

Ep. #330 - The Mechanics of Real Change - From Pain to Possibility Part 1 of 3



Full Episode Transcript

With your host:

Susi Hatelly

[From Pain to Possibility](#) with Susi Hatelly

Introduction (00:00.00)

You are listening to From Pain To Possibility with Susi Hatelly. You'll hear Susi's best ideas on how to reduce or even eradicate your pain, and learn how to listen to your body when it whispers so you don't have to hear it scream. And now here's your host, Susi Hatelly.

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Susi (00:24.184)

Welcome and welcome back. I'm really glad that you're here today because I've been working on a three-part podcast series, which I am calling The Mechanics of Real Change. And over these next three episodes, I'll be unpacking what I have seen over the past 30 years that really helps people get out of pain and stay out of pain, moving through the layers that often get overlooked, from biomechanics to belief. From compensation patterns to clarity, from going through the motions to moving with meaning. So let's get into this first episode. And I'll start with a trip that my family took to Italy in June. And it was a three-part trip. Started off in Venice, finished in Florence, and in the middle, we were in the Tuscany Mountains. And...Stu and I were on a multi-day cycling trip. The kids were there too, and they were in an Italian camp. So was like summer camp for all of us. It was a lot of fun. So we had a five-day biking experience where we were in groups that really were the groups that we wanted to be in. So I was, a little more trained than Stu. So I was in a group that was stronger and then Stu was in a separate group. So this is my story about being this group. The group was quite strong, like, seriously strong. People who bike multiple times a week outside on their bikes, clocking major kilometers. And me, through the winter, I'm on Zwift, which is a riding app, and I'm on my bike, I've got my Wahoo trainer, and I'm clocking the hours and I'm clocking the strength part of it, the intensity part of it, but I'm not out for long rides at all. I live in a city where we have different seasons and so I just can't be outside where some people who are in California or in British Columbia can be. So I just don't have the length or the type of training that they had. And I'm also a relatively new rider. I've only been on my bike really in a specific way for about two years. And most of it has been on Zwift. And as I've mentioned, it's easier with the seasons, it's easier with young children. And here I was riding the Tuscany Mountains. Now, what I found fascinating, even though I was quite intimidated going in, knowing the strength of these folks, something fascinating was really happening through the days of riding. Even though the group had more cardiovascular endurance and had more experience on paper, I really held my own. Yes, I did get dropped a little bit, but I could continue to see them and I wasn't that far behind. and was curious on the climbs. And some of these climbs were 10 kilometer stretches at a 5 % grade. Some were shorter and steeper, like 10%, 11%, 15%. So these weren't casual hills, right? And mechanically, I did really well on the hills. I wasn't hurting. My joints were solid. I wasn't bracing. I wasn't overworking to keep up. My body was doing the job. that I trained it to do. So between my riding, my strengthening, my yoga, and the various other things I do to help my mechanics become more and more and more refined, my body did it well. Yes, I was challenged cardiovascularly. yeah, and strength wise, yes, they pushed me for sure. But mechanically, I

was sound. And I believe that I was able to push into the physiological challenge because I had the structure underneath. Said another way is that the structure underneath was solid. And that was so interesting to me. You can't push cardio if mechanics are falling apart. You can't build strength, real strength, on a foundation of compensation. So how does this connect to client work? I see this with clients so often.

You know, they want to go harder, get stronger and feel more mobile. And often they can do movement, especially if they've been athletic in the past. But one of the reasons they've shown up in my space and in my Zoom room for help is because their body is moving with such compensation and they can't figure out why they continue to have pain. Right, they're rotating from the pelvis instead of the hip, for example, or they're gripping with their glutes or their jaw to stabilize or their lower back is taking over for other parts of their bodies that are not doing the job. So they might be doing the thing, but they're not doing this thing in the way their body can actually sustain. And so they wonder initially when they start with me why their SI joint flares up or their knee is sore or their breath is tight. But then as we move through the private series together or through any of the group classes that I run, they start to understand because they can embody what is going on. They can feel the connections that are off, which really kind of highlights the myth of more. There's a prevailing idea in our culture, especially in fitness, that more is better. Push harder, do longer sessions, add more load. But here's a really compelling truth. If the body is compensating,

It's not absorbing or adapting to the load. Not at all. It's surviving it. And when you're surviving load, you're likely reinforcing dysfunction, which means that more reps don't equal better results. They equal deeper compensation. So a better question isn't how much can I do, it's how cleanly and perhaps clearly can I move while doing it. So let's bring this back to my trip in Italy. I found it really interesting. There was one rider in our group who wanted to do multiple days of 100K rides. Now our rides were mostly between 75 and 95 kilometers each day. And she really wanted to do a lot more 100K rides. And I was so curious about this because I mean, I think it'd be awesome to do like multiple days of that level of distance if one had the capacity to do it.

Susi (07:10.988)

And so I asked her, said, if you were here for five days, how many 100K days would you like to do? And she said, well, I don't know. I think I would do it until my back gave out. And that gave me a point of pause. I'll go until my back gives out. This is how so many people approach movement. It's not with an understanding of what their body needs, but a willingness to keep going until something breaks. Is that really strength? Or is that strain?

So what does this mean for you and your clients? If you're a teacher or a practitioner listening to this, your clients don't really need to be pushed harder in many cases. They need help building a body that can hold what they want to do. They need help seeing what's actually happening under load and you can teach them to see and to feel exactly that. How to move without strain, how to rebuild load transfer, how to shift from compensation to clarity.

And if there's any sort of thought in your head that people don't wanna do that, keep listening to this episode. I'm gonna show you how that is and the next episodes too. Because the thing is, is that over and over and over again, in my private series, in my on-demand classes, the feedback I keep getting back is, you're teaching me something no one has taught me before. Now I know there's other people teaching this stuff. They just haven't come across those people. My point is, there,

Susi (08:57.474)

thrilled to be both out of pain, to be getting stronger, and to getting back to the activities they wanna do. It's all how we teach them. And I'll keep going through this episode and also subsequent ones in this series. Now let me address the person, the client, the non-teacher. You might be in pain or recovering right now. And the good news is that you don't need to get stronger. You aren't weak. Even though someone may have told you that. You do need to move more cleanly. Your bomb mechanics do need to improve and refine, quite likely. And as you do that, you will naturally be able to add more load and become fitter and get stronger and all the things. By moving cleanly or cleaner, that's what gives you true capacity.

So that's really my invitation initially, is I don't want you to wait for your back to give out. I don't want your knees or your hips to become alarm bells for poor mechanics. But I do wanna help you to notice what's working well and build from there, to build mechanically sound bodies that hold more capacity and that break down way less often. So. Let's dig into this next segment about what happens when pain actually goes down and why that moment is so, so, so, so important. So in the last segment, I explored why mechanical soundness can give you a capacity to push, whether that's cardiovascularly, with strength, or through a healing process.

Susi (10:45.912)

But here's where things often get missed. You or your client have felt or see the shift and pain goes down, movement feels easier. And yet instead of pausing to take it all in, many teachers and many clients just go straight to the next thing. So few take that moment, that pause to recognize what's happened. And in my experience, that moment, is one of the most important moments of the healing process. Why? Because that pain went down moment. The pain went down. That pain went down tells me that the pain can go down. It's not the end, it's not the start of the next, like going to the next exercise. It's the beginning of something actually new arising. It's the milestone, it's the indicator. It lets us know what's possible. So here's what I say to my clients when they say, my pain's gone down. I will say to them, do you know what that means? And they say, what? And I say, it means your pain can go down. And they look at me a little bit like that dog looks at the owner like you are a little bit crazy. And I say, no, seriously. Do you know why I know that your pain can go down? Because it happened. Your tissues, your body, your system, is now demonstrating you can have less or no pain. And they keep looking at me and I say, we can't step over this. I really need to pause here because if the pain has gone down or if it's not there, depending on the situation, something else is. So what is that?

Susi (12:48.822)

And usually on the client side, there's a little bit of a pause because no one's ever really asked them that question before, right? Most people, when they've gotten relief from whatever they're doing, whether it's an adjustment or a ball work or a yoga exercise or whatever, they just carry on to the next thing. They're like, woo-hoo, I got relief. Onward I go, load myself back up again. Let's see how far I can go and then I'll do what I need to do to get the relief and cycle around and cycle around. And if you want to get out of that cycle, if you want to be a teacher who is known as someone who gets people out of that cycle, this is the moment to pay attention to. Because when someone's pain has gone down, there's something else there. There is another sensation. And that's the sensation we get to pay attention to because when we pay attention to that sensation, we can grow some endurance and some sustainability around that sensation. Here's a model I often use when I teach, and I've talked about it in other episodes, and it's actually not my model. It's a common cognitive action model that's used in many healing industries with personal development, change dynamics and other areas of life where looking at thoughts and beliefs and how they intersect with results is an important thing to consider. So let's break it down. Someone has a thought or a belief, which really is a long standing thought about anything in their life, whether it's about their pain or their body or something that's going on. And that thought resonates in their body as a sensation.

Now often that thought is also tied or connected or correlated with an emotion that also has a similar or related resonance in the body.

Susi (14:59.618)

And that combination between thought and or emotion and their respective resonances feed or fuel the action or behaviors that someone does. And these actions or behaviors are what leads to results. Right, so if someone is saying they don't believe they can get out of pain, or if they're angry at something, like even just think about those statements, think about or notice how they land in your body. And if those don't really resonate with you, consider a thought right now that you're having and notice where you feel it in your body. Or think about an emotion that you have and notice how you feel it in your body. Or even better yet, next time you're doing your yoga practice or your weight training practice or whatever, notice a thought you have about what you are doing and how that lands in your body. Which ones resonate as bracing? Which ones resonate as more freedom?

Which ones resonate as concern, right? And just, it's a data collecting practice of noticing and recognizing how thoughts and or beliefs and or emotions land in our bodies. And what's powerful about it is how those feelings, those sensations, those resonances fuel the actions or behaviors that we take. And that leads to our results. So in most, rehabilitation or fitness programs, there's a focus on action. Do the exercise, repeat the rep, grind out the plan. And results happen, yes, for sure, because you have to take action to get results. But for the people that I see, those results haven't happened consistently, and it's a reason why they are cycling around in pain or strain. Here's one reason why this happens.

For my folks and others who've been doing all the things and not getting what they want, they're doing all the action, yes. But lasting change starts before the action. It actually begins with the

thought, which might make you wonder, do you have to change your thinking to get out of pain? Yes, but not in the way you might be thinking about right now or considering. So let's go back to the brief example earlier. Someone gets out of pain and many professionals will keep going forward, stepping over the experience of someone feeling better and moving on to the next exercise. And for me, that's the very place to stop. With that new result of pain going down, I ask them what they now feel. If there is less or no pain, what is actually there? And as I mentioned earlier, often my clients will initially pause. And then they'll say, well, I'm not sure. It's just that the pain is down. So this is when I will gently add, okay, so if the pain is down, which is great, there is something else that's there. And here's why this is important. Because if the pain is down, it's harder to monitor when the sensation called the pain is down is starting to change and pain then goes back up again. But if you can name the sensation that's actually there, we can start to grow more endurance around that sensation. And we can notice when it starts to fade, which will likely be our indicator that pain is coming back.

Susi (18:40.694)

And so I just kind of stick with it, with them. And then a word bubbles up. Sometimes it's ease, softness, strength, peace, grace, tallness. I feel really good. Ultimately, the word or set of words that they use doesn't really matter because it's their subjective experience. I remember the first time a client told me that she felt peace instead of pain. That was the first time that ever happened. I'm like, wow, that is so interesting. Now, what she feels as peace might be entirely different from what I feel as peace. That's why it doesn't matter what the word is, I don't need to have it make sense to me. I need it to make sense to them so that they can discern between pain and what they are now growing. So when pain goes down, what's present? For one of my clients, it was peace. For another, it was lightness. For another, it was strength. For another, it was grace. Again, what matters is that we've named it because now we can build more of that. Here's what happens in this process of conversation, is they can now sense this new reality. It's not just pain and pain going down, it's peace, ease, strength. And you can see it in their whole being, the seedlings of a new thought being present, one that has more hope. You can see it in their eyes, they can feel the difference.

Susi (20:30.338)

and then they go into their next exercise with a different resonance because now I'm asking them to move in their peace range of motion, in their strength range of motion, in their ease range of motion. Whatever the word was, I'm asking them to move with that quality. They don't have to make it up because they've already felt it. And what starts to happen is a slightly different thought resonance experience that's fueling how they're doing their exercise and how they're being aware. To go into a bit of a granular detail about this, they've had a novel experience. They've had an aha, an insight of what is possible. And it's in that novelty that changes thoughts and beliefs. It's part of the formula, part of the equation for helping someone get out of pain long term. So, we're changing thinking, but it's not by going after changing thinking, but by acknowledging the results that have happened and naming what's actually there. So let's break this down a bit further. A novel experience creates a neurological opening. When a client has a moment of clarity, a flicker of possibility, or an a-ha. It's often because

something new is felt or realized, not just cognitively, but physically and emotionally. This novelty is salient to the brain, and the nervous system pays attention. This is neuroplasticity in action. Novel input breaks predictive patterning of the brain and invites a new pathway in. The nervous system then shifts from protection to exploration. When that glimmer of hope arises, the eyes light up, movement becomes less effortful. It suggests that the nervous system is perceiving increased safety.

Susi (22:38.488)

So instead of bracing, guarding, or compensating, which are often unconscious, this system begins to co-regulate with the new internal experience. Exercise isn't just movement anymore. It becomes inquiry. There's a belief shift then through embodied proof. And this is where the so-called magic is. It's not that the idea creates belief. It's the full felt-sense result. I.e. I didn't force that, but it felt better. Hey, wait, that worked and I didn't push. That's when belief shifts. It's thinking that has emerged, not been imposed. What's also happening is that sensory clarity is enhancing awareness and coordination. When you invite them to name what they feel and they can actually locate and describe it, they're engaging in the sensorimotor loop. Awareness deepens, coordination improves, and they are no longer doing to their body, they are now with it.

Susi (24:03.342)

There's a resonance now that they're able to bring into the next movement. It's not just a better attitude, it's better tuning or attunement. Their system is operating on a clearer frequency. They can feel where they are holding before and they can contrast that with this new, clearer movement. And that contrast is a teaching tool. They're now doing the next movement from that insight. The client having a novel embodied experience is a shift for their nervous system out of protection into possibility. It's rewiring movement, redefining belief, not through thought-based effort, but through sensation-based proof. And that is what leads to different thinking. So here's what practitioners will often miss in the pattern I see all the time. The client is saying, hey, cool, that didn't hurt so much. The practitioner then says, great, let's go with more reps. And to me, that's really a missed opportunity. So instead of just diving into the next moment, it's the moment to say, interesting, what do you notice now? If the pain is down, what's there instead? What's present in your body that wasn't there before? Even if they don't have the words, you've now queued their system to look inward, to sense. And that's what builds the interoceptive awareness and gives them that agency. It gives them that clarity of understanding, which builds that mechanical strength I referred to at the beginning of this episode. It's a key reason why I had that mechanical capacity so I could drive myself harder Cardiovascularly. Overall, my point here is when someone begins to feel better, don't rush it. When you begin to feel better, don't dismiss it. Say it out loud. Like this is different. And that it's different means it can be different. So what's actually the contrast here? What's the new sensation that's present? If the pain, the ache or the strain is not here or it's less than what is here. Because when you can acknowledge it, you can repeat it and what you repeat you reinforce.

Susi (26:43.352)

So now let's get into the real engine behind this process. The why. Because if there's not a compelling reason to change, all of this is gonna fall flat. And we'll talk about what really fuels change and how to uncover it, even when clients don't know it yet. So we've talked about mechanical integrity, the foundation for load strength and recovery. We've talked about how that my pain went down moment is powerful belief shifting and an experience that ought not to be stepped over because of what it can do for results, but also for the mechanical integrity. So now let's talk about what makes change stick. Because what really helps this whole process is a really meaningful reason to keep going. And that reason, that's the client's why. So often people will come into sessions saying things like, I want to move better. I don't want this to come back. I want to feel stronger. And those are terrific starting points. But they're not what sustains a healing journey. The real question is, what does that give you? Why now? What will you be able to do if this pain or this strain wasn't here? Or if you could be stronger? Or if you were moving better. Because when someone says, I want to walk pain-free, and they're already walking, that's not really the whole compelling truth. It's really the first layer.

Susi (28:27.234)

And I don't push someone through this process, which I'll explain now through this segment. Here is a truth I see over and over again. If a client doesn't have a compelling reason to move differently, they'll often default back to what's familiar, even if it hurts, even if it's dysfunctional, even if they've felt something better. Because without a why, without a sense of ownership, the nervous system won't reorient. It will go back to home base even if home base is tension, bracing, and compensation. One of my trainees recently had an experience in one of my Power of Pure Movement programs of getting out of pain. And she also had the experience of less range of motion. And initially she told me that she was disappointed. She was thrilled to have no pain, but she was disappointed that her range was less because she had greater range of motion with pain, less range of motion without pain. Why was she disappointed then? Because she wasn't moving as far as she used to and that she knew she could. So even though she felt better, initially she couldn't celebrate it. Her goal and her identity had been tied to a bigger range, but not to feeling ease. And that's what really kind of opened up a dialogue when she actually realized, wait a second, I've got a bigger range of motion that exists.

Susi (30:12.77)

But right now, that range, if I do the full range, is filled with pain. She has the smaller range of motion that's filled with no pain. And they're not two separate realities. We can train one to the other. We have to choose the one we're building upon. Because when she moves in a larger range with pain, that's than what she's going to train a larger range of pain. If you continue to train in pain, you'll continue to have pain. At least that's the experience that I have seen with clientele over 30 years. And the contrast to that is when people learn to move with less or no pain, even in a smaller range, they then train that state and they can then make that range bigger with less or no pain. So it's easier to build greater range with less or no pain, it's easier to build greater strength with less or no pain, then to continue the range you're doing with pain and expect the pain to go away. So, when a client says they want to walk with less pain, but they're already walking, it's not really a compelling reason because they're already walking. Truly the

compelling reason is where they are feeling very restricted. But, I'm not going to punish someone, so to speak, for not getting to a truly compelling reason. The reality is, is that many people don't know what they want, or they might be unconsciously afraid to name it, or they just don't trust the client or the professional they're working with to tell them yet, or they don't yet believe it's possible. So they can name something that's a little bit closer to them. And as they get the results, the professional is earning the trust from them, the healing relationship connection for them to share more. Like I said, there's all sorts of reasons that people do not express what they really want. And in those cases, as professionals, our job is to be patient.

Susi (32:36.472)

to earn trust, and to ask the right questions at the right time. And when the moment comes, and when they say something that really rings true, we can reflect it back, name it, and let them hear it for themselves. Because the more clearly they can say, this is what I want, the more likely they will be to move toward it. So this is a reflection that you can take into your week. As a professional, if you're working with someone or you're working with yourself and you're trying to create change, ask this, why now? What will this change make possible? If you are able to move in more of a pain-free range of motion, then what can you now do? Because healing isn't just about biomechanics, it's also about identity, ownership, and direction. When the movement is clean, when the nervous system feels the shift and when the why is clear, that's when change really becomes embodied.

Susi (33:48.056)

So where we're gonna move next into the next episode is to explore what happens after that. When pain goes down and then now what? I'm looking forward to chatting with you on the next episode. And if this has resonated with you and you wanna become the teacher who supports people in a process like this, then do check out the Therapeutic Yoga Intensive and you can learn more about it over at functionalsynergy.com/intensive. And if you are a client and you are interested in working privately with me, I have a wait list running right now and you can reach us over at our support page at functionalsynergy.com. Thanks so much for listening and we will see you next time.

Susi (34:41.442)

Hey, did you love this episode? If you're ready to dig in deeper and explore more holistically with me, come and check out the Therapeutic Yoga Intensive happening this October, October 25th to the 30th. You can learn more over at functionalsynergy.com/intensive.