

EPISODE NO. 315

The Importance of Firsts

(Plus My Favorite Firsts of 2022)



SCHOOL OF SELF-IMAGE

As we approach a new year, I want you to think about trying new things. I want you to think about intentionally creating new first. It reminds me of a quote by Neil Gaiman where he says, "I hope that in this year to come, you make mistakes, because if you're making mistakes, then you are making new things, trying new things, learning, living, pushing yourself, changing yourself, changing your world. You're doing things you've never done before, and more importantly, you're doing something." In this episode I'm going to talk about the importance of having first, and I'm sharing some of my favorite first of 2022. So let's dive in.

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. How's it going? How are you feeling? What are you excited about? What are you afraid of? Some deep questions. And they are such good questions. We need to check in with ourselves, my friends, and see how we're doing. Most of the time when I'm asked these kinds of questions, I'm feeling a mixture of excitement and elation, and also terrified. And I realize why that is, and it's what today's episode is all about. My life is filled with a lot of first, the first time doing something. And first are magical and they are also extremely scary. But without them, your life becomes mundane. You feel like you're stuck in a rut. And one of the best ways to get out of a rut, my friends, is to commit to having more first in your life.

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We remember our first. First are magical and sometimes they're not so great. If you think about your first day of school, your first kiss, maybe you look back at that and realize, "My God, that was awkward, trying to figure out how to kiss someone." Your first car, your first job, your first born, your first heartbreak, your first trip overseas, your first house. First are what make life so incredible and amazing. And it's what grows our character, it's how we learn about the world, it's how we learn about ourselves. And yet, so many people stop having first. In fact, first are often attached to the first half of life. Think about it, when you're a kid, everything is new, everything's exciting. You're so looking forward to experiencing all of these first. And then, at some point, we stop having them, or we don't have as many. And it's not because first aren't available. Every day, there is a countless number of first that are available to each of us. And yet, so many people stop having them as they get older.

I decided that I want to continue to have first until the day I die, which, that'll be a first too. I love having first, because they grow me, they are exciting, they expose me to more of the world, they change my perspective. First are powerful. They're also associated with youth. And that's another reason why I plan to keep having them. First keep you young. So why don't we have them? Why do we stop having first? And the main reason is because we get into ruts of thinking and therefore doing. Think about it. When you're a kid, you haven't created those deep neural pathways yet, and so you are thinking new and exciting thoughts. You're imagining how your future can be. You're using your imagination to think in creative and fun ways.

And then, life happens. And we start to have impressions upon our brains that create these deep neural pathways, which then cause us to continue to think the same thoughts over and over and over again. And therefore we're doing the same things over and over again. And therefore we're experiencing the same things over and over again. This causes us to get very comfortable with what is familiar and we are afraid of the unfamiliar. We're afraid of the unknown. But a first requires that you step into the unknown. Any type of first is going to be a little uncomfortable, only because you've never done it before. But when you're afraid of failing, when you're afraid of maybe looking stupid, when you're afraid of humiliation, all which is a potential possibility with a first, and you let that fear run your life, what ends up happening is you end up living in a very mundane and ordinary existence. So if you want to live an extraordinary life, you must be willing to have a lot of first.

So let's talk about first and then I'm going to share some of the first that I've had this year, because as I told you, I am committing to intentionally seeking out more first in my life, 'cause I want to stay young, and I want to learn and grow.

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And I know, and I've said this many times on the podcast, but everything that I want and don't yet have is in the unfamiliar, and that is going to require that I do things, and think things, and be things for the very first time. So when it comes to first, the first thing you have to know is that everything at one point was a first. Everything. Your first breath, your first steps, your first day at school. And you are a collection of your first. And so if you want to change, if you want to elevate your self-image, you are going to have to add new things into your, let's just say, your life bucket, that informs you to think in new ways.

Another thing about first is that the first time is often awkward, tough, scary. And that is okay. That's not a reason not to have first, it's a reason to do it. I think about Fonz. He went skiing for the first time a couple years ago and it was so awkward. It was not easy for him. And I think about the first time I went skiing, it was the same. It was so awkward. I didn't know what I was doing. It was frustrating. I was falling down a lot, but I kept practicing it, until now, I think I'm a pretty decent skier. But that first time usually isn't so smooth. I think about my very first coaching call. I wish that I had a recording to play to you all. I think we forget that the first time for any of us is a little awkward, if not flat-out terrible.

I often talk with new coaches and they think that they're special when it comes to their coaching ability and feeling as if they're not a good enough coach. And what I tell them is that the first time you do anything, it's going to be different. Now, sometimes the first is awesome and incredible, and you don't have to experience the awkwardness, but for the most part I have found that most first aren't that way. Think about the person that goes to med school and decides to specialize in cardiothoracic surgery. The first time he or she operates on someone else, it's going to be awkward, which is why they have attendants around them to make sure they're doing it okay, they're not killing someone. But in time, with practice and with experience and years of doing it, they may rise to the top of their field. But they had to be willing to do it for the very first time.

Now some first you're going to love and they're going to become a part of your life. Other first you're going to do and decide you're never going to do that again. For example, this year I accidentally went to a rave. And it did feel like an accidental attendance, because I wanted to go to a concert at Red Rocks, which I'd never done before, a first. And I wanted to go hear a DJ that I've listened to for years.

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And so we got there and I realized a little of the behavior is probably because they're in an altered state, and everybody was wearing thongs, and crazy costumes, and it was quite a scene. And listen, I am so happy I went. And I never need to do that ever again. It was a first that I'm glad I had that experience and again, I never want to do it again. But another first that I had this year is I went to my first NBA game, and that I want to do forever and ever, amen. I had so much fun and now I can't get enough. I'm like, "I want to go to all the NBA games." They're so much fun to watch in person. But the thing is you have to be willing to do things and be disappointed, to not like it, in order to discover the things that you do like to do, and enjoy, and want to add to your life.

I was coaching a woman, probably a couple years ago, and I'll never forget the conversation because she was like, "I'm so afraid of being disappointed, I just don't do anything." And I said to her, I'm like, "You have to be willing to be disappointed to be delighted." And it's so true. Think about it. If I was so afraid of being disappointed because I may not like an experience, then I would not have gone to the rave, the accidental rave that I went to, but I equally would not have gone to an NBA game. I would just be sitting at home being afraid to be disappointed and I would be missing out on the best things in life. I would be missing out on experiencing first. So you have to be willing to be disappointed, to be delighted.

The other thing that I've noticed about first is that they are often the gateway to other first. So I think about my first time in Paris, it then became the first time that I went to a French winery, and then that led me to the first time that I experienced a Sauterne. And it's just like they keep adding to each other. It's like, you walk through this doorway of a first and then there's another first, and another first. And you could have never experienced them without that first one. It was the entry point to experience so many other things. And then finally, what I want us all to think about, and I said this earlier, but the end of your life, death is the final first. And so between now and then, why not accumulate a lot of first? Which to me is accumulating a lot of life experience.

I talked about in last week's podcast about slipstreams. About how will you measure your life? Is it going to be in years lived, or in the life experience? And if you want it to be in the life experience, which I think is the ultimate way of measuring your life, then it's going to require that you are willing to experience a lot of first. So let me ask you, when was the last time that you had a first? And if you're having a hard time coming up with that answer, or you realize that you aren't having that many, what if you committed to having more first in 2023? I know I'm going to do that. In fact, I'm proud of the first that I've had this year.

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Before recording this, I was looking through my camera roll, really taking in my 2022, and looking for the first that I've had this year. And I mentioned a couple. I went to a rave, I also went to an NBA game.

I also bought land, and next year I'll be building a house. Those are two firsts for me and I'm a little nervous. In fact, today right before I started recording this, I had a meeting with my builder, and architect, and the whole team that's helping me with the house, and I could feel myself going into that, "Oh my goodness, this is a little scary." And of course it is, because it's the first time I've done it. And in many ways I've had so much freedom by not owning a home. I've been able to pick up and go, and not really think about having a house. But I'm also excited about doing this for the first time and creating a physical space that I will make so many memories in, and family will come to, and friends, that I call my own. So this year, my first was buying the land, and next year, fingers crossed, I will complete a house. That's the plan.

The other thing that I did for the first time this year was host a very large event. In fact, I hosted two, the first one was in South Beach back in February, it was called SOSI Beach Live. And going into that, I didn't know if I was going to enjoy it. It's a lot of work. And I was doing it as an experiment to see, "Do I really like this?" And the only way to find out if you like something is to do it, to experience it, to try it for the first time. A lot of you all are sitting at home trying to figure that out. And because you don't have the experience, you don't yet know if you're going to like it or not.

And I do believe, looking back at my life, one of the reasons why I've been able to create the results I've created is that I've been willing to try things knowing, "I may not like this." And that's okay, but the only way I'm going to know is if I do it. And so I hosted my first big event in February and I loved it so much. At that event, I announced I was going to be doing another one in November, which just passed. We did that one in Scottsdale. It was called SOSI Desert Live. And at the SOSI Beach Live, the next one almost sold out, because everybody was having so much fun.

And yet it was a lot of work, and so I told my team, I'm like, "Listen, I don't know if I'm going to do another event after SOSI Desert." Because it is. It takes a lot of time to do an event really well. And while I was at the event, my team planned for it, I was like, "You know what? I actually want to do it again." And so we're already planning on the next SOSI event. And I announced it at SOSI Desert, and just like SOSI Beach, we had so many women say, "I'm in, I want to come back." And so I'm so excited. However, I had to be willing to do it for the first time in order to gauge whether it was something that I wanted to add to my life and to my business.

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Another first that I had this year is that I hired a travel concierge. I know, it sounds so fancy right? And it is. Up until this year I had always planned my own travel. Part of this is because I am a little bit of a control freak. I love being all up in the business of my travel. But the other part was I just didn't know that there were people out there who could plan something as good as I think I can plan it. And you all know, who have planned experiences, and trips, and vacations, it takes a lot of thought to do it well. And this was just a year where I wanted to take my brain and put it on other things. And I still wanted to have incredible experiences.

So I hired Cassandra from Premier Wellness Travel, who basically plans everything. She thinks through every single detail, from the moment I'm driving to the airport, even beyond that, before that, making sure I'm prepared to have everything that I need, every little detail. And I cannot tell you how that up-leveled not only my self-image, but also my travel experience. To be able to have someone to make all of those decisions, to get you, to understand what you like, to understand your budget, and then put everything in place to support all of that. It was definitely a first that I want to continue having. Now because of that, I had another first, and that is I went to Portofino, Italy. I'd never been to Portofino before. I'd been to other parts of Italy but never Portofino.

So I want to share with you how the universe works. So we're sitting at this restaurant, along the water in Portofino, and we start talking to the owner of that restaurant. And he asked us where we're from and we're like, "We live in Denver." And he was like, "Oh, my cousin owns a restaurant in Denver." And I was like, "Oh, that's cool." And I asked him, "Where is the restaurant?" And he told me the address. And guess what? It is two blocks from where I live. So of course we had to go to this restaurant when we came back. And it was so much fun, us telling him how we'd met his cousin. And of course he treated us like royalty. It was so much fun. And it all came from a first. As I said earlier, first tend to be gateways to other first and other amazing experiences.

Another first that I had was actually in Portofino and it was a first that I would prefer not to ever have again, because as I said, not all first are great, and some first you never intended to have. And that is the case with this first. So basically what happened is we go to Portofino and my travel concierge arranged for us to go to this private beach club one day, because I wanted to go and enjoy the water. And it was the most beautiful beach club. It was by Dior, and so it was all decked out in Dior design. And as we're walking up, this lovely woman told us, she was like, "Hey listen, I know the water looks beautiful today, but I just want to warn you that there are jellyfish everywhere." And I was like, "Okay, cool."

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And so we're at the beach club, we're lying in the sun and I'm so hot, and I look out, and it is such a gorgeous picturesque day. The water is so clear and there are people swimming everywhere.

And so I look to Fonz and I'm like, "Let's go get in the water." And you have to understand Fonz is a little afraid of the water. And he loves to tell this story. He finds it hilarious, because his story, his version, is that I tried to coach him into going into the water. I told him, apparently, according to his version, I don't remember this, but he said I told him "that he should just change his thoughts and come enjoy the water with me." And of course he was like, "No, I'm not getting in the water." So I tell him, I'm like, "Okay, I'm going to go get in the water." And he's standing on the dock and I ask him, I'm like, "Please look out for jellyfish." Because we were warned that they're everywhere. So I get in the water, I'm swimming around, I'm having such a moment you all, I'm in the water thinking about how I can't believe that I'm here. I mean, come on. I grew up not traveling to Italy, and definitely not being at the Dior private beach club in Portofino.

And so I'm just enjoying it, just taking it all in, I'm so present. When all of a sudden the most painful sensation happens to my left arm. And Fonz's version is that I literally walked on water getting out of the ocean. I got stung by this jellyfish. And so I come out of the water and the attendants are surrounding me. And Fonz is trying not to laugh. He was very compassionate. He later was like, "I told you so." But in the moment he was trying to take care of me. To this day I have this mark on my arm. You literally can see a jellyfish mark on my arm. This jellyfish bite was no joke. It was a first. And I hope I never have that experience again.

But I was thinking about it. Do I regret it? Absolutely not. Because that's the thing, as I was saying before, you have to be willing to be bitten, by life, to enjoy the delights of life. And I still think about how delightful it was to be in that water, enjoying the Portofino sunshine, and it just so happens that I got bitten by a jellyfish, very first time, and I hope I never ever experienced that again.

Another first that I had was speaking on a large stage, speaking in front of over a thousand people. Now, in my business I often speak to thousands of people on Zoom, online, but being on stage in front of over a thousand people is a very different experience. And with most first that are large in nature, meaning they're so outside of what you're accustomed to doing, it's going to be really uncomfortable. So for example, going to Portofino was a beautiful experience.

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It was a first, I loved it, but because I've traveled overseas now, it wasn't something that was uncomfortable, except for the jellyfish bite, that literally was uncomfortable. But it was still a first that grew me, and changed my perspective, and helped me to get clarity on what I enjoy and what I don't. However, speaking on a stage in front of thousands of people is a very different experience when you're not used to it.

And so I remember I was so nervous. I didn't sleep the night before, I was anxious, I was afraid, I was all of the things. And I did it anyway. And then once I was done, I was like, "Oh, I could get used to this. This was not as hard as I thought it was." In fact, I actually enjoyed it. Now some people would be in that situation and they would do it, and they would finish their talk, and they'd be like, "Never again." But they wouldn't know that until they experienced it. And for me, I was like, "Oh, this was actually really fun." I loved speaking on that stage. I loved the energy of the room. I loved reading the energy and figuring out how to get the crowd involved, and telling stories, and hopefully having an impact on people's lives. I really, really enjoyed it.

And as I was saying, first are something that you either begin to incorporate into your life, or you decide never again. And first are also opportunities that can grow. And so since that talk, I've been asked to speak on other large stages, which is so much fun, but I had to be willing to do it for the first time. Another fun first that I had this year is I went to my very first prom. That's right. My very first prom in my forties. Now some of you may not know this, but I dropped out of high school. I wanted to grow up really fast. I can see now, looking back, I was trying to escape the religion that I grew up in. And the answer was to grow fast, hurry up, go to college, get a job, get married, have a kid. That was how I thought I was going to get out of it.

So what I ended up doing is dropping out of high school, so that I could actually get my high school diploma faster. So I dropped out, and because I was ahead, I went straight to college, finished my high school diploma, and at the same time I was taking college classes. So I was actually the youngest person at the time, I don't know if that's still the case, but to graduate from nursing school at the college I went to. And then I got married at 18. And so I just bypassed the whole prom and graduation, didn't have any of that. And I always wondered what it was like to go to a prom. And so when there was an adult prom that was announced here in Denver, I was like, "I want to go." And it was the sweetest thing, because Fonz treated it like a prom. He got me flowers and he picked me up, and we went to dinner beforehand, and we had prom pictures. It was so much fun.

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And it just proved that you're never too old for a first, even when it's something like a prom. You can create the experiences that you deeply, deeply crave. Another thing that I thought I craved when I was a young adult was being a model. I think a lot of girls might do this. We see models in the magazines and we think, "Wow, they have the best job ever. They get to travel and they probably get free clothes, and they get to go out to all the best restaurants." And I thought it was probably the most glamorous job ever. And so when I grew up and I started to have friends who were models, turns out, not the case. It is a very difficult job in many, many ways. And now I realize I would never want to be a model.

However, I got to make that childhood dream come true this year. I had another first. I was able to be a part of a real photo shoot. So for my best friend Brooke's 50th birthday, she had David Yarrow, who is a world famous photographer, do a photo shoot with her and her closest friends. And I was fortunate to be a part of that group. And it was a legit photo shoot. It was well produced. We had makeup artists, and hairstylists, and a whole crew, to make sure that he captured those few perfect shots. And that was a first for me. Now, I've had photo shoots before, but this level of production, this level of thought, and care, and planning, I'd never experienced before. And I rather enjoyed it. And it's probably because I was with my favorite people in the most beautiful locations here in Colorado, and with David Yarrow, his work is just mind blowing. He's so talented.

But I also enjoyed it because I'm at a point in my life where I just don't care as much. There was a time when I would be in front of a camera and just be so awkward, because I would be judgmental, and I would try to be perfect, and I'd be so worried about how does it look and what do people think? And I'm just not in that space anymore. And so when you're not in that space, you end up actually taking much better pictures. You're relaxed and you're having fun, and you're calm, and all of that energy I feel like is translated in the photographs.

And so when the photos came back, I was like, "Oh wow, we all are just so beautiful in our own unique way." Everybody in that photograph, you could see... I don't know how to explain it other than I feel like you can see that we've done the work on ourselves. We are just enjoying being ourselves and also enjoying celebrating each other's beauty. It was one of my favorite days of this year, and it was a first, and it's a first I think I'd love to have again. I don't know what that's going to look like, but I was like, "Maybe it's not too old to be a model. That could be fun." Especially when you have the wisdom that we have as we get older. It's so fun.

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I've had a lot of first this year, but the last one that I'm going to talk about I'm so excited about. I actually see a huge future because of this first. And I'm just warning y'all, I could go pro. Are you wondering what I'm talking about? Pickleball. This year I played pickleball for the very first time and I am obsessed. And when I tell y'all I'm obsessed, like legit obsessed. My friend Brooke was like, "You are an addict." We played one day for six hours and I didn't want to stop. I'm like, "Let's go, let's go." And funny story, the first time I played, it was this year, and it was Brooke and one of her friends, and me and Fonz. And we like to play for money. We get very competitive. And so there was some money on the line and none of us had really... Brooke had played, but none of the rest of us had played. And I'm very competitive, especially when it comes to games, very competitive. And I didn't realize that in pickleball that you shouldn't dive for the ball. So the ball comes over the net, and I am running, and I literally dive. And when I do, my finger somehow sticks out and my finger is basically dislocated. It is hanging off my pinky. And I jump up and I'm sort of in shock, because I see my finger's not right. And I just turned my head and I looked at Fonz, I'm like, "Pull it back into place." And so he pops it back into place, it's swelling up, it's black and blue. And I'm like, "Let's go." I didn't want to stop playing. So we finished the game and we won.

This is how much I love pickleball. And now I'm like, "I want a pickleball birthday. I want a pickleball wedding. I want a pickleball Christmas." Like all the holidays I want to play pickleball. And it's because I experienced it for the first time. Now, think about this, and this is what happens to a lot of people. You would hear someone say, "Hey, let's go play pickleball." And your brain would immediately go to, "No, I've never done it before. I'm not going to be good at it." And you would possibly miss out on the best thing ever. And now I will say, I'm going to brag on myself, I'm really good at pickleball, and I was the first time I played. And that's only because I've played tennis in the past. However, I remember when I first started playing tennis when I was an adult, I was in my twenties, I was terrible at it when I first started terrible. But I took lessons, and I kept showing up, and I kept practicing until I got good.

Now, I'm not the best pickleball player. Turns out there are some really good players. Since I've fallen in love with pickleball, it shows up on my algorithm all of the time now. And so I get to see people playing. I'm like, "Oh." I thought I was good. I'm actually not that good. But amongst my people, I'm not bad. But getting back to the topic of this podcast, it's because I was willing to be bad at it that I realized I was good at it. It's because I was willing to try something and potentially not like it that I discovered something that I am obsessed with. You all, you have to have first in your life.

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And I could keep going on and on about other first that I've had this year, but I hope you can see the power of first. And not every first is going to be amazing. You're going to try things and you're going to hate it.

But don't ever use that as a reason not to have more first. Just understand that that's part of the process. But by having more first, you're going to stumble upon things that you love, things that you will want to incorporate more of into your life, things that will grow you, new opportunities, other new first, other new experiences. All because you were willing to try something for the first time. And so I want you just to think about this year and ask yourself, did you have any first?

And if so, take a moment to just take that in, and look at how it impacted you. What did you discover? What did you learn from having that first? And do you like how many first you had? Do you feel like you are fulfilled? For me, I look back and I've had a lot of first this year and I still feel like there's so many other first I could have had.

And so going into 2023, I want this to be a big focus, a big intention for me. I want to focus on having more first and creating them deliberately. And knowing by doing that I'm going to stumble probably upon more first that I didn't even know I was going to have, but I will have those because I was intentional about having the others. So let's create some first in 2023, are you in? I would love to hear your thoughts. So come find me on Instagram @tonyaleigh and share with me your first that you've had from this year, and other firsts that you're excited about creating in 2023. Have a beautiful week everyone, and I will see you in next week's episode. Cheers.

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