



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Well, hello there my friend, how are you today? 299 episodes. I've got something really fun scheduled for next week, I can't wait to do this. This is going to be a really, really good one.

But in the meantime, today, I've got a really good episode for you as well. Today, I want to talk about how to celebrate success. And so, those who were in my book ambassador's group, in our circle group that we closed down a couple weeks ago, they know I was talking about this in a live stream that I did in there, about this idea of how to celebrate our successes.

And I'm not exaggerating when I say that I just recently was coached on this, by my coach, like literally feeling unsure about how to be in a place of feeling happy for myself, impressed with myself, proud of myself, in celebration of myself. And it was just a really fascinating little wormhole we went down, that of course, comes back to old ways of thinking about myself.

And I think that so many of us struggle with this, and I think it's a really big reason why people struggle with weight loss. So, I want to address this, through the framework of me having... as I'm recording this, yesterday was the pub date, the date that my book was live for purchase. And so, I'm just fresh in doing this work. And I want to share that with you as well, because I know when I was losing weight, I could have really learned a lot from this kind of work. I really wish that I'd had some of it. And so, I want to make sure that you get that as well.

So, you may have heard the term, the "arrival fallacy." If you've heard of that, it's a term that people use, that they think that once I get or accomplish X, Y, Z thing, I will have arrived. Once I arrive at that goal or at that promotion, or arrive at having the family that I thought I was going to have, or the home that's always been my dream, that something miraculous is going to happen. The skies will open, confetti will fall on you. You will never feel a negative emotion ever again. Like it's just going to feel so, so, so, so good.

And it's a fallacy for a reason, because we get there, it does not feel the way we thought it would feel. Not that it necessarily feels bad, although it could. It just doesn't usually feel as good as we thought it would feel.

And then, what we often think is like, “Oh, I was confused. I thought that accomplishing that thing was going to be enough for me to feel so good about myself and feel like I have what I need and want and that my life is great. So, since it doesn't feel that way, it must mean that I need to accomplish something else.”

And so, what people who struggle with the arrival fallacy (and I'm raising my hand as totally one of them), what we do is we just hop from goal, to goal, to goal, to goal. And so, I think so many doctors go through this in particular. I think a lot of high accomplishing, people who are very productive, who just feel like they're contributing to the world, I think that a lot of people struggle with this. But doctors in particular, because our path to becoming doctors is so laid out as well. It's very easy.

I remember myself just thinking like, “Okay, once I get into medical school, like that's going to be the thing.” And then like, “Oh, once I just get through intern year, like that's going to be the thing. Okay, well, no. So, yes, some things are better and also, some things are harder and more scary and more difficult.”

“So, okay. Now, it's just like once I get to the final year (whether it's your chief year or whatever, it is your final year in your training) that's going to be the thing. Oh, well, okay maybe that's not quite as good. Once I get a job or get into fellowship or whatever the next steps are for you. Like once I get that. And then once I'm making enough money that I can do this thing, like that's going to be the thing.”

And we just are constantly dangling that carrot and never feeling that good or as good as we want to feel or think will feel when we get there. And I think this really can be a recipe for burnout. Like we can really start to feel like after years and years of doing this nothing we do is ever enough, so what's the point?

Like if I'm just going to feel bad, if I'm just going to feel miserable, if I'm just going to feel like I'm always coming up short or it's never sufficient, whatever I do, then why am I even trying to do any of this stuff? And it can really take many of us down a really dark and scary path.

For others, they just feel this just overall, just blah. This stagnation in life, this feeling like you just don't really know what your next direction is, because you're kind of onto yourself. Like it doesn't matter what you do, you never get to feel good. So, then what are you supposed to do then?

Like it can be this sort of relatively midlife kind of period of time where you just are like I just want to opt out, but I don't even know what else to do. And that's what can happen with that arrival fallacy.

So, I think to a certain extent, all of us can probably identify a time, or examples where this has been the case. I certainly can. Like one that pops out for me, is graduating from medical school. In my mind, this was going to be amazing. And not only was it about the actual day, but I have to say, it was like how I wanted other people to treat me, important people in my life, how they responded to it.

It was like I couldn't really allow myself to feel really proud of myself or impressed with myself or to really celebrate, unless other people were gushing over how great the accomplishment was. And when other people weren't gushing about it, then to me, the day kind of fell flat. It was kind of like, "It wasn't as good as I thought it would be."

So, it turns out maybe now I have to actually be practicing as a doctor, not just getting the diploma, that's not enough. And I even remember someone very important to me, very close person to me saying when I was graduating high school, like very much downplaying it; "I don't know that this is really that big of a deal. Graduating high school, that should be like the very bottom of the expectations for yourself." Like something very much like that.

And I remember just adopting that, because like I said, that was a very influential person for me at that time in my life. And then thinking like, "Oh yeah, well, going to college, that's the thing."

But then I also remember my friends who were also high achievers, like people who were top in the class, like going around after graduation or even like before, when we were waiting for the ceremony, giving hugs and, "Congratulations," and "Great job."

And thinking to myself, "Well, you're obviously headed off to college and to do amazing, great things." I wasn't saying it to them, but in my mind thinking like oh, weird that they're so proud of themselves for this accomplishment. Like of course, they were going to graduate.

And now I realize like, no, they were just celebrating. Like it's just a milestone. There's nothing wrong with getting excited about that milestone. I talked about that just a few episodes ago and how to reach big goals.

Like that is an okay thing to do. We don't have to constantly downplay those things as like it's not good enough. Or like it's the least that I could have accomplished or whatever. Like when we do that, we're essentially putting ourselves down. That's like not a kind thing, for us to be thinking.

And of course, like I said, at 18-years-old, I was just taking things at face value and not actually probably giving proper consideration to other people's thoughts as they were offered to me. So, that's fine.

See, now, in my mid-forties, I get to reexamine all of this stuff. And so, often we think too, like, "If I could just have a baby," and then you have the baby. This actually has just been happening to someone that I know, who you have the baby and you're like, "Okay, great, I have the baby." And then it's like, "Oh, but this is really hard, and this isn't exactly what I thought it was going to be." And, "Oh my gosh, like when do we get to the good part?"

It's like constantly like, "Oh, once the child is sleeping through the night, once they can talk, once they can move, once they can, blah, blah, blah." Like it's that constant idea that what's coming in the future is better than what is today and what really the truth is, what's coming in the future gets to be better and better, but also, will have its own new challenges.

So, we don't have to look at it like nothing's ever going to get better. I love thinking that life just gets better and better and better. That's a great thought for me. I feel very energized and very excited and it feels very motivating to me.

But my sub-belief beneath that is not, "Oh, well, I'll get there. And I'll only feel amazing all of the time and there won't be any new challenges or issues or struggles that I need to work through."

So, think about that particularly when it comes to weight loss. Like how often do we lose the first 10 pounds, and maybe we share that with someone and they're like, "Good job. That is amazing. Good for you." And we're like, "Ugh, but I still have so much more to go."

I hear that a lot. I hear that a lot. Like we are just downplaying that success. Like both may be true, but why are we constantly looking at what more there is to do? Why can't we just stop and go, "Yeah, you know what, I lost 10 pounds and that's awesome. And I'm awesome for doing this for myself, for sticking with myself as I go through this process, for not giving up on myself, for figuring out what to do when mistakes are made" — when there's failures and things don't work out the way we think they are going to. "Picking myself back up, brushing off my knees, figuring out what the next best steps are and continuing forward." That is awesome. That really is awesome.

So, let's talk more about why we're so reluctant to celebrate ourselves. I think for a lot of us, this can really come from the messaging we received as a child. Like if you came from people who very much valued humility, being very, very humble, being very modest, not overly inflating yourself, being very careful that your ego doesn't get out of check — things like that can send that message inadvertently.

I just want to say that, I think that when that messaging is offered to us, particularly when we're younger, it's all coming from a good place. I don't think people are intending to harm us with that thinking.

I think particularly for certain groups, keeping yourself on the smaller side, making sure that things don't get too big is a way of ensuring safety. And I don't want to minimize that. It's important to recognize, yeah, that could make a lot of sense for certain people. Or people who've lived through different things than we've lived through, will see that being a different way might result in things that are really not good and unsafe.

And so, we can recognize that that messaging was coming with really good intentions, but maybe with our brains, and the state of development they were in at the time that we received this messaging, that maybe we interpreted it in a different way. Or it could be that just the way we're living our life, the time we're living in, the environment that we're living in no longer is the same. And maybe it's actually possibly a bit detrimental to us. So, I just want to mention that.

So, when it comes to humility, it's a really interesting thing. People like talk about, "Oh, and they're so humble, and they're so humble." But when you really think about humility, like in some ways, I don't know that it's always so great. It's not saying, I'm just as good as everybody else. I'm not better than them. And I'm not worse than them. It's kind of indicating that you're not as good as other people. It really, really kind of is.

And the fear is, if we think too highly of ourselves, and if we're too proud of ourselves and we celebrate too much, that it's like we're going to hit this peak. And then what comes after the peak? It comes the downward slide afterward. And that leads us possibly into arrogance, into being rude, into just really becoming that kind of person that we don't want to become. That person who is demanding and unkind, and without empathy and without sympathy, and just becomes like a bad person.

So, we don't want to get to the place where we are overvaluing ourselves compared to others. And out of prevention, like we don't want that to happen. Sometimes we swing that pendulum a little bit too far, the other direction where we're like, "Well, it might be like a razor thin line if I think I'm as good as everybody else. So, just to play it safe, I'll just think that I'm not as good as everybody else. Then, I don't have to worry about myself getting into that place of arrogance, of putting down other people and things like that."

When, of course, that doesn't serve us or anybody else. How does it help anybody else, for us to think that we're not as good as them, or somehow lesser than them? Of course, that doesn't help us and it doesn't help them.

And so, like for me I know, just with my upbringing and all my experiences, it's something that I really have to work on, recognizing that it's okay to think positively about myself. That people who are really concerned about becoming an arrogant jerk, generally are not the people who are going to become arrogant jerks.

It's kind of like I've heard people say, "If you're asking yourself if you're a narcissist, then you're not a narcissist because narcissists are not asking themselves that question." If you're thinking, "Shoot, am I getting really arrogant?" Probably the answer is no. Or if you are, you've just dipped the tippy, tippy tip of your toe in that water, and you're catching yourself really, really early.

I think it's just really important to think about this, because really ultimately, when we will not let ourselves celebrate our successes, what we're saying is that there's a limit to how positive we'll allow our thoughts about ourselves to be. I get to think positive things about myself to a certain extent, but it can't be too much, like there's a limit there.

And particularly, that limit becomes more obvious when I have accomplished something like losing some weight or whatever the things are, like you went through an event and were able to really follow your plan the way you wanted to, or got a promotion at work, or got your grant accepted or whatever it is.

Like we think that there's safety in not allowing ourselves to think more positive thoughts, more highly positive thoughts. And I just want to say that this is something to consider. This is something to spend a little time on; what is the bad thing that I think might happen, if I allow myself to celebrate the success?

For so many of us, it feels really kind of uncomfortable. I think I've shared on this podcast before, but in case I haven't, like I've never loved having attention on myself. Like for years, my mother can tell you, for years at my birthday parties, when the candles on the cake were lit and everybody was singing, I would cry, cry, and cry and cry.

And I remember being old enough, like I think one of the years, where it was maybe like the last time or like the first time I didn't cry, I remember feeling like don't cry, but feeling like it just happening, like my eyes burning and like having to hold those tears back. There was something about it that made me so uncomfortable.

Like people being happy for me, people celebrating me. I didn't want to get married in a church or with a big ceremony where people would all be looking at me. Instead, I got married on the beach with just immediate family members. And even that felt a little awkward and weird.

So, maybe you don't have it to the same extent, but how can we move into just receiving the positive well-meaning, well-intentioned thoughts from other people, and then allow ourselves to think those thoughts about ourselves as well.

That was basically my task for myself yesterday, to really enjoy myself as all these well wishes and messages came in, and people sent me flowers and things like that, to just really enjoy it, to be thankful for them, to be thankful to myself, to just be in that state of receiving from others and from myself. So, that it really does feel good, so I can let myself enjoy this.

I can't tell you how many people who've published books before me, who've reached out and said, "Oh my God, I was so burned out after and I felt so awful after." Last night I went to bed and I thought to myself, "You know what, at least right now, like I am not feeling burned out. I'm feeling really, really good about this."

Feeling like I'm just really proud of myself for working through this in the way that I have, for getting the help that I need, of course, for my team, for supporting me. Because they have been really carrying so much load and so appreciative of them, of course. I'm going to tell everybody who will listen about how great they are, which is also interesting. We're so quick to celebrate others, but when it comes to celebrating ourselves, we're like, "Oh no, I don't need that." Sound familiar?

So, anyway, I want to suggest to you that whatever goal you're working on right now, what is kind of the micro version of that? What is the goal that you've set for yourself for maybe this week or this month, or another short-term, kind of a goal, and start thinking about how you can really celebrate getting there.

The other thing I want to just mention is often when we think about celebration, we think it involves spending money and that can be a way ... we're like, "Well, now, I don't overeat and I don't go in these fancy restaurants and roll myself out of there, because I overate and overdrunk. So, like, how do you celebrate?"

What I want to offer is that celebration isn't just an action, it's not just doing. Of course, you can do those things like go shopping for new clothes or whatever; whatever you love to do, treat yourself to a facial — whatever you like to do, amazing. But that's just one way to celebrate.

And I want to encourage you to celebrate by allowing yourself to think really loving, supportive and celebration-y kinds of thoughts, letting yourself feel the emotions that come from that. You don't have to necessarily do anything. You just get to sit and be with yourself in that expansive feeling of celebration of feeling pride for what you've accomplished, for just loving on yourself for doing this thing that you didn't have to do, but you set your mind to doing. Can you just be with that?

I think that's really important too, because it's important that we celebrate the little successes and sometimes we're busy. We don't have time for a facial. You know what I mean? Or get our nails done or whatever the thing is, you don't really feel like going shopping or something like that, but it doesn't matter. None of that matters when you can celebrate just by being you, in your body, in your experience of your life as you. That's what's most important.

So, think about how you can maybe increase those celebratory thoughts and increase the celebratory feelings, even just a couple percent. If it makes you feel really uncomfortable to really go there, then maybe just a little bit more, what could that look like?

Maybe it's even just journaling on why you're so happy. Fill one page with why you're so happy that you stuck with yourself and that you're at this point that you've gotten to. That can be enough too. We have to learn how to celebrate our successes.

And that can even look like, "I've been maintaining my weight for three years and I went on this vacation and ended up being very, very stressful, and I still took excellent care of myself. I'm going to celebrate that success." Because even in maintenance, we've got to still have some of those touch points for ourselves. Like look at this, "In the past, I would've totally over eaten and I didn't, go-me, so, so happy for myself."

We are allowed to do that. It doesn't help us or anybody else when we dampen that, when we don't let ourselves feel it. If anything, it just keeps us in that arrival fallacy until we burn out and go what the, you know what.

Okay, my friend, thank you so much for your attention. I celebrate you today and I celebrate myself. We have to be able to do that.

Alright, my friend, have a great, wonderful rest of your week. Thank you for listening. I appreciate you so much. You are a super valuable, amazing human being to me, even if we've never met, even if we've never interacted. I just feel called to tell you that today, I really do not take your attention lightly and I really appreciate you being here. And I hope that in some way, this message today makes a difference in your life.

So, thank you so much, and I'll talk to you next time. Episode 300, here we come.