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The Power of a “Can” List



Dimitri Antoniou Jan 3, 2019 · 3 min read

A tool to find the silver lining and focus on what’s possible.

At age 14, I suffered my first concussion and spent 5 months on bed rest. 11 years and over a half-dozen concussions later, I’m now 25 and struggle with ongoing health issues that trace back to that first injury. After a recent concussion took me out of work for 3 weeks, I discovered the power of a “can” list.





Repeated concussions wear down both your body and spirit. Headaches, migraines, fatigue, light sensitivity, mood shifts, and trouble sleeping are just a few symptoms that pester me for weeks and months after an impact, eating at my motivation and optimism. A few weeks ago, an intense game of pickup basketball left me dazed and achy, kicking off a concussion relapse that I haven't yet shaken. About two weeks into my recovery, I decided to treat myself and go see a movie. I walked out two hours later and felt instant regret, as my formerly improved symptoms had taken a sharp decline.

To put it lightly, I felt pretty bummed that my recovering brain couldn't even handle a movie! So I decided to start a “can't” list of activities to avoid: loud movies, roller coasters, mountain biking, boxing, trampolines, etc. Staring at a list of fun activities I can no longer do oddly enough *did not* make me feel less bummed, so I decided to start a “can” list too.

A few items in, I thought: “This is pointless. This list is infinite.” Why not add curling, knitting, glassblowing, baking, and anything else I could think of? The list of activities that don't jostle your head is infinite, so what's the point? But I started a creative list anyways (tennis, pottery, archery, wood working), and quickly realized: **the point is that the list is infinite!**

My first “can't” list had 27 items, while my first “can” list had 72. **The “can” list will always be longer than the “can't” list.** My problem was that I never took the time to count the “can” list, and instead fixated on the few “can't” activities at the top of my list. Putting the two side by side helped me see the silver lining and focus on what's possible.

Concussions suck, but they're not unlike coping with getting older, mental health issues, physical injury, or any other uncontrollable change. Whether your knees can't take the marathon miles or you've discovered a Nutella allergy, the practice still stands. With a new sense of possibility, I'm re-energized and have pursued interests both new and old.

So what's the action item? If you're struggling with a “can't,” try writing out a list of things you can do. It'll make you feel more positive, and could even lead to a newly discovered passion :)

Comment with your favorite “Can” possibilities below!

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