

## 30. Being Present with Dr. Michael Hersh



**FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT**

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**Arpita:** Hey everybody. Welcome to another episode of Doctors Living Deliberately. I am here today with my amazing co-host, Dr. Michael Hersh, and we are gonna talk about something that he has written a couple of blog posts on and really feels passionate about because I honestly, I get where he's been. So Dr. Michael Hersh, welcome. How are you doing?

**Michael:** Amazing cohost. I love that intro. Thank you. Always great to chat with you and you know, without further ado, let's talk about what we're talking about and that is kind of learning to be present in the moment. And this is one of the things that I've been super critical and judgmental about for me. Because I just, I noticed that when my kids wanted to play with me and when there were things going on at home, maybe I could be still for a couple of moments, maybe I could sit down and play Barbies or something like that. And then moments later I would lose focus and my mind would go to, oh, you can't forget to do this. Oh, don't forget about the bills. Oh, make sure you write that down on the grocery list so that we remember to get that the next time we're at the store. And this was such a frustrating thing for me. I, I think I was never even aware that this was an issue. And then once I noticed it, once I saw how often it was coming up for me, it became, for me a big problem.

And it's something that as I have coached other physicians, I see it comes up over and over and over again for all doctors. I think because we're so used to multitasking and just always being so used to, okay, I'm doing this right now, but I can't forget all these other things. It makes me think of when I was an intern and I had a census list and we'd be talking about one patient and I'd remember, oh, I have to order labs on on this other patient. But anyway, what about you, Arpita, is this something that you've noticed in your own life?

**Arpita:** Yes. I think what I would just start off by saying is you mentioned it with regards to your kids and being little and wanting to play with them, but then like immediately being sucked into something else in your brain and it doesn't end. It doesn't matter how old your kids are. I'm here to tell you that mine are teenagers. I'm almost an empty nester, and I still find myself having the same situations come up where I recognize, at least now I have the awareness that I'm not fully present for them and, and pieces of this, you know, have evolved over the years of what that looks like. And I would say most commonly now, it's when I am pulled into work, and that might be on my phone or on my laptop, but it's kind of comical. The kids actually make fun of me now because they're like, oh yeah, she didn't hear a damn thing you just said. You have to say all that over again because it's the, it's the truth. They know that they can tell from my body language or from my responses that I'm checked out.

And I think what I have to just offer about that is that this is actually normal. It's part of life, you know, and, and what we wanna do is just start building a little bit of awareness around when we're seeing that happen, and then recognizing how we wanna make a change, if we wanna make a change about that, about the situations and where we're checking out and not being present. And the other little thing I will say, just as a little tidbit that I give my clients a lot of times, is that how you mentioned with the kids, you know, when you're sitting there and you're playing Barbies, which I would love to see you doing that actually. But when you're playing Barbies and then you find yourself like doing all these other things, is it also possibly because you don't really enjoy playing Barbies, right? Part of our, I think mom and dad guilt is that we want to have this quality time and be present with our kiddos, but we don't really care about the activity that we're doing with them, and so then we guilt ourselves for not being present there. Maybe that's an opportunity for us to consider other ways to be present. So I just wanna throw that out there as some of the stuff that I wanna have people noodle when we're thinking about how we can be our best selves.

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**Michael:** Yeah I think that's incredibly wise because you, you listen to the gurus and they're like, oh, your kids are gonna wanna do things that you don't always want to do. And part of your job as a parent looking to spend quality time with your children is to just do the thing. I think you're right because as my kids have transitioned maybe a little away from Barbies and a little towards the Nintendo, I find myself a lot more able to focus and pay attention as I am, you know, playing video games that didn't exist when I was a kid, and I find them more, you know, fascinating and a lot of fun to play. So I think that that is also really important to be aware of. And also that you get to choose, right? So I agree with you probably playing Barbies is not my favorite. And I can still choose to do it because I want to, or I can decide that maybe there are other times when I don't want to.

**Arpita:** Right. Right. And I think the big piece of that is guilt. Like I remember when my kiddos were little, like dreading going to the park and I'm like, I am such a horrible mom. I don't wanna go play in the park. It's hot, it's miserable. I'm sitting there watching these kids do silly things and I don't enjoy that. And part of it is just being able to say, you know what, that's okay if I don't enjoy that. What's a different way that I could spend time with them where I know I'm fully present and I'm engaged because that's how I enjoy being with them. I think that's a piece of it of course. The other piece of it is just being overwhelmed with all the things, right? When we're multitasking by keeping these lists in our brain of all the things that we have to do, and oftentimes multitasking in the moment. Let me do some laundry while I'm watching TV with them, cuz I'm hanging out with them, but I'm also answering emails on the side. What we start to recognize is how inefficient we become when we're multitasking so much like that. Right? And at in the beginning, I used to think that when I multitask, I'm a badass because I'm showing how much I can get done at the same time. And it kind of showed that I was so competent of doing things. And over time I started recognizing, maybe this is also a factor of age, how many more mistakes I was making, how much longer it was taking me to do things. And honestly, I couldn't remember what I had done. And so I'm like then going into what did I already take care of then I don't even remember. Did I do it well? I need to go back and check. So essentially spending more time on stuff. So, yeah, I think there's two components of it. It's, you know, the joy in being present as well as the cons of being multitasking at the same time.

**Michael:** Yeah. And so before coaching, you know, I, first of all always, not just before coaching, I, I've always been kind of a list maker and all the things that I need to get done and I've tried to transition into electronic lists, but I'll be honest with you, up until about a year ago, I was a pen and paper with my to-do list and every week I would rewrite the list. And it was my impression that the to-do list made me more productive. And what I found was I would just make this to-do list, it would be incredibly long, things that I knew I was not gonna get done that week were on the list. And I never actually planned out when I was gonna get any of this stuff done. And so when I brought some of these issues to coaching, and it was like, of course you can't be present in the moment because you have this incredibly long to-do list of things that you have not figured out when you're gonna get them all done. So the moment you sit down to do something else, your mind goes to that to-do list, and just all of a sudden you're like, okay, I can't do this because I have all of those other things to be doing. And you know, there's a quote by Eckhart Tolle that is "realize deeply that the present moment is all you ever have." And when I kind of put these things together that I couldn't live in the present moment, when my mind kept going to that extremely long to-do list of all of the other things that needed to get done, that was when I decided things needed to change. And when I decided to put some different practices into place so that I could be more effective and have more, you know, time with my kids when I could be fully present.

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**Arpita:** I think a piece of it is also recognizing that as we say with almost every area is that we're not gonna be perfect with this. Right? I, when we got on the call today, before we started, we were chit chatting ahead of time and I was like, yeah, this is kind of comical because I'm so not present right now. Right? And I was like, actually, that's what I'm gonna talk about. Like how I have become aware. I'm just simply aware of the fact that I'm not present with my kids. My daughter just came home from college a couple days ago and we're sitting here, we're interacting. And you know, my plan was yesterday, I had nothing on my calendar intentionally so that I could be out there with her and just hanging out, catching up. And inevitably I was out there with my laptop, I was working, and you know, I realized, you know, this is not what you had planned. This is not you being present and intentional. And right now you've got things that are overwhelming you, that you have to do. And so giving ourselves grace when we recognize that, just having the awareness that we're not present right now, maybe I can plan intentionally for when I can show up that way because we might plan, but life also happens and that's what keeps us from necessarily always being there. So yeah, right now I'm not very present and that's okay. And present for you though. Yes.

**Michael:** I mean, and ain't that the truth? You know, we make plans and then life happens. Right? And so do you have any tools that you specifically use to help you be more present? Like I know you were saying right now, accepting that life happens and that we are humans and that you can't control everything. But how do you, like, what do you put into place to help you on a more typical basis, be more present?

**Arpita:** So I have a Thursday timeout like planning program that I do for myself. And I literally will plan out my week on Thursday nights for the following week. And I do that intentionally because I get my groceries Friday morning. So literally to the point of what nights I can cook meals, what type of meal, et cetera, et cetera. But that allows me to plot out my week for the following week. And I do still have paper lists, like, here's my list. Right? So I'm a computer planner where I can put things in that are bigger projects long term down the road. So I know everything has a place, as you mentioned. Then I have a weekly planner that's handwritten, and I do that on Thursday night intentionally. So it's fresh in my mind for what's coming up next week. And I think the biggest piece of that is being realistic, right? Giving yourself realistic timeframes. Am I really gonna be able to get the kids to school and back and then get to work within 20 minutes before I start my cases? Or is it really gonna be more like 45, 50? You know? So being realistic, so you're not setting yourself up for failure. But I do that.

And I intentionally build in first the me time. So every morning before I get ready and get out the door, I do my meditation. You know, there are things that I build in so, we talked about vacations, I think in a different episode. Every time I have a vacation, the day after the vacation, I always make it so there's no set meetings so I can catch up. So I'm able to be present and not feeling pulled in so many different directions. And so when situations like the other day come up where I was supposed to be present with my daughter after coming home from college, and it doesn't happen, I know that this week when I plan again, I'm gonna try again. Right? It's not that it's forever lost. Right? Giving yourselves grace to realize, you know what, these kids are little and I wanna spend time with them, and I kind of screwed it up last week even though I planned. That's okay. No harm done. I can still do it. Right? Yeah. So I think those are kind of some of the things I do. But the calendaring is a big, big tool for that.

**Michael:** For sure. And so in speaking to the calendaring and going a little bit deeper on that, so still a, as I was mentioning to-do lists are kind of an integral part of how I run my life and I now have multiple to-do lists. I've got the to-do list for what I want to get done in any particular week, and then I keep a separate to-do list

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for longer term projects and goals so that when I'm building my week, I can always look to the other list and say, does any of this need to get done, or do I have time to do this stuff? Or, what is my time horizon for getting this done?

And then you were speaking a little bit to how you prioritize self-care first thing in the morning, and I think that gets to the second piece of the to-do list, which is creating some priorities. Then figuring out what gets scheduled, what needs to get done. And we'll link to this in the show notes, one really helpful tool is something called an Eisenhower Box. And I think James Clear has a really good diagram of this online, and so we'll link to that in the show notes. And what the Eisenhower box does is it splits things up into four quadrants in terms of urgent versus non-urgent tasks, and then important versus not important, and then you have your to-do list and you prioritize things based on what is urgent and important. Those are the first things. And then what is non-urgent but important goes in the second box. What is urgent but not important goes in the third box. And what is non-urgent and unimportant goes in the fourth box. And here's what I'm gonna tell you about that non-urgent and non-important box, that's the stuff that doesn't get done right? Like that's the stuff. If it's not urgent and not important, you just forget about it.

And the other kind of interesting thing is that that urgent but not important quadrant, like that's the stuff that you can try to find somebody to delegate to. Is this something that I can have somebody else do for me? So you and I both utilize virtual assistants that are incredibly helpful in helping us get all of the things done. That is what gives me more than 24 hours in a day is asking other people for help. So that is super helpful for that. And then going back to your list, what is urgent and important? Those are the first things that go in, right? Things that absolutely need to get done. You make sure that you find the time to get that stuff done. And then non-urgent, but important. This is the self-care that you're talking about. This is playing with my kids. This is exercise. You wanna make sure that you are making time for all of this stuff as well. And so you wanna find stuff on your calendar for all of the stuff that is important. By going through this exercise and making sure that your priorities are in line with your time, that is how that is the first step towards being more present. Cuz once you know that everything is taken care of, once you know that you've accounted for all the things, then when you sit down to play with your kids, you know you're meant to be there.

**Arpita:** Yeah. I think the trap people fall into is distinguishing the difference between the urgent and the important, right? And I think our devices are a great example again, right? When we get a text, we feel that we have this urgency that we have to respond. We have to stop what we're doing and answer the phone. We have to stop what we're doing and reply to that text. But that's a false sense of urgency in most cases, right? The information that came to us that we need to respond to might be important. But it's not necessarily urgent. And what happens is it interrupts us from what we're doing and it takes us out of that moment to be able to respond to it. And then it takes us twice as long to get back to what we were doing and get back on track.

And so my mind was blown when I did this. I went on this wellness healing trip a couple years ago. It was a device free resort and that was my first experience of not having a phone actually dinging and my watch not actually dinging. And I didn't realize how freaking distracted that thing made me, right? So when I came home, I said my mission here is to just continue with that. So I did not, since that day, I have not turned on my audible alerts on my phone, and that has been such a game changer. Like, I don't see my phone unless I'm actually trying to look at it. It's aside. And when I'm done doing my task, I will go and check it and respond accordingly. We just don't even realize how much we confuse urgent versus important when we have these day-to-day things pulling our attention in life each day. I would encourage you guys just to try even for a day,



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just see what would happen. And at the end of the day, when you look at your messages, look at what was really, really important that needed to be responded to versus urgent emergencies, somebody's dying, and I guarantee you most of them are important. And when you responded to 'em, it was just fine when they happened.

**Michael:** Yeah, that do not disturb and the focus features on your phone are game changers and underutilized for sure. You know, when I am seeing patients in the office, I leave my phone on my desk so that it doesn't bother me while I'm seeing patients and I've always done that, but it took me forever to realize I can do that at home too. I can, there's this just neat little button that you can just press and then you can be focused on what you wanna be focused on and truly a game changer. I use Do Not Disturb and those focus functions all the time.

**Arpita:** Think about it. I think part of our concern is what is the person who's sending us the text gonna think if I don't respond right away? Right. And so I think A. People are kind of oblivious to the fact, especially I, I know with physicians, I don't know any physician who doesn't leave their phone in their office while they're seeing the patients. Right? And so even employees and coworkers or colleagues or friends may not recognize that, that we're doing that. And quite frankly, it's okay. We wanna teach them. We're going to a different area here. We wanna teach 'em about the boundaries, right? You can send me a text during the day, but I likely will not be able to respond till later. So when we start putting this kind of idea in the world that this is how we're going to live. These are the rules that I have. It's all fine. It's gonna work out. There's no urgency. And if something is urgent where somebody is injured or hurt or it's truly an emergency, they're gonna find you. They're gonna find you. I can go on a tangent about my son when he fractured his elbow about this, how they found me because I didn't have my phone on me. But when it's urgent, you will be found for sure.

**Michael:** A hundred percent for sure. I would say the other thing that really comes up for people is when we talk about calendaring, when we talk about making time for things, the most common response I get from people is, well, how am I supposed to know how long this stuff is gonna take? And you know, there is Parkinson's law, which is also something that I've learned over the last couple of years, which is essentially that things will take as long as you give them. So if you can constrain yourself, if you can put something on your calendar and give yourself a certain amount of time to do it, in all likelihood, you're either gonna get it done in that time or get pretty close. And this is part of the learning process, right? You will learn as you put things on your calendar, how long they're gonna take, so that you can calendar appropriately. And just because you don't know how long something is gonna take, shouldn't be an excuse to not try it. Because again, this can be a real game changer just in terms of productivity, again, being more present. All the things.

**Arpita:** Totally. Yep. It's how much leniency do you wanna give yourself versus how strict do you wanna be with how much time you're giving yourself to complete the task? Because like you said, if we give ourselves three days to reorganize the fridge, it will take three days. Right? But anyway.

**Michael:** Three days to reorganize a fridge? I don't know. I dunno what your refrigerator looks like.

**Arpita:** Kind of messy, but no, it's fine. But, oh man.

**Michael:** Yeah. I mean, I think the other thing that we just need to be realistic about is that neither one of us is perfect about this. As you were alluding to at the beginning of the episode, you know, you are kind of in it right

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now and you have this experience recently with, you know, with your kids. And this happens for me still all the time. And the key is not being perfect about this. The key is just being aware and not judging yourself when things don't work out, when you're not present, when you're not able to show up in the way that you want, be curious about it. Why didn't it work out this time? And what can I do the next time to be more effective so that when your kids say, Daddy or Mommy, you know, can we play? That you get to show up fully present in that moment and be there with them because you know, that truly is the important stuff and you wanna make time for that.

**Arpita:** Yeah, for sure. Yeah. And just remembering that being present might look different for you than different from them. Than different from the other person. Right? You get to pick what brings you joy when you're being present. And it doesn't have to be the cookie cutter that everybody expects. Quote, quote. Well, awesome. It was good talking to you about this today. Thanks. I know this is Like I said, a guilt ridden area sometimes. So just do your best and your best is good enough and you know, in your heart, what you're wanting. Any final words for our listeners?

**Michael:** No, I, I mean, I think as we have talked about so many times before the first step is just being aware. And even if you don't do any of the other things that we talked about in this episode, even if, you know, you hear the word when we say the word calendaring, you hear budget and you just get completely turned off by that idea. That you just recognize that being aware of what you want is the first step in getting it. And I think we've talked about this before and no doubt we will come back to it again.

**Arpita:** Yes. I think I see a time management episode coming down the pike just from this. Sure.

**Michael:** Absolutely.

**Arpita:** Alright, well thanks. You take care, Michael.

**Michael:** Great seeing you as always, and we'll see everybody on the next episode of Doctors Living Deliberately. Bye

**Arpita:** Bye.