



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Hello, my friend. How are you? Welcome back to the podcast. If you are new here, welcome, welcome, welcome. I'm so excited to have you here. I am coming to you pretty early in the morning from Jackson Hole, Wyoming. I am at a writer's retreat for the weekend.

I think I've mentioned before on the podcast that my plan moving forward, my next big goal is to write a book. So I decided to sign up for this writer's retreat so that I could really get going, get the proposal done, write a sample chapter, just get an outline done, really get that all together so that I'll be ready to shop it around. So I'm happy to report today is our last day and I am close to completing that goal. So I am definitely planning on getting that all done today and I cannot wait. Where we have been staying is actually outside of Jackson Hole. I've never been here before, first time in Wyoming, and it is so beautiful, albeit cold, it's 45 degrees outside right now. Very, very cold and it was also very rainy for a while, but I'm telling you what, I mean, there is nothing like the night sky, clear night sky with the stars out, out here the air is so crisp and clean, and there's just snow covered mountains already near us, and it's just so gorgeous.

So I was even toying with the idea in my head like, "Oh, maybe we should move here at some point or something." And then I found out that the entire town has a population of 9,000 people and I was like, "Hmm, that's a little small. Maybe not." It's a good place to come and visit, right? And that's maybe what we'll do. In fact, we've been talking about going and taking the family next summer out to Yellowstone and the Tetons, and we were thinking about driving out, but now I'm thinking maybe we should just fly out here, get a car, and drive around and just really enjoy the beautiful scenery, and the wildlife, and all of that because it is super, super awesome here.

Okay. So today I want to talk to you about something that is near and dear to my heart and it really is about why you should stay in medicine. So I've been thinking about this one for a while and have been just working on getting my thoughts together on it, and I want to share with you kind of the genesis of this, why I want to even do an episode telling you that you should not leave medicine and telling you why. So what I found is that many physicians look at what I have created and what I've done since I've left medicine, which has been almost four years ago now, and they say, "Hey, that looks exciting. That looks amazing. I'm not super in love with my work right now." Or some of them really are not liking their work at all, and they are thinking, "Hey, I think I might want to do something else too. I think I'd like to leave medicine as well." And I'm definitely not saying that medicine is for everybody.

I am not saying that you can't change your mind. I'm not saying any of that at all. I'm not saying that you have to force yourself to do something you don't want to do, but for sure what I know is that you shouldn't leave medicine until you can love medicine, but you just want to do something else.

What I hear a lot of is, "I mean it's okay. I can do it, but I don't really love it. I'm just searching for that other thing." What's the next thing going to be? What's the other thing that I can do that's really going to light me up, that's really going to make me feel amazing? And where you're getting stuck when you're thinking that is in thinking that it's your job that lights you up, it's your job that makes you feel great, and it is not your job's job to make you feel happy, to make you feel fulfilled, or satisfied, or engaged, or energized, or any of that kind of thing.

That is not your job's job. That is your job. Your job is a constant. It's a neutral fact that you interpret with the thoughts that you think about it. And for so many of us, we've been thinking such terrible thoughts about our practice, about our coworkers, about the hospital that we work for, whatever it is for so long that we just think it's truth. We don't really, really identify that they are thoughts, that it really is an optional way of looking at our lives. So this comes up periodically, and of course, here's the thing. I of course don't want all the doctors to leave. Who's going to take care of all of us? We have to have amazing doctors who love being doctors to provide excellent care to the rest of us, right? Even when you're a physician, you need care from medical providers. Don't you want your doctors to be people who want to be there, who are really happy to see you, who feel like this is something that is very meaningful to them and they feel like it's their purpose in life and they're really connected? Of course you do, we all do.

So where this came up again for me is that recently someone that I know who is very familiar with coaching, let me know that she'd gone to a conference for women physicians and there were hundreds of women physicians there, and what she told me is that so many of the women that she met and that she spoke with were basically sitting around complaining about medicine, complaining about their jobs, talking about how they were working on making money in a different way than in medicine, that they had some sort of side gig that they were working on, that they were trying to build into their main thing so that they wouldn't have to practice at all anymore or as much anymore. She's a practicing physician and she really has worked very, very hard on her brain to love her job. Does it have its ups and downs? Of course, because she has a human brain and so half the time she's going to have some negative thoughts and negative emotions about her work, but she doesn't make that mean that something's going wrong or that she should be finding something else to do. She's looking at it like right, okay, it's my job to actually like my job, which is an excellent job. She makes great money, is able to support her family in a really great way. She helps people in a super, super meaningful way.

I mean, really on paper it's amazing, right? So the only thing that makes it not amazing is the way that you think about it. So she was just disappointed that there weren't more women at this conference who were working on really, really loving being a practicing physician and focusing on that. Now, it could just be that the people who were drawn to this conference were just more of a small subset who are focusing on these kinds of things, and that's of course completely fine, but it really is very telling.

This idea that I need to find something else. I need to find some other project to be working on, some other thing because my current job isn't enough. I think there's a parallel to this in mothering.

It used to be that women, most women stayed home, many women stayed home if their spouses were able to support them financially and support the family. It used to be enough to take care of your children and provide for the family, be a homemaker basically. Make sure your house is decently clean, provide meals, make sure your children do their homework, like the basics. That was what people expected and that was enough. That involved rest for these women, it involved social activities for them. For the most part, that was great. They weren't constantly thinking that that wasn't enough and they needed to be doing more. What I see now with women who stay home is that getting the household stuff done, and running the errands, and doing whatever you need to do for the kids is absolutely not enough for them in their minds. They need to be heading up some sort of massive committee, or volunteering in some sort of way, or having some sort of side job, or just something else that it seems like they believe will sort of justify their existence. It's not enough, it's not good enough to just be caring for your family and being there for your children and things like that, you have to be doing more.

I'm not saying that you shouldn't have aspirations or anything like that, but it's this idea that the basic stuff that you do, the main thing that you do isn't enough, you have to be doing more so that you can really feel like you're valuable, so you can really feel like you're worthy of taking up oxygen in this world. I think it's just, it's the same thing. It's this idea that whatever we're doing, whatever our main thing is or whatever we've been doing for any period of time is kind of boring and we want the dopamine hit of something new, of something that seems more exciting. Of course when you develop a side gig, then you have twice as much work to do, right? Or if you leave medicine and you do some other job or some other career, there's pluses and minuses to that too. It's 50/50 in that as well.

I think sometimes people look at me and they're like, "Look how amazing that is. She's a coach." I have a lot of issues that I work through too. This is certainly not something that's rainbows and daisies all of the time. Is it fun? Is it totally my calling? Absolutely it is, but could I also go back to medicine and totally love it and have it be just my favorite thing? I for sure could, and the reason I know I could is because I know that I can manage my brain, and my brain is what creates my experience of my life because my brain creates my thoughts, my thoughts are what determine how I feel, and my feelings are what create my experience of my life.

So where this came up again even more recently where I thought, "Okay, I'm going to really have to do a podcast on this topic." Is when I was in Florida a little bit ago, last month speaking at the Florida OB-GYN conference, and I had spoken about that a couple of podcasts ago. What happened there was I was speaking and we were talking just about how to feel better in your practice in general and creating confidence and things like that. There were all comers, all different kinds of ob-gyns of all different age ranges. There were people who were residents, there were people who were retired and all in between. So it was really an interesting mix of men and women and lots of different perspectives.

Towards the end, a man kind of off to the side raised his hand and I called on him. He stood up and grabbed the microphone, and he was kind of far away, I couldn't really see him that well, but he started talking about the practice of being an ob-gyn, and he said, "I just want to let all of you know, especially those of you who are newer to this field, know that practicing as an ob-gyn is an amazing job to have. It really is an excellent career."

So then he goes on to tell us why, and he said, "When you first start out you're delivering babies and it's so amazing. You get to be there on what's just the most exciting and amazing day for so many people. And are there sad times, and are there things that are harder to deal with when you're delivering babies? Absolutely there are, but for the most part it's such a great, great time to have in your life. And then when you get tired of doing that and you don't really want to get up and deliver in the middle of the night anymore, then you can really focus on doing surgery, and really developing your surgical skills, and having fun in the operating room, and getting really, really skilled at doing all of the surgeries. And then when you don't really want to operate anymore, you can focus on your in office practice, and doing in office gynecology, and you develop these relationships with these patients that you've seen for decades, and you get to follow up with them and help them through all different periods of their life, and it is just such a great way to make money, and support your family, and have really a great, great life."

Okay. So I said, "Thank you for saying all that." And then I asked everybody, I said, "What is he offering you?" And I told them, "What he's offering you are all of his thoughts about being an ob-gyn, and those are thoughts that serve him, which is why he's still here at this conference as a practicing ob-gyn." And so then I asked him, "So how long have you been in practice?" And I'm going to get this wrong. I really wish I'd gotten his name because he was so sweet and adorable, but I asked him how long he'd been practicing, and I think he said that he started practicing in the early '70s. So I was born in 1976, so he has seriously been practicing for well over 40 years and is working part-time now and has no intentions of quitting because he's created a job for himself that he loves. Why would you want to retire when you love what you're doing? You work as much as you want to and not more, and you get everything out of it that you want to get out of it, right?

So I thought that was so excellent. I really thanked him for standing up and telling everybody that because when you're around people who are complaining constantly about practice, and all they can talk about is saving enough money so that they can retire early, you're going to have to work on not adopting that way of thinking if you want to have a different experience. So after the fact, later that evening I ended up running into him and he, I was thinking before the talk and I told him that I was really just thinking about him and admiring his mindset over all the years. He said that he's in his 80s and is still practicing.

Isn't that amazing? And then there was one other thing that he said when he was speaking to everybody that I thought was so poignant as well and he said, "The thing is you have to be really, really careful to not let your ego get involved in this career as a physician." He said, "If you get all worked up about who is delivering who, and this woman is going to your partner to have her baby delivered and not to you, and your neighbor just ended up picking somebody else, or things like that and your ego gets hurt, you're going to end up burning yourself out." That's what he said, and he goes, "I know this because I did it."

So he's not just someone who is just genetically this eternal optimist and hopped into the practice of medicine and was like, "This is amazing." And never had any struggle. So I love that he was sharing that early on in his career. He struggled too and he got stuck in that mindset of who comes to see me is something that determines my value as a physician, and letting your ego determine what your experience is of your job. When you decide that none of that matters, that you're there to help the people who are wanting you to be their doctor, and you're focusing on them, and just not even making any of the rest of it be a big deal, that is how you actually really enjoy your practice. When you start thinking that other people that you work with should be acting in a different way so that you can be happy, you will burn yourself out. I think so much burnout is created for physicians by the negative emotions that they're generating on a regular basis with the way that they're thinking. It's emotional exhaustion that doesn't just happen to you.

I mean, there is emotional exhaustion from the highs and lows of dealing with people living and dying, and saving people and all of that, but that's actually not where most of our emotional energy goes when we're in practice. Most of our emotional energy really goes into resisting what is, thinking that other people should be different, complaining in our minds or out loud about this person, that person, that patient, the people who did this, they're not turning the OR over fast enough. Just constant complaints, and when you are in the habit of thinking in that way, your brain will just show you evidence constantly of what people are doing wrong so that you get to be upset about it and that is incredibly emotionally draining. Think how much more energy you would have at the end of a workday if you weren't constantly resisting what's going on.

Think about it. If you had to just walk around all day, holding two 25 pound dumbbells, do you think that you would be tired at the end of the day, more tired than usual? Of course you would be because you are resisting gravity by holding those dumbbells all day long, right? When you are resisting the way people are, the way life is, the way your practice is, you're exerting that same level of energy that's so depleting. So you can literally just drop the whole buy-in that you have to your brain's story about the way things are. You can just start to notice, wow, it's so interesting that my brain just wants to get upset about this. I'm not even asking you to think differently or to think more positively about it. I'm just asking you to take ownership for the fact that you are creating your own experience and your experience is what's making you miserable and wanting to leave medicine, right? Because of what you're creating.

So before you decide you want to leave medicine, before you start looking for a side gig, before you start looking for your exit strategy, really, really work on loving your job as a physician, on no longer resisting it, on opening up to it, on taking ownership for all of your emotions that you experienced. Not blaming anybody else for how your day goes, taking complete responsibility for it because that skill is something that is going to be able to be something you carry on with you into whatever you do. Maybe you can hear the geese that are flying over right now, flying south for the winter.

So I want you to understand that even if you end up deciding to leave medicine, if you do this work to love your current job right now, then you'll love what you move on to as well. Some people say, "Yeah, but if I love my job as a physician, then I won't leave." Well, maybe not.

Why would you leave something that you love? Or maybe you still will leave. It is possible to love something and still want to do something else. When I left my practice, I was not completely like I can't do this one more day, not at all. In fact, I totally could've continued doing it, I just wanted to do something else.

Now, could I have spent more time on my thinking there as well? Absolutely. I didn't have coaching the way I do now to be able to really work through all of that, but I just want you to really watch when your brain is starting to offer to you that something else is going to be better. The grass is greener over there. I just need to get away from this career that I spent so many years creating for myself that felt like would be a dream come true so that I can actually be happy. You can create that dream come true experience of being a physician that you thought you would have when you decided to go to medical school, all by working on your thinking.

Can't wait to see how many of you start to fall back in love with your life, it's the best.

Have a wonderful week and I'll talk to you very soon. Take care. Bye bye.