

## Optimizing recovery time

**Guest: Dr Fleet Maull**

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### **[00:00:10] Alex Howard**

Welcome everyone, to this interview where I'm super excited to be talking with Fleet Maull and we're going to be talking about the importance of rest.

We're going to touch on the power of mindfulness and we're also going to talk about the importance of really having good daily habits and practices in place. And Fleet will share a little bit about some of his self care practices that really support him when it comes to sleep.

To give you a bit of Fleet's background. Fleet Maull, PhD, CMT-P is an author, meditation teacher and social entrepreneur who developed Neuro-Somatic Mindfulness, a deeply embodied neuroscience and trauma-informed approach to meditation that accelerates healing, integration, and awakening.

He is the founder of the Heart Mind Institute, the Global Resilience Summit, Prison Mindfulness Institute, and Engaged Mindfulness Institute. Dr Maull is a Zen Rōshi and a senior Dharma teacher in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

He is the author of *Radical Responsibility: How to Move Beyond Blame, Fearlessly Live Your Highest Purpose and Become an Unstoppable Force for Good*.

So, welcome, Fleet. It's great to have another one of our conversations.

### **Dr Fleet Maull**

Yeah, I've been looking forward to it, Alex. Thank you for having me.

### **Alex Howard**

So I think a good starting point would be why rest and recovery is so important and also maybe a little bit of the relationship between having intense activity be that kind of positive stress or negative stress, and where that meets that need for rest and recovery.

### **Dr Fleet Maull**

Absolutely. I think we're learning more about this all the time and we all intuitively understand that after exerting ourselves we need to rest and recover. I mean, we intuitively know that. I think we tend to ignore it a lot, many of us. And push ourselves beyond what is reasonable and healthy for us.

**[00:02:22]**

And I want to admit right off the bat here, I'm a reformed sleeper. So I spent decades trying to cheat the clock. And maybe got away with it a bit when I was young, but you never know what patterns that sets up even when you're young and the price that we'll pay for that later on.

Even some of my mentors in the super high performance world, I remember talking about, well, sleep 7 hours, not 8, because just that 1 hour is going to add months and years onto your life that gives you an advantage over others to outperform and succeed and so forth.

And there was a period of my life in my, I would say, 30s where I was sleeping 4 or 5 hours a night and just really pushing myself and thinking somehow I could excel that way. Now I couldn't even begin to do that anymore anyway, and I hope I didn't pay too high a cost for that. But we know today that the body needs rest and recovery and there is an optimal balance between the two.

And one of the great things that we have today is all these wearables so we can track our sleep. And we can track exertion and strain, and we can track recovery time and we can track the balance of that recovery, both in terms of sleep and the amount of sleep we get and the quality of sleep we get, but also in terms of heart rate variability measured throughout the day.

Which can have a lot to do with just mindfulness and daily living and our meditation practices and things like that can help balance out, and allow us actually, if we're into being physically high performers, which supports being mentally high performers and live performers and we really want to do tough workouts, well we need to balance that with the recovery time.

And it's a combination of sleep and then also how we lead our life on a daily basis, which has to do with mindfulness, can have to do with breath work and breath regulation, as well as having a regular meditation practice.

And these wearables today, I've actually got two of them on. One on one wrist and one on the other. One of them is actually a smartwatch but has a lot of metrics as well and the other one is purely a wearable. And I'm not going to do a product placement here, but I'm able to access all the information on my smartphone here.

And just last night I can see that I was in bed for 8 hours and 6 minutes. I really try to stay and be in bed for 8 hours. I was awake 18% of that time. I had light sleep for 66% of it. Deep sleep for only 16% and very little REM sleep, which is odd because I know I did dream. And this is not particularly a good night's sleep.

Now, the night before I had a lot of REM and deep sleep and it was up around 33%, 34% and that's considered recovery sleep and that's a very good amount of sleep for an adult my age. But in a lot of the performance worlds we say that if you can't track it, you can't improve it. And what you do track will improve.

So I think tracking things in our life is really important and we can apply this to every dimension of our life, but I think it's particularly important in terms of sleep. I've just really been paying attention for some time now and have learned a lot more about it, have interviewed some brilliant scientists around sleep and I've become a believer. So I'm a reformed quality sleeper. Maybe we could start there.

**[00:06:20] Alex Howard**

I love it. I was just thinking, it's interesting what you're saying about the importance of rest because of course, a lot of the doping that goes on in sports is not just about improving performance, but it's accelerating recovery time and I think people often forget how important that rest and recovery actually is.

**Dr Fleet Maul**

I have a friend who became a triathlon athlete at the age of 60, he began. And I don't know, he's probably 67 now. I think he's been doing it for 67 years. And he's serious about it. He has a coach and really works and trains and competes and does pretty well, gets up on a medal stand for his age group quite a lot.

And he's really into the science of this. And he says the recovery time is just as important, if not more important, than the actual training or exertion that he does in terms of developing his capacity to increase his, to improve his, times in the triathlon.

We know a lot more about this today. I don't know, I can't remember the exact numbers here, but I read about this and I remember it was quite startling when I read it. And I believe it was LeBron James and the great tennis player Federer that both of them, when they're competing, they sleep like, it was some amazing number, 12, 14 hours a day when they're competing.

And this allows them to compete at the very highest level by really storing that deep, deep sleep and recovery time. So it's quite counter intuitive to what most of us think, right? And most of us think that high performing athletes like that, with everything they're doing and having to train, they probably would be lucky to get in 8 hours.

So they've understood, they've done the science. I mean, athletes at that level, they have all kinds of coaches and scientists. They get the best technology and they've learned that it gives them that edge on the court, the basketball court or the tennis court, to get that kind of sleep when they're competing.

So I think it's really quite interesting what we understand about this today. And we all want to be at our best in life. And again, we intuitively know that if we don't sleep well, we tend to be a bit cranky. We don't perform at our best. Our brain isn't quite up to speed. We just know that, but we all suffer with that illusion that we can continually cheat the clock.

But the clock is relentless. I mean, it's a wonderful thing because it's an equalizer for humanity. We all get 24 hours a day. There's nobody that gets more than 24 hours. Nobody gets less than 24 hours. But we don't get more than 24 hours. So if you try to cheat the clock today, you pay for it tomorrow. That's all there is to it.

**Alex Howard**

You wrote something really interesting in the notes that you shared in prep for the interview. You said the brain and body's internal health maintenance team works the night shift while we sleep. I thought that was really interesting. When we're sleeping, it's not actually a passive thing. We might be sleeping, but our system is actually working hard.

### **[00:09:36] Dr Fleet Maull**

Well, this is even a deeper view into why rest and recovery and sleep are so important, clearly to optimize our performance. It's important, as we've been discussing. But yes, we have this internal healthcare system, or it's been called a waste management system, so our brain operates on basically oxygen and sugar. That's what the brain cells need, the neurons need to fire and function at their very best.

They're consuming oxygen and sugar, so like any consumption process, there's waste. And so how does the brain get rid of that waste? Well, there's something called the glymphatic system that we know much more about in just recent years.

There were some really interesting brain scans done of people while they were sleeping, I believe at Boston University in 2019. And that's ongoing and we're learning so much more about the neurobiology of sleep from these kinds of studies.

But the glymphatic system is a series of tubes that brings this fresh liquid or fluid into the brain and mixes it with the fluid and the blood in the brain and dissolves the waste into that and then flushes it out back into the bloodstream. And so that only happens, they feel, again this is ongoing science and research, but the understanding is that this happens during deep sleep.

It doesn't happen during light sleep. It happens during deep sleep. And so again, the importance of getting deep sleep. And there's research showing that inefficient waste management, in other words if we're not able to rinse the toxins and the waste out of the brain, that can contribute to cognitive decline and dementia.

And they've seen some of this occur with traumatic brain injuries, with research done with a lot of athletes, especially the football players that are with repeated concussions. That alerted them to people who are unable to efficiently remove the toxins from the brain.

And this contributes to their cognitive decline and cognitive challenges. And there's ongoing research that is exploring and suspects that inefficient waste management within our brain due to a lack of sleep can contribute to the onset of dementia and possibly even Alzheimer's as we age.

### **Alex Howard**

That's fascinating. Also, you said something else that I thought was interesting in the notes. I want to get into this a bit more. You talked about different types of sleep. I thought it was really interesting. I think people often think, well, sleep is sleep. But what do you mean by that?

### **Dr Fleet Maull**

Well, as I was showing you on what I track with my measurable here, you have sleep, they measure sleep based on the brain cycles that you're in, the brainwaves. Your brainwaves states. So I think, I haven't looked at this in a while, but beta is associated with regular cognitive activity.

We move into delta when we're moving into meditative states and so forth. And then theta, I believe, is the deep sleep state, if I have it correctly. And so they can measure where you are in your sleep cycle by measuring your brain waves.

**[00:13:02]**

And also these wearables detect that, I think through that and through pulse. And you need an EEG or some other kind of neurofeedback brain measuring machine to directly measure brainwaves, but somehow these wearables are able to measure it, I think, in connection with your pulse and other things they're measuring.

So at any rate, we need that deep sleep, and we need sufficient amounts of it during the night. Most people are familiar with REM sleep, which is rapid eye movement sleep, and this is when we're dreaming. And this is important too, because dreaming is, you might think of dreaming as psychological waste management, there's an emotional processing that's going on when we're dreaming.

And another image that I like for people that are into computers, most of our computers all do this automatically now, but a decade or so ago, your computer, you had to defragment it periodically because just through the use of the computer, different files break down and your computer isn't working as well because you've got all these lost files or disconnected files, broken files and so forth.

And even the way the hard drive on your computer was organized. That would break down. And so you need to run a defragmentation program. Now, your modern computers do that every time you put them to sleep, which is an instant correlator here. You put your computer to sleep, it's doing the same thing, and as you bring it back online, it's doing that.

So there's so many correlations between how we're building the digital devices and how the human brain works, obviously. And it's a race to see this idea of getting the singularity. I mean, we're building machines to mimic the brain, but we're actually developing a greater understanding of the brain using the metaphors of the machines in some way.

And of course, with artificial intelligence, they think someday we may get to where these machines can outdo the brain. Scary thought, but hopefully we'll harness that for good purposes.

So the idea of defragmentation is what's happening during dream sleep on some level. We're doing this emotional processing, right? And so we need both REM sleep and deep sleep. And that's part of your recovery time. So your sleep is made up of times when you're awake.

You'd be surprised how many times we're actually awake during the evening. Now, we may wake up and need to use the restroom or something. We're aware we were awake for a while, or maybe we got startled, something awoke us. But we actually wake up many times during the night and we don't know it.

And then we have what's called light sleep. And obviously being awake doesn't count. Light sleep doesn't really contribute much to our rest and recovery time. It's the REM sleep and the deep sleep. They really contribute to our recovery and do both this neurobiological waste management and this psychological processing that we need to thrive and be healthy.

### **Alex Howard**

It's so funny, Fleet, I haven't thought about defragging a computer for years. I suddenly thought, why don't we do that? But of course, as you say, that's how technology evolves. And there's the miracle of the human anatomy of how it does these things.

**[00:16:39]**

Maybe we could also touch on the importance of how what's happening during the day is impacting sleep at night. So for example, if we're overstimulated or overactivated during the day, how that's really setting up our brain and our nervous system for our quality of sleep.

**Dr Fleet Maull**

Absolutely. And that's the great thing about the world of wearables and tracking because you can, for example, I didn't do very well with my sleep last night. I had insufficient amounts of both deep sleep and REM sleep. And I'm completely aware of why that is. I worked late last night.

I'm putting on a summit and as you know, they're a lot of work and we got a little behind and so I was up late working last night and of course I'm working on a computer. So I'm getting all of that blue light and I'm doing all this simulation and I'm working and all that. And then finally I turn it off and I go up and get into bed and want to just go to sleep.

Well, I haven't prepared my brain to have a good night's sleep. So how do we prepare our brain to have a good night's sleep?

Well, we actually want to start shutting down long before we go to bed, ideally around 4 hours. Now, that may seem like a lot. Now that doesn't mean we have to just shut down and do nothing, but there's a lot of information about this today.

We're advised to begin dimming the lights a bit in our home at night and to avoid the blue light of our digital devices, our cell phones and our computers, create as big of a gap, as long of a gap as we can between that and when we go to sleep at night.

Now, of course, we can wear blue light glasses. That protects us somewhat. That's a good thing to do anyway. I think the science is still out on this, but I'm speculating there's something to it, so I wear them when I'm working on my computer. If we're watching TV late at night, that can be very stimulating and so forth. And again, it's a digital device, so we're getting that blue light.

So it's really good to begin just dimming down our day. You really think about how our body, our human lives have changed so drastically, dramatically, even in the last decade, much less the last 100 years, 200 years, and it's changing very rapidly at this time.

But our basic body of neurobiology hasn't changed in millennia. And so we're not designed to live this way. And if you think about how we evolved to live when the sun went down, you went to sleep pretty soon. What else were you going to do, right? You didn't have lights initially. You didn't even have the ability to create fire or candles or something like that. So you pretty much went to sleep.

Eventually we developed fire and then candles and kerosene lamps and things like that. But even then, things were darkened. I mean, how illuminated can things be with kerosene lamps and candles and so forth? But now we can have it absolutely bright. We can have it like daytime, 24 hours a day.

Your lifestyle can be like you live in Las Vegas or something and it's open 24 hours a day. And we're not set up to live that way. Our biorhythms are not set up to function that way. So we can really exert ourselves during the day and work hard both physically, cognitively.

**[00:20:11]**

And it's really a matter of setting alarms on our watch or our phone or doing things so that and having some agreements with our partners. Our spouses. Our roommates. Our housemates, that hey, we're going to start toning it down at a certain time every night and doing certain things to dim the lights. Minimize computer, cell phone, television activity. And begin preparing ourselves to have a good night's sleep. And to the extent that we do that, we set ourselves up to sleep well.

Now, conversely, to get our biorhythm cycle going in the right direction to begin with, we evolved to get up with the sun, that's when we always got up. The sunrises, you get up.

Now, many of us, including myself, don't get up at sunrise these days. I aspire to, but I'm not quite there, depending on the time of year anyway. Sometimes that would be like 5:30. I'm generally getting up around 6:30 or 7. But that early morning light is really important to expose ourselves to that early morning light because that gets the whole biorhythm cycle going.

So we really need to think of our whole day as a holistic enterprise, and then we can even go beyond that to think of our whole year because there's the cycles of the seasons. And of course we played around with that with the daylight savings time and that's a controversial issue on several levels.

But at any rate, there are these cycles throughout the year and we tend to live outside of them, even with our diet. I get a lot of advice from an ayurvedic physician who I really like named John Douillard. He has this idea of the three season diet, to eat in season.

So getting our lives back in alignment with the natural rhythms and cycles of life, the 24 hour cycle, the annual cycle, in how we live and how we eat, our lifestyle and so forth, all that's going to set us up to optimize our rest and optimize our performance.

And this is really going against the grain because I think we modern humans have developed this hubris that we can just push through. We have no limitations. We can ignore life. I'm just going to drive through. And we've developed this complete disconnection from our bodies and from the earth because we haven't lived close to nature for so long and so we don't respect it anymore. And we're living these very disconnected lives and really paying a price for it.

### **Alex Howard**

And I suppose in some ways the dysregulation in our sleep patterns is its own example that something is out of balance, it's almost an expression or a symptom of something.

### **Dr Fleet Maul**

Absolutely. Again, this is another good reason to track things, however we do it, whether we're using wearables or some other ways of tracking our sleep and our exercise and our diet and our lifestyle and our performance and so forth.

Because when we notice a change, we can go, oh, well that's interesting. What's going on there? What's going on with me? Maybe there's something I'm not paying attention to in my life. Maybe there's something I'm avoiding. Maybe there's something going on for me emotionally. Maybe there's something relationally going on in my life that I'm not dealing with.

**[00:23:33]**

And the sooner we pick up on these things and give them the attention they need and deserve, the less likely we are to end up in trouble. Whether it's really emotional trouble with some kind of emotional or mental breakdown, or whether it's ending up in relational conflicts. Or ending up in financial trouble.

Or ending up in real physical trouble, finding ourselves in an ambulance on the way to the hospital because we've been ignoring things for so long. It's like we all know that with our automobile, if it starts making funny noises and we just keep ignoring it, ignoring it, sooner or later we're going to be calling a tow truck.

And so it's the same thing. If we ignore our body at the physical, mental, cognitive, emotional and spiritual level, we're going to pay the price sooner or later. So this idea of getting back into the natural rhythms and cycles of life and really paying attention and tracking, allows us to pick up on things much sooner and make the small adjustments to keep our life on track and optimize our lives and our performance, our happiness and so forth, rather than wait until things fall apart.

### **Alex Howard**

What's your, as someone who's personally practiced and taught meditation for many years, I'm also curious as to what you see as being the benefit and the impact of meditation practice around sleep?

### **Dr Fleet Maul**

That's something that I really would love to be able to reestablish in my life. And I'm not talking about meditation altogether, but I'm talking about meditating in the evening. I meditate in the morning every day. My wife and I get up every morning and we share some of the same practices we do. So we're very dedicated meditation practitioners and have been for many decades.

And so the morning is really focused on self care and I think that's very important. I get up and I have a whole exercise and yoga routine that I do, and then I go in and do the whole bathroom thing. And then we make some tea and go in and do our meditation practice. And then go down and have a very nutritious breakfast and usually go for a walk.

All that before we start the day. And so it's really setting the day up for success. I used to meditate every evening many years ago. I meditated in the morning and evening. In fact, morning, afternoon and evening. If any people are familiar with my backstory, I had a 14 year sabbatical in federal prison. Not to make light of that, but maybe it's helpful to myself to make light of it sometimes.

But I actually have deep regrets. So I got in there for involvement with drugs. But I do feel really good about what I did at that time, it was basically my monastery time and I was intensely practicing. I had a very active life. I was teaching school regularly. Nine to five job, Monday through Friday, and very active, but also really dedicated to practice.

And I practiced early in the morning. I usually practiced again around midday. And I practiced for an hour, an hour and a half, sometimes 2 hours at night. So that was really the ideal thing to be doing before going to sleep, settling down into that profound state of relaxation.

So I would love to reestablish it in my life and do maybe 30 minutes of practice before I go to sleep at night. I think that would be an ideal thing. But what I'm noticing again, with tracking, using a wearable,



that the more I practice and the more breath work I do during the day, and that's something I come back to repeatedly throughout the day of doing various kinds of simple breath work, the more I do that, the more my recovery numbers go up.

**[00:27:13]**

Even if I didn't sleep so well, I got good recovery numbers. You balance out strain and recovery is what you're measuring with some of these wearables. And I can get really good recovery numbers just because, number one, I'm doing a significant amount of meditation that day, but I'm also doing breath regulation throughout the day.

### **Alex Howard**

Is there something around, even if it's practice in the morning which is obviously many hours away from going to sleep at night, as you say somehow setting the system up and bringing it to balance? And in a sense training our mind into a place where, I guess when it comes to sleep time, we can actually have an influence over our mind racing and all the distractions and stuff that may be coming in.

### **Dr Fleet Maul**

Oh, absolutely. I mean, if we develop a solid mindfulness awareness practice, we develop an ability to work with our mind. And it's very unlikely that our mind is going to spin out of control on us and prevent us from sleeping.

Now, any of us could have something happen in our life where we're really upset and it's hard to turn that off at night or something. But in general, if we're regular meditation practitioners and we're practicing in a deeply embodied way, and we're really even practicing enough to develop real stability of attention and stability of awareness and maybe even moving into nondual forms of meditation, if we're that dedicated to meditation, then we know how to work with our mind.

And very unlikely that our mind is going to get so overactive going to sleep that we wouldn't be able to turn it off and go to sleep, because we'll just immediately begin doing a little breath regulation or something, seeing the ephemeral nature of thoughts and letting thoughts self liberate and so forth.

I mean, as a practitioner, you know how to work with your mind and you can do that, so it's very helpful. And if we've had a solid practice on that day, it is setting us up, even though it's a long way from when we're going to sleep. It is going to contribute to having a better night's sleep that night.

But it's also contributing to preparing us to really exert ourselves during the day. And again, what you're able to track in terms of strain and recovery at the beginning of the day, based on how well you slept and then based on having a morning meditation practice, doing some breath regulation, doing these kinds of things, you can track and notice that you're in a really good recovery place.

So you're actually set up to really strain that day. I mean, you're set up to really exert yourself that day and maybe go for some high performance exertion that day because you're in a good state to do that. And if you're not in a good state to do that and then you do it anyway, then you're creating sleep debt. You're creating recovery debt.

And you try to cheat the clock and cheat your recovery time and so you're very unlikely to have a good night's sleep that night and you're going to get in a non virtuous cycle. A lot of this has to do

with the idea of being in a virtuous cycle or a non virtuous cycle, even sometimes called a vicious cycle.

**[00:30:08]**

You get things going the wrong way and it just gets worse and worse. Sometimes you just get dispirited about it and you say, to heck with it and you give up. Or, you get it going again. You take action and get it going again and that builds momentum. You get a virtuous cycle going and it builds momentum.

So this very much works on that 24 hour cycle in terms of the amount of exertion we do and the amount of rest and recovery we're getting, whether it's through sleep or meditation or just the way we live. Breath regulation. I mean, what's our resting heart rate during the day? That has a lot to do with how much we exercise, but it could also be strongly influenced by being regular practitioners of breath regulation. And meditators.

**Alex Howard**

Although I think for a lot of people, often the hardest thing is getting started with these practices. They recognize that they should be doing it, or they could be doing it, and they recognize the value, but the hard thing is that initial discipline.

And I guess, particularly, the more sleep deprived we are, the less motivation we have or, you were talking about vicious circles and virtuous circles, the more likely we are to make bad choices or unhealthy choices in terms of what we do.

So I'm curious as to, in your experience, what helps people really build these consistent, steady foundations and have the patience and discipline to follow through with them?

**Dr Fleet Maull**

Yeah, well, I spoke about my morning routine and my wife's morning routine. They're a little different, but they operate pretty well in parallel. We practice together every morning. And there's a lot of performance coaches out there, mindset coaches, that talk a lot about developing a strong morning routine.

I think Tony Robbins talks about his hour of power and things like that. One of the secrets to this is, Kelly McGonigal, a health psychologist at Stanford, wrote a great book called *Willpower*, and I really recommend it. It's kind of a mysterious thing, what is willpower?

But one thing we know about it is we have a lot more of it in the morning than we do in the evening. It kind of wanes throughout the day, and it has to do with our physical energy, our cognitive energy, and just exertion, recovery and so forth.

I mean, maybe if you absolutely optimize everything, you still have strong willpower in the evening. But for most of us, our strongest willpower is going to be in the morning. So that's the time to build your disciplines and build that foundation. Now, we always want to start small with whatever we're doing.

**[00:32:46]**

So I'm going to make one incremental change. So every morning when I wake up, I'm going to take five minutes just to connect with a sense of gratitude for having another day and all the things I can be grateful for in my life, my family, my opportunities, my health and so forth.

And just spend five minutes quietly focusing on gratitude, maybe a little slowing down the breath. Or just some little thing like that that we can do and start experiencing some breath from. Especially if we do some breath regulations, something even simple like straw breathing where we breathe in through the nose and out through pursed lips, like that. And we breathe out twice as long as we breathe in.

So you might breathe in a four count, breathe out an eight count, breathe in five, out five, something like that. Find your own rhythm. And anybody who does that, even for two or three minutes, is immediately going to experience a rather profound physiological shift. You go, wow, this works. You actually feel yourself slowing down and feeling a lot more relaxed.

So you get an immediate payoff. It's good to find a little thing to build in that you can do that's short, quick, it's easy and you get an immediate payout because then you're training the brain to recognise and say, oh, this works. There's benefit in this. I'm going to keep doing it. There's a reward.

And so you build that one simple one in and you want to anchor that with something you're already doing. So maybe you anchor it with the fact that your alarm goes off, or you wake up. So this is the first thing I do. I connect one event with another.

Or you have other things that you can anchor things to in your morning routine. Like most of us, we probably get up and brush our teeth every morning. So what do we do next? Or we take a shower, whatever we do. So there's things that we're already doing that we can add new behaviors to. This is called habit stacking.

I really recommend all the books around habit stacking and tiny habits and so forth. It's always suggested that we start small and then you build routines. So like my morning routine, I built it one habit by another. I wake up and before I even get out of bed, it depends on what's happening with my wife, normally she's up right away, if she wants to sleep in for some reason, I get up and I go into our guest bedroom and I do it laying down on that bed.

But normally before I get out of bed, I have this whole stretching routine I do for my back and my core. And I do spinal twists. I have a whole routine I do before I get out of bed. Then I get up and sit on the side of my bed and I do breath regulation and gratitude practice.

And then I get up and I make the bed, turn around, I see a nicely made bed, which gives me a sense of accomplishment already in the day. And then I get down on the floor and I have a whole yoga routine and stretching routine that I do.

Now, I built these things one at a time. Once I have finished the whole routine, and sometimes I'll shorten it a bit if I'm pressed for time, but it's hard for me to do that, it's hard for me not to do that routine. I feel compelled to. Why? Because this has actually become a set of neural pathways, well grooved neural pathways in my brain.

**[00:35:52]**

Neurons that fire together, wire together. So I built these habits. So I complete that, then I go in and do my shower and my hygiene and so forth. And then, as I said, we have a nice room we've set up for meditation, which again, sets ourselves up for success. If you have a nice space where you meditate every day, you don't have to clear stuff out of the way and move stuff, it's already there and it's all set up, you're much more likely to do it.

One thing that I wanted to do was avoid the phone at night. If you have the phone there by your bed stand, the temptation, it's just right there, the temptation. It's going to be very hard not to do that. Or you're going to wake up in the morning and the first thing, you want to grab your phone and look at it.

What if you leave it downstairs and you would have to get up and walk all the way downstairs or in another room of the house. You're much less likely to do that. So you're setting yourself up for success. It's very good not to have the digital devices near you when you sleep anyway. Get them as far away from you as you can.

So you do things to set yourself up for success and you build small habits into routines and those routines get well ingrained. So you just build this slowly. The first two and a half hours of my day is completely grooved at this point. Now, I'll adjust it a little bit from time to time due to necessities, something will happen and of course if I cheat the clock on the other end, then I can really struggle.

But generally that two and a half hours is set. I have a hard time changing it because I've really grooved it and that's setting you up for success. And then you can work with the rest of the day. And this is an area where I'm challenged, in the evenings. There is somewhat of a routine. There are some things my wife and I do to kind of settle down and so forth, but sometimes I let work interfere.

So I think in the same way, we could set up a set of routines that we do in the evening where we start to dim the lights at a certain time every day. We get away from digital devices. Maybe we shift to just some reading or if we have a partner or spouse, we just have a nice conversation but we start slowing down and preparing to end our day.

### **Alex Howard**

I think what's also important, Fleet, what strikes me as you're talking is that you've built this morning routine over time because you've committed to each of those things long enough to go, that had a big enough impact that it deserves to be in this routine, in this structure.

And there's something about staying on the course of something far enough to actually get that experience that then allows one to have that deeper commitment and motivation.

### **Dr Fleet Maull**

And the beautiful thing, you build this one little habit at a time. Many people have heard that if you improve things by 1% a day, well, at the end of the year, that's 365%. So we just keep making small improvements. It's that Japanese idea of continuous improvement, Kaizen.

You just keep making these small improvements, but it really builds up over time. So I didn't do all of that in a day. I built that up over months and years, but once you get it established, the beautiful thing then is it's like you can tinker with it here and there, finely tuning it. It's like you have a fine tuned automobile, but you're still going to adjust the tuning a little bit here.

**[00:39:22]**

My chiropractor suggested something new to me and so I added that into my routine, right. Or I read about something, I learned about something or I do a breath workshop and I learn a little something. So I tweak my routine a little bit. Once we get that established, then it's just a matter of making small adjustments to really fine tune ourselves for really optimal performance.

And we all know that when we're well rested and we're doing the common sense things that are good for us around diet and exercise and rest, we feel better, we live better, we're happier and so forth. And when we don't, we don't. And there's absolutely nobody that can shift that except us.

### **Alex Howard**

Yeah. It also strikes me, Fleet, that you're addressing the issue on multiple levels. Because you mentioned there's movement in there, there's meditation, mind training in there, there's the right nutrition in there, there's breath work in there.

And there's something about, from what I'm hearing you say, for you it's not just doing this one piece, but it's actually a lifestyle change that impacts these different arenas really, in our life. And it sounds like that's important in your experience.

### **Dr Fleet Maul**

It's very much a lifestyle change and a mindset change. And the more that we get ourselves in sync with the natural cycles of life, with our own biorhythms, with the cycles of the seasons, with the 24 hour clock, with healthy light exposure, and we have some inner practices, some contemplative practices, we begin to reconnect with the way we were meant to live.

We begin to reconnect with the environment that we're in. We begin to see ourselves not as these separate discrete beings that can just run around making use of whatever is around and pushing things out of our way, but that are actually part of a fabric of life. We're part of an energetic matrix and that we actually are connected to everyone and everything, which is incredibly humbling.

I'm sure many of us have been seeing these photographs coming back from the webb telescope that just leave one so full of awe. Those things can help us realize how vast and immense and mysterious and magical and powerful life is. And when we start getting our lifestyle back in sync, we start opening to that and by opening to that, we actually all live in a limitless bank of energy, is one way to look at it.

That's the way my first meditation teacher, the Tibetan master Chögyam Trungpa, talks about it, that we all live in this limitless bank of energy that we can tune into at any point. And actually you can learn to tune into that and override the body and do incredible things, but then you're going to have to go back and recover anyway because the body is the body.

Now there are yogis supposedly that don't sleep. Now I don't know about that but I think they have somehow created a whole other neurophysiological reality. I did know one Tibetan master whose attendant told me that as far as he knew, he didn't know whether he slept or not. He said he would disappear into his room 4 hours a night, and he always stayed in the residence where he was, this was a Tibetan teacher who traveled the world teaching, and all he knew was he went and closed the door but the light stayed on. 4 hours a day.

**[00:43:06]**

And I don't want to in any way be pejorative here because I knew that teacher well into his 80s. And this amazing profound teacher, being, he is still alive and I have heard he has retired and I have heard that there may be some cognitive decline. Now that may have been inevitable with old age, but maybe eventually even a great yogi paid the price for that.

But we get back in tune with the mystery of life and the flow of life and the fabric of life and that can nurture us and feed us. Coming back to everything we're learning about light exposure and the importance of how that early morning light sets us up to be in our proper biorhythm cycle.

We are light beings, that's what we are. We know that the most essential, what we're actually made of at the subatomic level is light. We're light beings and we live in a universe made of light and we all evolved out of stardust.

So we live in this energetic universe, we live in a matrix of energy and when we get humble and reopen to that and get back in sync, then we're naturally in flow and we're nurtured by life and empowered by life. And I don't think there's any limit to how high we can perform as human beings in any dimension of our life.

I mean we don't really know what the limits of any level of human performance are, but whatever degrees of high performance in every aspect of life we aspire to, we have to build in how do we have the energy to do that in a sustainable way? And it begins with good self care.

### **Alex Howard**

Yes, because of course, that's the thing, right, that someone can perform on something in the short term just by sheer drive and motivation. But to be able to sustain, there has to be that quality of depth of rest that's there.

I'm mindful of time. There's lots of places we could go, but maybe the best piece here is for people that want to find out more about you and your work. What's the best place to go and what's some of what folks can find?

### **Dr Fleet Maul**

Well, the easiest place to start is my basic website, [fleetmaull.com](https://fleetmaull.com), and that will lead you to most everything else. If you want to learn about the courses I offer online, [heartmind.co](https://heartmind.co), which is Heart Mind Institute, [heartmind.co](https://heartmind.co).

And there I have lots of online courses that relate to a lot of what we've been talking about today, as well as, like your organization, we put on a lot of summits and we just finished one.

And we have a psychedelic assisted psychotherapy summit coming up soon and we have a big summit every January, which is all about optimizing your life. It's called the best year of your life. And it's the idea that in January we can restart everything and get that virtuous cycle going again in all the different dimensions of our life. So people can learn all about that at [heartmind.co](https://heartmind.co).

And if they're interested in my book, *Radical Responsibility*, which is really focusing on there's nobody but us who can make all these changes. They can check that out at [radicalresponsibilitybook.com](https://radicalresponsibilitybook.com).

**[00:46:22] Alex Howard**

Awesome. Fleet, thank you so much. It's always a pleasure to have some time together. So thank you for today.

**Dr Fleet Maul**

I really enjoyed it, Alex, great to spend time with you.