Katrina Ubell: Hey there, my friend. How are you? Welcome back to the podcast. I'm so glad to have you here. If you are new here, welcome, welcome, welcome. So glad that you're here. I have so much to share with you and so much that can help you, so I'm so glad that you're here. I want to just touch base with you on how you're doing, a number of weeks into this now. I have to tell you, it came to this. I had to groom my own dog. Yes I did. Well I didn't have to, but he really, really needed it and we didn't have another option so I took him outside. He was fed a steady stream of treats while I used a dull pair of scissors and a beard trimmer that we happened to have and I tried to cut him.

Now normally the groomer would use clippers on him anyway, so I figured that this would be no big deal, just try not to shave him. Trying to make it so he had some fur leftover. Well it turns out that dog fur and human beard hair are not the same at all when it comes to clipping. So I'm sure all the veterinarians out there who are listening are just laughing at me right now. It was really, really challenging to get it to cut anything actually. And of course then trying to get him to hold still while I cut his face with scissors. I just did the best that I could. He looks cutely scruffy. My whole goal the whole time was to at least have it not be where I would be embarrassed when I walked him. I'm like, okay, he has to just at least look presentable. And he was just getting really, really hot and his beard was getting really long and he needed a trim.

So I figured this is what I got to do. I'm going to do it, right? We figure it out. I've already cut my husband's hair too. Literally, I haven't cut anyone's hair ever in my life, except that's not true. I did cut my firstborn child. I felt for some reason so dumb. I felt like I should be the one to cut his hair for the first time. So he had all these adorable little curls in the back of his hair. So I remember trying to get him to hold still and have him not look at me while I was cutting those off, which didn't work very well at all. I think it was not long before I then took him to someone who really knew what they were doing to actually give him a real haircut. So just to tell you, I do not have any skill when it comes to this kind of thing.

But I kind of like that when you don't have any other options, you get resourceful and you just figure it out. It's kind of a little bit kind of fun. Right? Something else to do. So anyway, that's the latest when it comes to that. One of my kids is going to need a haircut probably pretty soon. I'm going to try and do it on him. The other one I'm not even going to try. I told him he can just let it grow out long, I won't do that to him.

Okay, let's get going. I've been hearing from people and clients and people on social media and just kind of everybody, kind of this general vibe of asking a lot of what if questions. So focusing on what if. So here's just some examples of what if questions that you might have been thinking recently. What if this pandemic isn't over soon? What if this is our new normal? I've seen a lot of resistance to that one. What if I don't have the PPE I need when I get to work, every day wondering, right? What if I don't don or doff my PPE properly and I end up exposing myself? What if I get exposed and I have to quarantine myself away from my whole family for two weeks?

What if I expose my family and they get sick? What if this is the beginning of the end for me? What if I get Covid and I get really sick and I end up dying? What if someone I love gets Covid and dies? What if I admit someone who I think doesn't have Covid but then they turn out to have it and expose everybody? What if I send someone home from the ER who I think is okay, but then they end up decompensating at home? What if school doesn't go back soon? What if I can't get my kid to do their schoolwork and they have to repeat a grade? What if my kids don't have any camps or planned activities this summer? What if they're home all summer with nothing to do? What if my child doesn't get to walk for graduation? What if we don't get to host the graduation party that I've been looking forward to for so many years?

What if my spouse and I can't figure out a way to get along while we're together so much? What if I don't get to go on that trip that I've been planning for two years? What if I'm not allowed to see patients or operate for a long time? What if I can't retire when I've been planning to? What if I have to lay off all of my beloved employees? What if I have to close my practice? What if I get laid off? What if I can't find another job? What if my adult children who have moved back home can't find a job and therefore keep living with me indefinitely? What if I can't work for so long that I run out of money and can't pay my bills and have to file for bankruptcy? What if I lose my house?

What if I can't stop eating my emotions and I gain five pounds every month until this ends? What if I can't moderate my alcohol consumption and I actually end up with a real drinking problem? What if this pandemic ends up ruining my life in all possible ways? This is just scraping the surface. You might be like, great, thanks for offering me all the new things to worry about Katrina. But this is just scraping the surface. We have so many of these what if thoughts circulating through our heads all day long and every time something changes or doesn't change, we think, what if? What if this is worse? What if it doesn't get better? What if this is actually what my life has to be like? I'm not okay with this. And so when you're living in the what ifs, what you're doing is creating fear and stress and anxiety for yourself. You are asking yourself questions that seem useful, right?

You may have to close your practice. You may have to file for bankruptcy. You may show up to work and not have the proper protective equipment that you need. But when you're living in what if, you're living in the space of it actually happening and then resisting that. And that resistance is what creates all the fear and stress and anxiety. It's thinking this thing might happen and I don't want that. That's the resistance. The I don't want that is the resistance. And then going, this isn't going to be okay. And then your brain usually spins out into a whole bunch of other what ifs and all those what ifs are coming from your primitive brain. This is the part of your brain that is very, very old, very ancient, and it does a very good job of its purpose in life, which is to keep you safe.

And so it is identifying any possible threat that it possibly can and just presenting it to you. What if this happens? What if that happens? How am I going to solve for this? How am I going to solve for that? What if everything falls apart? What am I going to do? And it thinks it's very useful and it can be useful. Sometimes we really do need to go to that worst case scenario and think it through and know exactly what we're going to do. But when you have this litany of what if questions about all the possible things that could go wrong in your life, it might be a little too much to spend a lot of time going to all of those places. For instance, I have already gone to the place of my husband dies or I die, or both of us die. Because that seemed pretty worst case scenario and I have a plan, I already know how it's all going to be handled.

It's already all been discussed. I've had the discussion with my husband about what I want him to do if I die. It's all happened. So now I don't need to worry about that anymore. I don't need to think about that over and over and over again. When we have the what if questions, our brains are just looping and spinning on, but there's something else and you still haven't figured it out. What I find is that sometimes I'll think, what if this thing happens, what if I lose my house? I come up with a solution. But what if you lose your house? It keeps coming back and it keeps coming back and that just isn't useful at all. So what I want to offer you today is a way to redirect your brain when it's going into the what ifs, because all of these concerns are legitimate concerns, right?

All these thing, or many of these things, may really happen and so it makes sense that your brain would offer you up the suggestion that you might want to think about it. But when it's just creating not useful emotions, right, you don't figure out solutions from fear and anxiety. That is not the place that you want to be making decisions from, right? What you're able to do here is you're able to redirect things to come up with an actual solution to the problem and reassure yourself that you've got yourself. Because all the what if questions, they're basically doubting your ability to handle it, right? You can kind of put this at the end of every one of those questions. What if I have to lay off all my beloved employees? What's that going to mean about me? How is this not going to work out for me?

How is it going to be bad for me? It's actually very negatively self-focused. It's basically telling yourself that you can't handle it, right? What if my adult children who've moved back home, can't find a job, keep living with me and I can't handle that? What if I can't stop eating my emotions and I gain five pounds every month until this ends, and I can't handle that, right? What if this ends up ruining my life and I can't handle that? It assumes that you're not going to be able to work out a solution, which of course you will, but in what I'm going to suggest to you, you will be actively focusing on figuring out what the solution is. Or if you don't need to figure out what the solution is right now, you at least are reminding yourself that you are a completely capable human being who is able to find a solution when required.

So rather than living in the future in a very problem focused way, which is what you're doing when you're thinking what if questions all the time, what you're doing is you're answering the question but starting it with even if. So just to back up for one second, when you think about the thought model, which I've taught you before, on the thought line, sometimes people put questions. So some people might say, well, I've taken these thoughts that I have and these questions that I have, I've put them in the thought line of the model and I have not had much success.

What if I expose my family and they get sick? And then you feel fear. And what do you do? So the way you approach a question in the thought line is you answer the question and you put the answer on the thought line. Okay?

So with all of these questions, you put the answer on there, but often the answer is something also self defeating. So instead of doing that, I want to suggest that you answer each of these questions, or every time your brain offers you a what if question, that you answer it with a sentence or statement that starts with even if, okay. What if I can't find another job? You reframe it to, even if I can't find another job, I will x, y, z. Right? What I would think is, even if I can't find another job as a physician, I know I can find a job doing something.

I know I can create a job for myself because I know that I can create value that fellow humans are willing to pay money for. I don't really need to worry about what I'm going to do if I can't find another job as a physician if I've gotten laid off because I know that no matter what, I can make some money. And maybe not as much as I was making as a physician, but while everything is sorting itself out, I for sure know that there's ways for me to make money. Even when we're social distancing, even when we can't be around one another.

There's so many options. There's so many different ways to provide value and get a financial exchange in return. Let's do some other examples with even if. What if this is our new normal, right? Even if this is our new normal, I can get used to this too. I can come up with solutions to this too. I can figure this out too. You know what I think of, it's always interesting when I see people who are resisting this being our new normal so much. Think of so many times in your life, in your training as a physician, how things were so different all of a sudden. Literally in medical school, every rotation you went on, totally new normal every month. Show up the first day. Don't know who you're working with. Don't know what the team is going to be like. You don't know if the residents and fellows and attendings are going to be supportive of you, if they're going to be jerks, if they're going to be mean, they're going to actually help you to learn something, let you do some stuff.

You don't even know where you're going half the time, right? Change like that was very normal for us at a certain time. Even in residency, every month we were transitioning to some different rotation, doing something different, working with different people, right? When you go into practice in pediatrics, there's so much seasonality to what we used to see and what all the pediatricians now are still seeing, right? There's so much, like it's RSV season. Okay, well this is our new normal, is RSV season. And then it's summer checkups. Okay. This is our new normal, it's summer checkup time. And what we're doing is we're creating a new version of normal where we don't leave our houses very often and we grocery shop once every two weeks and we figure out new ways to provide for our families, right?

Or we're in the hospital dressed head to toe in a whole bunch of gear to protect ourselves from contracting what the patients we're taking care of have, right? Even if that's the case, this is what I'm going to do. What if I get Covid and get really sick and die? Even if I get Covid and get really sick and die, my family knows that I love them. I have done an excellent job living my life up until this point. Have I done everything perfectly?

Absolutely not, but I definitely couldn't say that I had a waste of a life. I never knew that I had more time ahead of me that I was going to... I never had a guarantee that I would live a very long life. In fact, by a lot of standards, I've already lived a very long life. And I can just decide, if I get sick and die, then that was my time.

That was my time. My life was actually complete. All my family and friends and everyone I love, they had the exact right amount of time with me and they don't need more and I don't either. I always think to myself, well, if I'm dead, then I'm dead, so I'm gone, right? What really is painful for us is what we think our death will cause for those who love us, right? So thinking about our children, maybe our spouse, our family members, people like that. But when you look at all the people who grieve all around the world, every day, people are able to move through that.

People are able to feel the pain and grieve the loss and become resilient because of it and move forward. It is possible. Even if school doesn't go back soon, I can work on loving my kids, focusing on the relationship that I have, focusing on the things that I can control, which is pretty much only me and just love them even when they're doing things that I don't think that they should be doing, ie, not during their schoolwork, spending too much time on social media or video games or staying up too late or all of those things, right?

Even if my child doesn't get to walk for graduation, that's okay. They still get to have the pride in their accomplishment from having graduated. Literally being able to walk on a stage, wear a cap and gown and have someone give a boring speech for 20 minutes, it's not the end of the world to miss that. It really is okay. It's kind of like when people who are engaged are focused so much on the wedding, like this is the most important day of your life or the best day of your life. I often think to myself, you do not want that day to be the best day of your life because you have a whole lot more days coming up ahead. You want those days to be better, so you don't need to put so much pressure on one day, like that day is so important.

I mean, would you prefer to have this amazing wedding day? Would you prefer to have the opportunity to walk for graduation? Of course. But if that opportunity doesn't arise for whatever reason, even if that happens, you still can move forward and live a great life because you're in control of that. I remember the first time I ever really heard this kind of statement or read it, it was in a book by Jack Canfield. It's called The Success Principles and it's actually a very dense book, but it has some really, really, really good stuff in it. If you're looking for something right now to dig into, it's a good one, especially because each chapter is quite short so you can really take a little bit in and apply it and keep going. But what he talked about in one of those chapters was how whatever you're experiencing in your life right now, it's always a result that you have created.

And that what he encourages you to do is to take ownership of every single result, good and bad in your life. And he talks about how doing so is one of the most empowering things that you can do. Now, as I started doing that, I remember I actually think were out camping and I was reading this book and I was trying to get my little kids to sleep, which if you've ever camped, it's basically impossible because it's loud, it's bright, it's hot in the tent in the middle of the day. It's hard. And you want to be able to let the kids stay up late, because you want to be able to have the campfire and let them see the stars and all of that. So when they're not napping, you're just going, oh, this isn't going to be good. So I was sitting there with so much worry and fear. My child, he's not going to nap and then he's going to be so crabby, it's going to be so hard.

And I started to think to myself, well that is so interesting, right? Because if I find that he doesn't nap and he is cranky and doesn't sleep well or we have a hard time with him that evening, how is that my fault? Because I was thinking, well it's not, I'm not in charge of whether he sleeps or not. But you know what, I am in charge of whether I take him on a camping trip where it's much harder for him to sleep and take a nap. We could have just stayed home and he could have been in his temperature controlled room with the blackout shades down and the sound machine on and the house silent so he could have a really good nap. I was in control of taking him to a place where it's much harder for him to nap.

So this is not a blame situation. This is a situation where you're taking ownership for all of the results you're creating in your life, and literally good or bad, everything that you're having right now. Everything. If you're like, well, how did I create the result of my kids being home from school? Well, I mean, you decided to have children, right? That's how you created that result. So you can do this for every single result, good or bad that you have in your life right now and really take ownership of how you created it. I promise you it's so empowering, but you cannot blame yourself. There's no judgment in it. It's just saying, oh, this is how I created this. How did I create a job where I have to reuse all my protective equipment all the time? Well, I became a doctor who works in a field where I'm taking care of patients even when they're contagious and... Right?

You can go back to all those decisions. That decision when I decided to become an ER doctor is when I signed up for this task of taking care of people with less than proper PPE, in your opinion, right? So when you go to the even if statements, what you're doing is you're taking ownership of the results that you're creating, right? If my spouse and I can't figure out a way to get along while we're together so much, then I'm going to take ownership of that result and I'm going to figure out what we need to do. I'm going to get coaching on that. We're going to maybe see a relationship counselor together. Maybe we'll end up getting divorced. Who knows what's going to happen. But even if we can't figure it out, we can't figure out a way to get along, then we're going to come up with the next best solution. We're going to create a result that works for both of us.

So I want to encourage you to first of all, notice all the what ifs. Many of them are probably floating underneath the surface for you. They may not be super top of mind. If you're feeling this kind of low grade buzzing anxiety, if you're feeling this fear, check in. What is it that your brain is ruminating on? What does it looping on? What are the what if questions that you have in there that are creating the problem for you? And flip those around, answer the question and start it with even if. Even if x, y, z happens, this is how I'm going to respond to it. I always, for myself, always come back to, even if all the bad things happen, I know I've got me. I know that I can always provide for myself because I'm a smart person. I'm willing to work hard and do what it takes.

And if I believe that about myself, then I don't need to worry about all of these things. All of the different things that could happen, I will figure them out when they come to fruition. I don't need to spend so much time worrying about them today, robbing myself of the time that I do have today because I'm living in the future, just spinning and spinning and spinning on the problem. So find the solutions and start with even if.

Have a wonderful, wonderful week. I'll be back next week with more for you.

Have a great one. I'll talk to you soon. Bye.