



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Hey, friend. Welcome back. How are you? Podcast 96 sounds a lot like 100, right? Holy moly. I can't believe I'm in that last little push. Every now and then, my kids will say, "What are you on right now?" Since I record these ahead a little bit, I'm like, "I don't know what's actually published, but I just recorded whatever number." Super fun. I can't believe this many podcasts have flown by because I feel like this is what I do and it's so fun and we get to connect. It's been 96 weeks of this. So great. I love it so much.

I just took one of the new puppies and put her in my closet in her crate. I thought maybe she'd behave herself right next to me and be quiet enough that I could record this, but she's a puppy, and a three-month-old puppy is kind of like a two-year-old-ish. They're not reliable. I was like, "Oh, you're being loud. You're going to have to go up there and take a nap." I'm telling you this puppy business, I'm all in, but, boy oh boy, do I manage my thinking sometimes. Holy moly. You know, what was so great today is one of my friends actually sent me a message and was saying, "You know, you probably don't remember, but my masters thesis was on children and their dogs, and the conclusion was that basically besides feeding your children well and providing them with an education and loving them, one of the best things you can do for them is to give them a dog." I was like, "Okay. See? That's why we're doing this. Thank you for those thoughts. I will be using them," because, wow, one is hard and once we have two back, it's going to be even harder.

What has happened is we have this trainer about an hour from us, and she does a little couple week board and train with puppies, but one at a time. The little boy, Oggy, is with her right now, and I have Sunny, the little girl. Then, they're going to flip flop in a couple of days. Wow. What I realize now is getting litter mates was pretty ambitious of us, but we're going to do it because we just love them and we love our kids and our kids really love these dogs. Holy moly. They're so cute. They're just really kind of annoying right now a lot of the time. Here's what I have to say. My youngest is five. You get a new puppy and your youngest is still in kind of "difficult" stage, still really a handful, do not get a puppy. Just really don't. I'm saying that because my five-year-old is actually in a really great place, but I can not even imagine doing this about a year ago or so, a year and a half ago or earlier when she was just so much more of a handful. They're so cute, so fun. Winter's coming in Wisconsin. That's going to add a whole extra element, but it's going to be good. It's going to get me outside, right? All in how I decide to think about it.

Listen, before I get into what we're talking about today, which is super fun, I'm excited to tell you all about it, just wanted to put in a little plug to just ask you if you might be willing to share this podcast with other physicians that you know, whether that's your personal physicians, whether that's friends that you have that are physicians, even if they don't have a weight problem. Actually, I spoke in church the other day and a gal came up to me and she was like, "Hey, I totally listen to your podcast. I don't have a weight issue at all. When someone suggested this podcast to me, I was slightly offended because I don't have a weight problem, but it's been so great and so helpful." If you know someone who is a doctor who is thin, you still might want to suggest the podcast to them because they can still get a ton out of it. The more doctors we help, really, seriously, this helps all of us because we're all on the receiving end of medical treatment. If you could do that, I would appreciate it. Thank you so much.

Today we're going to talk about our comfort zone. Not many of us think about this too often, but most of us function within our comfort zone. We want to feel comfortable, and this especially becomes an issue as we get older. You can think about this as you think about people who you know who are older, whether it's your parents or just older people that you know who are aging. Some of them do this and some don't, but some really just stay in their comfort zone, and they just don't really push themselves. They don't stretch themselves. They just don't want to do anything that is that uncomfortable. If something's uncomfortable, then we want to go away immediately. For a lot of us, that's where buffering with food or alcohol comes in. We're like, "That was an awful experience so let me make that better, and I know exactly how. Let me have a glass of wine. Let me have a snack." For instance, you had a hard day. That wasn't comfortable, so then your thought goes to, "I definitely deserve a glass of wine. I definitely deserve to eat a cookie or some ice cream or whatever." Or you had an argument with your husband, your partner, your teenager, your threenager, and that was uncomfortable, so then your brain goes to, "For sure a snack will help bring me back into that good ole comfort zone again."

What happens is, over time, when you consistently live within your comfort zone, the size of that comfort zone shrinks. You're doing lots of things, and then you're doing a little bit of less things and less and less. Then, what feels comfortable becomes less and less. What's interesting is that even though we want comfort so much, it's also uncomfortable to not be growing as a human being. That drive for growth is innate in us as humans, and it's how humans have made so much progress in the world in 200,000 years. If we're not growing, and we're just living in that comfort zone, you'd think that we'd be really comfortable, right? I'm in my comfort zone so I just experience comfort all the time, but we're not really comfortable. In fact, we are grumpy and jaded and bitter and disconnected and not tapping into our full potential, and this actually feels pretty terrible.

Think of people you know who are on the older end of their lifespan and approach the world in this way. They just are grumpy all the time. They do the same stuff over and over again. They never push themselves. Then, think about whether you are on the path to that same mindset or if you're doing something else to make sure that you land in a different location when that time comes. Doing something else than just what's comfortable requires effort and it requires discomfort.

Similar to not eating junk food now or just food that isn't on your plan now, which is uncomfortable now, in order to have the net positive outcome of losing weight later, pushing yourself to grow now will feel uncomfortable now, and it gives you that net positive outcome of having a rich and varied life experience and the ability to grow as a human being.

I know that lack of personal growth within my medical practice, back when I was in practicing as a pediatrician, was one huge reason I was so dissatisfied there. I don't think I could have really identified that when I was there. I didn't really have that thought surface level to really be able to connect with that, but now it's clear as day to me. I was just doing the same thing over and over again and there was really no room for growth for me there. Whether some of that was the structure of the job or some of that was me not looking for areas of growth opportunity, I think it's probably some elements of both, but this might be happening for you too, especially if you're contemplating leaving your practice. Many of you reach out to me and say, "How did you know you were ready to leave? How did you decide to do this? Maybe I should do it too."

I think that medicine's not for everybody, but I do think that the solution is not that all the doctors leave practice. All doctors don't just leave medicine. I want to offer to you what I could have really used so that if I'd had all these tools, I think there's actually a good chance that I wouldn't have left. I'm not sure. Of course, I don't regret it. I think I've told you that before because I love what I'm doing and I feel so connected to all of you and I feel like I have this bigger purpose in my life that I'm now fulfilling. That's all worked out great, but I also really could have used these tools when I was in practice. My challenge to you is to apply them to yourself while you're in practice and then from that place decide what you want to do.

I want to share with you what has been happening for me in terms of this comfort zone kind of a thing. It's been going on now for it was like last summer that this started, so maybe a year and three months ago. That is when I learned about the concept of the daily dare. The purpose of a daily dare is to build confidence in yourself. What that means is that every day you dare yourself to do something that you wouldn't ordinarily do. If you're someone who, if the food comes at a restaurant and it's gross or not what you ordered or doesn't taste good, you would rather die than send it back, then you would dare yourself to go somewhere and send the food back to really push yourself outside of your comfort zone or to reach out to a mentor that you've never met and see if you can talk to them. Just something that is a dare for you. It can be a big thing. It can be a small thing.

I found out about this because the purpose of this is to build confidence in yourself. My thoughts were, "I'm already confident enough." I'm pretty confident. I thought, "I make myself do uncomfortable things in my business on the daily. This is all the time. I don't need really more discomfort. That's really unnecessary for me." That was my thought, and I kind of disregarded it, and kind of just was like, "I'm not doing that this time." Meanwhile, my 12-year-old son is taking voice lessons, at the time, he was 11, because he just loves to sing. I had the thought, "I'd love to do that. I'd love to take voice lessons, but, oh my god, that makes me so uncomfortable," and it just clicked.

I had this thought like, "Oh, so maybe I should dare myself to take voice lessons. Maybe that's what this daily dare thing is." I go, "You know what? It makes me really uncomfortable to think about getting up and singing in front of somebody else even though I love to sing and I think it'd be fun to learn more about it. It makes me so uncomfortable that that holds me back." Then, I create all these stories about how I don't have time and blah, blah, blah.

I thought, "You know what? I think I have to do this. This is the dare." I did. I reached out to the teacher and writing the email, my heart was racing. I'm like, "So, I think I have to do this thing where I have to challenge myself, and I think I need to do voice lessons. Do you ever work with adults?" She's like, "Absolutely. This will be great." That's what I did. I started taking voice lessons with her. For real, I was uncomfortable, especially the first session, but then she, as an expert that she is, professional singer, she taught me so many amazing things. She actually really helped me with my voice. If you've been listening to the earlier episodes of this podcast, you know that a long time ago, I recorded a podcast where my voice was like really raspy. It was a huge problem for me in practice.

For a while there, I was losing my voice for a week every eight weeks or so. I had to see a laryngologist and go to speech therapy. Really is an on and off issue for me. She helped me so much to learn how to utilize my voice, to warm my voice up, how to handle my voice when it's not doing that well but I need to be able to speak. I learned so much, plus I got to reconnect with music again because I played instruments in high school but then pretty much dropped it in college as so many of us do. Got a little sidetracked with my educational endeavors. I like to listen to music, but I wasn't connected to creating music anymore. That was this unexpected benefit. Over the course of time, it became totally comfortable to go there and do my voice lessons. Then, she was having a little workshop where some of her students were getting together and everyone was going to sing in front of each other in a very supportive environment. Nothing was totally polished, but this is what I'm working on to get some feedback.

Of course, that was the next step, made me totally uncomfortable to sing in front of other people because here's the thing. They were all like middle school and high school students. There were no other adults. Can you imagine? I asked my son, I said, "Well, would it be really weird if I came as your mom?" He said, "It only would be weird if you came and you didn't sing." I was like, "Okay. I'm going to go, and then I have to sing." That was my dare to myself. I went, and I sang, and I lived to tell the tale. I didn't freak out, and I didn't faint, and I didn't have a heart attack. It all worked out. I was able to do that. That started building my confidence as a singer. Now, it's not like I'm going out and booking solo gigs or something like that, but it was really something that I had wanted to do forever, and because of my fear and that avoidance of discomfort and wanting to stay in my comfort zone, I didn't do it. Think of what I'd been missing out on that whole time because I wanted to stay in that comfort zone.

Then, I was in church one day. I had often thought this, but our church, we have lay readers. We have people who are not the pastors who get up and read some scriptures at every service. It's just regular people. You just sign up. The person was doing the reading, and I thought, "I should totally do that."

That would be such great practice of getting up and speaking in front of everybody," but then immediately, "That would make me so uncomfortable. I'd have to stand up in front of all of these people," we have a pretty big church, "stand up in front of all these people and do that." Then, I was like, "Well, okay. I guess I have to do it." Then the ball had been set rolling because of the voice lesson thing. I reached out to the person who does the scheduling, and she set something up for me.

I was nervous. I really was nervous. I even had one of those readings where some of the words are weird, so I had to look that up and got that all dialed. I practiced my delivery. I got up there, and I did it. It was totally fine. I was a little nervous. I was definitely a little nervous, but when I do it again next time, I'm going to be that much less nervous. It doesn't freak me out anymore. I don't think of getting up there to be the lay reader as being so uncomfortable. I haven't done it again because there's so many people in the pool that you don't really get an opportunity very often, but I'm totally signed up. Whenever my opportunity comes up, I'm definitely doing it again. It was such a good experience of pushing myself to do something that isn't my usual comfort zone.

Then, I have basically wanted to go to a Tony Robbins event forever, for a really long time. Tony Robbins, you guys probably all know who he is. He's the Awaken the Giant Within guy, super big, big motivational speaker kind of guy. He is not actually the youngest anymore. I mean, he's not really, really old, but he has a bunch of health problems and stuff. I thought, "You know what? I mean, going to a live event with him would be very awesome. It's kind of one of those bucket list items. It's something that nobody else really can do because only Tony Robbins is Tony Robbins." I was just sort of looking on his website like, "Oh, I wonder what he has for events. It'd be kind of neat to go to one." I looked and there was an event this past summer that was in Chicago. That's super close for me. I was like, "Oh my gosh. I could just drive there. That would be cool. It wouldn't take so long for me to get there and back. I wouldn't have to be away from the family so long, and the name of the program is called Unleash the Power Within."

I was looking at what was included, like what they cover, and I saw that a fire walk was a part of it. Some of you may know that that's kind of a classic Tony Robbins kind of thing. Oprah went to this event way back in the day, and she did the fire walk. I was kind of like, "Oh, that's cool," but, again, I had that feeling of that run away type of feeling like, "Oh my god, but the fire walk? Really?" I'm looking at the other events. Certainly there's another event I could go to that doesn't involve the fire walk, but the dates weren't as good. None of them were as close. I thought, "You know what? Okay. I'm having this feeling. I don't want to do that. That would be so uncomfortable, so I guess I'm doing it then." I knew that was coming. I booked it months in advance. Every time I thought about it, it made me uncomfortable.

Then, I went to the event, and they teach you how to do it, and I did it. I totally did it. I can not even tell you the confidence that that built in me, just going. I was so afraid of doing that. I mean, everything, rightfully so, in your brain is going, "Turn around and go the other direction. You should not be walking barefoot on a pile of coals. That's a very bad idea." They teach you how to do it, and it was such a transformative experience.

The state of mind that I had to get myself into to be able to do that was so empowering. It really makes you believe like, "Wow. If I can do that, I can do anything." That's the point. That's the name of it, Unleash the Power Within, understanding the power that you have within yourself that you don't even know how to tap into. That was an amazing experience, and I'm so glad that I pushed myself to do that.

Then, last summer, I went to Switzerland to visit a friend. That friend suggested that we either do some hang gliding or paragliding in this one city that we were going to. She sent me some videos of her doing it. My immediate thought is, "Oh, no. I'm not someone who does things like that," because I'm totally someone who is very afraid of heights even as a child. I was someone who was born in southern California. People come to visit or whatever, and we would go, I don't even know which cities we'd go to, different piers and things like that. We'd go to the pier, and if you've ever been on a pier, it's usually big wooden boards, and there's usually a bit of a gap between the boards. You can see through. That's probably just for the boards to be able to expand and contract and things like that. You can see through and see the water underneath just a little bit.

This completely freaked me out as a child, and not just like a two or three-year-old child who really couldn't understand that they couldn't fall through the cracks. Even when I was older, it made my hands and feet tingle. I was just so uncomfortable even though I knew rationally that I couldn't fall through. It just made me so uncomfortable. The other thing that freaked me out as a kid was you know the stairs that don't have backs to them? It's just the platform that you step on. I had such a hard time with stairs like that. We didn't have them in my house, but in places that we went to ... I think back in the 80s that was sort of a trend for a while, so some of my friends would have those stairs. It was so hard for me to go up those stairs. It was like I felt like I was going to fall through even though I knew I wasn't going to fall through. It was just this intense fear of heights. You know this is so funny that we're talking about Switzerland. You might be able to hear our little cuckoo clock that we got, it just went off, that we got when we were in Europe this summer. It's so fun.

I show these videos to my 12-year-old son who's coming to the trip to Switzerland with me. I say, "Hey, do you want to do these things? Do you want to go paragliding or hang gliding?" He's like, "Oh, I don't really know. I don't know if I want to do that." Then, my thought is, "I don't want him to miss out on this amazing opportunity because he's scared. He should totally do it." I coach him, and he agrees to do it, but then what does that mean? I guess I have to do it now too. What? I'm going to be hanging from the sky? What are you talking about? I don't do these things. I'm very afraid of heights. Then, I thought, "Well, I mean, I have to do this. I can't just encourage him to do it and then I don't go."

We go and get set up to do it, and I just keep staying really focused on him and his experience. As I'm coaching him, I'm basically coaching myself at the same time, just saying, "Hey, you know what is really interesting? You can create the feeling of excitement from fear by continuing to breathe. When we're afraid, we really hold our breath. That is one reason it feels so uncomfortable, but excitement actually feels really similar to fear. It just includes breathing too. If you continue breathing, you can really focus on being excited about this experience," telling him all this stuff, but I need to hear it too. I'm the one who's like, "Keep breathing. Everything's fine."

It was such a kind of funny story too because we got up there, we were all harnessed in, and literally ready to go, and then the pilots they call them look up on their apps to see the weather, and there's a little storm cell coming in. They're like, "Sorry, guys. We have to cancel." We were literally ready to go. I was like, "Okay." We went back down, and we didn't even think we were going to be able to do it, but later that day, we found another company that had some spots. We went up and actually, it ended up being better. We went to a place further away so we had a longer glide. It was just cooler for lots of reasons. We just had a great time with them. I was just so excited for my son. I have video of him taking off. I'm just so excited for him. Then, it was like, "Oh, now it's our turn. Off we go."

I really was afraid there for a little while. You're like hanging. At first, it felt really surreal like, "Is this real life? It's so quiet." It almost looked like I was just looking at a movie screen. Then, you get to a point where you're like, "No, this is really what's happening." This guy, he was the owner, he was my pilot, and he was doing some crazy stuff. He's like, "Let's go smell these trees," and down we go. I'm like, "Oh my god." It's like being on a rollercoaster. At the end, they're like, "If you want to do some tricks, we can do that, but you just let us know." He didn't ask me. He just did them all. Oh my god. I was like, "Ah," but I totally did it. It was great, and it was fun. I'm so glad I did it. Now I have this amazing thing, experience with my son. It was so fun. My little kid saw me coming down. It was just absolutely amazing. Again, building my confidence. Maybe I'm not as scared of heights as I keep telling myself I am.

Many of you know that back in January, I spoke at Miraval, at the physicians wellness retreat, and I really didn't get a chance to take advantage of what Miraval has on that trip. I thought, "You know what? For our anniversary, I'm going to bring my husband back here, and we're going to do some of the fun stuff here." What they have is a challenge course there. It's like a ropes course. They call it a challenge course. It just involves heights and climbing and lots of belaying from ropes and things like that. Because I still have this story that heights scare me, I said to him, "You know, I think we should sign up for one or two of these challenge course things every single day." He's like, "Okay. Let's do it." We did. We zip lined. That's, you know, okay, you have to jump off or whatever, but we had to climb a 45-foot high telephone pole first to get to the platform. That was the scariest part. We walked on a tightrope. They call it a tightrope. It wasn't very tight. It was actually quite bouncy. Really high up, and you're only balancing with loose ropes, and you're trying to cross this wire.

We got attached to a wire, and we're hanging from it, and our fellow group members hoisted us up to one side, and then you're just hanging there. You let go of a rope, which unravels and just drops you, and you just swing and swing and swing back and forth. It's called Swing and a Prayer. It's so funny. That was awesome and scary, and we did it anyway. Then, we did this one activity where my husband and I both got up onto separate wires together, and then we held each other up. We're high off the ground, hands together, holding each other up by our hands, and inching our way out as the wires we're standing on separate further and further apart. We're doing that and holding each other up and communicating. It was amazing. It was so great. What was so interesting is every single time, well, that's not true. Three of the four times we had to climb up one of those telephone poles, I was so scared the first time. By the last time, I'm like, "Right. I've got this." That's how you build up that confidence. I don't have to be scared of this because I can do this. The reason I know I can do it is because I did.

You can see how this one little thing about voice lessons has snowballed into all these experiences. You might be thinking, "Does she have something else planned?" Of course I do, in fact. This last summer, my son did an Outward Bound trip. If you're not familiar with Outward Bound, these trips are very much roughing it out in the wilderness, and they're all about leadership and followership and growth opportunities for kids and adults. They're hard, like you work. That seems really uncomfortable. Then, I thought, "You know what? I should see ..." This was my thought, "I would do one of those if it was a women's only trip. Then, I would do it." Then, I went and looked. Wouldn't you know, they have the women's only trip.

Next year, I'm going to be doing rock climbing. This is a real rock, high in the sky, not the fake climbing wall kind of thing. It's a rock climbing and yoga trip for women. I'm going to be doing that, which is totally outside of my comfort zone, totally not my thing at all. I'm like, "All right. Let's do it. I don't know, but I'm going to learn and I'm going to do it." What I've seen for myself is truly the confidence that all these experiences have created for me. What I'm doing every time I do one of these things is I'm building evidence for myself that I can be scared and do something anyway. What I'm doing is training my brain to interpret the discomfort and the fear as something I should do instead of something I should run away from.

Here's the thing. People have now asked me, "What's next? Are you going to jump out of a plane? Are you going to do some bungee jumping? What are you going to do?" Here's the thing. I don't really want to do those things. I'm not really that interested in doing them, and I never have been. What I'm pushing myself to do is something that I think I'd love to do or if I weren't just so afraid and uncomfortable when I think about doing it, then I would do it. Well, that's what I then push myself to do, no matter what. I'm just not that interested in jumping out of a plane, but if I were and I thought that that was just such an amazing, cool thing, then, yes, I would go ahead and push myself to do it.

What's interesting is that as the time approaches to do the thing, I feel the nerves, I feel the fear, but what happens is I don't resist it and think I should be feeling differently. One way that I don't think I should be feeling differently is that I don't contemplate in the moment whether or not I should quit or give up or just say I don't want to do it because I've built up that relationship with myself. I know I'm going to do it. It's done. I'm going to do it because I said I would. Interestingly, that ends up cutting down on so much of the brain chatter that creates the fear and the nervousness. It's still there. It's just not as intense as it is when you think that you still have an out. Then, the experience of doing the hard thing is not as hard as if I were indulging in all the drama surrounding it. So interesting.

I want you to think about your comfort zone. What are you doing right now to grow yourself personally and professionally? That can be a combo, some personal growth within your profession, but it also can be separate, like your personal growth. That's what happened for me. Professionally, I was like, "Yeah, I'm stretching myself all the time. Not a problem there. I'm uncomfortable all the time." Personally, I was playing it safe, and that's where I needed to focus my attention. I also want to be clear that by professionally I don't mean just getting your CME done or going to conferences. Unless you're deathly afraid of flying, but you really would like to fly to a conference, then that would be something.

How are you becoming a better physician? How are you making your experience of being a physician satisfying for yourself? How are you challenging yourself or are you waiting for someone else to take on that job for you? Are you thinking it's someone else's job to challenge you or help you make your job satisfying? This is your job to do, your responsibility.

Think about something that you'd love to do but aren't sure you can do it or you're just too afraid to do it or it just makes you feel really uncomfortable when you think about doing it and sign up to do it now. Just one thing. Then, from there, decide on the next thing, and let it snowball. Just see how it changes your life for the better. Once you've done it, go onto iTunes and leave me a review and tell me what you did because I can not wait to hear what you guys decide to do. It will really change your life, I promise. So great. All right. Have a wonderful week, and I will talk to you next time. Take care. Bye, bye.