

How Fitness Saved a Life and Became a Livelihood – Doug Bopst with Dave Asprey – #806

Announcer:

Bulletproof Radio, a state of high performance.

Dave Asprey:

You're listening to Bulletproof Radio, with Dave Asprey. Today, we're going to talk about some pretty deep stuff, going to jail. We're going to talk about addiction, and we're going to talk about what you could do stuck in a jail cell versus what most people do in a jail cell and what different mindset happens there. My guest today is Doug Bopst who's been on a bunch of media outlets lately, and he talks about something called The Adversity Advantage, same as his podcast. I just on there, I'm talking about fast this way. And it was really impressed with interview, so I'm like, "Hey, you should come on my show."

So we're going to get to talk to a felon, a drug addict, at least a former drug addict, about, what do you do if you have an infinite amount of time locked in a room? By the way, I'm not talking about the pandemic, just to be really clear, I'm talking about jail, but sometimes they feel similar. Doug, welcome to the show.

Doug Bopst:

Dave, man, thanks for having me and for that nice little intro.

Dave:

What I like about your work is that you talk about self-destructive cycles people get stuck in, but before we get into the psychology of things like this, tell me a little bit about your story. Why did you get thrown in jail?

Doug:

You have like three days? No, I'm kidding. Well, you know what's interesting, is you said a moment ago that I have a show called The Adversity Advantage, but when I was younger, I did everything to use adversity to my complete disadvantage. And I was battling a lot of insecurities, trauma, pain in a really unhealthy way. My parents got divorced when I was five. I loved sports, but it was as unathletic as they came. I never had a girlfriend. And I was always looking for my first way to escape as I think about it, and initially it was through food, as I remember. I was eating like cinnamon buns and pasta a lot, bacon, not the good bacon, sausage, the most unhealthy processed food.

And by the age of like 10, 11, 12, I started to gain weight at a young age, so I started asking myself questions like, "Why am I the only one whose parents in my friend group are divorced?"

Dave:

There used to be a lot of shame around divorce. It feels like that's pretty much gone, like half of people do it.

Doug:

They're right. But back then, literally, out of my friend group. I was the only one because people weren't getting divorced as frequently. And then I was like, "Well, what's wrong with me? Why am I wearing Husky pants and not a lot of other people around me are?" And combine that with, I didn't have the best "genetics," I started getting pudgy. So of course, more layers of insecurity, more layers of fear,

anxiety, depression, that sort of thing. And I was bullied in school, and I was picked on, I was told that I looked like I had Down syndrome when I was in grade school.

And when I was 14, one of my friends offered me a hit off a marijuana pipe. And as you alluded to a minute ago, I did go to jail. And I never thought that this first hit of marijuana off a marijuana pipe would lead to me going to jail. I never thought it would start the destructive pattern, but it did, and here's why. When I took that first hit, I felt this huge monkey come off my back. I felt all my fears were gone, all my insecurities. I didn't have to worry if I was going to find love, I didn't have to worry what my parents' relationship was going to look like, I didn't have to worry how I was going to do in school. I was able to numb the pain. So what happens?

Dave:

The anxiety went down.

Doug:

Anxiety went down, fear went down, I was able to be myself. And then you keep chasing that feeling. It wasn't that I loved the taste of pot, I love the feeling that it gave me. And that's why a lot of kids, especially, a lot of people, they go down that rabbit hole because they end up doing it for the wrong reasons, they ended up doing it to mask pain. And you can only get high off pot so much before you have to move on to something else, which is what happened to me. And so I began smoking every day. And then once you're a teenager smoking every day, it becomes an expensive habit. So I ended up selling a bit on the side to support that, ended up creating tension in my family and my mom and I got into some disagreements.

And on my 16th birthday, I was kicked out of her house and shipped to live with my dad full time, because at that time, we were living 50/50 with both my parents. Changed schools immediately thinking that that would change my habits, that I would change my friends, and really, it just created more layers of trauma, insecurities, and pain in my life. I barely graduated high school because all my friends and I would do is we would ride around, listen to music, get high, eat junk food and we would skip class to get high. And by the time I graduated high school... And keep in mind, I was a smart kid, I had aspirations. I wanted to be a lawyer when I was a kid, I wanted to be an FBI agent, I wanted to play sports, I wanted to be an astronaut.

It wasn't like I was the kid who just didn't care about myself at all.

Dave:

You weren't a slacker?

Doug:

No.

Dave:

Although you sure sound like one.

Doug:

Right. I mean, I was. I mean, I wasn't in some ways, but in other ways, I still had these dreams in my head and I'm like, "Man, I think I could be something," but my self-esteem was so low, it held me back. And as soon as I graduated, I started to actually sell pot to make money. And I met a guy and ended up

picking up a few pounds of pot a week to sell. And it was flipping upwards of like \$10,000 worth of pot a week. And now I was learning how you can make money in the drug game. And what happens when you start selling drugs? You meet more people that are doing drugs. Got introduced to cocaine, did a line of cocaine, and my addictive behavior caught up with me. And one line turned into two, turned into three, and then ended up getting to the point where I was doing an eight-ball of coke a day.

The problem was, here I am, like 17, 18 years old. And I had anxiety, coke and anxiety go about as well together as someone trying to lose weight and eat pizza every day, it just doesn't work. And what ended up really bringing me to my knees, Dave, was Oxycontin. I was like 18, 19 years old, and a friend of mine offered me a five milligram Percocet. And that same feeling that I had when I first started smoking pot was the same feeling that I had when I took that five milligram Percocet. I snorted it. That same monkey came off my back. All my fears were gone, anxieties, that sort of thing. And then the five milligrams turned into 10, turned into 20, all the way until I was doing three, 400 milligrams, milligrams, every single day up my nose-

Dave:

Dear God.

Doug:

... to support my habit. I couldn't get out of bed some days without doing 150, 160 milligrams. I was spending hundreds of dollars a day, and half my left nostril was missing. I didn't have a bowel movement for nearly a month.

Dave:

Wow. So you really wrecked yourself, man?

Doug:

I did. And one of my biggest setbacks ended up becoming... I mean, in the time, I thought was one of my biggest setbacks, became one of my biggest blessings. In Cinco de Mayo of 2008, I was riding around with a few of my friends to make a drug deal, had a half a pound of pot in my trunk, \$2,000 in cash in the glove box, and there was a cop running radar. So I thought it was a brilliant idea to flash my high beams at the police officer because I had a busted headlight that I had been too lazy to fix because all I cared about at the time was doing and selling drugs. Flashed the high beams at him, gives him, of course, a reason to pull me over.

Pulls me over, comes up to the car. I stammered, I pull out my license and give him the registration. One thing leads to the next, I'm out of the car in handcuffs. He's searching it because he suspected suspicious activity, finds the pot, finds the money and I'm in the back of this police officer's car. And all the bad choices that I had made in response to my circumstances started to come to a head, because I was like, "How did a kid who just wanted to be loved, how did a cute to just wanted to be good at sports, how did this kid get here?" And I was thinking about all of my unfortunate circumstances. I was thinking about the divorce, I was thinking about the kids that picked on me, I was thinking about the girls that rejected me.

And then I was thinking about my response and how that destructive pattern started and where it got me to. And at that moment, my heart was in the pit of my stomach. Obviously, my heart's racing, everything you can imagine. I thought my life was over. I'm taken to jail and I'm charged with a felony possession with intent to distribute marijuana. And a few months later, I end up going to court. And you would think though, that during this time that I would try to get my life together. No, more pain, more

trauma, more anxiety, so I continued to do more drugs. I go to court, it's September of 2008, 20 years old, and the judge sentences me to five years, suspends everything but 90 days, five years' probation, 200 hours community service, all kinds of fines and drug classes.

But he looks at me, he's like, "Doug, you're young, you're 20 years old. This felony conviction is going to haunt you for the rest of your life." He's like, "I'm going to make you a deal." I'm like, "Deal? A deal after you just told me that?" He's like, "If you complete everything without messing up and you get through your probation, you don't miss any appointments, you don't fail any drug tests, you do your community service, I'll take the conviction off your record and give you a PBJ." I'm like, "All right. Whatever, man." I didn't think I was going on to be able to see my 25th birthday. So I take the deal, I leave court, report the jail a few weeks later. It was ironically a week after my 21st birthday.

And what was interesting though, was as much as I was... Obviously, I was scared, I was anxious, I was fearful, all those stigmas you think about of what happens in jail was going through my mind being this kid who was unconfident as they come, and then on top of that, I had this horrific opioid addiction to kick. What's funny is that, when I walked through jail, I cried because I didn't want to go in, and when I left, I cried because I didn't want to leave because a massive transformation happened.

Dave:

And so you were in for 90 days.

Doug:

90 days.

Dave:

Do you remember the judge's name?

Doug:

Yes. Yeah. Judge Waldron.

Dave:

So shout out to Judge Waldron. That's the kind of judge that we're supposed to have. He did you such a solid there. There's something horrific about throwing young people, especially under 25, but even more under 21, in jail. Your prefrontal cortex isn't done yet. And as you've already said, addiction is addiction, it's a disease. And locking people up maybe isn't a good strategy, but maybe 90 days is not a bad strategy. So what'd you do in 90 days in jail? How'd you keep from getting your ass kicked?

Doug:

A lot in that short amount of time. And what happened was, I walked in there and I was scared for my life, because like I said, I was unathletic, I was unconfident. I was the kid who ran away when people would get into fights. I was the kid who never stood up for myself. So I was like, "Man, I'm a recipe for disaster in here." And I detox cold turkey from the opiates for three weeks, which is like having the worst case of the flu, like every symptom you can imagine. But the worst part of it was, you feel like you're trying to crawl out of your own skin. And as I look back, it was the old me leaving so that the new me could become new.

And my soon-to-be cellmate was sitting there at the Scrabble table and he looked like a more jacked version of Brad Pitt from Fight Club. And he's like, "What are you doing here?" And I told him a

little bit about why I was there. I told him I got busted selling drugs. He's like, "All right, man." He's like, "Well, when you get through your detox, you're going to start working out with me." I was like, "Yeah, right, man." Because at the time, I could have been a model for Pillsbury, I was so out of shape. There's no way I'm going to work out in jail. And that night, I saw him working out and he's doing all these pull-ups, like thousands of pushups, working out for like hours straight.

I'm like, "Who is this guy?" And I've been a trainer now for almost 10 years, and to this day, he's still one of the most fit guys I've ever seen. A few days later, we're in the cell and we're just talking, and he's sitting there and he's asking me more questions about why I went to jail. He's like, "Well, what happened to you?" I was like, "Ah, my parents got divorced, or I was picked, or the girls didn't like me." And he said, "Dude, quit being a victim, man." He's like, "You got yourself here." He's like, "There's plenty of people that went through the situations that you went through that aren't in jail."

And I'm like, "Yeah, I guess you're right." In that moment, Dave, I didn't get what I wanted to hear, but I think I got what I needed to hear, because for the first time in my life, I felt truly empowered because there was this guy who, he had no skin in the game of my life, he wasn't a family, he wasn't a close friend at the time, who gave me some hard truth. And we just started to build a little bit of a friendship in there. And after him pestering me about it, it was like a few weeks went by or something, I decided to give exercise a try. And I remember the first time I went to work out, I was in front of a bunch of grown men in the common area of jail.

And he's like, "All right, Doug, do a pushup." I get down to do a pushup, couldn't do one. Couldn't even do one for my knees. I collapsed right on the ground. I was like, "Why can't I do a pushup?" And he looked at me, he's like, "Because you're fat." And I hated that word. And I know people don't like that word, but for me it motivated me because I hated that word.

Dave:

It's a real thing. I was a fat kid. It's all right. People who don't like it, get a therapist. It's okay if you're fat, you can change it, but to try and hide it with another word is not realistic.

Doug:

Right. He's like, "I don't know what else to tell you, man." He's like, "Your core is weak, you're not strong." He's like, "You're loaded with belly fat." He's like, "You can't even hold yourself up, that's why you can't do a pushup." I'm like, "Yeah, it makes sense." And so I went to go walk up and down the stairs in between sets to take a break, and I could barely walk up and down the steps without being out of breath because I was also smoking at the time a pack and a half of cigarettes a day. And it motivated me because I was like, "Man, what the heck have I let myself come to?" Because I was completely sober from all the drugs at this time.

And I remember we set a goal to do a set of 10 pushups and run a mile during my time in jail. And he agreed to train me in there every single day for the remainder of my sentence under a few stipulations. One was, he gave me a little meal plan that I had to follow as much as you could in jail, like cutting out a lot of the processed carbs, making sure that I was eating my protein, and stuff like that. And that I had to show up, I couldn't quit. And what happened was, after a time, for a few days, I was able to do one pushup, and I was like, "Wow, I never thought I could do a pushup. Now, I can do one pushup." Then what happens? You want to do more of that.

Then I was able to two pushups, three, four, and so on. And then alongside of that, now I was starting to actually run at night. So I would do the body weight workouts in the morning at one time and then I would run at night and I would hold a deck of cards, playing cards. And every time I would run a lap, I would pass a card from my left hand to my right hand, I'd count laps in there. And that started

building up too, I was able to start running like three or four laps without being out of breath, five, six, and so on. And then by the end of my 90-day sentence, I was able to do that a set of 10 pushups and run that mile.

And I felt this light bulb go off in my head that for the first time of my life, I was finally going to be able to change my life. I had this different swagger about me. I was walking with my chest out, my shoulders back. I was finally able to get comfortable being uncomfortable. I was finally able to face my fears and face my emotions, really, head on, and learn to channel a lot of that pain into something good. Because we all have pain, we all have a dark side to our past, but it's like, "How are you dealing with that?" That's what counts. You can either let it just sit there and rot inside of you, or you can transfer it into something positive or else you end up transferring it onto somebody else.

And I also, for the first time, did the thing that I knew I should have been doing all along. I knew I should've stopped using drugs, I knew I should've started taking care of my health, it just seemed so insurmountable. But that's why I love the fact that I just started with doing one push-up because you build off that and you build self-confidence instead of saying, "Hey, let's start with 50 pushups." No, start with one. And the other thing it did for me, it was, it gave me discipline and consistency, something that I never had in my life. I was never disciplined about anything.

I had 20 jobs by the time I was 21 years old. I couldn't stay discipline or stay consistent with anything. And when I left, I cried the last day I was there, I literally cried because I was like, "How am I ever going to repay you?" And he said, "Don't mess up and pay it forward. And when he said pay it forward, I had no idea what that really meant, I had never read a personal development book in my life, so I didn't know what being of service meant or giving back. And he gave me a workout plan that I still have framed in my place today so I never forget where I came from. That's big for me. I never, ever, ever want to forget where I came from.

Dave:

Is he still in jail?

Doug:

No, he got out. And him and I, we actually had stayed in touch for a little while. And then I think he went back and forth, and we actually grabbed a few workouts together, out on the outside, which was awesome. Because I was able to keep up with him doing his workouts, which before, it was like me doing the little novice workouts and he was in there doing his thing. And I was motivated. And it was a more, as I look back when I got out, it was more to not let him down because I felt like this this unexpected angel came into my life and helped me save my own life when I think really he was putting a lot of his energy he could have been saving his own, to save mine.

I stayed on the plan he gave me, lost a bunch of weight, got to a place fitness-wise where I wanted to help other people use fitness to change their lives, and I became a personal trainer back in April of 2011. We're recording in, what? The first week of March. In one month, it'll be 10 years. And I felt this new high come within me because I felt like I could now pay it forward and pass the torch and show other people what the power of fitness has done for me to them. By the way, by literally by the grace of God, as I look back, I built a really successful personal training business out of this wellness center and built relationships with my clients and started to slowly tell my story and be like, "Fitness saved my life when I was in jail."

And people really started to cling to that because they were like, "Wow, this kid's hyper honest, he's being vulnerable." And people were like, "Me too, I've been depressed, I've been anxious, I was

picked on, I was overweight and I felt like crap," and I could relate to people on their deepest level of pain.

Dave:

Do you have a girlfriend now?

Doug:

I did. I'm not in a relationship now, I have had a girlfriend.

Dave:

All right. So you can date too, man. You did all of it.

Doug:

Yeah. And time flew by, and things started to happen and things started to unfold. I haven't touched the drugs I was abusing since. I guess it was the fall of 2013, my probation was up, and one of my clients was an attorney so we wrote the judge a letter for modification of my sentence, and he granted me my day in court. In January of 2014, I went before him and he held up his end of the bargain. He saw that I completed everything that he had given me without messing up, and he took the felony conviction off my record and gave me the PBJ. I never realized how much one's life can change in a matter of seconds for being shackled as a felon, not being able to vote, not being able to leave the country, not being able to all of these things I legally couldn't do to now being a free man.

And it inspired me to continue to share my story. I ended up publishing my first book, From Felony to Fitness to Free, to help other people make the most of second chance, turn negative into a positive, and inspire people also to focus on how far they've come and not how far they have to go. And also, the power of choices, man. As I look back, and the reason I love the notion of adversity advantage is, I made so many poor choices. Obviously, my situation was horrible, but I made so many poor choices in response to that that made my situation 100 times worse based on how I handled it. And that's what happens to people.

Dave:

Did you hear my podcast with Joe Polish a while back?

Doug:

I don't, but there've been a few people that have been asking me if I connected with him.

Dave:

You got to check that one out. Joe's a really close friend who was a massive, massive addict. You hit rock bottom in different ways, but he was like, "All right, I've got nothing." And he started a company cleaning carpets, and now he's one of the most sought after marketing guys. A really close friends. He's taught me a lot about how to do marketing for Bulletproof. His Genius Network things has been real transformative for me. But he talks openly about addiction as well. It's an interview you'd like. And the reason I like talking with you, I like talking with people who've been addicts is that the patterns that you talk about, these destructive cycles, everyone has them. Varying causes, varying degrees, but people respond differently.

And it's when you learn something from hitting rock bottom in jail versus hitting rock bottom the way many people do in all sorts of different ways, emotionally, psychologically, health-wise, whatever, it sometimes takes a wakeup call. I want to know though, so you're saying you were bullied, you had the divorce when you're five, which is really traumatic for kids, especially depending on how the parents handle it. If you could, say, pick the four things that were the biggest cause of the trauma that messed with you, give me the four of them in order from the most impactful to least.

Doug:

I would say being bullied and being picked on was number one, because it was during a time where I was trying to build connection with people. And then also as a by-product of that, it inhibited my ability to get girls, I think, because I felt like crap about myself, especially when I was around a group of people. The second thing was definitely the sports because I loved sports growing up. I was the kid who watched ESPN, I was the kid who collected cards, I was the kid who tracked stats, but I was also always the kid who never made any of the teams. And I was just like, "What is wrong with me? Why are all these other kids just gifted better than me at this stuff?"

Dave:

So you had bullying, and then failure at sports.

Doug:

Failure at sports. As I look back, my parents' relationship, I think definitely was hard. They hardly communicated, it was a rough divorce, so watching that. And then my dad was... I mean, I love him and we've come a long way, but he was extremely hard on us growing up, and that was tough to deal with. And then I would say lastly, what really got it going for me as I look back is my inner circle, the people I hung out with. I thought what I was doing was normal, and I believe your environment can create a false sense of normalcy. Like if you're around 10 people that are just making poor choices all the time or doing drugs, you're going to think that's normal because it's just what you are now.

Dave:

Well, you are a kid, you have nothing else to compare it against, right?

Doug:

Yeah. I had a lack of identity, and looking back now, I always tell people, if you don't develop your own identity, you'll develop it from other people because you'll try to fit in. I just see that so much now. I wouldn't have done a lot of the things I've done now if it wasn't for the people I surrounded myself with. I wouldn't have started a podcast, I wouldn't have written books, I wouldn't have had the courage to talk to people like you. So it was definitely the people I was around.

I'm not blaming them, they didn't force me to do anything.

Dave:

How you pick your friend circled, man. You were there for a reason.

Doug:

Yeah. But, I think one of the things that's hardest for people to do is to leave their friend group when they're trying to make a change because they're like, "Oh my gosh, I've hung around this person for 15

years. We've partied together. We've done all this stuff." But just remember, people are choosing not to grow with you, and that's a choice. That's on them, that's not on you. And it's like, do you want to be the person who's 40, 50 years old looking back and saying, "Man, I'm so thankful that I had the courage and overcame my fears to step away from that circle and stepped into a new circle that was with people that had common futures and not common past and now I have a family, now I feel great about myself. I'm doing all these things."

Or do you want to be that person that's 40, 50 years old, and being like, man, I wish I would have done that. That's what happens. A short-term fear is a lot easier to overcome and long-term regret for not making the changes you wish you made a long time ago.

Dave:

When you say you were bullied, were you getting beaten up or were they just mean to you? What does that look like?

Doug:

I feel like I was like the scapegoat out of the kids.

Dave:

It was mostly the emotional.

Doug:

I didn't look very attractive. I didn't feel attractive, so of course I wasn't going to look attractive. And I started to develop this identity around me based on these lies that other people were telling me and I started to believe them. I started to believe that I was ugly, I start to believe that I looked like this person, I looked like that person. And so what's that do? It completely crushes your self-confidence.

Dave:

It's really crazy what that does. Some people, it puts you on a spiral that you went on. I know a lot of entrepreneurs who are bullied, I see a lot of men at 40 Years of Zen. We come in and spend five days and we go through all that stuff. The number of people who are financially successful running companies, because they're still proving that they're good enough to the seventh grade bully, it's a lot of people, and it's always pain. So you're like, "That's not why I'm an entrepreneur, I don't have to respond to that anymore. I can actually do it because it is of service to others." And then it's easy to be an entrepreneur when you're like, "If I fail, I'm not good enough and then I'm going to go right back into seventh grade mode."

It's brutal. I got bullied a lot too. But I got the emotional stuff, I also got the physical stuff, but the one thing I learned about bullies is they're bad at physics because I was always bigger than they were. So eventually, I'm like, "Guys, you have a fat kid sitting on, probably punching you in the face until you stop moving." But I never threw a first punch. I was maybe not a nice kid, but when you're bullied all the time, that's how it works. So a lot of my early success was that, "I'm good enough. I'm not going to fail." It creates so much pain. I would love to see a lot less bullying, because, I mean, look what it did for you, nothing good.

Doug:

Right. And you look back, you're like, "Well, what I've done differently?" I don't know because now it's like, yeah, I would just tell kids to work out and hang out with the best and just know that the way someone treats you is on them, not on you. But if I was like 12, 13, I might've understood that, but I don't know if I would have actually done that.

Dave:

Dude, when you're 12 or 13, your brain isn't fully formed. My kids are that age, and they're just learning how relationships work and you have to fail a few times at things like that. And you can tell them, but the feelings are so strong at that age. So this is why teachers have to step up when there's bullying, and I know a lot of teachers aren't empowered to step up, they're not allowed to stop it by whatever policies they have. But I'm hopeful that things will shift a little bit more towards that because it's a lot easier to catch it at that age than it is to catch it when you're 20 and in jail.

Doug:

For sure.

Dave:

So you've managed to stay clean for 12 years. Do you ever worry that you're going to relapse?

Doug:

No. The interesting thing is, one of the hardest things I think for people to do in recovery, at least in my experience and talking to people, is to re-attach behavior to emotion. Meaning, like I used drugs in response to negative emotion that I thought like anxiety, depression, stress, fear. It was second nature to be like, "Okay, I'm anxious, I'm going to get high. Okay, I'm depressed, I'm going to get high." But in jail, all the masks came off. So I was forced to really look at myself in the mirror, head on, I was completely naked, not in a physical sense, but mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. So I had to learn to manage my emotions in a way that was healthy.

So I started to develop just new patterns so that when I got out of jail and I was stressed, yeah, of course in the back of my mind the first few months, I thought about drugs, but I never had a craving to say, "Okay, I'm going to do it right now." It was more so like, "All right, Dough, you know what happens when you go down that road, let's not go there." And I just focused literally on one day at a time. Literally, it was like, "Okay, I know the odds are so stacked against me right now." I had failed most of my life up until that point when I got out of jail, and like I said, damaged relationships, was either fired or quit jobs without notice, I had failed to get my life on track.

But I knew if I could just lean into the sense of blind faith, that if I could just focus on doing everything I know I needed to do that day to be a better version of myself, literally, a better version of myself, that it gave me a chance to stay clean another day. And then it just slowly over time, every time I would get stressed or depressed or anxious, I would go for a run, and I would run a mile or two or three, and then I would exercise, and then those feelings would dissipate. And then what happens? Well, you build self-confidence, because you're like, "Wow, not only do I feel better at myself because I moved my body, I feel better at myself because I didn't turn to drugs to numb my pain."

And then you learn like, "Wow, this works. This actually works." And not that it's like a one-to-one coping mechanism, but it definitely helps reduce the half-life of whatever you're going through. And then over time, those cravings go away because now you've rewired your brain to say, "Okay, you're anxious, go for a run. You're stressed, call this person. You're having a bad day, go work out." And then that becomes your new normal, you develop a new normal.

Dave:

Are you addicted to success?

Doug:

Interesting. I've gotten asked this frequently. I definitely exercise consistently, and back when I first started doing this, there were times where I would miss a day at the gym, but I was never crazy fanatic to the point where I would spend hours at the gym. And there's times now where I might only work out three days a week, but most of the time, I try to get four or five good days of exercise in. Just now because it's just a pattern, I just know it makes me just feel better as a person and makes me-

Dave:

It's more of a habit but not an addiction.

Doug:

Right. Because a lot of people, they just change addictions, they just go from one thing to the next, but I do believe you have to put things in your life, Dave, when you stop using the drugs or if you're abusing alcohol, whatever it was, you got to have things in your life to help you deal with the problems that caused you to use the drugs and alcohol in a negative way in the first place. So that's why I always emphasize people going to therapy or exercise, meditation, eating right, challenging yourself, doing all these things.

Exercise can't be the sole thing, but it definitely in my opinion, is one of the most underutilized tools for addiction recovery is exercise and eating right.

Dave:

What would have happened when you were 18 if you had a therapist?

Doug:

Looking back, I was in and out of therapy most of my teenage life, but it was more so because I was forced to go. My parents were like, "Oh, you need to go to therapy." Or, "You need to talk about your problems." Or, "He's smoking weed." Or, "He's doing this." And I remember being in therapist office and them telling me that I needed to exercise or I needed to eat better and do all these things, but I just never had the confidence in myself to do it. I had all this weight I was carrying around physically, mentally and emotionally. And I was like, "How am I ever going to get there?"

And I think what happens with people, I don't care if they're trying to lose weight or beat addiction, they're so focused on five months from now, but they forget that you just starts with right now, where you're at. You got to lose that first pound before you lose the 100th pound. You got to do that first pushup before you do the 10th. But when you're an addict, you're so impulsive and impatient and it's like all or nothing, that I was either going to lose all the weight at once or I wasn't going to lose it at all. And I was embarrassed to be in the gym. I was timid, I was scared because I was like, "Are people going to look at me?"

Because being the kid like I said, that was picked on and always cut from the sports teams, I was like, "Are people going to look at me like something's wrong with me? Am I going to be able to do this exercise without looking goofy?" Or what have you. I didn't have any self-esteem or confidence, because I believe we our external world is a reflection of how we feel internally and you make decisions based on

your current level of consciousness. If you feel like complete crap about yourself, those decisions you make are going to be normal to you because you feel like crap if you make crappy decisions.

And when I was in jail, I got lucky. As I look back, I really got lucky to go to jail when I did because I would have been dead, I could have been in jail for a lot longer, but I went to jail, literally had this guy offer to help save my life, and thank God, he did. And thank God he did it the way that he did in the sense of just having me start with holding my body weight up, and then doing the one pushup because it built this foundation of confidence in me that I never had before. And I remember I asked him, I said, "How long is it going to take me lose the weight and do all the stuff?"

And he's like, "How long have you been beating up your body for?" And I'm like, "A long time." He said, "It's going to take a long time, man." And I learned to accept it, because I think part of the problem people run into is they think because they're making a healthy decision and they're going to go on this transformation journey, that it's going to become easy and there's never going to be any troubles because they're doing something good for themselves. There's troubles with everything, it's just, how do you respond?

Dave:

There are. Are you happy with your body now? You look in the mirror, you're like, "Yeah, I got this"?

Doug:

Yeah. And I think what I'm happiest about now is when I first got out, fitness was my life, not in an addictive sense, but I was so passionate about just reading magazines and doing research. And not that I don't do any of that now because I do, and going to the gym, but that became the only thing that I was focused on because in my addict mind, I was like, "Okay, I have to eat perfect, I have to get to the gym," because I equated me not going to the gym with me falling down into the old patterns of drug that I didn't want to go back on. But the older I got, the more I realized that fitness can't be your entire life, it has to be part of your life.

My identity isn't wrapped around how I look in the mirror because if I did, it's just a recipe for disaster. I keep myself fit, I eat well, I move my body, but it's not the end-all-be-all for how I live my life.

Dave:

It's funny, if you grew up heavy like both of us did, I like to think I'm over the vast majority of that, but a couple of years ago, Men's Health came up to do a shoot at my house, my upgrade labs up here. And it was going to be an interview about this new recovery facility that we're actually going to be franchising this year, so we're looking to get in that everywhere. And I was like, "Oh, this is cool." And then the guys are like, "All right. Well, for this one shot, we want you to take your shirt off." And I'm like, "Hold on a second here, I still have stretch marks." And I'm like, "And I know what you guys do. If someone's doing their shirt off, they take diuretics to get rid of water weight, they do a spray tan and they fast for a couple of days and you look all lean and ripped and feel like crap for a day or two, but you get the shot."

And by the way, some of the celebrities I've worked with did the same thing with the shirts off scene in superhero movies. They're so completely broken for that shot, but it looks good. And then they go eat some pizza. So I was like, "Are you serious?" That was hard for me, it's, "Hey, I'll find it." So the pictures there, you can still see the stretch marks in it, but I think I look pretty good, especially for not having prepped. But there's always a little bit of a lingering thing there, but you feel like you've got past that, like your identity is tied up in it, mine isn't tied up in mine either, I just like to feel good. If I have a dad bod, as long as my brain is working as well as it possibly can, I'm going to live a long time, I don't really care. I'm married, I have kids, what do I need ripped abs for?

Doug:

I think at the end of the day, anytime you were somebody who was carrying a bunch of weight and you saw how detrimental that was, not only to your physical health, but to your mental and emotional health, there's always going to be part of you that has those memories. But I think what you do with those memories is what counts, you're like, "Okay. I remember who I was, I'm going to do everything I can to make sure I'm never that person again. And I'm going to remember how I felt in those moments to make sure that every decision I make, doesn't reflect who I was."

And I also think that at the end of the day, we all want to look good naked. I think that's the goal of everybody. I think we all want to look good with our shirts off. We just do. But I think the problem is like, what does good look like to you, and how do you define that? Are you healthy? Are you healthy mentally, emotionally, and spiritually and physically? Not just physically. You can be completely ripped with your shirt off and be completely spiritually bankrupt. I've been there.

Dave:

A lot of the online community around fitness is exactly that. There's a lot of trolling and hate that goes on there. And guys, I don't care how many pushups you can do, you're still a jerk.

Doug:

Yeah. And I know for me, I just thought that... I've ever hit a point in my life this is probably back in, I don't remember the exact year, it was maybe 2015, 2016, I was 5% body fat, I was ripped. I had every ab sticking out possible, and I was making good money as a trainer, I'd just written my first book. I'm like, "Man, life is so good right now." And I was clean, I was doing all these things, but I started noticing a pattern. I started noticing that I couldn't forgive myself for my past. I still was hung up on the fact that I was a former convicted felon.

I was still hung up on the fact that I had damaged relationships or that I was still looking in the mirror and I still saw the fat Doug, because people would look at me and they're like, "Oh, how come you don't have a girlfriend? Why aren't you dating?" A lot of it was because I still saw the same old Doug in the mirror.

Dave:

It takes a while to shift that.

Doug:

It does. And something transformational happened, one of my clients at the time was a pastor, had a non-denominational church and just so happened, this was around the same time a mentor of mine was like, "Doug, get some spirituality in your life. You have a good group of friends, you've been doing a lot of good work, you're fit, you're positive, it just seems like you're lacking forgiveness, you're holding on to resentments." And growing up, I grew up old school religious. I knew if I was good, you went to heaven, if you're bad, you go to hell. And I'm like, "I'm going to freaking hell."

It didn't really matter because I thought, no matter what, you're not saved, you're just going to hell. And then I also was told that God is good, God's about love. And if I was like, "If God's about love and God loves me, then why do I suck at sports? Why this? Why that?" And then after talking to a mentor of mine and then talking to one of my clients, one of my clients is like, "Yeah, you should do come to church with me on this Sunday, we'll go to Chipotle after." I'm like, "Man, I don't eat Chipotle and I'm going to hell for putting you through this workout." And I laughed it off.

And then I started thinking about it a little bit more, I ended up going to a retreat and then having another conversation. And I broke down because I was chasing girl after girl and I just wasn't happy. I felt like I was drinking from the cup and I had to fill the cup with more water every single time because it kept getting emptier and emptier because I was just filling this internal void with all these external things, success, notoriety, I guess from writing the book, and then fitness, all these things. And I finally managed some courage to call up my client, and I was like, "Hey, I think I'm ready to give this Jesus, God thing a try."

And I swear to God, when I told him that, he responded as if he'd just won the lottery. I was like, "Why is this guy so happy?" And here's what the important thing is that I went into his office and I said a prayer and we prayed together. And the same monkey that came off my back when I was doing drugs, came off my back again there, I don't even know how to describe it. I started bawling my eyes out and I walked out of that church and I called my mom. And for the first time in my life, I apologized to her because as much as my circumstances weren't in my favor, I wasn't the best kid, and I apologized to her for the first time.

And then over time as I started to develop a relationship with God, and to me, still to this day, it's more about relationship. I'm going to check the box, go to church every Sunday, it's more like how you treat other people, how do you show up, because anybody can go to church or whatever one day, but how do you show up in the rest of your life? How do you respond to people who don't agree with you? I support all kinds of spirituality, all kinds of religions. Do what works for you, as long as you're not a jerk, and it's making your life better, do it.

And I started to realize that there was purpose in my pain, that I might not have been proud of all the choices that I had made, but God was because now he's used them to not only help me, but for me to help other people. And I also started to realize that the old me died when I was in jail. I felt like my big spiritual awakening happened when I was in jail and I was really made new. And it really hit home with me and I took it and ran with it, and I was like, "Wow, I think I'm here for a bigger reason than just being a trainer." I'm like, "Yeah, I can train clients and help them on this level here."

When I wrote my first book, parents would come up to me like, "Oh my gosh, I'm sending this book to my son for his birthday." And I'm laughing, I'm like, "Why?" I barely passed high school, what was so good about my book? And it was only like, I don't know, 50 pages, I don't know the exact page count, but it wasn't a big novel or anything. And I was like, "Wow, people are really relating to my story." And I was like, "Maybe this is why God kept me alive," because I buried several of my friends when I was a kid. And I don't mean just people that I knew, people that I hung out with.

I went to several funerals, talk about trauma. I went to several funerals when I was a teenager, so I got pretty immune to seeing what death looked like very early on, and I was like, "Man, I need to keep sharing my story." And that's been the big mission of mine over the last, I don't know, five, six years of doing a lot of this stuff that I've been doing is simply to help people, give people hope, whether that's somebody who's struggling with addiction, whether that's a parent, whether that's somebody who's just struggling to feel better about themselves. And that's just my main mission right now, and it has been.

Dave:

It's interesting, you talk about forgiveness and finding a religious path, forgiveness of other people and forgiveness of yourself. And those are some of the hardest, I'll call them bio hacks. These are techniques, they're free. They're the things that actually have some of the highest return on investment for just liking your life, you stop disliking yourself and yeah, I screwed up, maybe there's a reason for it. How did you figure out how to do forgiveness? It's one of the hardest skills there is.

Doug:

Well, I think I just knew just from... What happened was I kept asking some of my friends, I was like, "Why don't I have any confidence in myself?" And I thought I was a handsome kid, people were telling me that I was like Mark Wahlberg. I was like, "How come I don't have any confidence? I'm as good looking guy." And people were like, "What was your childhood like?" And I never really opened up as much about my childhood when I would talk to people and I would tell them... And then it was like, "Man, I need to repair the relationship with my parents."

And I had to really understand, especially with my mom because there was a point in time where my mom and I didn't talk as much for a while because she was struggling to forgive me, I was struggling to forgive her, but I knew at the end of the day, in order for me to have a healthy relationship with a female, I needed to forgive my mom. And it took some time, and it started with the fact of accepting the fact of what happened when I was younger and knowing that things happened for me, not necessarily to me and I needed to stop being a victim.

Dave:

That mindset, it can sound a little bit cliché, but I know people who live that. A lot of people listening may remember the interview with Sean Stephenson, who was known as the Three Foot Giant. He's one of the guys that lived the longest of anyone with brittle bone disease, just incredible pain, broken 200 bones in his body, just a really powerful interview. He was a dear friend, and he passed, I think a couple of years ago now. And he fell out of his wheelchair, and they took him to the hospital, they didn't realize it was quite as bad as it was. And he turned to a friend of ours.

Actually, it was Joe Polish who's been on the show too and said, "This didn't happen to me, this happened for me." And you can get that mindset all the way down into that and then everything that happens you stop being a victim, you're like, "All right, what's it going to do for me?" And that's probably the highest and best explanation of the adversity advantage that you're talking about, where you can own it. And it totally takes the charge off all the bad stuff that happens, but it takes some work to get there.

Doug:

Well, it does. And I think the acceptance part was really helpful for me and I knew that I couldn't change my parents, I couldn't change them. I couldn't get them to forgive me, I couldn't get them to change the way they treated me or whatever, but I could change myself. And there was power in that. And I knew that if I focused on continuing to improve the way my mental health was, my emotional health, my spiritual health, and kept on the path and kept proving to myself that I was a good person, and that I was worthy of having healthy relationships, they would come alongside me and if they didn't, that was on them.

And the other thing, I saw, Tony Robbins video too, which really helped me. And he said something along the lines of, "If you're going to blame people for all the wrong they did, you better blame them for the good too." And I started to realize, I am who I am. I am a giving person, I am loving, I'm compassionate, I have a purpose because of a lot of the wrong that happened in my life. And I knew that I had to forgive not only my parents, but forgive myself, Dave, forgive myself for lying to people, forgive myself for manipulating others and for the drugs and everything else.

And I had to accept, I couldn't change the past. I couldn't. We all wish we could change what happened two days ago, two weeks ago, two months ago, you physically can't, the only thing you can do is accept it and learn from it. And I also had to know that if people were going to judge me for the mistakes that I made, that they weren't meant to be in my life, because we all make mistakes. We all do

things we wish we wouldn't have done, but it's like, how are you using those mistakes to change the way you act in the future? And so many people, they make these mistakes, you see it all the time. They make these mistakes, and what do they do?

Instead of putting 95% of their energy on how I can learn from these and use these to grow, they spend 95% of the time focusing on the mistake and how they could have done it differently. They just stay in this same destructive cycle, and they end up just looking back like two, three, four, five years from now, and they're like, "Wow, why am I still feeling this miserable and pessimistic?" Well, because you haven't done anything with your mistakes, you just let them sit there and rot you.

Dave:

I love that perspective, and I'm hoping that when people hear this episode, they'll connect with that because that forgiveness thing, if you don't do that and you don't do it all the way, it holds you back, because you constantly spend energy thinking about that all the time, which is just such a waste. For me, the thing that worked best was basically having a lie detector. And so I'm like, "Yeah, I forgive them." And your brain is like, "No, you didn't." Oh man, I'm going to have to actually really forgive them? And you start to go back. But I do find a lot of spiritual practices and even a lot of religious practices, there's a lot going on there. That's why Bishop Michael Curry, the head of the Episcopalian Church was just on the show, and Pastor Nadia Bolz was on from the Lutheran Faith, because there's something there.

I'm not a religious guy, I don't have a particular religion even though I grew up with some Catholicism floating around enough to get some guilt, even though I didn't really go to Catholic Church. And it's one of those things where a lot of times in modern life, we reject that. And church attendance is down a lot all over the place to the point churches are sort of going, "What do we do wrong? How do we fix this?" And part of it is you need a community and that's upgrading your friend group that you talked about there. And part of it is you got to do the actual deep work. So whatever works, I like people to do.

So I think it's fantastic that you found a way, you incorporated faith, you actually figured out forgiveness, which is really tough for addicts, but it's the thing that breaks addiction. I'm going to talk to you a little bit about physical fitness, we've had a lot of exercise people on here. And I have a love-hate relationship with exercise. I spent 18 months working out an hour and a half a day, six days a week, because I wasn't going to be fat anymore. And at the end of that, even with my high lettuce, no dressing, no chicken kind of chicken salad, I was still a 46-inch waist and £300 pounds and I was pissed.

And so I don't want to waste time on exercise, but I want to exercise. I value fitness, I value feeling good, I value having strong muscles and all that, but I don't want to spend an hour and a half a day every day doing it. So I'm like, how do I do it in less time? How do I do it in a way that's going to be most effective, but gives me more time with my kids? So what I want to learn from you, prison workouts, there's books written about them, they're generally, they make CrossFit look like it's weak, they're super intense. How do you train people? How has it shifted from your time learning in the hardest place actually as you could think of to where you are now? Give me your breakdown on your beliefs and what you've learned about exercise over the time.

Doug:

Well, in jail there was no gym, so it was just using your body weight. And when I was working out, it wasn't necessarily as much to get in shape as it was for me to relearn how to deal with my emotions in a way that was conducive to who I wanted to become. And yeah, I got fit in there and I was able to do pushups and we would fill up these trash bags with water and do boxing and do bicep curls. And that was fun, but it was more just to set a foundation of like, "All right, Doug, this is how you build

confidence in yourself, is how you build discipline is by exercising." And I had a good foundation as far as what I needed to do when I got out.

As far as my clients today, when you first become a trainer, one of the things you hear a lot, I'm just going to get my client the hardest workout possible. I'm going to make them puke or I'm going to make them super sore. And now it's more about risk adjusted workouts and injury prevention because if I hurt clients, not a good client, because what happens if you hurt a client, people are going to be like, "Well, how'd you get hurt?" "Oh, I was working out with so-and-so and I got hurt." And then what happens to your referral business? It doesn't really work.

Plus, if your passion and purpose in life is to help people change their lives through fitness, you need clients. So you want to make sure that you're programming clients to be fit, not hurt. And so our workouts are anywhere between 30 and 60 minutes depending on their goals, nothing too, too crazy. Honestly, every exercise I put in the program of my clients, I want to know why I'm doing it. So it's a mix? Most clients come to me, and it's a general population, they're like, "I just want to be fit. I don't want to think about my workouts. I'm busy with a job, busy as a mom," or whatever. And so a lot of strength training, we lift weights, dumbbells, barbells, we push sleds. We use medicine balls.

And there's a lot of interval-based cardio training, we slam stuff, there's boxing, there's bikes where we can do like sprints on an assault bike or row. It's not a lot of steady-state cardio. I think there's something about being strong that people like, it doesn't matter if you're a male or female, that if you really want to have a body that's built to last, you need to strength train because there's nothing worse than being somewhere and you can't pick your kid up or you can't carry the groceries up and down the stairs because your muscles are weak or you're reaching above and you can't put something away because you don't have the strength.

So it's really about training for life. And I think the best bang for the buck, if you will, is to have a blend where you're doing a fair amount of strength training. It doesn't have to be five, six days a week, even if it's like two to three days a week, a little bit of cardio to act as a side dish, if you will.

Dave:

Do you do like sprints in cardio, or you just get on a bike and ride for half hour and hit your life?

Doug:

No, no, no. It's like 60 seconds sprints on an Aerodyne bike.

Dave:

Okay. Got it. That's manageable.

Doug:

And I think the thing is this is that when you lift weights, you obviously decrease your risk of osteoporosis, you can lower your blood pressure. We know all the benefits of resistance training, but I honestly think there's something to be said for feeling strong, for being able to come home and tell your spouse or tell your kids like, Wow, I did this." And not using the scale is the only metric, because there's plenty of things that can affect how we weigh on the scale. And then you can become fanatical about it, and you're checking the scale like multiple times a day. We all know, it's happened to me too.

But if you give yourself other metrics to focus on other than just the scale, that's where lifting weights come in because you're like, "Oh, I was able to do the squat better, or I did more push-ups. I was able to lift this weight." And the other thing I like to focus on with my clients is the emotional and

mental part of it, so that if the scale isn't moving, they have other things to focus on. Well, how have you been feeling over the last three weeks? Oh, my energy is great. Well, focus on that. Focus on how over the last month, your energy is up, your relationships have improved, you've gone to the gym now more times in the last month than you have in the last 10 years. Lean in on that.

Because I think so many times people put all their stock in the scale, and it doesn't really matter what the scale says because what matters is body fat percentage at the end of the day. Like I said, we all want to look better, "naked" and some of these scales don't have a good gauge to measure body fat, so it can be very misleading. And the other thing too is when you use strength training, it decreases your risk of injury. And as you get older, you know what happens, you lose muscle, people get back pain, their joints start to hurt. So the more you can strengthen the stuff around that, the better it'll be for long term and longevity.

And people seem to like it, and we have fun. And I definitely train... As much as there's a lot of similarities in how I train men versus I train women, I'm not like screaming at the women I train, it's more obviously, you've got to talk to them, just the way they seem to like to be talked to during training, obviously there's certain people that like to be yelled at, but from my experience, most of my female clients would not like me just screaming at them.

Dave:

Do you have male clients like that?

Doug:

No. But I'm saying there's some times where there'll be a group of guys and will get riled up and we'll be just-

Dave:

They can push each other. I get that vibe. And if I had a trainer who screamed at me, I'd be like, "Dude, fuck you." I just feel like I'm not into that, shut up and tell me what I'm doing wrong, but yelling is not motivating.

Doug:

I'm not there with a whistle, no, it's just we have fun. It's fun, Dave. I think it has to be fun, it's got to be maintainable. And I think too that people, they have to have something to look forward to, and I think fitness can be that. My whole goal isn't to have somebody feel like crap when they leave, it's to have them feel better and have them be thankful if they came in to see me. And it's training somebody from the inside out. I talk to people all the time about what podcasts they're listening to, I talk to people all the time about a good book I've read, I've talked to them about talking to somebody like you about fasting.

I talk to them about the importance of surrounding yourself with good people, gratitude, because it's all encompassing. You can be externally motivated all day, but if you're not surrounding yourself with the other things in your life outside of that, it's going to throw it all off, in my opinion.

Dave:

It's funny, I've had over the years lots of friends say, "Hey, I'm going to hire a trainer, what should I ask them?" I'm like, "Well, go do your workout, and if they don't say anything about food, fire them." Because training alone, it just doesn't do it, you got to also match the food to what you're doing, and

like you said, having fun, so you actually look forward to it instead of it being something you don't like. It makes all the fun.

Doug:

Well, the last thing I want to say about that is meeting them where they're at too, because you see a lot of trainers, they give their clients work out their workouts, and they're like, "Oh, if I'm doing this, that means my clients should do it." And that's why when I was in jail, it really set me up to be, I think a great trainer, because I remember where I was when I first started. So I can relate to where a lot of people are when they first start, and I'm like, I remember what it was like if somebody said, "Hey, go do 50 pushups," when I couldn't do one. I remember what it would've felt like, I was intimidated, I was scared, I was like, "There's no way."

But it's like, if you can just say, "Okay, if you're just starting, why don't we just go for a 10-minute walk together? Why don't we just focus on doing a few sets of squats or a few planks," or whatever, just simple, and build off that because what tends to happen is people do that and they maybe do 10, 15 minutes of exercise, they feel good because they feel confident. It's like, "Wow, I did this." Then what do they want to do? They want to do more of it, just the way it works with anything.

Dave:

It's exactly right. Well, Doug, I appreciate you coming on and sharing your story, and I think there's great value to be had from learning from people who've gone through stuff that I haven't gone through. The level of addiction and spending some time in jail and really having to climb out of a hole, it's always the extremes that teach us the lessons, it's always the outliers. And you're an outlier because you came back from a pretty dark place. So I think there's a lot of nuggets of wisdom in our interview. Thanks for being on Bulletproof Radio.

Doug:

Dave, thanks for having me, man.

Dave:

You guys want to know more about Doug's work, he's at dougbopest.com, D-O-U-G-B-O-P-S-T.com. And his book, *Adversity Advantage* is definitely the right book for you if you're looking to figure out how do you reframe adversity, maybe even, I don't know, maybe 2020. And look at what good things happened in there because there are some good things, even though frankly, it's been kind of a shit show. And on that note, guys, if you like Bulletproof Radio, you liked the episode, I always love reviews, so thanks for leaving one.