



# WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Well, hey there, my friend. I just wanted to come in really quickly before the episode starts to let you know that I recorded this episode a few weeks ago. Every now and then, I get my act together and I actually pre-record a few episodes so that I am a little bit ahead, so I have a little bit of a cushion, a little bit of extra space there in my life with these podcast episodes. And I wanted to let you know that I listened back to the episode and it's actually super applicable and helpful, and I want to make sure that I get it to you, but I did want to mention that I recorded it right before the kind of increase in police brutality and racial equity discussions happening in the U.S.

So you'll notice that I don't mention anything about that because that wasn't sort of at the height of the discussion at that moment. Now, I do want to let you know that if that is something that you're going through right now or that's something that you're focusing on, you can still listen to this episode through that lens, and everything that I teach you totally applies to that situation, as well. In fact, it applies to any situation—I just used COVID and the pandemic as the main lens through which to explain what I want to explain to you, and my experience of having gone through that or still in the process of going through that.

So I just wanted to let you know, that's why I don't mention it, and that's why it's not discussed, but this is still totally applicable, so please listen with the intention to find whatever you're struggling with right now in the words that I offer to you.

And with that, I'll give you episode 179.

Well, hey there, my friend. How are you? Welcome back to the podcast. If you're new here, I'm so glad to have you here. I think this is going to be a really good episode that's going to help so many people. I always love to share the work that I am doing and when I've come through something that I've been struggling with. I know that so many of you are struggling with the same thing and, soon as I have it sorted, I, of course, always want to be able to share that with you as well. That's what we're going to be talking about today.

Okay, let's start talking about letting it be hard and letting it be easy. The last couple weeks, for sure, I have been in a funk. It was real interesting. I have not had many times in my life where I was committed like that where I was just feeling funky, Funky McFunkerson. I was just feeling a bit low, down in the dumps, kind of blue. I'm not somebody who's actually had a history of depression ever in my life.

As I was going through this, I was thinking, "If I went and saw somebody, what would they say?" I don't think I would have been diagnosed with anything like that. I think I would have been probably diagnosed with an adjustment reaction. That would be my guess as to what it really was that was going on.

As I was going through it, I just kept telling myself, "Just let it be hard. Let it be hard." Here was the thing. Often, when I felt like that in the past, there was a very specific it. I knew what it was. I knew why I was feeling that way. I can't say that, in this specific situation, there was something that I could really pinpoint besides the fact that all of our lives are totally different. I think that it was about two months into the whole thing of the pandemic and our lives being totally different.

I hypothesized that maybe, those first number of weeks, I was just in rah-rah-it's-going-to-be-okay mode and not really letting myself be with the sadness and the disappointment and the discomfort of what had really changed. I think maybe that was part of it, and so it was just surfacing at that point, especially as it started to really sink in that this was not going to be changing anytime soon and our whole lives are just very different. The point is that I just couldn't figure out why it was in this funk. I did not know what the thoughts were. All I knew was I just didn't feel great, did not feel good at all, was definitely just feeling like I was blue and in a funk.

Here's why I asked myself to let it be hard. When you let it be hard, what you're doing is you're opening yourself up to a new way of thinking. What you're doing is you're readying your brain for an alternative when the alternative presents itself. Day after day, I was offering myself the opportunity to think about things in a different way, and nothing felt believable. Nothing stuck, and that's normal and okay. Okay? Letting it be hard means that you're allowing your feelings whatever you're feeling. You're not resisting them. You're not thinking you should be feeling differently.

It's very easy, when you're in a funk like this, to start thinking that you shouldn't be in a funk, that you should cheer yourself up, that you have nothing to complain about, that people have it so much worse than you, or maybe you think you really do have a lot to complain about and it's a very sorry, sad state of affairs in your life and really buying in to there is a problem and things should be different than they are. That's resisting what you're actually feeling. When I would remind myself, "Let it be hard," I was saying, "Just allow the hardness. Just allow the funk. Let it be the way that I'm feeling."

I've taught you before on this podcast that I believe that, if you're doing it right as a human being, you're going to be experiencing approximately 50% positive emotions and 50% negative emotions. Now, many of us try to argue that we would like little higher on the positive side and a little lower on the negative side, but when you even it all out, it ends up being about 50/50. What's so good about believing that is that, when we are not feeling good, when we are not feeling a positive emotion, we're not thinking that something's going wrong and that we should be feeling something different.

Now, here's what's interesting. I was feeling negative emotion most of the time. We did watch a Jerry Seinfeld comedy special on, I think it was on Netflix, and definitely laughed my head off, so I had moments where I had some pleasure in my life. It wasn't like that I couldn't feel any pleasure at all, but then I'd just come right back to that funk again.

When you are believing that 50% of the time is going to be negative emotion, no one ever said that it's going to be 50/50 even split every single day. In fact, I've had many days where I've really not experienced a lot of negative emotion, and so then the flip side for having days like that is that you're going to have days where most of your emotions are negative and you don't have that many positive ones. Knowing that, I just moved into the funk, "It's okay. Here I am. I'm in the funk. I don't know what it is, but I'm just allowing this to be here. I'm not resisting it. I'm willing to stay with myself for as long as it takes until I work through this."

When you're not resisting and you're just allowing the feelings, what you're doing is you're opening yourself up to potential solutions when they arise. Now, for me, I didn't feel like I really got any solutions at all for about two weeks, but when they presented themselves, I was ready. I was there. I was waiting like, "Oh, here it is." I remember just thinking like, "Oh, my gosh. This is the light, I think. This is the path. I'm going to follow this." It was a new opportunity, a new way of thinking, and it wasn't changing my circumstances.

It wasn't like, all of a sudden, the stores were open or something. It wasn't anything different. If anything, things maybe changed in a way that was good and bad, meaning my husband went back to work full time, which meant that I had more responsibilities at home with the kids being home. What it was was a new opportunity for how to think, so I didn't have to change the circumstances to have a different feeling. All I had to do was change my thinking. When I was willing to be open to that when it presented itself, I was there to be able to take it.

When you're letting it be hard, what you want to be doing is watching your thoughts. What are your thoughts that are making it hard? I asked myself, "What am I thinking?" Sometimes I really didn't know what was making it so hard, but I didn't just give up. I didn't get mad at myself that I couldn't identify with it. What you want to do is stay curious. You want to stay inquisitive, and you want to stay aware. There's the experience of your life and then there's you noticing what your experience of your life is. It's really important. Okay? You're working on understanding what your thoughts are. You may not be able to change your thoughts, and that's totally okay. You just want to understand what the thoughts are. Then when you know what the thoughts are, then when you're ready to change them, you can.

I noticed how I was very committed to a lot of negative, thinking about a lot of different circumstances in my life. I was really committed to going to a victim mentality and a scarcity mindset, which are always my two patterns. I always tell my clients, "It's so great when you figure out what your main pattern or main couple patterns are, because if you're ever struggling, it's probably one of those things. It usually comes back to that." For me, it's victim mentality and scarcity and, of course, both of those were present. I could see how I was creating a victim mentality for myself, how I was creating villains with the way that I was thinking, which made me the victim.

I knew how disempowering it was. I could see it, but I was not, at the time, able to take my power back and no longer think about them as the villain and those situations as the villain and stop thinking of myself as the victim, but I could see what was happening. At least I understood what was going on. I was letting it be hard. I wasn't forcing myself to change. I wasn't desperate to find a new thought. I was just allowing it to be hard, understanding why it was hard, and just staying with myself while it was hard.

When you let it be hard and you stay with yourself while it's hard but you're still taking responsibility for why it's hard, that's when you're open to a new way of thinking. Okay? It's not because of what's happening around you that it's so hard. It's because of the way that you're thinking. When you think that it shouldn't be hard and you're resisting the hard, right, you're thinking, "Something's going wrong here," that's when you start to try to neutralize your emotions. That's when you start eating and drinking. You start thinking, "There's a problem here. I shouldn't be feeling so bad. Maybe a snack will help. Maybe having a glass of wine will help. Maybe watching a whole bunch of TV will help. Maybe shopping for some stuff will help." You're just doing everything you can to avoid feeling it.

Then what you're doing is you're drowning in it. You're grabbing onto what's hard and you're not allowing any kind of opportunity for progress out of it. It's so much harder to find your way out when you're resisting that hardness and then trying to escape it with all the things, right, not connecting with people, isolating yourself, all of those things.

If you're on the front lines taking care of patients right now, let it be hard. Of course, it's hard. Of course, it's scary. Of course, you wish it were different, and that's okay. Just let it be hard. Right now, what you're being called to do is a job that is hard. There's other times when you've had an excellent experience. There's 50/50 in your job as well. Just let it be hard right now.

Now, are there other ways of thinking about working on the front lines that don't make it such a hard experience? Of course there is, but if you're not ready to take those on, if they don't feel true and believable to you, then you're just going to be committed to that hardness. If you think you shouldn't be having the experience that you're having, that's when you start really having a hard time, freaking out, eating and drinking all the things, really feeling sorry for yourself, all the self-pity. That is much, much harder to get out of, so let it be hard. Of course, it's hard.

If you're grieving right now, for whatever reason, let it be hard. It's hard right now, and that's okay. Nothing is going wrong when part of your human life is that you're going through a hard time right now. It's all about being willing to feel what you're feeling and then, gently and carefully and with kindness and love for yourself, noticing what you're thinking, how you're interpreting your life so that you can understand what's creating that feeling and, when you're ready to change it, you can.

That's what happened. I was actually listening to something totally random and, as typically happens with my brain, I'll start listening to one thing and then my brain goes to the next thing. It was like there was something that I heard, and that was like flipping a switch. I wrote it down, and then I heard something else, and I wrote that down. Right away, my brain started going, "What if this wasn't like this at all? What if I didn't have to think about it like that? What if all these things I'm committed to thinking are not even true? What if it doesn't have to be that way?"

All of a sudden, I started seeing possibility. I started seeing a new opportunity, another way of thinking about it. I could feel it. It literally felt like, "Oh, my gosh. I'm coming out of this. There's the light. I'm coming out of the tunnel, I think. It's happening." It's so great because I was willing to keep traveling down that tunnel. When you are so committed to buffering and trying to avoid feeling your feelings, you're just basically building like setting up camp within the tunnel, so much harder to get out of it. If you're willing to just keep plodding along and it's another dark day in the tunnel, you know that, eventually, you're going to get there.

We do just want to add that, if you have a history of mental health issues, if you feel like this is something that's more significant than what I'm talking about like an actual major depressive episode or something like that, you're going to want to, of course, seek some professional help for that. What I'm talking about is something where you know it's not to that level but yet you're still struggling.

Now let's talk about letting it be easy because it's interesting. You'd think letting it be easy would be so easy, but often, it isn't. We often resist things being easy as well. Here's an example.

Like so many, like everybody else, my kids came home and we were doing school from home. The first couple weeks when they were home, I felt like I needed to check everything and to make sure that they understood that this thing wasn't quite right, and checking all the math, and all those things. Well, as time progressed, the kids took matters into their own hands. My two little kids, it's so cute, they were taking this cash register, toy cash register that we have that actually has a calculator in it, and they were using the calculator on that to check their own math, and I started just letting them check their own math.

I would say, "Oh, did you check your math?" "Yes." "Okay." Then I'd think, "Oh, my gosh. I should really go through it again. What if they're not getting it? What if they don't understand? I should look. Are their teachers even going to look at this stuff?" Same thing for all their writing, "Should I be looking at that? Should I be sending this stuff in? Do the teachers want to know it?" What I realized was it was getting easier because the kids were becoming more independent and I was resisting letting it be easy.

What I decided for myself because, in general, my kids don't struggle in school and they're doing fine with their work, that I was just going to let it be easy and let them take on that independence. It actually goes along very well with the Montessori education that they're getting anyway. Knowing that, if they don't get the difference between there, their and they're at first and second grade, then they're not doing any worse than most adults. Right? It's completely fine. They will learn it at some point in their lives. If they make a couple math errors, it's not going to be a big deal. Just let it be easy. Let them do that work.

Here's another example. We've had some nice weather. It's springtime, right, and so there's a beautiful day outside, and the spring flowers are blooming, and the birds are chirping, and it's just so beautiful. This is why we live in Wisconsin, for those beautiful days and that great summer that we have. It's so easy to not stop and enjoy it, to not let something good like that into your life, to basically have the shades drawn on what's good in the world, being so committed to things being hard that you won't even let your brain show you what is nice, something as simple and pure as a beautiful day in nature.

Letting it be easy means allowing yourself to stop for a moment or maybe a little longer, maybe taking a walk, maybe sitting outside, maybe just going outside and getting five breaths of fresh air before you go back inside. It means looking out the window and just admiring what's beautiful out there. Let that part of your life be easy. Give yourself a moment to let it be easy.

Here's another example where I've been working on letting it be easy. My husband, like I mentioned, has been going back to work. He's not at full capacity, but they're doing their best to have as full of a clinic and OR times as they can. What that means is the kids are still home. The kids are still responsible for multiple Zoom calls a day and all their schoolwork, and I'm still responsible for doing all of my work as well. I was getting used to having him home and helping me with those things and taking full responsibility for making sure that a lot of things with the kids were getting done.

Of course, I was starting to feel sorry for myself and started to think about all the ways that this is going to be a problem. It's going to be hard, and I don't know how to do it. When I think in that way, that it's going to be hard, what I do is I block my brain from seeing any solutions. When I let it be easy, I find solutions for how to get my work done and how to let them get their work done, and everybody gets what they need in their day, and it all works out.

I had to remind myself, "Just what if it were easy? How could I make this easy?" What that meant is, of course, that I had to change what I was doing. Of course, I had gotten into the habit of sleeping in longer, taking my sweet time, working out downstairs, showering up and then wanting to get started with work when the kids were already practically done with their day and then expecting them to be quiet and not doing anything. Of course, that doesn't work, so I started getting up early again before they did, right away working out, getting showered, getting ready to go. They sit down to do their schoolwork. I sit down and do my work as well. It's worked so much better.

What this means is, when you're letting it be easy, it means that you're allowing the good. You don't have to be committed to things being hard or bad. When you're committed to them being hard, you will not see a solution. Letting it be easy means letting your brain go to the solutions place. You stop resisting what is, which is the reality of the situation, so you can get to work finding a solution to the obstacle or the problem.

Once I allowed myself to let it be easy to be home with the kids, then I could figure out, "How am I going to do this?" or at least something that I could try. Who's to say that I won't need to tweak things and have to change things, but at least I'm moving forward instead of just being so committed to my terrible thinking that I unintentionally create a terrible experience of this.

Of course, then my brain was like, "Well, at least they have something to do right now. What are we going to do in the summer? If they don't open the borders and I can't send them off to Canada to my husband's family's cabin with their grandparents, how am I going to ever get anything done?" Well, I just decided, "Well, what if it were easy to get everything I needed to get done when I needed to get it done? Then what? How would I approach my day?" Of course, all the solutions came to me.

I want to encourage you to think about where things are hard in your life and let them be hard so that you can move through the tunnel and find that light and come out of it on the other end. How long the tunnel lasts, we don't know, but the more that you're willing to stay with yourself in the difficult times, the better it's going to be when you move your way out of it.

It's so sweet to experience those positive emotions again. When you resist them, you're committing yourself to more negative emotions. If you gain a whole bunch of weight and you just waste all your days doing things that aren't actually improving you or pushing you forward in your life or evolving you or growing you as a human, what you're doing is you're committing to the same results that you already don't like. You're not allowing yourself to come up with the ways to create new results.

Have a wonderful, wonderful week. Remember, let it be hard if it's hard right now. Let it be easy if it's easy right now.

I'll talk to you next time. Take care. Bye.