

## 23. Is Fear of Failure Holding You Back?



**FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT**

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**Arpita:** Hi everybody, and welcome to another episode of Doctors Living Deliberately. I am Dr. Arpita Gupta DePalma, and I am here with my co-host, Dr. Michael Hersh today. Hey, Michael.

**Michael:** Hey, Arpita. How are you?

**Arpita:** Good. Good. I am excited about today's episode. We are gonna talk a little bit around the fear of failure, like what holds us back and why we just kind of get stuck sometimes in our ways of being, and it kind of ties in a little bit with that. I think the perfectionism, you know how we want everything to be a hundred percent perfect and because of that, that actually sometimes does not do us well in multiple ways, but this is kind of one of the big ones. And this is an area that you really have done a lot of work around too. So I'm excited to talk to you more about it today and get your perspective and we can kind of share some nuggets hopefully with our guests. So tell me a little bit about your experience with this. How did you kind of say, this is something I like talking about?

**Michael:** So, you know, I won't say that I always recognized how fear of failure was showing up, but as I've gotten into coaching and as I have been coaching physicians and just, you know, I think talking more and more with people, I see how fear of failure holds us back. In a lot of our, you know, physician groups on social media, people will talk about all of these things that they really want to be doing and they don't do it because they are afraid that they might fail. And you know, it's just so interesting because physicians are really, we're kind of success junkies and perfectionists and we're so used to just getting everything right and doing everything well and at face value that seems like it should be amazing. Right? But when you see the result is that it ends up holding you back because you just expect everything to be a success after that and if it's not a guaranteed success, then you don't even want to do it. You see how that could prevent you from living into your goals and hopes and dreams and end up just not even trying.

**Arpita:** Yeah, I think that's a great point that we are so used to having done well and performed well and succeeded that anything that we look towards as a challenge or like a goal that we have that is riddled with potential obstacles and challenges, oftentimes is just kind of discarded or pushed to the side because it's that discomfort of change, the discomfort of reaching that goal. Right? And I think a piece of this that I like to always kind of be a little bit mindful of when I start thinking about it is these challenges that we have, these obstacles that we perceive that will be there when we're trying to do something, oftentimes it's just our brain, again, trying to keep us safe and keep us from having to move forward or move down that path. I know you referenced snow before, like, you know when you change in the highway and it's a snowy day and you have to go off the tracks of the car in front of you. But similarly, it's our brain is trying to keep us safe and oftentimes we'll make those obstacles seem a lot larger than they are, right? And so even just having that perspective to go back and look at 'em and say, is it really that big of a deal? And these challenges that I'm foreseeing in the future to get my goal, but.

**Michael:** Yeah, and I, I think the problem that comes up for physicians and, high achievers in general is how we treat ourselves if we can't do the thing that we set out to do. Right? And so that I think is where a lot of the fear of failure is based is in the question, what if I fail? And many of us, myself included, if I try something and it doesn't work out, there's a lot of self-judgment there. There's a complete lack of compassion for myself for having tried something new and it not working out the way that I wanted to. And so when we know that about ourselves right, then, it makes us a lot less likely to try the thing, because if I know I'm gonna be mean to

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myself when I don't get it right, well then maybe I just shouldn't try at all, and then I don't have to worry about being mean to myself.

**Arpita:** Yeah, totally. That's a piece of it for sure. I think another piece of it is the shame that we feel for if we fail. Like, especially like for me, I think one of the things that came up is like when I'm doing presentations for people, when I'm doing presentations in front of other physicians and my comparisonitis right? That I am a physician who is not practicing and these are all doctors and they're amazing and they're doing hard things and I'm lecturing to them and I better get it right because how embarrassing is it for me if I can't even do this right? And then just catching myself when I'm saying that. And maybe putting a different perspective on it that, Okay, yeah. I'm lecturing to them and that's something that they may not be comfortable doing. Right? And so just even recognizing how your brain is choosing to think about it and where it's not serving you oftentimes will kind of give you a little glimmer for where you go instead when you find yourself in these negative thought patterns that are not serving you or helping you in any way.

**Michael:** I will also say that we make these individual failures mean something about ourselves, right? Like we make failing at one particular thing mean that we are a failure. And there's a very famous Thomas Edison quote where when he's talking about inventing the light bulb. He says, I didn't fail. I just found 10,000 ways that didn't work. And, and it just shows that, you know, if you can just shift what your thoughts are about the individual experience, right? Like the one thing that didn't work out the way that you wanted to, and take a kind of a, a bird's eye view, a broader lens of kind of what it means. You realize it, it really is just a stepping stone in helping you to get to the thing that you wanted. And you were asking about like personal examples of failure. I mean, so you and I, have been on this entrepreneurial journey for the last couple of years. And man, if that is not an exercise in just failure after failure, after failure, and I never saw myself as an entrepreneur. I went to medical school with the kind of, with just the goal of being a practicing doctor, and that was all I ever saw myself as, and it's all I ever wanted to do. And when I stepped kind of into this arena of entrepreneurship, I had to take a hard look at why I had never really seen myself as an entrepreneur. And it really was a hundred percent this fear of failure, trying to do something that I had never done before, and then recognizing that this could not be a success, this could completely fail. And having to learn how to be okay with that over and over and over again. This isn't something that you just kind of get used to one time. Because if you're gonna succeed, you have to get used to failure.

**Arpita:** Yeah. And I think that's like even just having that perspective to see that you persevered through that, right? And a lot of people don't even get to that point because they don't even start because of that fear. So that's one of the things that I think that's really helped me is just reminding myself of that, that you are doing things and it kind of sucks a lot of the time along the way. And that's okay. At least you're doing it right? At least I am doing it is the big thing because people may not do it, they may not feel comfortable. And that's what we're talking about. That fear of the failure that comes with it, that holds you back. I feel like one of the things that also came up for me is just recognizing that we have these again, ideas in our head of what we can do and what we're supposed to do and what's the norm for what our career should look like. And so as a physician, you know, I think it's become much more normalized to do other things if not replacing, but in addition to being a physician. And that has made it an acceptable kind of challenge to create for ourselves and that, it's amazing. It's huge. You know, not only can you practice medicine, you can maybe own your practice. You can create a D P C or a concierge type of practice. You can create a business that has nothing to do with it. I mean, there's just so many ways. So where are you holding yourself back by thinking it can only be a certain way? That's a question I would ask yourself.

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**Michael:** Right. Yeah. And you know, certainly, you know, we could do an entire episode on entrepreneurship as well, but I will say one of the biggest lies out there is that doctors are bad at business, right? So for many, many years, doctors ran their own practices and they did it successfully, and they did it autonomously. And doctors, I think they make incredible entrepreneurs for so many reasons. And so, you know, this, again, we're not talking about entrepreneurship in general, but I think I have seen so much growth in myself in learning to lean into this fear of failure and all of that has come from the entrepreneurial journey. So you know, you definitely need to lean into the fear of failure because what I'll offer the listeners is that, you know, we hold ourselves back from trying something because we're afraid of failing, but not trying doesn't allow you to escape the feeling that comes with feel of failure because you still end up having to feel failure. That feeling just comes when you realize that you never achieved that goal, that big dream, the thing that you always hoped you would accomplish in your life, that's where the fear of failure shows up. But the worst part about feeling it there is that you never even gave yourself the chance to succeed. So you have to feel the failure, and you never even gave yourself the opportunity to succeed.

**Arpita:** Totally, a hundred percent. That's the case when you start to really think about it. You know, I think also one of the things that I was thinking about as you were talking is that when we go back and think about the dreams, like you mentioned, like the dreams that we had for ourselves, we don't do that anymore. Part of it is how we've gotten into a routine and that I mentioned the discomfort of changing to create something new. That coupled with the lack of time that we give ourselves to even maybe plan for what we would wanna create in our lives. What else we wanna do? We have to really attack this from multiple perspectives. You know, giving yourself the time to think about what do I wanna do? What are my goals? What is my inner knowing know that I wanna create for myself, and how do I build that time in? And how do I prepare myself that it's gonna be uncomfortable along the way. It's gonna be uncomfortable when you get there. It's not gonna be perfect even when you get there. Right? So what do you ultimately truly just want to do? That's where you have to, I think, start with this work and then deal with that fear of failure and say, I can do it. And I would've failed ahead of time. I heard one of my friends I can't remember who it was now, but she said, fail stands for the first attempt in learning. Right.

**Michael:** Love that.

**Arpita:** So every single time we fail, we make that first attempt to learn what we need to learn to get to where we wanna be. And so I think that's important to remember that who cares what the other person thinks? Just do what you wanna do.

**Michael:** And I think that that is kind of the first step in reframing because you and I, we talk to lots of high achieving professionals. We talk to lots of other physicians and you know, the fear of failure comes up all the time when people are thinking about this, you know, if they want to take a different job or if they want to try something different or new in their life. And, you know, when it comes down to kind of exploring that, the first step is really reframing what you think about the failure, just like you were saying that each failure is a learning opportunity and it presents to you information about how to succeed. Oh, I tried this and it didn't work, so I'm gonna try something different. And that is the path. It literally the path is paved with failures so that you can find your way to success.

**Arpita:** And I think, you know, our mentor keeps saying, you gotta have a hundred fails before you win. Right? So fail and do it again. Do it again, do it again. Do it again. So I think it's comical when they talk about

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going on a hundred dates before you find your husband or your spouse or your partner or whatever. So it's the same thing, like a hundred fails, expect it, plan for it. And that way, maybe for me personally, thinking of it from that perspective, made the fails not be so painful, right? Like, okay, I'm only on number 20, I got a way to go. Right? So I, that's another way that I found, helped me to start thinking about it too, but,

**Michael:** Yeah. And there's a great book out there as a recommendation, no no affiliation here, but the Gap and the Gain by Dan Sullivan kind of lays out how we can look at goals and and even failures because so many times we've, we focus on the end result. We see the, the big hope, the big dream, the thing that we've laid out ahead of us, and we see how far away it is. And rather than focusing on the gap where you are now versus where you want to be in the future, looking at the gains and how far you've come, it takes the sting out of the individual failures because when you fail, you can still look back and be like, but look how far I've made it. Look how far I've come. This failure means nothing because I'm not even close to the start line. I'm, you know, somewhere in the middle and I'm getting so much closer to what I want.

**Arpita:** Totally. And I'll challenge you, that again reminded me of something too that one of the things that I started doing, my coach helped me start this little thing, and I think you do this too. I think we've talked about this, is that I keep a list of all the things I've done, all the offers I have made for coaching, for programs, for talks, I make a list, right? Because we forget all the different things that we are doing, and then we feel like, okay, well I'm not doing anything. I'm not progressing. So if you can do that and go back and say, oh, hey, yeah, that was actually a win. That was a win too. That helps your brain focus on the good instead of only focusing on where you didn't necessarily succeed. So

**Michael:** Yes I a hundred percent do this because you're, you are right. We don't remember the wins. It is a terrible truth that we just don't remember these things. And so, yes I have several to-do lists. We can talk about that at some point as well. But on one of the to-do lists about once a month, I go back into this Google document that I've created, and I have it set up by month, by month, so that each month I'm writing down all of the things that I've done so that when I do try something and I fail and I try to make it mean, oh, you know this, this is terrible, you're never gonna succeed, this is never gonna work. I have it written down. No, no, no. Like, look at all of this stuff that you've done. Look at what you've accomplished, and it totally just in that activity of going back and looking at that list, I can reset myself and just remember, no, you've made so much progress. Just keep going.

**Arpita:** A hundred percent. I love this conversation and I hope it helps people recognize that they have the ability to consider it from a different perspective, to keep themselves moving forward.

**Michael:** So one other thing that I thought would be really good to close up this topic is that on the other kind of also competing with fear of failure is fear of success. And this is really important for people to look out for, right? So, some people are afraid that they could fail in the process, but another thing that holds people back is what if I get everything that I truly want? Then what? What if this is a raging success and what does my life look like when it changes? And it's just something for our listeners to keep an eye out for in themselves. It's something that I have personally been coached on. And so just something to be aware of.

**Arpita:** Totally. I think I can relate too, because you think of, oh God, if this happens and I actually do it and it succeeds, how is my life gonna look different? How is it gonna change? What am I gonna have to do then to keep up with that? So a hundred percent right, and also recognizing that that fear of success might be a little.

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mirror or a little light of knowing, of going back to, do you really want what you're going after? What are your reasons for going after what you're going after too? So,

**Michael:** Yeah. Yeah. And it's learning to lean into the discomfort. All of these things are uncomfortable. Right? And so it's okay. That's where all the growth is. It's recognizing that it's uncomfortable and then deciding is this something I really want? And then leaning into it and doing it, and maybe even making all your dreams come true in the process.

**Arpita:** Totally. Wonderful. Well, thanks Michael Hersh, this has been great. I think it's super relevant to keep people in the awareness of moving forward and avoiding not staying stuck because they're afraid of what might happen. But, but yeah. Yeah. Thank you.

**Michael:** Absolutely. I love these discussions. I love when you and I can just chat and share all this and yeah, can't wait for the next one.

**Arpita:** All right. We will see you soon.

**Michael:** Take care. Bye.

**Arpita:** Bye.