

19. Living a Life of Intention with Balance



FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

19. Living a Life of Intention with Balance

Michael: Hey everyone, and welcome to another episode of Doctors Living Deliberately. I'm Dr. Michael Hersh here as always with our co-host, Dr. Arpita Gupta DePalma. How are you?

Arpita: I am so good. How about you?

Michael: Great and excited for another one of these episodes where you and I get to have a conversation about topics that we love talking about and that really help us to delve deeper into what it means to be a doctor living deliberately. And today we are gonna tackle the idea of living life with balance. And I think for me and for a lot of physicians, we get stuck in this idea of work life balance. We kind of focus on the fact that work takes up too much of our life and we don't know how to create balance. And this was a big struggle for me when I first found physician coaching and I had an incredible physician coach who explained this to me in a way that really made clear kind of, where that error in my thinking was.

So I had this idea that work was taking too much time and I needed to create more time for my family and for my interests and all of these other things. And what she explained to me was the concept of work-life balance is kind of a, it's a total farce. Because we as physicians, essentially dedicated our twenties to medical training, so we built our life around work and then we finish with our training, we get out into the real world, and then we try to silo work off as this kind of other entity. It's not our life anymore, now it's just a part. And now we are just trying to, you know, figure out how to fit everything else in. And what she offered to me was the idea that work is our life. And that's okay. But there are so many other aspects to our life, and those different things may become more or less important at different points in our day or at different points in our week. And how we see it really can have a lot of impact on how we view what our days are like.

So, you know, when you can view your life as a whole and not just these different pieces it takes a lot of the pressure and the strain off that we're quote unquote not doing it right. And that's what I love about your concept about living a life in balance. So let's talk a little bit about that. How has this impacted you?

Arpita: I think for me, like you alluded to, right? We make it so that there are these buckets. We conceptualize it as buckets of things that we have to do. We have work, we have our personal life, we have our friends, we have, you know, just other responsibilities; volunteering, our kids like whatever it is, but we've compartmentalized it. And so when one part, we have this imaginary set amount that each part should take of the pie and when one part kind of seems to be pouring over into the other things kind of get all frazzled for us. Right? And so part of this is first just having recognition that it all works together. It all kind of is interwoven and how do we create the quilt, in a sense, that we want, right? What do we want to give more time to, and what

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do we want to maybe decrease? And so a lot of the times what happens is we start feeling like we're spending not enough time doing something and we want to add more of that.

And so having that awareness simply around something needs to change because I'm not feeling fulfilled in this area, and so how do I do that? That oftentimes is the first piece of it. When we first start to recognize that I'm not feeling joy anymore, I'm not feeling like I'm getting a breath, even getting to take a breath of fresh air because I'm so overwhelmed with this one area that's all consuming right now. And then recognizing how do we start to spread it out so we can incorporate the pieces that we want. So that's kind of how I take a peek at it. And first recognize, and I'll say honestly, for me, one of the first times, the most powerful times I recognized this, is that when I worked, worked, worked so hard and it was, mind you, on the coaching business, right? Something I loved and enjoyed doing, but I worked so hard that I literally could not think. I had to sit outside on my pool chair and just veg for like hours before I started feeling a little sense of normalcy return. And what I recognized when I did that is that I hadn't expended so much energy and killed myself that it took me so much longer to actually recuperate from that.

And so catching that in advance for how we want to recharge and how we wanna live with intention is important so that we don't get to that point where we're like at the point in a return where it takes so much more effort to to get to a baseline. So, yeah, so I think that answered your question, I hope a little bit.

Michael: For sure. Yeah. So do you have a process? So, you know, you were just giving us an example of, of kind of what that was like for you and trying to raise your awareness and recognize when it's coming up. So, so can you take our listeners through what that process might look like?

Arpita: Yeah, so I like to start with first really kind of focusing on the big three pillars of awareness, I would say. When we want to start doing this work, when we've recognized that we're not necessarily living with intention and we want to change how we're spending our time. So number one; where are you currently spending a lot of your brain energy and time? Where are you focused? Where are you perseverating? Take note of that. You know, are you spending a lot of time on social media? Are you spending a lot of time around people who are not in alignment with who you authentically want to be? Are they not positive people or positively contributing to you in a sense with your experiences and even the foods that we eat, like being mindful of. What we're putting in our bodies because that has an impact on how we feel. So that's the first pillar I would say, is being aware of where are you spending your brain space and what are you consuming? What are you allowing into your life right now that's not necessarily serving you?

Michael: That's so important to recognize because a lot of times we're looking for balance, we're looking to incorporate things into our life, but we don't give any time to really evaluating, well,

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where am I spending my time now? And are the things that I'm spending my time on in alignment with how I want to be living. And so if you want to do something like start a business or learn about real estate investments, you know, does scrolling on social media for hours help you get to that thing that you want? And that is where you create the space and the time for the goals that you have. So, exactly. Where are you spending your time? Take inventory. Does it align?

Arpita: Right, exactly. And then I would say the second pillar is really just reflecting and building awareness. Spending some time on where you wanna be, like what are your goals? What is your life's meaning and purpose? What are your priorities? Like if you could pick anything, what would they be? If you get to start all over, how would you list it out for how you wanna spend your time? So we have; how we're currently spending our time, how we would want to spend our time, is the next big pillar that you wanna do some self-reflection on.

Michael: And I'll just add in here, be real about your priorities, because I think sometimes, and I definitely fall into this trap where, you know, my family is first and foremost my number one priority, and that is a hundred percent true to me. However, if I built my entire existence around my number one priority of my family, we probably couldn't pay our bills. We couldn't keep a roof over our head. I couldn't feed my children and that is my top priority. So being realistic about, okay, so my number one priority is my family. However, I still have to prioritize my job so that I can take care of my family. So you really want to, when you're looking at your list of priorities, just be realistic about it. Yes, you can love your family and they can be your reason why, but when you're starting to divvy up your time, make sure you're living in alignment with, yes my family is number one, but I want to feed them as well.

Arpita: Right. And then also keeping track of if your priority is just one, like your family and that's all you're doing, you're ultimately going to burn out from that in a sense. Like be unhappy with that too. Right? For your own sake. You're not refilling your cup. So that, exactly. Being realistic. Totally.

And then the third area of just really starting to build the awareness. The third pillar is recognizing where you are holding yourself back. Right? What obstacles do you perceive would be in the way of reaching those goals that we talked about in the second pillar, but also are those obstacles, truly obstacles that are there? Are you just making 'em up? Or if they are there, are they really just kind of smaller than you're making 'em out to be? And even planning around, okay, yeah, these are obstacles. How can I get around them? They are gonna be there. What could I do to kind of troubleshoot and get my way around them?

So that's kind of where I say we start, right? That awareness around number one, where are you spending your current energies? What are you allowing? What are you consuming? Is it having a

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positive or negative impact on you? Where do you want to spend your energies? Like what are your goals? And then number three, what is keeping you from moving forward towards your goals because of the fear of failure, as we're gonna be talking about in an upcoming episode, and fear around just not wanting to deal with the challenges that you're gonna face. That's where we start. That's the first nugget. So..

Michael: Yeah, that's, and you know, these changes can be challenging, right? As you start to examine the life that you're currently living. Right? That is very comfortable. And we've, we've talked about before, and we will talk about many times again, that some of this can be uncomfortable as you start to want to live kind of more deliberately, you want to incorporate more balance, different activities, things like that. So when you are starting to want to make these changes, where do you suggest people start in terms of implementation?

Arpita: So after you've done your inventories and you've done the reflection, I would say you get to pick one thing, right? The problem is a lot of times we don't believe that we're gonna stick with what we say we're gonna do, right? Or we try it. We've tried exercising, we do it for a week, and then it slowly falls off. We pick what we wanna do, and we don't honor it. And so we are essentially losing trust in ourselves that we're gonna do what we say we're gonna do. So my first piece of advice is no matter what you pick, you start small and you start like totally bare minimum baseline. And that way when you say you're gonna do you're more likely than not going to do it. You're rebuilding that trust in yourself by establishing a new routine that you really have to try hard to honestly fail at doing. So pick something small. So I would say the very first thing also that I would recommend is if you're not doing anything, is scheduling your me time first. And so what do I mean by me time. Me time is not going and getting a Mani and Pedi. Me time is not, you know going shopping and getting something that makes you feel good. Me time is really just allowing yourself to be present with yourself. And it might involve an activity like meditation or going for a walk or doing something, but ultimately that me time is allowing you to recharge in a way that you know only you can do. Right? So, maybe meditating is one. Maybe resting, just allowing yourself to truly just sit there and do nothing. Maybe sleeping, making sure you're getting the seven, eight hours of sleep every night. You get to pick what it is that works for you and schedule in a way that you are going to make sure it happens all every single week or every single day, however you wanna start off.

So for me, one of the other pieces of this is also recognizing when I have that me time, for me now it's meditation, but it's allowing yourself to have that time to be the visionary, to be thinking and letting all the other stuff, all the other chaos and chatter that's in your brain to kind of go away so you can be present with yourself and you start to uncover thoughts and ideas pop up, things come up for you that you never would have had come up because there's just so much noise normally, right? So this is that time to rest and recharge. And you might start with 15

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minutes for a cup of coffee by yourself once a week, whatever it is, pick it so that you can't fail at it, right?

Michael: Yeah. And keeping the increments as small or as big as you can truly allow for yourself. And you were talking about showing up for yourself, and that's something that I think we don't give a lot of thought to. And so when I am working with physicians, I like to give people the example of if you were meeting a friend at a restaurant for lunch and that friend didn't show up for you the first time, probably would give 'em a pass. You would be like, it's not a big deal. Yeah. You know, they canceled it the last minute. It's, this isn't a problem. But if they repeatedly didn't show up every time you had plans, eventually you would stop making plans with that person. You would stop scheduling time on your busy schedule to meet up with this person that was canceling so often. And that is how we are with ourselves, right? So you were talking about exercise, you were talking about meditation. You need to build back up the trust. So if that friend was like, I promise, let's just meet for coffee. I'm gonna come to you. You don't even have to meet me anywhere. I'm just gonna bring coffee to your house. You would be a lot more likely to make plans with that unreliable friend again. And so that is what you're doing. You're retraining yourself to see you as reliable, and you can do that in very small increments. And you know, in a previous episode, we've talked with Dr. Rashmi Schramm, who talked about just incorporating two minutes of meditation or just even finding your comfortable spot, sitting in the spot, and then getting up again and not even meditating, just to show yourself that you can have your own back, that you can show up in that way. And so it's so important to start small, to give yourself those small wins and to prove that you are trustworthy to you.

Arpita: Totally. And then the other piece that I would add to that is making sure that you are scheduling it at a time that's realistically going to actually happen. Right? I was actually just talking to my son today about SAT prep and I was like, okay, you need to block an hour a week that you just focus and do Khan Academy or whatever it is that you're studying. And he was like, okay, yeah, I'm gonna do Sunday mornings. And I just looked at him and I was like, how realistic is that, that it's actually gonna happen? Because Sunday mornings you're inevitably sleeping off, hanging out with your friends the night before, or you're just being lazy and lounging around the house. You are not incentivized. So why not do it at one o'clock right after school ends on Friday because your brain is still in work mode and you can do it right then and knock it out and you're done. Right? So same thing with this

Michael: School ends at one o'clock on Fridays. I need, I need that schedule.

Arpita: Really. I know. Me too. But yeah, so you have to think about that in your life. If you put meditation in at 8, 7 45 in the morning, and you know, you're trying to get your kids ready for breakfast and get out and on the bus, it's not gonna happen, right? So you have to find a time that's realistic, that's going to actually encourage and facilitate whatever you're trying to add into

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your life, into your life. And I will say most people do some sort of calendaring, if you do a calendaring system for yourself, build it in right when you're doing that. So on Thursday nights, I make my calendar for the following week and I literally put it in where I know it's going to be realistic. I'm not gonna be interrupted by kids, by phone calls, by work. Where I will have that time to be by myself, and even if I am interrupted, I'm gonna be able to say, no, I'm not available. Right? Do not disturb. So that's a big part of it too, is not setting yourself up for failure by scheduling it at a time that's not gonna work for you in the first place.

Michael: Yeah, that's great. Any other strategies that you think would be useful for our listeners as they are trying to kind of live that more deliberate life with balance?

Arpita: I, you know, we've just scratched the surface here. I have a whole spiel of strategies that we can utilize that, how we can start making shift towards intentional living. What I wanted to do today is talk about just the general concepts of it and how we are going to start this off, but what I would say is start, like I said, doing your inventory and then scheduling the me time first, and then picking maybe one or two other things in your life that you could think of that bring you joy. What are you not doing that if you could go back and start from scratch and do everything the way you wanted, what are those things? And maybe even just making a list of that and then going back and saying, okay, I can reimplement this for 15 minutes here on my life, and setting yourself up so that you cannot fail. So one of the things I think I heard in another podcast was, if you want to set this new, you know, incentive of working out every morning or running once a week or walking once a week, set your clothes out the night before, right? So it's not a chore in the morning to pull your sneakers and your socks and your workout clothes and get it all together with your AirPods and all that. Make it all pulled out and ready for you. So all you have to do in the morning is get up and not really think about it. Just go through the motions and then get out the door. So what can you do to facilitate whatever you're trying to implement into your life so that it makes it, essentially a no-brainer. Easy to do.

Michael: This highlights James Clear's atomic habits of making it easy, making it obvious, making it attractive, all of the things that you need to do to kind of get yourself into a new habit, something that you are trying to create for yourself. And I think the other key thing that you're highlighting here is that this is ongoing work. This is never work that is done because we always want to be examining how we are living our life. We want to be looking at how am I spending my time? Is it in alignment with the things that I want to be doing? Because the truth is, things change, right? The decisions that I was making at 20 years old about how I wanted to prioritize my time and the activities that I had in, going on in my life were different than when I was 30. Were different than when I was 40 and are different now. So just giving yourself the grace and the presence to know like, yes, maybe I did spend too much time scrolling on Facebook at 40 years old. And that's okay. And now I'm not doing that as much anymore. And you know, who knows, five years from now, 10 years from now, this all may look completely different. But not

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being too hard on yourself for how you have done things in the past, how you're doing things now, or how you hope to do things in the future.

Arpita: Totally. What serves you best in this phase of your life, right? And adapting as the phases come and go and as, as it shifts.

Michael: Fantastic. Well I think what we should probably plan to do is circle back on this topic in the future. I, I think you've got some more stuff to share on this important topic, and so I think maybe we should plan to do that again.

Arpita: I think that sounds like a plan. Totally.

Michael: Well, great talking to you as always, and look forward to seeing you all again on the next episode of Doctors Living Deliberately. Bye.

Arpita: Bye-bye. Have a great evening.