



EPISODE NO. 303

Lessons Learned From My Relationship

Do you know the best thing about relationships? There is always something to learn. In today's episode, I'm diving into the top lessons that I've learned from my relationship. So, let's get to it.

Welcome to the School of Self-Image, where personal development meets style. Here's your hostess, master life coach, Tonya Leigh.

Hello, my gorgeous friends. Today, I'm going to talk about a topic that I don't discuss that often but I'm asked about it a lot, and that is my relationship. Now, I want to make a disclaimer here that I do not consider myself a relationship expert. In complete transparency, I have been married and divorced twice and I also had another long-term relationship. But this relationship is different. And I can see now where it took me going through those prior relationships, to make me ready for this one. On Christmas day of 2021, he proposed, so we are going to get married eventually. But the beautiful thing is neither of us are in a hurry. People keep asking like, "When are you going to get married?" I'm like, "I'm just enjoying this stage. I'm just enjoying being engaged."

And I will tell you all, I had committed that I was never getting married again. I was like, "That is just not for me." But when the right one comes along, you start to reconsider all of those things that you said you would never, ever do.

Lessons Learned From My Relationship

And I just never thought I would find someone like him. That's such a great match. He is my best friend, he's my lover, he's my confidant, he is an incredible man that I am so happy to have met. So, I want to share the lessons that I've learned, and listen y'all, I know I have a lot more to learn. We are just two years in and I do know that there is a honeymoon phase, but I also think that when you've had enough relationships, you don't get swept up in that. I've watched some of my friends get involved in relationships and right out of the gate it's super passionate, and hot, and I can't keep up. I'm like, "Whoa."

And with me and Fonz, while there was a lot of passion, it was something different. We didn't have that intoxicating lust, although that's not a bad thing, we just had like this deep appreciation. And it was like meeting someone that you've known your whole life but you're meeting for the first time. That's what it felt like with him. And so, let me just share some of the lessons that I've learned. The first lesson is don't hide who you are. When I met Fonz, that's his name actually, it's Alfonzo, Fonz for short, but when I met Fonz, I was in a really good place in life that resulted from doing a lot of work on myself. I had spent a lot of time on my own, by myself during the pandemic and I was enjoying it, I was having so much fun. And then I started dating a little bit, and that was fun. But here's the thing, I was not interested in another relationship or at least I didn't think I was. That was not a priority.

And so, when I would go out with people, I had made a commitment to myself, "I'm not going to hide any of who I am." I'm going to put it all out on the table from the beginning so that if I'm not a match with someone, we're not going to waste each other's time. I'm not going to try to pretend to be someone just so someone likes me. I'm going to be who I am and let that decide whether that person's attracted to me, and hopefully they'll do the same. And so, I'll never forget my first date with Fonz. I shared some things with him that he was like, "Whoa, I've never had someone be so honest this soon." But I was like, "Hey, listen, I don't want to waste your time and I don't want you to waste mine. I want to see who I want to be around. I'd like to make sure that I am matching up with the right people."

And the beauty of not caring and not really wanting a relationship is you just get to be who you are and if someone's not interested, you're like, "Okay." And again, I had done a lot of work on myself and I was so happy with who I was that I didn't need that approval from someone else. And so, it just allowed me to date from this really open and exciting place versus from a place of not enoughness, "I need you to like me. I need you to approve of me." And that energy is actually really repelling.

Lessons Learned From My Relationship

And so, being honest and not hiding who I was was actually what really attracted Fonz to me from the get go. And I believe it's why we have such a good relationship right now. We're both extremely honest with how we're feeling, what's going on with us. We don't hide things from each other, which is a beautiful thing. It creates a lot of intimacy.

Now, on the flip side, another lesson that I've learned is that it's important to have a secret garden. Now, to be clear, this does not mean that you keep secrets from someone. I just like the terminology. When I think of a secret garden, I think of having an air of mystery, having a little world of your own that is special and dear to you. For example, I like to use the restroom alone. I close the door, that's my own little world that no one needs to be a part of. But I know some of y'all open the door and you let everybody come in, your husband, your kids, and hey, that's fine if that's what you enjoy. But I do think there's something to keeping a little mystery in a relationship that keeps the spice going, that keeps it alive.

I also love having things that I'm learning about, things that are happening in my business that are for me to know. I don't have to share them with everyone, even my partner. There are things that are just for me. The other day, Fonz left and he was gone for a while. And I asked him, I texted him, I'm like, "Hey, when are you coming back home?" And he was like, "I'll be back home in a bit." And so, he came back and I was like, "Where were you? What were you doing?" And he was like, "I was doing boy stuff." Now, some people go crazy when someone says something like that, and that's a whole different topic. You have to learn to trust your partner. If you can't trust him, you shouldn't be with him. And I do trust Fonz immensely. But I know that he has his own little secret garden. And I also have an idea of what he does in that secret garden. I think he was off playing chess with his dear friend, David. He loves to play chess.

But it keeps it fun and exciting to have your own life and then you come back together and you're both fulfilled, because you're doing things in your own world and then you get to share your worlds with each other. I also think it's important that you fill your own cup. If you're always looking to your partner to fill your needs, you're going to be greatly disappointed. Your partner is not meant to fulfill all of your needs. But yet that's the pressure that we put on them. I've done that before in previous relationships and it's just not fair to that person and it's not fair to you, because that person cannot give you everything that you need nor should they. It is up to you to fill your own cup. And for me, I know that in order to fill my own cup, I need to have more than just my partner. I need to have friends, I need my team in my business, I need my family.

Lessons Learned From My Relationship

If I expect Fonz to fulfill all of those needs, he's going to be exhausted, he's going to be resentful, and he's not going to be successful at it because he can't. There are certain things that I want to do that he has no interest in. For example, I like to ski, he does not. He tried it once and that was enough. So, if I'm always saying, "Hey, you need to come ski with me," then he can do it but he's not going to enjoy himself and he's going to end up resentful. So instead, I have friends that love skiing. I can go skiing with them. He loves to play basketball. I am not good at basketball. But he has his friends that he gets to go and play basketball with and I can go and watch him if I so choose, but he doesn't need me to do that for him. We both have a community around us that helps us to fulfill our needs and to fill up our own cup. And filling up our own cup also means self-care and taking care of ourselves.

But the beautiful thing is when you fill your cup up, then your partner gets to drink from it. You both get to nourish each other when you're focused on taking care of yourself and fulfilling your own needs. The next thing that I've learned might be a little controversial, but hear me out. I've learned that you really need to treat your relationship like a business. So, let me explain. When I think about my business, it's very intentional. We get together every year and we think about things like, "What are our goals? What's our vision? What's our mission?" We talk about our milestones that we want to have. We talk about our values as a company. And it really just sets the tone and creates a container for magic to happen. And I feel like relationships should have the same approach.

This past year, I was inspired by my friend, Jennifer Hoody, her and her partner, they have relationship retreats. And we were talking about it and I'm like, "Oh my goodness, I want to do one of those." And so, when Fonz and I went to Italy, we spent a couple of days just focusing on our relationship. And I treated it like a business meeting. I brought my notebook, I set aside time for play and relaxation so that we could be our most creative. Again, all of the things that I would do for a business retreat I did for our relationship retreat. And that time, just made sure that we're on the same page, that we're wanting to go in the same direction, that we share similar values. And also, it's beautiful to have those deep conversations about things like, "Hey, what are your personal goals? What do you want to create? And how can I support you? What are you afraid of? What do you foresee as maybe being your obstacles? Let's do it together."

And it was such a beautiful thing and it's something that I want to continue to do. Because I care for my business so much, and so I take time out for my business. I think a lot about my business.

Lessons Learned From My Relationship

We have business meetings to make sure that the business is being cared for. But we don't do that for our own relationships and then we wonder why they struggle. Extraordinary relationships require focus, attention, nurturing, and yet we'll give our business more attention than we give our relationships. But relationships are, to me, the most important part of a well-lived life. And so yeah, I do think of my relationship as a business, because if I know anything, I take care of my business. And I want to take care of my relationship as good as if not better than my business. So, that is another lesson that I've learned.

Another one is to understand your partner's love language. Many times, we love someone the way we like to be loved. But I've learned that magic happens when you get to know how your partner loves to be loved. That's the type of sacrifice that we do to have great relationships. We think about the other person. We want to make sure that they feel seen, understood, and loved. And the beautiful part is when you do that, usually, most of the time, it's reciprocated back to you. And I just love Fonz so much I want him to feel loved, I want him to feel appreciated, I want him to feel seen. And so, I do what I can to offer him that. And then, it's so beautiful how he gives it back. It's like, we can't outlove each other. It's like a competition in our house, like who can love each other the most.

So, I'm not sitting around thinking about, "Is he loving me properly?" I'm spending so much time thinking about, "How can I love him better?" I was with one of my girlfriends recently, actually there was a group of us together, and we were talking about her relationship. She's looking for someone and one of her desires is that she wants to be with a man that adores her. And listen, I've been there and I was explaining this to her. I'm like, "Yeah, I used to want the same thing. I needed that validation. I needed to feel that love and that adoration. And when I was in that energy, it was really difficult for me to have great relationships. Because when I wasn't being adored, I was being a bitch, quite honestly, and I would do some crazy things to try to get that adoration. But it's so different."

And I was telling her, I'm like, "I've matured and I've done so much work on myself and adoring myself. I literally don't need that anymore. I am giving that to myself all of the time, so now, when I'm with Fonz, I'm just adoring him. And the crazy thing is, it's the best relationship I've ever had. And he spends a lot of time adoring me, and I think he does it because I'm so busy adoring him." So, know your partner's love language. Okay, next lesson, and this is a good one, it's a big one. If you all did this, your relationships would get so much better. I wish I would've known this sooner. But this thing called the ego can get in the way, and the ego loves to be right.

Lessons Learned From My Relationship

One of the reasons why I enjoy my relationship so much with Fonz is that we have disagreements, we've had some arguments, but both of us enter into those disagreements with a desire to understand and to grow, not to be right.

So, I really want to know, "Why is this an issue? Why are you upset? What can we do here? What does this relationship need right now? How can we resolve this? How did I play a part in this?" It's all this ego aside, "Let me use this situation to become a better partner, a better human, and to understand my partner in a better way." And the communication that comes out of that energy is so different than when I went into disagreements with, "This needs to be right," because I wouldn't even hear the other person. I wasn't available. I was just so busy trying to win an argument. And if you're trying so hard to win an argument, chances are you're always going to lose, ultimately. You might win that one argument, but what's it going to cost you down the line? And so yeah, for the two of us, I feel like we argue really well and I think that's the reason why.

The last thing that I'm going to share, I think it's so important if you want to have a great relationship, is to make date nights a priority. Now, I know everyone has different priorities. My daughter is older, she's not in the house any longer, and so I have a lot more freedom than a lot of people. But no matter if you have little babies at home, can you carve out an hour or two for your partner and maybe the date nights at home where you all just manage to get an hour together to do whatever you want or maybe you hire a babysitter to come in? But we can get into such monotonous routines with each other that it becomes boring. There's nothing to look forward to. There's no spice. And so, having date nights on the calendar is a declaration of like, "Hey, my relationship matters." In fact, when I'm helping women figure out what they value, I sometimes will ask them, "Let me see your calendar." Because that calendar reflects what you currently value.

If your relationship is not on that calendar and you're struggling with your relationship, it's quite interesting. Have you made it a priority? If not, make sure the things that are important to you are on the calendar. And that's why we always have date nights and they're one of my favorite nights. We love to go out with friends sometimes and sometimes it's just the two of us. But it's just a chance for us to get out, get dressed up, and say, "You matter. You matter enough to me that we make this a priority." And we take turns planning date night, I think that's important. And we try to outdo each other on date night. I'm like, "You know what, my date night was better." And then, he comes back and he surprises me with the next one.

Lessons Learned From My Relationship

But it's fun. It's fun growing and evolving and using relationships to be a better version of yourself. And these are just a few of the lessons that I've learned that's allowed me to do that. And I have so many more lessons to learn. And that's the beauty of life, my friends. Listen, I would love to hear from you. What are the biggest lessons that you've learned from your relationship? Come find me on Instagram @tonyaleigh and let me know. Thank you all for tuning in this week, and I will see you in the next episode.

Hey, have you grabbed your free copy of the School of Self-Image Manifesto? If not, what in the world? Head over to schoolofselfimage.com/manifesto and get a copy that teaches you how to think and show up in the areas of mindset, style, and surroundings so that you can transform your self-image.