENT had been recommended to me, and after I mentioned that those were the methods I knew, she decided it would be a good idea to use an electric instrument, basically a vacuum. And immediately, without telling me she was going to do it, she stuck it into my ear, my right ear, and she told me this is going to be loud.

**[00:24:07.850] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

It's really loud. And she got whatever she needed to get out. Then she moved to the left ear, and I was still startled. And what happened at that point was that there was something that she called a screech, which is not what it's supposed to do. It was a loud, high-pitched malfunction, which, as we talked later on, she thought it only happened in her 14 years of practice once before, and that woman had recovered from it after about 10 days. It would have been nice to know that that was a danger, and it would have been nice to know if she had told me what was coming, but that didn't happen. Well, for the next six months or so, maybe longer, maybe less long, I felt both heartbroken, depressed, and enraged. I had done enough expert witness work that I recognized, and I had had enough patients who had had legal problems, mostly in the form of divorce, that even as much as I wanted retribution, and I did, that was not going to avail me anything good. The rest of my life would have been in and out of court, in and out of depositions.

**[00:25:28.860] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

And then they would have said, Oh, you're such and such an age and you're retired and how much money do you make? And it would have been rendered into something. And you've never done this for a living. I've done a lot of things in music with the Chicago Symphony, but I never was a performing musician and so on. I recognized that was a poor choice. Well, as I say, I felt terrible. And as time passed, so did my level of life satisfaction return to normal. I can say, and I've said it for years, people find

it hard to believe two things. Number one, I'm as happy or as dystopic as I ever was. I actually am happy or not probably than I was at age 50, let's say. So I returned to the set point. The other thing was that many people said, Oh, this is because you have a lot of interests. This is because you have a strong will. This is because you recognize that you have a lot of friends and love in your life and you're financially stable and on and on. And I always say to them, No, that's not it.

**[00:26:49.870] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

It just happened. It just happened. And I will give you a psychologist's belief in what happened. That is to say, an evolutionary psychologist, which I'm not, but I know enough about evolutionary psychology I would say this, that if mankind, our distant ancestors were defeated by such things as I have described, obviously there were no incompetent ENTs sticking machines into their ears, we wouldn't be here. They would have been defeated by life, have done something harmful to themselves. They wouldn't have overcome all of the things that life has in store for us. And as both of you know, it's not always pleasant. But in the big picture, those people who are our ancestors are our ancestors because they were selected for by the evolutionary process. They had the capacity to overcome those things, and they had the capacity to adapt. So that's in us, in most of us at least. And enough of it was in me to be able to say that I would say to you, if somebody said, give me \$10,000 and I can make you're hearing what it was, I'd do it in a split second. I'm not suggesting otherwise. But I'm quite pleased to talk with people about music because I still know a lot and music history, and I read about it, but life goes on.

**[00:28:46.050] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

Well, and I love how 18 and 20 on your list are so compatible to one another. Twenty, where you say, When hardship comes, remember how you survived earlier losses and what properties within you enable to you to bounce back. What I love about that is that you're not saying we only learn and grow and can continue moving forward because the exact same horrific event occurred. The fact that you survive a series of things in life that are unfortunate, they can be varied and they are, but we learn and keep going. Losses happen.

**[00:29:26.360] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

They are part of a life and part of, actually, if every day was a sunny day, frankly, I wish it were because I'm concerned about the climate change. But if every day were metaphorically a sunny day, wouldn't appreciate the sunny days quite so much as you do.

**[00:29:48.430] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

Right.

**[00:29:49.040] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

We also learn so much when we struggle.

**[00:29:52.400] - Wynne Leon**

Yeah.

**[00:29:52.940] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

And.

**[00:29:55.420] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

Other people are invariably watching us as this is happening. So I often think of all of us as like teachers in the experience of life because there's an audience always and someone who can benefit from seeing that perseverance.

**[00:30:12.850] - Wynne Leon**

Yeah. And it's as simple as with my kids, not doing things for them, but letting them do it themselves. They learn that competence that comes that they can keep trying and learning things. It's not just about the competence of things, but the confidence that they can keep at it.

**[00:30:37.910] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Very well said. I love that.

**[00:30:43.300] - Wynne Leon**

Thank you so much for sharing this wonderful essay and your thoughts and stories around it. We're so grateful for your time and touch in our lives.

**[00:30:51.530] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

Well, thank you both.

**[00:30:53.380] - Dr. Vicki Atkinson**

Thank you.

**[00:30:54.060] - Dr. Gerald Stein**

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