

7. Uplevel Your Awareness - with Dr. Arpita Gupta DePalma



FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

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Michael: Hey everyone, and welcome to another episode of Doctors Living Deliberately. We're so happy to have you here with us today, and I wanna of course, welcome my fantastic co-host as always. Hi, Arpita.

Arpita: Hey, Michael. That's so kind. Awesome to be doing this with you. You know, we always have so much fun.

Michael: So much fun and I'm super excited that we just get to have a conversation today, just the two of us. And I thought that we could talk about just the fact that you don't know what you don't know. Because this was I think one of the most pivotal parts of my transformation when I started to realize the impact of coaching. And really a lot of that just came from the fact that I didn't know all of the things I didn't know. And that's, I mean, it seems so obvious now because our world is just, is our experiences. And if you haven't taught yourself to think outside of that, there's so much that you're missing, and I know this is something that you really enjoy talking about. Like what's been your experience with this.

Arpita: Yeah. I think I love talking about it because I was so clueless. You know, we're so confident that we know what we're talking about. We know what we're doing. I mean, we're physicians. We've worked really hard, and so we're the experts. And so I think what I recognized over time is that I didn't even realize how much I wasn't capturing and being, quite frankly, aware of. And when I started the process of interacting with coaches and learning what this was about, I started recognizing how my awareness was really lacking with regards to how I was choosing, that's the optimal word, choosing to think about things. And that's kind of what really was a major, like bomb drop for me in terms of how I was starting to learn and grow in this. And that's why I think it's so powerful and why I enjoy speaking about it so much with people because I really do feel like this is the introductory thing. You have to be aware of what you're thinking first in order to be able to say, Hey, I might wanna think about this differently. How do I start doing that? So yeah, that's kind of why I love talking about it. But you know, you've gone through the process with me as well, and so I think we've all had this transformation. For me, the biggest part of it was just not really recognizing that I wasn't in control there, in any way.

Michael: Yeah. So do you have specific techniques that you currently use that help to kind of make you more aware of what's going on? Like how have you incorporated this into your life and yeah, what does that look like?

Arpita: So I think the biggest thing is just first recognizing that we have a choice to start looking at the things that happen in our world, to us, in a different way, right? We think that things are happening to us and that's what's making us be angry or upset or frustrated or happy, whatever, and ultimately it's not happening to us. Those are the facts or the neutral circumstances. How, like, how we like to refer

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to 'em that are happening to us in our life. What we can be more mindful of is starting to ask ourselves what are we thinking about those neutral circumstances or facts? And that's the part that's really hard initially because, and that's the part I was referring to, that I was completely out of my control, or I thought was completely outta my control. Because we become so set in our patterns and behaviors that we don't even pause for a minute to notice, that, that's where we do have control.

So one of the main tools that I use is the first morning thought, and I keep a log on my phone. I wake up in the morning before I get out of bed. As soon as my eyes opened, I've made it a practice to ask myself, what am I thinking? And what we can do when we do this is be aware of what thought is crossing through our mind and then decide and recognize if it's actually serving us, because that sets the tone for us during the day, right? So if you wake up thinking, oh, I've got, and I caught myself doing this, I've got so much to do. I dunno how I'm gonna get all done. I don't wanna do all this. That was becoming a pattern for me every morning, even on the weekends, even when I really didn't have that much to do. And that kind of puts this heavy burden on you. It makes you feel kind of just stressed or overwhelmed or whatever. And if you take a minute to like look at that first morning thought and say, Hey, is this really true? Or even if this is true, do I really wanna think this way? What's a different way I can think about it? It does change your mood a little. It shifts in, a just even a slight bit to help you be a little bit more productive and intentional during the day with how you wanna show up. So that's one of my favorite tools to use.

Another one we talk about, I think is, it's called a thought download. And that's essentially where we're just journaling. And what I've found is, you know, I catch myself doing this. I'm not gonna journal. I'm just gonna think, really sit here and just think about what I'm thinking. And it just doesn't get as deep when you do it that way. So when we sit down and like really write down what are we thinking, or even creating prompts for ourselves, like why did I get so upset with this situation? Or what am I making this situation mean about me? And you journal about it, it really helps to get to a deeper level of thinking, I find. So that's one of the other tools that I like to use in terms of actual tools.

But I might have gotten a little bit ahead of myself with the whole process of it. But you know, the other little piece I would say is just asking yourself throughout the day, what am I thinking? Especially when you find yourself kind of in a situation where you might feel activated or angry or, you know, just upset for any reason. Just step back and, and maybe putting your hand on your chest and breathing in for a minute and asking yourself, what am I thinking right now? You'll kind of discover a lot there.

Michael: Yeah. And so I think you've brought up an interesting point in here, right? So you are talking about awareness of your thinking, but I think before you can even get to awareness of what

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you're thinking, you have to kind of tune in to awareness of what you're feeling. So what, I wanna highlight what you were just saying is, so you wake up in the morning feeling overwhelmed, which I think we're talking to professionals here and it's very common to wake up in the morning and just feel like, oh my gosh, there's so much to do today. And that can leave you just, you know, getting outta bed already feeling overwhelmed. So I think tuning into the overwhelm and just realizing, cause I think so many of us, we just, you know, hit the ground running. We don't even give ourselves an opportunity to understand and to recognize that we're starting the day in overwhelm. So if you can raise your awareness to know, okay, I'm waking up, I don't feel great this morning and then starting with a simple question of why. Right? And then so you were just saying, okay, so why am I feeling overwhelmed? Oh, well there's all this stuff that I have to do today and there's no way I can get it all done. And once you can start to recognize like, oh, this is why I feel overwhelmed. Okay, so is that even true? There's so much stuff I have to do today that I can't get it all done.

Number one, is that even true? Can I not get all of this stuff done today? And if that is true, does it really all need to be done today, right? And so just taking yourself through the thoughts of like, okay, you can actually start to reason out for yourself like, okay, like, do I really need to be getting out of bed feeling this way? Like, maybe not, and maybe there's a better way. And so awareness comes in in different flavors and different layers, and I think it's just starting to recognize it. And I will be the first to admit, I am not perfect at this. Right? Like, this is, like, raising your awareness is amazing, but it's really difficult to do all the time. But starting to practice, it's, it's just like exercise, right? You're not going to run into the gym and just, you know, all of a sudden be a power lifter. But it all starts with just walking into the gym, right? And so this is all part of the practice. So how did you kind of start incorporating these morning routines into your life so that you could start raising your daily awareness?

Arpita: It's like you said, it's habit anchoring, but I, I wanna touch on one thing that you said there about, you know, the we're not perfect again in doing it, right? Because that's key. Because even though I've been doing this work now for three years, what I've found is that when we are really in the thick of something, especially when it's negative, it doesn't matter how much practice you have, you're probably gonna revert to the old thought patterns, because that's where our neuroplasticity is. It's gonna go back to what we know, what's comfortable, what's easy. And so that's really important because if we start beating ourselves up about that, that I thought I mastered this and now I'm back stuck in my crap, which you and I both know from other conversations I dealt with this week myself, we can't. We're just perpetuating our own failure. And so when we can look at those opportunities as actually nuggets of our further growth and learning, that's where your actual full potential is being met. And so we have to give ourselves grace when we revert back to the old thought patterns that are not serving us, because that's what happens when we are stretched thin. That's what happens when we're upset about something or really stuck in it. And that's the beauty of having a coach or somebody

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else to talk to about it because they help you see that, perspective. And that's exactly what you helped me do, Michael, like this week when I was in it, you know, you're moving something from this, consider it moving to that. And it was just like, oh, mind blown. You know, I've been doing this, but I needed you to help me kind of see that. So, yeah. Anyway, I think I forgot your question.

Michael: That's okay. You know that's what I love about this is that we can just have a conversation about it because actually you were just saying something and it brought up something that I wanted to talk about. So you used the term neuroplasticity and so not everybody is gonna be familiar with that term. And so I just wanted to take a moment to explain that. And how I like to explain this is, I know not all of you drive in snow, but I live in Chicago and there's a lot of snow here, and so when there's been snow and the roads have not been plowed, what people tend to do is they drive in the tire tracks of the car in front of them. Right? And so that's the safest place to be. There's not as much snow there. And we tend to, we grow up in our families, we are trained to think about things in a particular way that is the safe way that we think about things. And so we're driving in the tire tracks that have been laid out in front of us and that feels safe. But at some point, you're gonna need to get off the highway and you're gonna have to go where there aren't any tire tracks. If you actually want to go where you want to be, right, you're gonna have to exit. And that can feel dangerous. It can feel risky. You might skid or slide as you're trying to exit the highway. But if you don't take the risks to kind of veer off the path that you're on, you can't get where you want to go.

And so this is the idea of neuroplasticity, which is, you're on this path, you have this trained way of doing things. But if you want a different goal, if you want to do things a little bit differently, you kind of have to lean into the discomfort of veering off that safe path to try something different. And so, Neuroplasticity allows us to do things differently, but it gets back to this conversation of awareness. We have to be aware of what we want so that we can take the different path.

Arpita: Yeah, that was an awesome analogy. I love it. I love that because it's very, very spot on and true, and that discomfort of shifting is partially having the awareness that I'm thinking this, but if somebody from the outside was looking at the exact same situation, i.e., the fact, would they have a different thought about it or story? So how could somebody else be thinking about it? And is it possible that I could consider that perspective as well? And ultimately it actually makes me feel a little better.

Part of it is also when we wanna build awareness around when we have these thought patterns for all these years, because it's kind of like where we like live in the doom and gloom and it feels good because it's comfortable and it just feels kind of like, okay, and it's kind of neat to see because I noticed that, I started recognizing, like I talk about the anger a lot, but when I started recognizing that I was almost getting a dopa hit for when I was getting angry, so having the awareness even to

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recognize that, and this is a little bit higher level, but when you're recognizing that you're feeling essentially a rush from the negative feeling that you're having because you've done it for so long, that is very important as well. And just having that awareness that yes, it's not gonna feel good to shift, take the exit in the snow where no one else is gone. It's not gonna feel great, but is it ultimately gonna get me feeling better at the end because I'm considering a new perspective.

And so that I think, going back to that awareness, right? We have as humans, 60 to 80,000 thoughts going through our head each and every day. And so we are obviously not aware of all of them. 80% of those thoughts roughly are negative thoughts, so we are not aware of everything that's going through our mind. What these exercises are helping us do is build that awareness about what are we actually thinking? Is that thought really true? Is it just me believing it because I've always thought of it that way for so long. And how is that thought ultimately making me feel? Right? Because when we are really, really emotional about things, we get upset, we get angry, we are not able to perform well, right? When emotion is high, intelligence is low. And so we want to get to a point where when we are thinking about things, it's creating or generating feelings for us that build confidence or, even if it's a negative emotion, but it's one that kind of fuels us to move forward so that our actions are more productive, they're really serving us.

So when you asked me, I did remember your question. It came back to me. It was, how do you do these things? How do you implement them in the day? And so one of the things I learned at one of these conferences that I've been to recently is just habit it anchoring. And so doing things that you're already doing and then stacking something with it. So I brush my teeth at least twice a day. When I'm sitting there at the sink brushing my teeth, there's really nothing else I can do. So how can I be more present in those moments? In the morning, I ask myself, what am I thankful for? Right? Part of this is also reprogramming our brain, because like I said, 80% of our thoughts are negative, so we have to start reprogramming our brain to think of it in a more positive light. So I do a gratitude practice in the morning. What am I thankful for? And most importantly, why, why am I thankful for it? That's the morning brush.

The evening brush when I'm brushing my teeth is what went well today, what were my wins today, times three. And I make myself focus, and I, I've said this before, one day one of my wins was the dog didn't have diarrhea, so it doesn't have to be huge. Diarrhea on my shag carpet. Let me clarify why it was so bad. Okay. But it doesn't have to be a huge win, but it's just helping our brain refocus on the good. We're building the new neural pathway, we're taking that exit in the snow so that we're practicing that so our patterns are shifting and that takes time, but it's totally worth it when we get there at the end.

Michael: Yeah, I think exactly what you're saying in terms of starting to recognize your wins, starting

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to recognize where things are going well, that is not how the human brain works, right? Our mind you know, it looks immediately past the good stuff that's happening to the next potentially bad thing or something that didn't go well. And so that does require intentionality that does require you to make time to see what, what did go well for me today? How am I winning? Because if you're not intentional about it, all you're gonna see is the doom and gloom, and that is just gonna perpetuate kind of the negative thinking that you have. And so, yeah it's absolutely, it's so important.

Arpita: I think part of it is also just not, again, beating yourself up for that pattern because this is our body, our evolution of what was put in place to keep us safe, to survival of the fittest, right? So we are constantly, our brains are constantly seeking danger, things that are gonna hurt us, things are gonna kill us. And even though that was from the caveman days with the sabertooth tigers and the like, getting separated from your pack. We still have that ingrained in us, in our brains. And so even though the threats are totally different, that reaction to the threat is the same as if we're gonna die.

And so now we have to kind of recognize, hey, this isn't really that big of a threat and I need to maybe step back and take a minute to really assess what are different ways to think about this obstacle or this problem that I have at hand. And which one am I gonna take on because it feels a little better and that's another little bomb I'm gonna drop, and we can talk about this later, but one of the biggest aha moments I had when I started getting coached myself was that our thoughts create our feelings, right?

We think that the husband didn't help take out the trash and he's made me mad. Or, you know, my freaking building is costing a crap ton of, that I didn't expect, and that's what's pissing me off about it. It's not that, it's what we're thinking about it, right? So ultimately my thought when the dogs poop was sitting in the yard and the husband didn't pick it up, is he doesn't care. He doesn't wanna help me out. He doesn't, he's too busy to help me. With the building. What are we gonna do now? How are we gonna pay for everything? So, how do you wanna think about this? We step back and say, you know what, it's not that, he's actually doing so much other stuff, and that's why he's not working on this, but he loves me and, oh, we've got other resources. We're gonna figure it out. We always make everything happen.

So how you choose to think about that, the things in your life ultimately drives how you feel and that drives how you react, how you respond, and what you create. So I just wanted to add that little bullet in there because I think that's one of the major foundational points as well, that we really were never taught in med school. Nobody ever taught us that, right?

Michael: A hundred percent. Yeah. And so I wanna offer to our audience, I think one of the tools that really shifted everything for me was the thought download that you mentioned earlier. Some people call it a brain dump. And this I think is such, it's so simple and it can make you so much more aware of what's going on and so just very simple instructions for this, sitting down, I'm a pen and paper kind

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of guy, so I like pen and paper. Some people, you know, you can just do this on a notes app on your phone and literally nothing else, no distractions, writing down every single thing that is in your mind, okay? That can be, I gotta go to the grocery store, you know, I have to remember to sign my kids up for the extracurricular activity. I have so many patients to see today. There's so many procedures. I'm never gonna get it all done. I have to get all my tax stuff together. All, all the things. And when you think you are done, don't stop. Give yourself another minute or two to really empty out all the things because in that last one to two minute, that's the real stuff. That's the gold, right? It's not putting your tax papers together that's stressing you out. There's other stuff going on there. And just the process of writing this stuff down and visualizing it, seeing it written for me, again on pen with pen and paper. It is a game changer in terms of awareness. You're like, wow, I did not know all of that stuff was going on. And that, that is kind of the first step in awareness in getting you to the next step of figuring out, like questioning it and then ultimately, if you want to changing it.

Arpita: And I, I'll add to that, one of the powerful pieces of just doing your thought download or the brain dump or whatever, is to go back and maybe underline with a red pen the facts, the things that are provable in a court of law. If you asked a hundred people if this is what happened, that's what gets underlined. And then when you go back and read it, see how many things that you have listed that are actual facts versus your stories about them, i.e. your thoughts. And that's where the "oh my gosh" moment is, is because you recognize that ultimately all your stories are what are creating your feelings and results for yourself.

I wanna just kind of, if I can for a moment, just pause and just refocus. We've got the first morning thought log. We've got the thought dumps. What if people don't even wanna start with, this is like crazy. I don't have time for this. How am I gonna remember to do that in the morning? I just want you to start with one simple thing throughout the day when you feel your shoulder up to your ear, when you feel you know the tension in your head, when you're feeling any sort of angst or not feeling good, ask yourself, what am I thinking? That's it. If you start with that, it will be so eye-opening to see what's actually going through your head, because that is what's causing you to have those physical responses as well on your body. And sometimes you don't even know that, you just recognize that maybe your heart, you're having heart palpitations or something in your body is all that you're aware of, what is going on? Same thing. Sit back, take a breath. What am I thinking? That's the beginning step of building your awareness around what's going through your mind, or even building awareness of what's going on in my body right now. That's the very first step. So if you can just implement that first during the day, couple times, you're gonna start seeing a difference in terms of your building your own awareness.

Michael: Game changer for sure. This was so good. I'm so glad we had a chance to talk about this.

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And yeah. Any final words on this?

Arpita: You can do it, you can change. I mean, it's so hard to believe. And I, the last piece is again, we, I kind of mentioned it, is that when you're in the thick of it, it is so baffling to me that you can't see it yourself even despite having done all this work. And that's where having somebody to kind of guide you through it and consider and give you those other perspectives is so helpful because when you're in your shit, is how I say it, you can't see your shit. You can only see the windows clogged and somebody else is to go and wipe it all away in a sense, so that you can see through and consider other things. So I, I would just highly, highly encourage you to be inquisitive, have an open mind, and consider the possibility of having other perspectives.

Michael: Yeah, absolutely. What would my life look like if I just change the way I see things? So good.

Arpita: Hundred percent.

Michael: So good. Thank you. It was great chatting with you as always. Looking forward to seeing everybody on the next episode of Doctor's Living Deliberately.

Arpita: Wonderful. It was so good. We'll see you guys soon.

Michael: Take care. Bye bye.