Mel Robbins Keypoints — Purpose, Happiness & Reinvention

Mel Robbins Keypoints

Episodes in this pack: 69

The Power of Reinvention: Switching Things Up at Any Age

Guest: Ina Garten
Date: 2026-10-15 · Duration: 0:54:58
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6KjH6Svur0o

KEYPOINTS

• Boredom can be a useful signal to leave

At 30, after four years at the White House Office of Management and Budget working on nuclear energy policy, Ina Garten felt she worked very hard and still nothing changed. She also believed no one would ever choose a woman to run OMB. She wrote, "There has to be something more fun than this," and says her low tolerance for boredom made her willing to take big risks to get out of it.

• "Do what you think is fun. If it's fun, you'll be really good at it"

Her husband Jeffrey said this when she told him about a newspaper ad for a food store. Ina reads it as a return to what you enjoyed at 10, before the "shoulds" (lawyer, doctor) took over. Jeffrey later admitted he thought he was just humoring her when he agreed to drive up and look at the store.

• Your past prepares you more than you think

Only when she wrote her 2024 memoir, Be Ready When the Luck Happens, did Ina connect the dots. In Washington she had taught herself to cook, renovated and sold old houses, negotiated bank loans and gone to business school at night. The store was the first job that combined everything she loved. She also sees cooking as science: you test things, but you end up with roast chicken instead of gibberellic acid.

• Jump in the pond rather than deciding from the edge

"Working scared" means you can't tell how cold or deep the pond is from the bank. You get in, splash around and see what's there, and from inside you may spot a better place to go. Mel ties this to John Grisham's "golden moment": a light goes on inside you, and following it changes the direction of your life.

• "Go as far as you can see; when you get there, you'll be able to see farther"

A friend passed Ina this line, attributed to J.P. Morgan. She never plans where she's going. She starts each day with a purpose, does the best job she can, and decides tomorrow's task before stopping. Mel says she wasted decades as an unhappy lawyer looking for her calling. You don't need the whole picture, only the recognition that the current path is no longer yours.

• Treat a business as an experiment and don't assume you know the answer

Her fancy dishes, like veal with morels and herb-covered roast chicken on large platters, didn't sell. The same chickens in red-and-white checked paper trays sold in ten minutes. Her conclusion: people have elegant taste but want simple, earthy food at home. She would put out five things and see what people chose. "If you decide in advance that you think you know what the answer is, you're wrong."

• Before you do something, decide how you'll do it better and your own way

For her first cookbook she set three rules: simple recipes that work every time, beautiful photographs and ingredients from the grocery store. She refuses to write "the cookbook that sells" or the one other people think she should write. Mel calls this getting clear on how and why you want to do something and blocking out the noise.

• Start the hard conversation even when you don't know the outcome

Ten years into the marriage, while running the new store, Ina told Jeffrey on a beach walk that she needed to be on her own. She didn't know if it was for now or forever. You can't control the response, she says, but the response shows whether the other person can bend. Jeffrey said, "If you feel like you need to be on your own," which made her love him more.

• Exercise your power like a muscle by asking

Ina quotes a line attributed to George Lucas: "We're all living in cages with the door wide open." Her advice is to ask for what you want, for example twice the salary offered, and accept that the answer may be no. Then ask someone else, or do it yourself. Mel tells her daughters that if plenty of less capable people have figured it out, so can they.

EXAMPLES

• The $87 first day

The seller, Diana Estrada, showed Ina how to cash out the register on the Thursday before Memorial Day weekend. It held $87 in gross takings. Jeffrey multiplied that by the days of summer and said, "I don't think you're going to make it here." By Friday night the store was sold out, so they bought flour, sugar and chicken at the grocery store and baked all night.

• The gold necklace

Customers ordered her around as if she were staff. Diana told her to wear jewelry so people would know she owned the store. She bought the gaudiest gold necklace she could find, and customers immediately asked, "Is this your store?" Her lesson: you can change the conversation by changing yourself, not the other person.

• Mel's six-hour bakery career

Stuck at a law firm she hated in Boston and inspired by Barefoot Contessa photos, Mel took a weekend bakery job. After six hours of carrot muffins, wiping counters and hauling 30 lb garbage bags, she knew she didn't want to own one. What she wanted was control over her time and a sense of community.

• Work there first

A friend who co-founded Burton Snowboards wanted a specialty food store. Ina had her spend a summer working in the Barefoot Contessa bakery first. She loved it and went on to open a successful store in Stowe, Vermont. At the end of Mel's arena tour, the top two "wild card" dreams among 9,000 people were writing a book and opening a bakery.

• Selling the store, then the hardest year

Working 6 a.m. to 1 a.m. with catering, and no longer challenged, Ina sold the business to her chef and manager and financed the deal herself, on her accountant Susanna's suggestion. She then had a year with nothing to do but "a manicure on Wednesday." Jeffrey pushed her to find another way into food, and the cookbook proposal she sent to a top editor was accepted

within a week.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Run a small test before a big leap**
  Take a weekend job, do a season's apprenticeship, or keep the old model running while you plan changes. Ina ran the store exactly as the seller had for the first summer and redesigned it over the winter. Ask the seller to stay on and teach you, as Diana did for her first month.
- **Use a start-and-end-of-day ritual**
  Begin each day with a clear purpose and finish by naming tomorrow's task. This replaces needing a five-year plan with steady movement and room for chances you didn't plan for.
- **Expect the middle of a change to feel like fog**
  Ina calls transitions an abyss where you may think what you left was the best thing you'll ever do. She says you keep moving. Going down the rabbit hole after separating, she took Jeffrey's advice to get up, take the train and be around friends, and he didn't try to fix her.

7 Life Lessons (I Wish Someone Had Told Me)

Date: 2026-10-05 · Duration: 1:04:27
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=362Dmp_HU0Y

KEYPOINTS

• Move at least once, and treat the guilt as proof the relationship matters

To a listener torn between moving and staying near family, Mel says move, especially in your 20s. 'Your move isn't forever, but changing your environment changes you forever.' Family hesitancy is about them liking you close. Guilt doesn't mean you shouldn't go; it means your family matters. Physical distance can deepen emotional closeness because you stop taking each other for granted.

• Change starts with deciding you don't like how life feels

Mel says she missed this for decades: change is a choice. Autopilot lulls you into tolerating stress and a 'blah' life without taking the first step, which is admitting 'I don't like this anymore. I need a change.' Relationships, habits, jobs, location and mindset can all change once that decision is made.

• Passion is a feeling, and it's really just energy

Passion isn't a hidden job, calling or person to find. Swap the word for 'energy': a passionate chef, rodeo barrel rider or DJ is simply energized by what they do. So ask what energizes you, and list everything that lifts your mood, such as dancing, gardening, choir, museums, team sports or cooking for friends, without judging it.

• Adding something you enjoy can make an overloaded week feel lighter

Mel cites Wharton behavioral scientist Katy Milkman: when you're overwhelmed, scheduling something you enjoy (not a 'should') increases your sense of control over your time, because it signals you matter. It also gives a double boost of energy, once while anticipating it and again when you show up. Her prompt: ask 'What am I looking forward to today or this week?' to train positive anticipation.

• You cannot out-exercise a poor diet

At 55, after menopause, Mel realized 'the problem wasn't the fitness, it was the fuel.' She wasn't eating enough protein or fiber. Experts and her doctors suggested about 120 g of protein daily; she aims for 100 g and has never hit 120. She targets 30 g of fiber, citing Dr. Amy Shah's claim that 95% of Americans fall short. These are her personal targets as relayed from guests, not individual medical advice.

• Train to feel strong, not to look skinny

For about 50 years, Mel says, she exercised to be thin because she was driven by how she looked to others. Shifting to strength, energy, longevity and vitality changed her motivation. She wants to dance in her 80s and 90s rather than be 'thin and frail'.

• Swap 'should' for an intention

'Should' is pressure, not intention. Her intentions are to be someone who takes care of herself, to dance at her grandkids' weddings and to lift her own suitcase into the overhead bin. She cites research, particularly on women, that reframing exercise as the only time in the day that's just for you increases the desire to protect it.

• You can't think logically while flooded, so name it and pause

Using Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence director Marc Brackett's framework: (1) notice you're having an emotional reaction; (2) label it precisely (scared vs. lonely, angry vs. overwhelmed, hurt vs. incompetent); (3) practice not responding. Labeling slows the emotion and suggests the right fix, whether a hug, a walk, breathing or asking for help. Mel cites UCLA 'affect labeling' research showing that naming feelings reduces activity in the brain's emotional center, plus the '90-second rule' that most emotions pass if not fed. She links it to Viktor Frankl's gap between stimulus and response.

• A breakup is grief and withdrawal

The pain isn't a sign the right person got away; it means the time together mattered and the future you pictured died. Your brain is unlearning doing life with someone, which is why you can 'hear' their reply while driving. Like quitting alcohol, any contact such as voice memos, social feeds or old photos reactivates the wiring. She cites research that most people start feeling better around 11.5 weeks after a breakup.

• Your heart decides what, your head decides when and how

For a career change where the heart says yes and the head isn't sure, follow the heart for direction. Use the head for timing and responsibility, such as building a financial runway rather than quitting today.

EXAMPLES

• Kendall's move

Mel's daughter moved from the East Coast to Los Angeles for seven years, grew into a new version of herself, then felt the place 'wasn't as sparkly anymore' and decided to move again. Mel uses the story to show that outgrowing a place is a signal to act: 'If you change nothing, nothing changes.'

• Five books and why fiction builds compassion

Mel recommends Pierce Brown's Red Rising (her son Oakley's favorite, read to connect with him), Kristin Hannah's Firefly Lane (from her mother-in-law, about lifelong female friendship), Virginia Evans's The Correspondent (told in letters by a grouchy older woman), John Grisham's espionage novel The French Illusion (she credits his The Firm with showing her she didn't have to practice law), and Sarah J. Maas's A Court of Thorns and Roses series. Her point is that stepping into unlike minds expands compassion.

• Mel's daily routine

Her day starts with water plus 10 g creatine (she started at 5 g and increased after four to five weeks) and a 23 g protein shot. Then she moves: walks or hikes at least five days a week and lifts heavy weights for 30 minutes three days a week, crediting guests Stacy Sims, Gabrielle Lyon, Vonda Wright, Amy Shah and Eric Topol. Second breakfast is Greek yogurt with blueberries or eggs and salad. She delays coffee until 90 minutes after waking, eats salads with protein for lunch and dinner, takes a nightly bath and goes to bed early.

- **Naming overwhelm in real time**
  On a day with travel logistics, her daughter's breakdown, a missed work deadline and being sick, Mel felt the emotion rise 'like a volcano'. Others read this as hostility. Saying aloud 'I'm really overwhelmed right now' slowed it down.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Breakup recovery steps**
  From Let Them: 30 days of no contact; box up every visible reminder (no burning); refresh the bedroom with paint, new sheets or a furniture rearrangement; ask friends and family to check in; fill your calendar, since an idle mind ruminates; pick a proud-making challenge like a 5K. Ask: 'If the love of my life were around the corner, how would I spend my nights and weekends?'
- **The one-year heart test**
  Close your eyes and imagine life a year from now if nothing changes, then a year after making the change. If your heart expands, that's a yes even if you're nervous; if it contracts, that's a no. Then plan the logistics with your head.
- **Goal shielding for overwhelming days**
  Ask, 'If I could only make progress on one thing today, what would it be?' Write it down and tackle it before the day swallows you. Mel cites a Journal of Personality and Social Psychology study showing single-goal focus protects attention and boosts persistence. 'Busy means you did a lot; productive means you moved something important forward.'
- **Insert one enjoyable thing this week**
  For example, an improv class, a pickup game, a solo movie or a walk you've skipped. Anticipating it adds energy before it even happens.

How to Reinvent Yourself and Start a New Chapter

Guest: John Grisham
Date: 2026-10-01 · Duration: 1:09:07
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jez2pA6iFLA

KEYPOINTS

• Your current chapter is not your final one

Mel opens by explaining why Grisham matters to her. In 1991, miserable in her first year at Boston College Law School and feeling trapped by loans, she read The Firm. Learning that the author was a lawyer who also wrote gripping fiction gave her an epiphany that a law degree didn't have to define her whole life. The theme of the episode is that you can always write the next chapter, even when the current one feels finished or wrong.

• 'Golden moments' redirect a whole life

Grisham describes moments when a light goes on and you don't fully know why, and he says this has happened to him at least twice. Drifting at 20 after transferring between colleges, he watched a wounded Vietnam veteran tear apart a pro-war professor in a 1975 finance class. Afterwards the vet told him general business was 'crap' and to study accounting as preparation for law school. He took the advice on the spot and says he stopped drifting and became a different person.

• Looking back, the messy path connects

Seen in reverse, Grisham's detours (drifting, odd jobs, small-town practice) all fed the books. Mel takes from this that when you're overwhelmed and unsure of your next move, you don't need to know the whole path yet. You need the next step.

• One page a day beats big bursts

Grisham's core rule: if you're serious, stop talking about it and don't talk your book to death. Write at least a page every day. It might take 15 minutes one day and an hour the next, ideally at the same time, in the same spot, with the same coffee, which he still does after 50-plus books. He wrote A Time to Kill and The Firm over five years by getting up at 5 a.m. before practising law. It got easier with repetition.

• Know your ending before you start

Grisham doesn't write the first scene until he knows the last one, because if you know where you're going it's hard to get lost. He sees writers produce 50,000 words on inspiration, back themselves into a corner and throw it away. He outlines everything and refines each idea into a pitch of 30 seconds or less, which he tests on his wife Renee, who is brutally honest and shoots most of them down. Mel reframes this as clarity and alignment for any goal.

• Rejection is normal, not a verdict

His first manuscript went out to two lists of 10 agents and 10 publishers, and the rejections came straight back. Mel counts 28 rejections in total, and A Time to Kill was a flop when it finally came out. Grisham notes that almost every successful writer, and arguably every successful person, was turned down repeatedly. What sets his story apart is that he didn't stop.

• You make your own luck by staying in the current

Grisham calls The Firm's breakout a huge lucky break. Mel pushes back, drawing on a luck researcher she had on the show: luck is mostly the actions that put you in the current. Five years of writing, pushing past rejections and shrugging off a flop all set up the moment. He agrees it was a five-year journey he tends to downplay for a laugh.

• Every job is material

Grisham laid asphalt, sold underwear and changed colleges several times. He says every job you ever have teaches lessons you use for the rest of your life, so time that feels wasted in an ill-fitting job still counts.

• Being falsely accused shaped his lifelong sense of justice

At 19 a teacher pulled him into a hallway mid-exam, said his term paper was too well written for a student his age, accused him of plagiarism and gave it an F. He cried in the restroom, then failed the final and got a D-minus. Years later he realised how traumatic it had been and that it fed his writing about people who are wrongly convicted. Mel connects it to believing in yourself when someone else doesn't.

• Fight hopelessness locally

Grisham says he's still angry and frustrated at the lack of criminal justice reform. Mel's answer is that heartbreak means you still care. Ask yourself what one thing you can do today, in your home, marriage, friendships or community, that is part of a positive shift.

EXAMPLES

• The origin of The Firm

At Ole Miss in the early 1980s, a top-student friend kept visiting regional firms in Houston, Memphis and New Orleans. He came back once saying one firm felt weird, like the kind of place you never leave. Grisham kept the idea for years and wrote The Firm in two years straight after A Time to Kill. They joked the title would never stick.

• The $600,000 film-rights surprise

With the manuscript stalled at his agent in late 1989, a scout sent around 25 copies to Hollywood studios over Christmas without anyone telling Grisham. A bidding war started. His agent hoped for $400,000–500,000, and Paramount paid $600,000, which was more than Grisham had earned in 10 years of practising law. He and Renee sat down at the kitchen table to decide what to do.

• Becoming a 'big guy'

After The Firm hit the New York Times list in 1991 and he did a round of interviews including the Today Show, someone told him Stephen King and Michael Crichton publish every year. Grisham went home to Oxford, Mississippi and wrote around the clock so The Pelican Brief would come out in 1992.

• A first draft of nearly 1,000 pages

Typed up, A Time to Kill was almost a thousand pages. Grisham says he wasn't a writer and didn't know what he was doing, which is why he now outlines.

- **Into wrongful convictions**
  As a young lawyer he read a New York Times obituary of a man much like himself who had come within five days of execution in Oklahoma despite being innocent. He met the family and wrote the book. That work led him to the Innocence Project. He realised thousands of innocent people are in prison, and 20 years later he's still writing about it.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Pick a daily slot for your 'dream' work**
  Same time, same place, a tiny minimum such as one page or 15 minutes. Skip the announcement. Do the work quietly and let it add up.
- **Write your 30-second pitch first**
  Before starting a project or career change, say where it ends and why it matters in 30 seconds to an honest person. If you can't, you're not clear yet.
- **Treat rejections as part of the process**
  Plan for many 'no's from the start, keep submitting, and measure progress by pages and attempts instead of acceptances.
- **For drifting 18–26-year-olds**
  Grisham drifted until 20. Expose yourself to people and jobs, and listen for the advice that clicks. One conversation can redirect you.

Oprah Winfrey: How to Find Your Unique Purpose, Authentic Power, and Calling in Life

Guest: Oprah Winfrey
Date: 2026-09-17 · Duration: 1:18:18
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=adQyLViK_ZU

KEYPOINTS

- **Who you become matters more than what you acquire**
  Looking back at 72, Oprah says what she has acquired isn't as remarkable as who she has become, and she is most proud of the woman she is now. Her opening message: everyone has the power to fulfil 'the fullest expression of yourself as a human being.' She calls Earth a school where we all teach and learn, and believes everyone came here to serve. She also credits 25 years at number one to never seeing a difference between herself and her audience. She saw herself as their surrogate voice.
- **You have an inner GPS, and her first memory of hearing it was at four or five**
  Oprah describes a voice or feeling that guides her. Her only conscious memory of first hearing it is from early childhood in rural Mississippi, churning butter on the back porch while her grandmother hung sheets she'd brought home from the white families she worked for. When her grandmother said 'you better watch me, one day you're going to have to do this', a feeling told Oprah, 'No, you won't. This will not be your life.' She adds with a laugh: 'But don't tell her.'
- **The noise of fear and people-pleasing drowns the whisper**
  Oprah admits there were long stretches when she couldn't hear that inner voice because fear and the 'disease to please' were so loud. Her test for whether you're on track is flow. Getting off centre and not listening shows up as disorder in every area, including your house, closets and car.
- **Things happen for you without meaning you deserved them**
  When Oprah says things happen for a reason, she is careful to separate that from blame. She was raped at nine, and again at 10 and 14, and grew up poor in Mississippi where it was illegal for Black people to be on the street after dark. She says there is a reason for everything, but that doesn't make you responsible or mean it should have happened. A lonely childhood without validation at home drove her to become a talker and to excel at school, which became her calling.
- **Stop seeking 10-gallon love from pint-sized people**
  From a life class with T.D. Jakes that made her cry: some people are '10-gallon' people looking for 10 gallons of love, attention and acceptance from 'pint-sized' people who can't even carry a gallon. Recognising someone's capacity, rather than expecting what they can't give, is how she made peace with her mother long before her mother died.
- **Intention is cause and effect: what you put out comes back**
  In the late 1980s Oprah read Gary Zukav's The Seat of the Soul. Its chapters on intention, linked to karma, cured her people-pleasing. If you say yes to please people, they feel that intention. After 1989 every show was designed around one intention: give viewers an aha moment that could change their direction.
- **Bring intention to any job, even a boring one**
  If you're working just to make ends meet, Oprah says to let every step in that job be for the love of your family and never lose sight of that as you walk out the door. Purpose also lives in how you treat the person parking your car. That is your 'heart print'.
- **Ask 'What do I really want?' and get specific**
  After shows, women would tell Oprah 'I just want to be happy'. When pressed, they could only point to their children's happiness. She pushes people to define the dream they hold in their own heart, not the one Instagram, X or Threads decided for them.
- **You always have the right to change your mind**
  Oprah calls ending her show and launching OWN one of the biggest mistakes of her life. Her inner voice was so strong she'd wake at night unable to breathe, saying 'don't do it'. But she'd already signed. She reveals she kept her word to please people outside her, not because she wanted to. In 2012, one of her worst years, every headline was about 'the struggling OWN network'. She says the question is who you're keeping your word to, the outside or the inside.
- **Purpose is quiet, daily and bigger than you**
  Oprah says people stay stuck because they can't see their connection to something greater, and she insists your life isn't that small. People at church told her grandmother she had 'a talking child', and her purpose turned out to be using her voice. At 72 she asks 'How can I be used?' and treats life as if she has one solid decade left to deliver her message with clarity, love and no ego.

EXAMPLES

- **The on-air humiliation she never got over**
  On a live show, a man revealed in front of the audience that a woman was pregnant, and the audience gasped. Oprah apologised to both afterwards and says the woman's humiliation 'still abides with me'. She told producers 'never again'. Her lesson is that the worst thing you can do is humiliate someone, so never criticise anyone in front of others.
- **The car full of hair rollers**
  Driving a little Chevette, young Oprah did her hair on the way to work and threw the rollers in the back until the car was a wreck. Seeing it, she thought, 'This car represents my life right now.' She cleaned it out one roller at a time, finding quarters under the seat.
- **Caroline Myss and 'spirit' in 1992**
  During a show with Caroline Myss (Anatomy of the Spirit), Oprah saw the audience had tuned out and stopped to ask why. They didn't know what 'spirit' meant ('Jesus? Moses?'). That led to segments called Remembering Your Spirit, explaining that you have a mind, a body and a spirit.
- **Mattie Stepanek's 'heart print'**

Oprah learned the term from Mattie Stepanek, a young guest in a wheelchair who died at 13. Whenever you move someone, you leave a heart print. She pairs it with Maya Angelou's line that people remember how you made them feel.

- **Mel's 5:55 a.m. 'good morning'**

Mel tells of smiling and saying good morning to a woman trudging across a crosswalk with her head down. The woman perked up. Mel's point is that a tiny exchange of energy can flip a switch in someone else.

- **The Sphere moment**

Standing alone after U2's first show at the Las Vegas Sphere, Oprah felt the same feeling she had at five on the back porch. She takes it as a sign of being connected to the life force within her.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Run a weekly 'whisper check'**

Notice where your life feels out of flow (house, car, relationships, sleep) and ask what you're ignoring. Restore order one 'roller' at a time.

- **Before saying yes, name your intention**

Ask whether you're agreeing to please people or because you want to. Oprah's view is that the intention behind a yes shapes the result.

- **Right-size expectations of 'pint-sized' people**

Stop going back to people for love they can't hold. Accept their capacity, find the 10 gallons elsewhere, and make peace on your own terms.

- **Give yourself a decade**

Mel suggests stealing Oprah's frame at any age: what would you do with the next ten years if they were your window to deliver what you came to give?

Stanford Psychologist: 7 Small Things That Make a Huge Difference in How You Feel

Guest: Kelly McGonigal
Date: 2026-09-10 · Duration: 1:12:20
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UL6h-OqJQh8

KEYPOINTS

• Joy is the opposite of a gut punch, and its job is to make you want to be alive

Kelly McGonigal defines joy by its opposite. Bad news makes your heart sink and leaves a heavy residue. Joy is the moment your heart lifts, you feel lighter, and your outlook on yourself and life improves, however small the trigger. "Joy would not exist if life were not hard." She calls it an uplift that pulls you out of feeling stuck or hopeless, a survival instinct rather than a reward for a perfect life.

• Joy comes from four consistent sources

From thousands of "joy reports" and research worldwide, McGonigal names four sources. The first is feeling close to someone, and laughing together is the easiest example. The second is doing something that makes you feel good about who you are: progress on a goal, a task you'd put off, acting on your values, helping someone. The third is noticing beauty, often nature; birds come up surprisingly often. The fourth is being absorbed in something you love.

• Stress symptoms are your body trying to help

Her best-known talk argues that people misread stress as betrayal. A racing heart delivers energy. Under stress the brain also gives more weight to signals from the heart, which she reads, partly as a metaphor, as a nudge to remember what you care about. Her suggested response: "Thank you body for trying to give me energy," then ask what you can do here that reflects who or what matters most.

• Muscles release "hope molecules"

Exercise science now treats muscle as a kind of pharmacy. Contracting muscles release chemicals that support immunity, heart health and blood sugar, and molecules that reach the brain to aid stress recovery and motivation, acting like antidepressants, as McGonigal puts it. You don't need a strenuous workout. Going from nothing to anything is the biggest step, and less activity means less of this effect.

• Resistance before a helpful activity is a sign you need it

Feeling low on energy or socially anxious before joining in, like hovering at the edge of a wedding dance floor, is real but easy to misread. You haven't yet done the thing that would give you energy or ease the self-consciousness. Rely on a commitment you've made to yourself, not on feeling ready.

• Memories are a resource you can draw on

Calling up a meaningful memory produces an immediate lift in hope. A follow-up question McGonigal learned from another psychologist makes it more useful: "What's an important thought or feeling this memory gives you?" The point is not only to feel better but to see who you want to be in the moment.

• Point your attention on purpose

Many people have a negativity bias. McGonigal compares choosing a focus to looking for a specific cereal in the supermarket: once you tell your brain what to find, it stands out. Prompts she uses include looking around for something that reminds you of someone you love, or for evidence that someone made your life better.

• Shutting down is a form of self-protection; train for courage outside the crisis

Dissociation happens when your body decides there's nothing you can do, so it makes you less present out of kindness. It can turn into a chronic habit. Start by recognising that part of you cares enough to shield you. Then practise courage in smaller, similar situations, and talk to yourself the way someone encouraging would.

• Hopelessness means change the approach, not the goal

Despair tends to spread from one strategy to life as a whole. McGonigal reads it more narrowly. If you've sent 300 applications with no response, the strategy is failing, not your future. A harmful relationship may be hopeless, but there is hope of getting out. As a Stanford freshman adviser she told students who failed premed that there are many ways to have a life worth living.

• Joy isn't selfish: "meet joy with joy"

She calls joy an act of care for yourself and others. People need company in their best moments as much as comfort in their worst. Her single most important practice is to treat someone else's good news as a chance to connect.

EXAMPLES

• Music: the two-to-three-minute dose

Listening to a song you love quickly releases dopamine, endorphins and endocannabinoids. Neuroscientists use favourite songs to study joy and to reduce pain during medical procedures. The smallest effective doses she found were two to three minutes. Her current favourite is a Madonna dance track with a lyric about everybody being a work of art.

• The spin class that trained her to fly

McGonigal had a lifelong fear of flying, with panic and dissociation. Her spin classes felt the same: a pounding heart and wanting to escape a sweaty room. She went back and practised staying on the bike, telling herself she was choosing a life where she could fly. She then flew to record this episode.

• Three hours on the shower floor

Two years ago her father was diagnosed with terminal cancer while her mother needed intensive care. Calls and texts poured in while she was showering, so she turned off the water and sat on the floor for about three hours. Over time she kept going by finding one moment of laughter or touch a day and recalling one highlight before sleep.

• Mel's shower and her NICU memory

During severe postpartum depression after her daughter Sawyer was born, one hot shower after 11 days in bed gave Mel a sense that things could change. She also recalls friends Robin and Lisa meeting her at the Mass General Brigham NICU at 11 p.m. when her five-day-old son Oakley was airlifted there. The memory reminds her she wasn't alone and makes her want to show up for others the same way.

• The global hope study

Asked what gives them hope when life is hard, people worldwide named helping someone, being thanked by someone they helped, and seeing someone help another person. McGonigal adds that letting others help you is an underrated act. It gives both people hope and creates a chance to say thank you.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Song plus movement when you feel flat

Play a song you love and do anything other than sit or lie down: dance in the kitchen, carry heavy things, walk down the driveway and back. If you can't move, move what you can or just listen, which activates the brain's movement areas.

• End each day with one highlight

Before your mind starts planning tomorrow's worries, name one good moment, one laugh or one sign you're not alone. It reminds your brain that good things are possible.

• Do an act of joy without waiting to feel joyful

Send an encouraging note, put something beautiful into the world or give someone a reason to laugh. You don't need to feel hopeful first, and you usually benefit too. Trust the things you love "beyond reason", like board games, knitting, fantasy audiobooks or pets, and don't justify them to anyone.

• Share your struggles and your wins

Not wanting to be a burden and not wanting to brag are two sides of the same habit. Mel was upset when her parents hid her father's brain aneurysm for a month: protecting her "denied me the opportunity to love you." Think in terms of interdependence.

Feeling Lost or Behind in Life? The #1 Happiness Expert Explains How to Find Your Purpose

Guest: Dr. Dacher Keltner
Date: 2026-07-13 · Duration: 1:06:21
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Lg2T5F-1nc

KEYPOINTS

- **What the happiness research points to is small, repeated moments, not big life overhauls.**
  Dr. Dacher Keltner, a UC Berkeley psychologist and founding director of the Greater Good Science Center, says the science of happiness 'exploded' over the past 30–40 years. Money and circumstances 'matter a little' (living in a democracy, having a healthy body), but what you can do right now is collect little moments of joy, beauty, laughter, gratitude, awe, love and kindness. Even five minutes a week savoring something beautiful helps.
- **Purpose comes from realizing 'this is in me and I'm serving some part of the world through it.'**
  For Keltner, purpose isn't a job title. He realized his was to teach (he comes from a long line of teachers). Once you see what you're serving through your actions, he says, purpose brings power and agency. He wants room for every kind of calling, including the struggling actress and the carpenter (his dad was one), not just perfectionistic achievement.
- **The first step out of feeling lost is asking questions, not changing careers.**
  He asks: What really inspired me as a child? Who inspires me, in my life or in history? What are my core strengths and values? He stresses 'this isn't about your career.' It's about where you come alive, even if that isn't what you do most of the day. Mel points out he didn't say to quit your job or adopt a 17-step morning routine. Just put a little of that into this weekend.
- **Your early inspirations work like a compass.**
  Drawing on narrative psychology ('we are stories, almost like books'), Keltner says the people and moments that moved you early point to what you care about. They can guide friendships, volunteer work, what you pursue, even which film you choose. He recalls the Dalai Lama telling a 2003 panel he was on that 'kindness is a basic state of human nature.'
- **When you're exhausted or purposeless, go back to kindness.**
  He says nearly every ethical tradition, from Confucianism to the Abrahamic faiths to modern philosophy, starts there. Practice it walking through the city, helping someone across the street, at work. He notes 30–40% of Americans volunteer. In his account, gratitude, beauty and kindness engage the vagus nerve, which calms the body and supports healthy immune function, and they involve dopamine, which he links to energy and purpose.
- **Awe is the feeling of meeting something vast you can't immediately understand, and it's easy to study.**
  His lab produces awe with music, big trees, national parks, art museums and thinking about inspiring people, then measures self-reports, brain activity, goosebumps and vagus nerve activity. He says it's 'actually pretty tractable' in the lab, despite people assuming it can't be measured.
- **In awe, the brain's 'ego network' quiets and the body shifts toward connection.**
  His description: the default mode network, where to-do lists, goals and self-focus live, deactivates, so 'your ego is no longer hassling' you. The vagus nerve slows your heart rate and makes you feel connected. There's 'a little bit of evidence' that oxytocin is released. Immune function improves, and your mind gets quiet and widens to the bigger picture.
- **A minute of awe a day is his top recommendation.**
  He tells audiences of doctors and nurses there's 'nothing better for your mind and body than a minute of awe a day.' He says it reduces depression, anxiety and daily stress, lowers exhaustion and loneliness, and increases energy and purpose. His recipe: pause, put away your devices, take a deep breath, and look for one of the 'eight wonders' his research found around the world.
- **The fearful story is always only part of the story.**
  He acknowledges stress is higher and young people are struggling. He has followed the data for 35–40 years. Citing Thich Nhat Hanh, he says that if you pause you can still smell the flowers, hear children laughing and see the light in someone's eyes. Mel connects this to the line that the good in your life depends on your ability to see it.

EXAMPLES

- **The awe walk study (with Virginia Sturm)**
  Participants took a weekly walk. Controls just enjoyed it, while the awe group looked from small to vast (bark to tree, raindrop to storm) and visited places of childlike wonder. Adults 75 and older reported less bodily pain, and he says a paper under review shows better brain health six years later.
- **Losing his younger brother**
  Keltner describes grief that 'dislocated' him. Despite being hardworking and purposeful, he felt exhausted and without purpose. His way back was looking for the moments of purpose in each day and committing to kindness. He also found comfort in Eleanor Roosevelt's nightly prayer to see 'the simple beauties all around me.'
- **The flowers exercise with Mel**
  With eyes closed, Mel touched flowers on set. They took her back to lying in her front yard as a kid in a small town in western Michigan, and then to her husband Chris, their flower beds and her grandmother. Keltner says that widening chain of connections is what awe does.
- **Mel's barred owls and Grand Canyon trip**
  Mel admits she's the one in her family who shushes everyone at dusk to hear barred owls calling ('who cooks for you?'). She was about to raft the Grand Canyon, a trip three years in the planning. Keltner says experiences 'beyond your frame of reference' like these are exactly what trigger awe.
- **His own reliable awe**
  An annual summer trip with his daughter Natalie and friends, where he feels 'part of the trees and the rivers and the fish.' He cites Darwin's phrase 'endless forms most beautiful.'

OTHER RELEVANT

- **60-second awe prompts**

  Look at the sky, which his undergrads love. Think of someone whose moral beauty inspires you and feel it in your body. Recall moving together with others (yoga class, a game, a concert). Look at a painting or a pattern. Play a piece of music that brings you to tears. Think about ideas you love or about the life cycle: we only have a little time here.

- **Purpose inventory**

  Write answers to: What inspired me as a child? Who inspires me? What are my core strengths? Then schedule one small expression of the answer this week.

- **Daily pause**

  Find a moment or two each day to slow down: a sunset, music, journaling. Treat it as maintenance, not a luxury.

Try it For 1 Week: Small Ways to Make Your Life Fun & Exciting Again

Guest: Priya Parker
Date: 2026-06-22 · Duration: 1:06:46
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDqKUXp2ENk

KEYPOINTS

• Most gatherings disappoint because we plan the logistics and leave the people to chance

Priya Parker, a conflict-resolution facilitator and author of The Art of Gathering, defines a gathering as three or more people coming together, for a reason, with a beginning, middle and end. Hosts obsess over food, venue and table, then 'hope for the best' on connection, so people end up spending $73 on dinner and going home lonelier. 'There's almost nothing lonelier than being with other people and feeling alone.' She argues we need 'group help,' not just self-help, because many problems are shared.

• The biggest mistake is skipping the purpose: first ask 'what's the need here?'

The reason you visit your parents may change over 20 years. Once it was so they could bond with your kids; now it might be learning about their lives while you can. You don't have to announce the purpose. Just knowing it changes what you do. Mel connects this to her line: 'If you change nothing, nothing changes.'

• A good purpose is specific, unique and disputable

Specific, because meaning lies in specificity: one woman with a basil plant that bloomed too much threw a margherita-pizza party. Unique to this moment: turning 37 isn't turning 56. Disputable, meaning it sets boundaries and not everyone has to come. Over-inviting out of niceness 'dilutes our gatherings.'

• Sometimes talk is the enemy of connection

Families stuck on a couch become 'a cauldron' of short tempers. Mel notices less conflict on trips with things to do. Parker's mentor Hal Saunders, who created the sustained dialogue process, taught that dialogue isn't always the right tool. Sometimes people need a soccer game, a dance party, a walk, gardening or antiquing. Gatherings are 'like accordions': alternate dense shared moments with looser breathing room.

• Introverts often make the best hosts because they design structure instead of performing

Many people others named as great hosts called themselves introverts. One said she was so uncomfortable at most gatherings that she started designing ones she'd want to attend. They rely on structure, not their own 'tap dancing.' Examples include a quiet corner with two hammocks, or sending two relatives who don't know each other out for eggs so they talk in the car.

• Connection is threatened as much by unhealthy peace as by unhealthy conflict

Parker's parents never fought, and then separated. Her takeaway: 'there's great loss in avoidance.' Unhealthy peace looks like a hurt left unspoken until you ghost someone, a team everyone knows is launching a bad product, or a table looking down while an uncle berates a cousin. We swing between avoiding and 'burning the house down.' Mel immediately thinks of 'about five marriages.'

• Healthy heat is learnable, and conflict is a sign that you care

'We don't fight about things we don't care about.' Facilitators look for the 'relational longing' at the centre of a fight; people who truly hate each other just leave. Prepare your body first. Facilitator Prentis Hemphill says 'the most powerful body we have is a relaxed body.' Breathe, plant both feet and know your intention, even if your voice shakes. Then ask: 'Do you have a moment? Something didn't sit well with me.'

• The best way to change a tense family dynamic is before anyone enters the room

Find allies, the people who catch your eye across the table. Replace old formats that no longer work, and 'fight, but about other stuff.' Whoever holds social power sets the group's relationship to conflict.

• The first 5% of a gathering teaches people how to behave

A gathering is 'a temporary alternative world.' Give arrivals a role, such as 'wine minister' or 'water minister,' or set up a greeting committee that says 'We've heard so much about you!' On Zoom, which kills informal connection, be fully on from the start like a live sportscaster, warm up the chat and use playful rules.

• Most gatherings don't end; give them an 'honorable death'

Her improv teacher, Dave Sawyer, said good actors think about entrances and great actors obsess about exits. Walk guests out. Signal last call, for example 'Thank you for coming. For those who can stay, nightcap in the living room.' Close with shared reflection: best moments, best jokes, the MVP, what you learned.

EXAMPLES

• 'What's the naughtiest thing you've done that was worth it… before age 12?'

At a Florida restaurant, Parker's daughter asked her grandfather this 'magical question,' one everyone wants to answer and everyone wants to hear. Stories none of them knew came out, and it became a completely different lunch.

• Mel's 30th-anniversary weekends

Rather than one big dance party where she'd talk to nobody, Mel invited groups of faraway friends for separate weekends, including Chris's college friends for a nearby bluegrass festival (tents yes, dogs no). Her need: social lives 'deleted' since 2020 by hybrid work, moves and empty nesting. She also plans to host a viewing party for three foxtail lilies she has waited three years to see bloom.

• The family cooking championship

A family stuck in yearly political fights pre-assigned mixed teams of cooks and non-cooks to make each meal. They ended up arguing about the best salsa instead of politics.

• Hot-takes party and rose-and-thorn

Guests defend trivial controversial opinions ('There should be only one type of pasta,' 'Tuesday is the best day') to practise warm disagreement. A manager added 10 minutes of rose-and-thorn to weekly meetings for 10 weeks. By week eight the rest of

the meeting had changed, because 'thorns' had become normal.

• Sound baths, sunscreen and wedding dresses

A friend hosting in-laws for the first time at Thanksgiving booked a 90-minute group sound bath, so nobody had to talk. At a 40th birthday, each guest brought an offering for the group: favourite sunscreen, a childhood game, tiny chocolate bars. A 'wear the best thing in your closet' dress code brought three wedding dresses.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Keep magical questions in your pocket

What do you own that no one else here owns (Mel: a tractor)? What film could you never watch again (Mel: Jaws)? What outfit do you still keep, and why? What would your life's opening-credits song be? What's your favourite way to eat a potato?

• Meet your neighbours with a 'chair and share'

Slip analog flyers under doors inviting people to bring a chair and share their name. One woman drew 40 neighbours this way. Recruit co-hosts, and keep going to the same recurring events, because 'proximity and repetition create safety.'

• Hosting isn't an identity

Host something you'd love to attend, even with just one other person, and skip it if it feels like an obligation. Rotate who asks the weekly icebreaker question on team calls. If it all feels like too much, start by being a great guest.

Feel Better Immediately: Do THIS Today to Reset Your Life, Energy, & Happiness

Date: 2026-06-04 · Duration: 1:01:47
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Snuhd59cNP0

KEYPOINTS

• A mid-year reset can be two questions instead of a productivity overhaul.
Back from roughly three months on tour, Mel says she deliberately didn't want another episode about research and optimizing. Question one looks back: what have you done, experienced or gotten through this year that you're proud of? Question two looks ahead: what are you looking forward to? 'There's nothing you need to do,' she says. The point is to stop racing through the year and then look up in December wondering where it went.

• Stop measuring your life by what you haven't done.
Most people skip giving themselves credit because they're busy getting through the day. Her prompts: expecting your first baby, getting into grad school, surviving a breakup (and feeling a bit better 11–12 weeks in). Allow multiple answers, and include quiet wins nobody sees, like caregiving and simply continuing to show up.

• What Mel is proudest of is controlling her response, not anything she achieved.
The tour meant 16-hour days. At 57, she says it 'nearly killed me,' and she now wonders how musicians keep that pace for 100–200 days. Something went wrong every day. She chose to 'ride the wave' and deliberately stay calm, present and looked after. Because of that, she says, she enjoyed it and actually remembers it. Hard things you can't control will knock you down, but how you show up is up to you.

• Stress makes you miss the good parts of your own life.
'It's hard to have fun when you're stressed out… when you're constantly gripping the wheel of life.' Mel says that if she'd been fretting backstage, she would have missed the tour's best moment. Dwelling on what went wrong 'robs' you of celebrating what went right.

• Feeling flat often means your brain has habituated.
Mel draws on neuroscientist Dr. Tali Sharot (UCL's Affective Brain Lab, a past guest). The brain loves familiarity and learns patterns: same commute, same three meals, same scrolling. As things become familiar, it reacts less, including to the good stuff. That's why you can love your house, partner or dog and stop appreciating them, or have a life you worked hard for and still feel flat.

• Novelty and anticipation wake your brain back up.
According to the research Mel describes, something new on the calendar gives your mind 'somewhere good to go.' You get to time-travel out of the daily routine and toward something that reminds you who you are, and that life isn't only work, bills, caregiving and laundry. Anticipation itself is part of the payoff, not just the event.

• 'Nothing to look forward to' is useful information.
If you're 'just trying to survive the day,' that honest answer explains why days blur together on autopilot: wake up, answer texts, check social media, coffee, work, home, dinner. Mel treats it as a sign of what's missing, not a personal failing.

• The future you want starts today with one small step.
Pick a date, pick a thing, make a plan, send the text, buy the tickets, or organize the group for the hike. It doesn't have to be a big trip. A neighborhood barbecue counts. 'You deserve to have something in your life that makes you look up and go, I can't wait for that.'

• When something goes wrong, you get to choose your mindset.
Mel's recurring point through the tour and trip stories: assume no one meant to mess things up, tell yourself a story that helps ('this is a sign'), and save the laugh for later. That keeps a setback from wrecking the experience.

EXAMPLES

• The confetti that 'farted'
At Sydney, the tour's biggest show with 9,000 people, Mel hit the big finale cue and only one of six cannons went off. The confetti 'didn't even hit the front row.' She didn't snap at anyone, since no one did it on purpose, and the audience still had an 'electric' night.

• The 37th birthday in Vancouver
At the Mother's Day matinee in Vancouver, Mel's friend Sam, performing as her drag alter ego 'Melodrama,' went into the crowd and found a woman turning 37 who was facing cancer. A room of strangers stood up cheering, and tour director Marcus ran a signed book out to her. Mel calls it the highlight of the tour and one she'd have missed if she'd been stressed backstage.

• Lynn's shark onesie
On the 16-hour flight to New Zealand, teammate Lynn, who is terrified of flying and imagined surviving a crash only to be eaten by sharks, came out of the bathroom in a hooded shark onesie, shark slippers and shark-teeth glasses: 'If we're going to go down…'

• Birkenstocks at Baxter State Park
After 8 hours in the pickup, Mel realized her hiking boots were on the back porch in Vermont and all she had were Birkenstocks. They drove 45 minutes the wrong way to a farm supply store with one pair of stiff new hiking boots in her size. She declared them 'magic boots' and climbed Katahdin: '12 hours, zero blisters.'

• Cameron's brother 'forgot' his PhD
When producer Cameron asked her brother what he was proud of this year, he said 'nothing,' and had forgotten he'd gotten into a PhD program.

• The Grand Canyon trip and the 1986 backpack
Mel's planned trip, three years in the making, is a 9-hour hike into the Grand Canyon in 100° heat, then nine days rafting with

three families. Packing, she pulled out the Lowe Alpine pack she bought in Grand Rapids in 1986 before starting at Dartmouth. It's now 39 years old and feels like 'a seven pounder.'

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Question 1: What am I proud of this year?**
  Go back to January. List several answers, including what you survived and quiet ways you showed up. Ask a friend or family member, too, because they may have forgotten their own.
- **Question 2: What am I looking forward to?**
  If the answer is nothing, put one thing on the calendar this week: a concert, a hike, a dinner, a visit.
- **Fight habituation with small novelty**
  Change one routine (a different route, a new meal, a new place) to help your brain notice the good again.

What Makes a Good Life? This Study on 26,000 Regrets Will Guide You for the Rest of Your Life

Guest: Daniel Pink
Date: 2026-05-25 · Duration: 1:09:14
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnUVdqyaoc4

KEYPOINTS

• Regret is a signal to answer, not a feeling to avoid

Daniel Pink, a bestselling author whose TED talk has more than 12 million views, says we've been fed 'bad advice' to always be positive and never look back. Regret is an emotion we feel when we look back and wish we'd acted differently. Researchers have studied it for about 60 years and find it's one of the most common human emotions. His metaphor: regret is 'a knock at the door. Answer the door. See what it has to tell you.'

• Thinking through regrets on purpose makes people better at things

Pink cites evidence, including from negotiation studies, that people who systematically interrogate a regret improve next time. The key word is systematically. Replaying a scene and wallowing doesn't help. Burying it doesn't either. Mel compares carrying regrets to dragging a suitcase you never open.

• People's regrets around the world are strikingly similar

The World Regret Survey collected more than 26,000 regrets from 134 countries. Pink says the most surprising finding was how universal they sound: people everywhere regret the same kinds of things. Regret feels lonely and shameful, but it's one of the most shared experiences there is.

• Almost all regrets fall into four types

Foundation: 'if only I had done the work' (money, health, education). Boldness: 'if only I had taken the chance.' Moral: 'if only I had done the right thing.' Connection: 'if only I had reached out.' Pink argues that, read in reverse, these four describe a good life: a solid foundation, some boldness, goodness and love.

• Connection regrets are the most common, and relationships usually drift rather than blow up

The typical story is a friendship, or a relationship that should have existed, that faded away. Pink says we imagine relationships end in explosions, but most just drift. The fix is usually small: 'When in doubt, reach out.' In his interviews, reconnected relationships restart almost instantly.

• We hold back because we think reaching out will be awkward and unwelcome

Pink calls this a lesson for himself. We assume we'd be thrilled to hear from an old friend but that nobody else would, as if we're 'so special.' He says reaching out is learned behavior, not natural behavior. As a man in his early 60s, texting a buddy 'Hey, I'm thinking of you' doesn't come easily, but the second time is less awkward.

• Foundation regrets come from small choices adding up

One treated dinner is fine. Picking up the check five times a week for ten years leaves a person at 40 with no savings, living paycheck to paycheck on a good salary. These regrets erode the base of a life slowly, which is why they are easy to ignore until late.

• Boldness regrets grow with age because inaction can't be undone in your head

Boldness regrets come from choosing to play it safe over taking the chance: not studying abroad, not speaking up, not starting that business, and hundreds of dating regrets about never asking someone out. When people don't take the shot, Pink says, they overwhelmingly regret it. Regrets about something you did can be softened with a 'downward counterfactual' (imagining how it could have been worse). Regrets about what you didn't do leave only the open-ended 'what if.'

• Moral regrets are the smallest category but the most deeply held

These come from taking the low road at a fork, such as cheating or being unkind. There were fewer of them in the database, but people carried them heavily.

• Be fair to your past self

Mel makes the point that judging your 20s self with what your 57-year-old self knows is unfair. Pink adds grace for 'I wish I'd done it sooner' regrets: you did eventually act. As the proverb goes, the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago, and the second-best time is now.

EXAMPLES

• Cheryl and Jen

A woman Pink interviewed had drifted from a close college friend for 20–25 years and wanted to call but never did. Pink got frustrated: 'Cheryl, you know what to do.' Five days later she emailed Jen, who was thrilled. They talked, met up, and Pink now gets a photo of them together every six months.

• Mel and Jodie

Mel's childhood best friend stayed in the Midwest when Mel went east for college. They went 20-some years without talking 'for no reason,' bumped into each other in Mel's mid-40s, and now text weekly. They line up work trips to share hotel rooms, Mel in Vermont and Jodie in Arizona. Mel calls it one of the greatest joys of her life.

• Mel's money regret

Mel took the credit cards handed out at college registration and entered marriage with about $20,000 in secret debt. She hid in shame through her 20s and 30s, and by her early 40s she and her husband were $800,000 in debt with liens on the house. It only changed once the pain forced her to deal with it. Pink compares that to waiting two years on a headache instead of seeing a doctor.

• Olympic bronze beats silver

In a study rating medalists' facial expressions, gold medalists looked happiest, then bronze, then silver. Silver medalists were stuck on 'if only I'd been faster,' while bronze medalists were glad they'd made the podium at all.

- **Where the book started**

  Pink, 61 and on 'the back nine of life,' got the idea after his daughter Sophia's graduation made him think about his own college regrets: wishing he'd been kinder, taken more risks and worked harder.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Inward, outward, forward: his three-step reset**

  Inward: treat yourself with self-compassion, the way you'd treat a friend. Pink says piles of evidence show harsh self-talk doesn't improve performance, while self-compassion does. Outward: get it out of your head by writing it down or talking about it. Forward: draw a lesson and decide what to do next.

- **Write about the regret for 15 minutes a day, three days in a row**

  Pink credits this to research by James Pennebaker at the University of Texas. Writing turns a vague 'phantom' into words you can examine, and people feel better about the regret afterward.

- **Talk to yourself in the third person**

  Pink says research finds people think more clearly when they ask 'what should [your name] do?' instead of 'what should I do?'

- **Consult your future self**

  Stuck on a big decision? Imagine talking with yourself 10 years from now, in 2036. Pink says that person almost always wants you to build a foundation, take the shot, do the right thing and reach out.

What Really Matters in Life? A Cancer Surgeon's Warning After 15,000 Patients

Guest: Dr. Rahul Jandial
Date: 2026-03-19 · Duration: 1:15:53
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4CewOV9u7Q

KEYPOINTS

• The dying tend to split into two stories: 'I wish I had' and 'I'm glad I did.'
Dr. Rahul Jandial, a neurosurgeon and neuroscientist at City of Hope who says he has treated more than 15,000 stage 4 cancer patients, noticed a pattern. Patients stuck on 'I wish I had' ('…gotten screened earlier,' '…not smoked') cope poorly, even when they're medically doing well. Those who say 'I'm glad I did' cope well, even when they're doing worse. How you tell the story mattered more than the outcome.

• The most common regret is not being bold enough at life's turning points.
Patients whose kids have grown up tell him they wish they'd been bolder at life's pivots and trusted their hunches about changing direction. 'They never say, I'm glad I was practical and conservative.' They look back and say 'it's a short run, I should have taken a few more chances,' as long as it didn't mean hurting people or 'gambling it all away.'

• Younger parents with cancer pray for a finish line, not a cure.
Patients in their 40s and 50s with children often aren't focused on a cure. Their prayer is to live until the kids finish high school and leave home, so the kids don't watch their mother or father die while they're teenagers. Clarity about what matters arrives fast when time is short.

• Tie your self-worth to opportunities, not outcomes.
At 53, Jandial says he has felt lost whenever he chased an outcome instead of an opportunity. If you 'hitch your mental health or self-worth' to results, you'll either aim too low or keep judging yourself wrongly. 'There is no moment of arrival,' only preparation, strategies and coping skills.

• Sometimes you have to 'amputate' something, even when it looks bad from the outside.
Choices in the outside world and in your own mind can each be constructive or destructive. At 19, partying too much and facing other crises as his mother was diagnosed with breast cancer, he cut out school, leaving Berkeley to go home. He says amputations like that can permanently change relationships or careers, but it was the first time he felt he was 'driving my life.'

• Mentorship rarely just lands on you. You have to put yourself where it can happen.
While working as a security guard, he enrolled at Compton Community College, where an English professor became his mentor. That only happened because he showed up and signed up. 'You can't just wait for inspiration and mentorship to land on you.'

• In a crisis, pace your breathing so you don't panic.
He uses this in surgery and says Navy SEALs and deep divers do too. Directing attention to your breathing trains focus, which he calls 'attentional power.' Slow, deep breaths prevent hyperventilation: 'When you blow off the carbon dioxide, you will panic,' and then you can't do what you need to. He links it to calming an over-excited limbic system.

• The brain changes by repurposing what's left, which suggests a healthy brain can change too.
He's skeptical of loose 'rewiring' talk. After a hemispherectomy, removing nearly half the brain for uncontrollable seizures in children, the space stays hollow and fills with fluid. Nothing regrows. Yet a few years later many of those kids are walking, because the remaining neurons take on new jobs ('the dancer became the soldier'). If an injured brain can recover like that, he asks, what about a healthy one?

• Repetition literally builds the groove.
His image: neurons are 'microscopic jellyfish' spraying electricity at each other. When you keep thinking or acting the same way, the brain saves energy by wrapping those connections in fatty insulation (myelin). Like a groove down a mountain, the path gets easier with each pass, so the first efforts take the most energy.

• Caregivers aren't alone, but they need their private moments.
His message to family caregivers: the person next to you may not have been there yet but will be, or may already have survived it. Our struggles look similar at the brain level. Use the support available, and protect 'those private moments that you only share with yourself.'

EXAMPLES

• 'My life started at LAX'
He barely remembers his first eight years. One day he was in the foothills of the Himalayas in Kashmir, 'beautiful' and 'violent.' Twenty-four hours and a Pan Am flight later he landed at LAX with his parents and brother. His message to his 9-year-old self: you'll be underestimated and there will be pain.

• 'I know you'll do well, but I hope you do good'
His Compton Community College English professor wrote this on his work. He still has it. 'I caught fire.' He had once gotten by on CliffsNotes.

• The mother in Managua
On a surgical trip to Nicaragua with a friend who heads children's brain surgery in San Diego, he met a mother who had traveled a long way by bus with her shoeless child. She later told a nurse she had 'done it': she'd gotten her son to American brain surgeons. Her success was seizing the opportunity, not guaranteeing the outcome. The boy did well, though many children with cancer don't.

• Security guard years
After leaving Berkeley, he spent two years as a security guard in a cafeteria. His mother recovered from breast cancer and his family stabilized, the two priorities he had chosen. He says he felt proud of a bold step 'when the optics weren't' good.

• Patients who hide their cancer
Many patients in their 40s and 50s hate being asked 'How are you doing?' and wear wigs to hide treatment. He watches them

'write their own story in their own mind' instead of letting others define it.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **The 'glad I did' audit**
  List the moments you're glad you acted on. Then name one current hunch about changing direction that wouldn't hurt anyone, and take one step on it.
- **Paced breathing before high-stakes moments**
  Slow, deep, unhurried breaths before surgery, a hard conversation or a presentation. The goal is simply to avoid breathing too fast.
- **Opportunity framing**
  Define success as showing up for the opportunity (applying, signing up, getting to the right room) rather than controlling the result.

How to Build a Life That Matters & Get What You Want Starting Today

Guest: Seth Godin
Date: 2026-03-12 · Duration: 1:06:21
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cWZI2RyI9wM

KEYPOINTS

• Start where you are; resistance is a sign the work matters

Seth Godin, author of 20+ bestsellers and one of Mel's longtime mentors, says the only place to begin is where you are. If you wait to get somewhere else first, you never get there. Anything important brings resistance, and 'if you don't feel resistance, it might not be important enough.' This episode isn't about marketing; it's about why people keep postponing the life they want.

• Pick yourself instead of waiting to be chosen

His two words. The 'dominant system' trains you to wait for an invitation: to apply, to be cast, for the company to come to the placement office, for a publisher to call and ask for your novel. It feels awkward to say 'I picked myself. I made this.' But no one is forcing you to wait; you're choosing it, and waiting is 'a safe, lovely place to hang out.'

• Swap 'but' for 'and'

'I'm on vacation but it's raining' means the vacation is ruined. 'I'm on vacation and it's raining' opens the question of what to do now. Godin is careful to say bad things do happen to people who don't deserve them; the question is how you process them. 'But' does heavy lifting in the stories we tell ourselves, as in wanting someone to have the wedding they want but also wanting it to fit your budget and taste.

• Problems have solutions; situations don't

A situation, like the weather or a loss, has to be accepted and worked around. Most of what we call stuck, though, is a problem with a known solution we don't want to do: a breakup, caring for yourself, sticking to a budget, risking others' judgment. Name which one you're facing.

• You become who you hang out with, so build your own scene

Whether it was Chicago jazz musicians in 1964 or Silicon Valley founders a decade ago, people conform to their scene. If yours isn't taking you where you want to go, build a different circle, one that asks each other hard questions about relationships, books and the things you're making.

• We are experts at finding safe places to hide

Hiding is fine if it's working. If it isn't, stop. One modern hiding place is playing influencer: buying the hat and the lighting, waiting for 300,000 followers, posting free content that does the platform's work, and burning relationships by asking friends to boost you, while pandering to a crowd you don't know.

• Find the smallest viable unit of your art

Ask what small shift would be worth making. If you've been paralyzed for 20 years about going back to nursing school, volunteer at a senior home or hospital one afternoon a week; they won't turn you away. Two hours a week changing someone's life beats sitting at home wishing, and it tells you whether you want more.

• Comparison is a ratchet; ask who you seek to become

Wanting more than the neighbors, or the nicer Paris vacation, only exists because the bar keeps rising: 'No one went on vacation to Paris 300 years ago.' It's a carrot tied to a stick. To break it, name the motive out loud ('I'm paying $400 for sneakers I could buy for $50 because I felt left out in high school'), then choose what you 'rest your eyes on': what you celebrate and complain about at the dinner table.

• 'Merely ship it,' not 'just ship it'

Quality means three things: meeting spec (a 1984 Camry where every part fits), luxury (a Rolls-Royce isn't higher quality, just more luxurious), and the zero-defect perfectionism we use as an excuse. 'The point of perfectionism is not to make it better. It's to keep you from shipping it.' 'Just ship it' implies junk. 'Merely ship it' means it meets spec, so you put it out without attachment or argument.

• Authenticity is overrated; play a role consistently

Walking his dog he's 'small-s, small-g' Seth. At work he plays the role of the person who wrote 10,000 blog posts and 20 books, and his job is to play it consistently. Don't adopt a role that's opposite to who you want to be, which will burn you out, and don't use 'I was just being authentic' as a get-out-of-jail-free card.

EXAMPLES

• His mother's Sotheby's appraisal day

Godin's mother took over a Buffalo museum's tiny shop and, with her partner, grew it to 10 times the size; she also co-founded the Museum Store Association. Around 1973, before Antiques Roadshow existed, she brought in two Sotheby's appraisers to draw people who felt museums weren't for them. The night before, she worried no one would come, then said: 'If no one comes, no one will know that no one came.' About 5,000 people lined up. His lesson: if she'd done only what was in her job description, it would still be a phone booth selling postcards.

• The 15-minute raise conversation

His example of a problem with a solution: if you're willing to have an uncomfortable 15-minute conversation with your boss once a year about where you are and where you want to go, you'll make more money. If that's too scary, accept what you have.

• A blog under a fake name

For years he has suggested starting a blog, under an assumed name if you like. After 100 days you'll be proud enough to put your name on it. Sharing ideas costs nothing and gives you leverage.

• About 117 typos in The Let Them Theory

Mel says readers found about 117 errors in her bestseller after it went to print, and she's proud she shipped anyway. Godin's response: typos are a spec issue (New York publishing's standard is 'no obvious typos'), and the book's concept isn't an error.

• The six-year-old's C

A child brings home A, A, C, and parents fixate on the C because in 11 years they imagine 'famous' (not 'good') colleges. That shows what a household is keeping score of.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Two questions for any project**
  'Who's it for? What's it for?' Use them to cut through perfectionism and comparison.
- **Name the fear behind a purchase or a stall**
  Say it aloud: 'I'm doing this because I'm afraid.' Hearing yourself can show how little sense it makes.
- **His closing charge**
  Do work that matters for people who care. It can be a little work for one person; that's enough. Then do it again. Make a ruckus.

How to Design Your Life in 1 Hour

Guest: Bill Burnett and Dave Evans
Date: 2026-02-23 · Duration: 0:59:26
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y29PQz239J8

KEYPOINTS

• You can't design 'your life.' You design 'your lives.'
Stanford professors Bill Burnett and Dave Evans, creators of the Designing Your Life course and book, say all of us 'contain more aliveness than one lifetime permits.' There's more than one of you in there, so there are many good lives you could live, not one right answer to find. Choosing one means saying no to others, and that's fine.

• Maslow's 'become all that you can be' is impossible, and that takes the pressure off.
They argue that Maslow's 1943 idea of self-actualization by becoming everything you can be is 'dead wrong,' because you're 'way bigger than your own lifetime.' 'I've buried plenty of people. None of them were done.' You won't finish, so stop treating every choice as the final verdict on your life.

• If you're in your 20s and lost, you're not broken.
They say the brain's executive and empathy circuitry isn't fully developed until about 27 or 28, later in men. They tell graduating seniors, 'You're not broken, you're 22.' That's their caveated way of explaining why your early 20s feel so uncertain.

• The Odyssey Plan: sketch three different five-year lives.
Life 1: change nothing, and assume it goes well. Where are you in five years? Life 2: that path disappears and you still have bills to pay. What's plan B? Life 3, the wild card: money is no object and nobody would laugh. What would you do? Three is 'kind of a magic number.' You need more ideas to get to your best ones, and fixating on one boxes you in.

• The wild card exists to quiet your inner critic.
The crazy idea (a Beanie Baby store, a button shop) isn't necessarily good. Writing it down trains you to quiet the critic, which they describe as the evolutionary voice that kept us from being eaten by saber-tooth tigers. Friends often add to it ('that's crazy').

• Next, prototype: try small, cheap versions of a life before committing.
Pick something on a plan you want to learn about and test it with a conversation, a class or a short experience. A 'prototype interview' means talking with someone already living that life, like a contact who built an underwater camera company. 'Make a move, learn something, make a move, learn something.' You have to be 'competent at your incompetence' about a future you haven't figured out yet.

• Small steps make change happen. Big resolutions don't.
'You're not going to change if you make something so big.' Their example is the 'I'm going to run a marathon' resolution, which fails unless it's broken into very small steps. Small wins build the confidence to keep going.

• It's almost never too late. Run the numbers.
When a 54-year-old woman asked if she was crazy to go to medical school, one of the professors did the math with her: a likely lifespan into her late 80s, wanting to work to about 80, a year of pre-med prep, a year applying, four years of school, and residency (where, he notes, much of the doctoring happens). She'd still have more than a decade of practice. 'Cut out the crap' and look at the time you actually have.

• Reclaim 20 minutes from scrolling to just be present.
Ask people what video they last watched and they usually can't remember. If you can't remember it, why not 'reallocate that time to something more interesting'? Sit with yourself for 20 minutes and see what comes up. One of them describes his own critic at the easel ('the world needs an older white guy painter?') going quiet if he waits it out, until ideas surface.

• The whole method in 10 words: get curious, talk to people, try stuff, tell your story.
Burnett, a former marketing guy, came up with this on Canadian live TV when told to summarize the book in a sentence. Curiosity means leaning into what's available. Talking to people is where the real information is. Trying stuff is prototyping. Telling your story means reflecting on and sharing what you're learning, which beats 'I binge-watched Game of Thrones again.'

EXAMPLES

• The stuck 57-year-old chiropractor
In a room of 600 doing the 12–15-minute Odyssey exercise, one man just stared at his blank page. The professor asked whether he wanted to still be a chiropractor when he died. 'I don't think so.' 'Then at some point you're going to do something else. Write that down.' 'He had it in him. He just had to get over himself.'

• From Stanford gymnast to Cirque du Soleil
A student whose parents wanted her in medical school negotiated a detour first. Her wild card became real: she has performed with Cirque du Soleil in China as a circus clown.

• Eulogies while you're alive
Evans has been in a men's group for 32 years, which he started when his son was born. After speaking at members' funerals, they adopted a practice: say 'I'm going to die next week' and everyone writes your eulogy and reads it while you lie quietly and listen. Nobody praises well-done PowerPoints or on-time budgets.

• A third book at 71
For one of the professors, saying yes to their new book meant giving up four years, from 71 to 75, and 'about 75 no's' to other things. He's happy with it: 'It comes in packages of yes or no. Choose your life.'

OTHER RELEVANT

• Odyssey Plan worksheet
Spend 12–15 minutes writing three five-year sketches (current path, plan B, wild card). Give each a title and note what excites you and what scares you about it.

- **One prototype this week**
  Choose a question from one of your plans and set up one conversation with someone living it, or take one small class or try a short experience.
- **20-minute pause**
  Swap 20 minutes of scrolling for quiet time with a notebook. Let the inner critic talk itself out, and write down whatever comes after.
- **Book**
  Designing Your Life by Burnett and Evans covers the Odyssey Plan and prototyping in detail.

This Conversation Will Change How You Think About Your Entire Life

Guest: Ocean Vuong
Date: 2026-01-26 · Duration: 1:26:55
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6MzKYP9XeI

KEYPOINTS

• A meaningful life is about finding value where you are, not proving your worth

Ocean Vuong is a poet, novelist (On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous, The Emperor of Gladness), MacArthur 'genius grant' recipient and tenured NYU creative-writing professor. He says meaning is not a life used to prove to yourself or others that you're valuable. 'No one has to escape to be worthy.' Wherever you are, if you can still give and receive love, it's enough.

• Dignity means owning the parts others told you to throw away

Raised in Hartford, Connecticut, by illiterate women who worked in nail salons after leaving Vietnam, he came to see his family's struggles as 'sites of innovation and creative struggle'. Dignity, to him, is looking at what people said you should discard, realising it is always part of you, and being proud of it rather than carrying shame.

• Poverty makes people believe they are bad people

At 10 or 11, his mother apologised at bedtime that the family was 'so stupid': after 10 years in the US, other Vietnamese families had businesses and homes in Houston and LA. He remembers her counting how many tomatoes she could afford at the grocery store. He says shame runs through much of American life, especially for the poor.

• 'The hardest thing in the world is to live only once'

Mel asked about the first line of The Emperor of Gladness. Vuong says living once means you have to account for what you owe the people you love and your community, and live with that care. He contrasts it with 'YOLO', which treats one life as licence to 'smash it all'.

• He became a writer out of failure and shame

Expected to be his family's 'superhero' in business, the only English reader and the only possible college graduate, he dropped out of a New York business school after about four weeks. Too ashamed to go home empty-handed, he slept in Penn Station for two weeks, then enrolled at Brooklyn College. Now 37, he says half his life was 'absolute loss' and he's been 'in the whipped cream' of it for 20 years.

• Your younger self is the pebble; you are the ripple

He tells students to remember why they started: the moment a poem took their 'head off', as Emily Dickinson put it. Bring that younger person 'into the room', because they got you here without knowing what a professor or a CV was. When you wonder 'why am I in this rat race?', collaborate with them and thank them.

• Fear of cringe is crushing a generation's creativity

Having taught only Gen Z for 11 years, he sees graduate students arrive visibly beaten down and afraid. He blames meme culture, which turns 'a human being with a historical life' into an object for a group chat. He wants them to see failure as a necessary procedure of growth, not judgment as punishment, and not treat school as a factory that fixes weak poems.

• You can't hold self-hatred and compassion at once

He describes 'sequential thinking' from Buddhist psychology: you hold one emotion at a time, like a ball, and must put one down to pick up another. Holding your own suffering makes you suffer more; holding someone else's brings compassion. He admits some days he 'just doesn't have enough to go there'.

• Empathy as an endgame is a trap; kindness is empathy in action

Feeling for others can leave us complacent. Kindness is acting on 'our debt to each other'. He loves a religious line he half-remembers about being 'given ourselves'. Mel builds on it: purpose is recognising you've been given to yourself, then giving yourself to others through service.

• Ordinary lives are triumphs too

He wrote The Emperor of Gladness because the stories around him were only about poor people escaping. He wanted to honour people who stay, such as shift workers who pile into a van off the clock to watch their manager wrestle at a bar.

EXAMPLES

• His stepfather's screws

A refugee who spent seven days on a boat, his stepfather made the same screw for gas pumps for about 30 years until the company moved overseas. He then made a smaller screw at a Connecticut gun factory, working 3pm to midnight and hanging his uniform on a thumbtack in a rental they couldn't paint. Young Ocean thought 'that can't be me'; the retired stepfather calls it his triumph.

• Chicken nuggets in a McDonald's parking lot

His mother died seven months after a stage-four diagnosis. When he asked what her life had been, she named tiny moments, like eating nuggets with him in the car after work, a memory he'd forgotten. He started the novel seven weeks after her death: 'it's not about the big things.'

• The tobacco farm and McDonald's

At 15 he worked a tobacco farm for $9.50 an hour cash when minimum wage was $7.15. Living in Section 8 housing, his mother 'crunched the numbers' and told him he needed a McDonald's job at 16, far from the American-dream script of following your destiny.

• Mel's meditation in real time

Hearing him describe hoping his sister has a good day, Mel thought of her parents, who had just suddenly lost a close friend, and hoped they were surrounded by people. 'Everything self-centred disappeared,' and she planned to call them right after the taping.

• The rosebud and the rose

On day one he tells students they're in the unnamed space between rosebud and rose for the 14-week term. At the end, on a

count of three, they say 'thank you' to themselves aloud, because no one else will.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Copy out writing you love**
  When your inner language turns toxic ('I'm not enough'), hand-copy favourite poems or passages, his examples being Federico García Lorca, Toni Morrison and Mary Oliver. It puts you in someone else's head, like monks tracing psalms.
- **Radiating-outward check-in**
  When you notice self-focused distress, think of someone close and their struggle (his brother being yelled at in a retail job), say 'I hope they're okay today', then widen to your community.
- **Say thank you to your younger self daily**
  Each morning or writing session, picture the version of you who first set the intention and thank them out loud.
- **Define 'enough' by your values**
  If you wake up and drive your grandmother to her doctor's appointment, you have enough where you are, and that grounding in your values is where your power is. Mel says that's where she is now: when people ask what's next after the book and podcast, her answer is more time and presence with the people she loves.

Change Your Life This Year: How to Get From Where You Are to Where You Want to Be

Guest: Dr. Katy Milkman
Date: 2025-12-29 · Duration: 1:13:19
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iHpFwHYDnKE

KEYPOINTS

- **The biggest lie about change is that you just need to try harder or use more willpower.**
  Wharton behavioral scientist Katy Milkman says almost everyone has the wrong mental model: 'there's something wrong with me if I can't push through.' She treats changing as a learnable skill, 'like using an Excel spreadsheet.' It takes strategy, not grit. Most people approach a goal one-size-fits-all instead of designing a plan around what's actually blocking them.
- **Seven common barriers stop people from changing, and each needs a different tool.**
  Drawing on her Behavior Change for Good research center at Penn (co-directed with Angela Duckworth, with about 180 affiliated scientists), she lists them: getting started, impulsivity (wanting instant gratification), procrastination, forgetfulness, laziness (preferring the easy path, including old habits), lack of confidence, and conformity (copying the people around you). She stresses these barriers show up across age, gender, culture and country.
- **Fresh starts give you a burst of motivation to begin, but they don't carry you to the finish line.**
  New Year's, Mondays, birthdays, a new month or a promotion feel like new chapters. We sort time into 'before' and 'after,' feel a bit like a new person, and put distance between ourselves and past failures. Milkman says the reported 80% New Year's resolution failure rate misses the point: a fresh start only gets you going, and you still need tools to keep going.
- **Beat impulsivity by making the good thing fun.**
  'Temptation bundling' pairs something you should do with something you crave but only allow yourself during that activity, like gripping audiobooks only at the gym. Mel's takeaway was that people underestimate how much fun matters to sticking with something.
- **Commitment devices fight procrastination.**
  Put something at stake: for example, 'I'll fine myself $10 if I don't meditate three times this week,' and ask your partner to be the referee. She mentions websites such as Beeminder and stickK (she says she has no affiliation), or you can do it informally.
- **You don't fail because you don't care. You fail because you forget.**
  Economists call it an 'empathy gap': at night we're sure we'll remember tomorrow, then the morning swallows it. She cites 1800s memory research showing about 70% of memorized material is gone within hours. Fixes: checklists, calendar reminders, an email to your future self, and specific plans covering when, where and how.
- **Tie plans to a cue, and plan with someone else.**
  When a reminder can't be timed, link the action to a trigger, like 'when my daughter next calls, I'll do X.' In one study cited, pursuing goals in tandem with a friend worked better because it was more fun, added accountability and forced planning.
- **Use your laziness: make the good choice the default and the bad one hard to reach.**
  Set your browser's homepage to something other than social media, keep good things close, and put friction between you and bad choices. Habits grow out of consistent contexts like the kitchen in the morning. She points to Charles Duhigg's The Power of Habit and James Clear's Atomic Habits on the habit loop.
- **Giving advice builds confidence and helps the advice-giver too.**
  If confidence is your barrier, find someone you can mentor who's working on the same goal, or find a mentor who'll coach you and help you believe in yourself. Explaining what works to someone else reminds you that you already know a lot, and that builds belief in your own ability to follow through.
- **Build in grace and flexibility, because setbacks are normal.**
  There's no silver bullet. Practice habits with some variety, such as different gym times, so you're good at backup plans. A setback 'means there's something right with you. You are human.' Get back on track with a fresh start or a partner.

EXAMPLES

- **Google question that launched the fresh-start research**
  About 15 years ago at Google's Mountain View headquarters, HR leaders asked Milkman whether there's an ideal moment when employees are most open to using benefits like trainings and gyms. That question led to the work with her former student Hengchen Dai, now a UCLA professor, who was lead author. About 40% of Americans make New Year's resolutions.
- **Audiobooks at the gym: 56% more exercise**
  People randomly assigned to have access to tempting audiobooks only while working out exercised 56% more than people given an equally valuable gift certificate. In another study, just suggesting the idea produced lasting increases in exercise.
- **Eight minutes of advice-giving raised grades**
  In a project led by Lauren Eskreis-Winkler, high school students spent eight minutes writing study advice for younger students (how to avoid distraction, where to study, whether to play music). Their grades rose significantly compared with a control group, about one point on a 100-point scale in their target class and in math. Milkman says the effect is small but real.
- **Emergency reserves doubled success**
  Research by Marissa Sharif: people who set a stretch goal of meditating seven days a week with two 'emergency skip' days were about twice as successful as people who simply aimed for five days, even though the targets are identical.
- **Mel's own barriers**
  Hearing the list, Mel identified impulsivity and forgetfulness, which she called 'the bane of my existence.' She realized how often she hopes a change will happen instead of planning when, where and how.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Milkman's starter recipe**
  Set a concrete, measurable, bite-size stretch goal: stretch yourself 'a little, not a lot.' Plan when, where and how you'll do it, make it fun, then add whatever fits your barrier: reminders, a buddy, a mentor or someone to coach.
- **Diagnose before you prescribe**
  Ask which of the seven barriers is tripping you up. Willpower isn't the fix for forgetting, and reminders won't fix a confidence problem.
- **Use any meaningful date**
  Pick a birthday, a Monday or the first of the month to start, and line up your tools before the date arrives.
- **Books mentioned**
  Katy Milkman's own work on behavior change, plus The Power of Habit (Charles Duhigg) and Atomic Habits (James Clear).

5 Rules That Will Change Your Life Immediately

Guest: Mark Rober
Date: 2025-12-11 · Duration: 0:46:42
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRHU-fvsNo0

KEYPOINTS

• Treat your life like an experiment: setbacks are data.
Former NASA engineer Mark Rober, who has about 71 million YouTube subscribers and around 20 billion views on science videos, says the thread through his work is thinking like an engineer even if you aren't one. Experiments are supposed to fail along the way, and each failure tells you one more way not to do it. Seen that way, a setback becomes information rather than a verdict on you.

• The Super Mario Effect: focus on the princess, not the pits.
Nobody falls into the first pit in a video game and decides, 'I'm such a failure, I'll never play again.' You think, 'There's a pit there; next time I'll jump earlier.' Because your attention is on the goal, the failures become lessons. Rober is clear it isn't a 'Pollyanna' attitude: dying on a hard level 'stings,' and the sad sound still hurts, but you pick the controller back up.

• If you're scared to start, make failing the goal.
His advice to anyone afraid of looking cringy or worried what friends will think: start small and set a target number of failures. Hitting that number counts as winning, which takes the pressure off and stops you avoiding the thing. Mel calls this subtle reframe genius, because it goes beyond 'failure is okay' to making failure the box you check.

• You shouldn't expect to be good right away.
You don't expect to beat a video game on your first try, so Rober asks why you'd expect that in life. He says you often learn more from failing than succeeding, especially kids. Mel links this to resilience: each time you fail and keep going is evidence you can figure things out.

• Hide the vegetables.
His north star is to reach as many brains as possible with critical thinking, curiosity and embracing failure. He hooks people with a spectacle that evokes a visceral response, such as laughter, excitement or suspense, and slips the science lesson inside the story.

• Keep your eyes on the rock in front of you.
Rober says he doesn't think of himself as 'the world's science teacher'. He's focused on the current project, and when a video comes out he's already on the next one. Mel calls that the secret to success: work tied to something you care about, aimed at its impact on others. The moment you obsess over view counts, you're 'looking at the wrong data.'

• Creativity is a muscle.
Rober cites work with Dr. Adam Green of Georgetown measuring alpha brain waves, which he says are highly correlated with creative problem solving. The finding, as he tells it, is that the more time you spend in that creative state, the more easily your brain returns to it. The best words in science aren't 'Eureka' but 'Huh, I wonder why that happened.'

• Build happiness from first principles.
Engineers planning a Mars mission start from basics such as how much energy you need. Rober's basics for happiness are relationships, living by his values and knowing what impact he wants to have, and being motivated by those from the inside. He says many people buy the fancy things before realizing they don't bring happiness, and he has turned down choices that would have brought more reach or money to avoid a 'flash in the pan.'

• Gratitude is the antidote to chasing the next hit.
When he feels he should be doing better or have more, he resets by noticing what he already has, because abundance and scarcity both exist at any moment and it depends which you focus on. He mentions the common practice of writing down three things you're grateful for before bed. His backup hack is to imagine something precious, like your partner, being taken away.

• With kids, be as inefficient as possible.
At work Rober optimizes everything, but at home he flips it: the phone goes down, you read the book four times without skipping pages and you play the game. Mel calls it the best parenting advice she's heard in a long time. Kids don't need you to cram 50,000 things into 15 minutes; when they tell a long-winded story, the point isn't the punchline but your undivided attention.

EXAMPLES

• The auto-bullseye dartboard
The board tracked a thrown dart, predicted where it would land and moved to catch it in 400 milliseconds, faster than a blink. It took Rober 3 years, and every setback made him more determined rather than more defeated. That's where he first noticed the Super Mario mindset in himself.

• Lose 10 chess games
He had stopped playing online chess because losing felt like a judgment on him, so he set a goal to lose 10 games (not necessarily in a row). It 'reset everything.' Mel admitted she quit playing after her son Oakley crushed her.

• Porch-pirate decoy packages
After a package was stolen from his porch, he built decoy packages (complete with fart spray) and eventually placed about 20 on porches in porch-pirate hot spots across America, tracking them and watching the reactions in real time. The spectacle hides the engineering lesson.

• The 15-ton Jell-O pool
A swimming pool filled with 15 tons of Jell-O, which Rober says no one had ever pulled off. It's a classic case of hiding the vegetables: the giant stunt carries the science inside.

• Hair dryer and ping-pong ball
In the studio, a ping-pong ball floated in a hair dryer's stream and stayed there even when he tilted it. He explained it as the Coand 2 Vf`ect: air flowing around the sides of the ball 'cups' it in a low-pressure pocket, the same kind of principle behind a

curveball.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Set a failure quota**
  For anything new (chess, a language, a sport), decide how many attempts or losses count as success this month, and track them.
- **Gratitude reset**
  Write three good things from the day before bed. If that feels empty, imagine losing someone you love, then look again at the small stuff you're stressing over.
- **Free science curriculum**
  Rober is building a free 3rd–8th grade science curriculum for teachers, with videos, inexpensive classroom demos and standards alignment. It's a 3-year project that was about a year in when they spoke.

How to Reinvent Your Life Starting Today

Guest: Hoda Kotb
Date: 2025-12-08 · Duration: 1:22:08
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oAJnNf4RW_A

KEYPOINTS

- **You can 'stop the train' of your life at any age and decide whether to change direction.**
  Hoda Kotb says many people feel like they're on a train headed straight to the grave. Her point is that you can hit the brakes at 20, 40, 60 or 80, look at your life 'from 35,000 feet,' and decide. Your current job or relationship 'is not your destiny.' Otherwise you'll be 90 asking, 'What was I thinking?'
- **'Good enough' is not enough. Judge your life by how you feel, not by what you have.**
  Mel draws out the distinction: don't just scan the job and the house. Ask whether you feel respected and loved in this relationship, and whether you like how you feel in this job. Hoda moved from 'this is as good as it gets, I'm grateful' to 'there's more out there.' She stresses this isn't constant dissatisfaction. It's believing abundance is available and that wanting more isn't greedy.
- **Say the buried dream out loud, because staying silent keeps the door closed.**
  If you're convinced you missed the window, you're the one locking it. Hoda's two biggest life changes, she says, came from 'a whisper of not being afraid.' Saying it opens the door so 'the energy shifts' and possibilities show up.
- **Discouragement is the biggest obstacle.**
  Being discouraged means you've decided 'it's not possible for me.' Whether it's opening a flower shop or going back to college, Hoda's advice is to say it, try something and see, because sitting at home guarantees nothing happens.
- **Success comes from not quitting more than from talent.**
  Hoda doesn't think successful people are necessarily the most talented. What links them is that they never quit. Mel's summary: 'As long as you don't quit, you can't lose, because quitting is the moment you lose.' If you're still seeking, you're not stuck.
- **It's '27 nos and the one.'**
  Rebuilding after a divorce, a job search or any reinvention comes down to finding your one yes. If all you've heard so far is no, you just haven't met your 'Stan' yet.
- **What you tell yourself changes how your day goes.**
  Hoda tested the phrase 'Good things keep happening to me,' which she first dismissed as drivel, after a rough weekend. Saying it forced her to look for good things, and she came home a different person. Mel linked it to Alia Crum's research on mindset settings: 'the best advice is always cheesy.'
- **Take baby steps toward the jump: 30 minutes a day for 30 days.**
  Don't run off a cliff. If you want to open a coffee shop, spend 30 minutes today researching (Hoda suggests using AI to check local competition), 30 tomorrow on a business plan, and so on. After 30 days you have 900 minutes of data to decide whether it's really for you.
- **Be a beginner again.**
  At 61, starting a business with no experience, Hoda says it feels like being on the JV team surrounded by varsity players, and calls it 'one of the finest feelings in the world.' Her parting words: 'It's never too late. You're not too old. And everything happens right on time.'

EXAMPLES

- **Saying 'I want to be a mom' at 51**
  After breast cancer and a divorce, Hoda buried her wish for children because it seemed out of reach. On a beach walk, her friend Jen Miller casually said she'd never wanted kids, and Hoda realized she did. Once she said it aloud, she began the adoption process. While she sat at her desk sure it would never happen, a call came: 'She's here.' That was her daughter Haley. She now has an 8-year-old and a 6-year-old.
- **27 rejections, then Stan**
  After graduating from Virginia Tech, she borrowed her mom's car and spent 10 days driving around the Southeast. Richmond, Roanoke, Birmingham and Dothan all said no; one asked if she knew how to put the tape in the machine. Lost, she pulled into a CBS station in Greenville, where news director Stan watched the same 'worst tape in history' and hired her.
- **The paper-pieces exercise**
  Her friend Maria Shriver had her cut paper into pieces sized to how much time and energy each part of her life got: kids (biggest), work, visiting her mom, exercise, the dog, trips. Then she resized them to what she wanted, for example making work bigger, and was asked: 'That's your life. Do you like it?'
- **The top of the wave at 60**
  At her 60th birthday celebration on the Today show plaza, with family flown in and a painting from President George W. Bush, she had an out-of-body sense that 'this is the best it's ever going to be.' That feeling led her to leave at the peak of her career.
- **'Don't hog your journey'**
  While recovering from a mastectomy and wanting to hide her cancer, she flew home from a draining shoot in Ireland. A chatty stranger asked about her compression sleeve and told her cancer is part of her, 'like going to college,' and not to hog her journey because she could help others. That new courage led her to pitch herself to Jeff Zucker for the new fourth hour of Today.
- **The wheelchair trip**
  Hoda tells of a wealthy man she calls 'Cranky Ken' who kept buying bigger things, even the Seattle Seahawks, without lasting happiness. Then he helped deliver 75 wheelchairs in Bosnia, and one recipient said he wanted to memorize his face to thank him in heaven. Ken called it the first sheer joy and purpose he'd felt, and it changed his life's direction.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Stop-the-train check**
  Pause and ask honestly: Do I feel respected? Do I like how I feel in this job or relationship? Do I want to get off the train, change direction or speed up?
- **Six words to try**
  'Good things keep happening to me.' Say it through your morning and notice the evidence.
- **30 x 30 research plan**
  Thirty focused minutes a day for 30 days on a dream before you leap, giving you 900 minutes to decide.
- **Hoda's book**
  Jump and Find Joy, her book on letting go of what isn't working and going for what you want.

How to Live a Happier Life: Do THIS Gratitude Practice Today

Date: 2025-11-27 · Duration: 0:41:29
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEIIPN_89Yg

KEYPOINTS

- **Gratitude is a way to take back control of what your brain notices, not toxic positivity.**
  Mel admits she used to cringe at the word because of the fake smiles and pressure to feel thankful while life falls apart. Her reframe is that the world outside is constantly pouring 'garbage' into your mind, and deliberately choosing what to notice is 'an act of defiance.' What you focus on expands.
- **Negative experiences stick like Velcro, and gratitude helps them slide off.**
  In a replayed clip, stress expert Dr. Aditi Nerurkar cites psychologist Rick Hanson: under stress the brain holds onto the negative for survival ('danger, danger'), even when good and bad things are happening at the same rate. A daily gratitude practice, which she says takes about 60 seconds, is a form of 'cognitive reframing.'
- **Daily gratitude may improve mood, stress, burnout and sleep within weeks.**
  Nerurkar says studies show improvements at 30, 60 and 90 days, and that the practice quiets your inner critic by 'dialing down' the amygdala, the brain's alarm center. These are her summaries of the research, presented as encouraging rather than guaranteed.
- **Tool 1: the unsent letter, one page once a week to someone you're grateful for.**
  Be specific: What did they do? Why did it matter? How did it affect you? You don't have to send it, though Mel points out how much it could lift someone if you do. She likes doing hers on Sundays, her slower day.
- **Writing gratitude letters shifts you from scanning for threats to noticing what's good.**
  Mel explains the letter study's effect as changing the 'settings' of your mind away from a lifelong habit of scanning for problems. The benefit lasted after people stopped writing, which she calls an 'afterburner' effect.
- **Tool 2: the three-minute night journal.**
  Every night before bed, write three things from that day you're grateful for. Mel says she never goes to bed without scanning her day this way. Her examples: not losing it with her husband, lingering in a warm shower, and watching a deer munch the hostas outside Chris's office window.
- **Gratitude may show up in the body, not just the mind.**
  Mel reports the night-journal study found better sleep, lower inflammation, less physical stress and higher heart rate variability. She explains that higher heart rate variability means a flexible nervous system that handles stress and bounces back. She notes the study was small (70 people).
- **Tool 3: drop gratitude into your group texts.**
  Interrupt transactional chats about logistics and 'when can you get on the phone' with one appreciation a day: something that went well, a random kindness, a public shout-out. No extra commentary. Mel says replies come almost immediately and the tone of the whole chain shifts. Sharing gratitude is what makes positivity 'sticky' and contagious.
- **Pick the one tool you'll actually use.**
  You don't need all of them. The night journal, an end-of-day mental scan, a morning ritual, the weekly letter and the group text all rely on the same mechanism: training your attention toward what's good.

EXAMPLES

- **Indiana University letter study**
  Psychologist Dr. Joel Wong's randomized trial of nearly 300 people in therapy compared therapy alone, therapy plus expressive writing about stress, and therapy plus one gratitude letter a week. The letter group had significantly better mental health, with less depression and anxiety, during the four weeks and still 12 weeks later. They never sent the letters.
- **UC San Diego heart study**
  Dr. Laura Redwine's team studied 70 people with early-stage heart failure (heart-muscle problems but no symptoms yet), who are at high risk of developing serious heart disease. One group kept a gratitude journal most days of the week, reflecting deeply rather than listing generic items. The control group got standard care only. Stress, inflammation and heart rate variability were tested at the start and end of eight weeks. The journaling group had lower inflammation markers, improved heart rate variability and better sleep. Mel notes that low heart rate variability is linked to higher risk of heart disease, metabolic disorders, depression and anxiety.
- **Griffith University waitlist study**
  Psychologist Shelley Kerr randomly assigned 122 distressed people waiting for therapy to daily gratitude writing, acts of kindness with reflection, or neutral journaling (about 40 per group). After two weeks the gratitude group felt less depressed, had more positive emotions and felt better about life, and the gains were still there a month later.
- **Dr. Tara Swart's morning**
  The neuroscientist starts gratitude the moment she wakes: 'I love my silk pillowcase... my side-sleeping pillow... my wool mattress topper,' sometimes adding the room's temperature or quiet. Then she breathes deeply into her chest 'like a barrel,' scanning for tension, and gets herself out of bed by anticipating her cup of tea.
- **Mel's own group-text experiment**
  Mel noticed her family and work text threads had become almost entirely logistics: questions, documents to review, scheduling calls. She started slipping in one appreciation a day, like 'I'm really proud of you for this' or 'you did a really good job.' She says people responded almost right away and the threads felt warmer, and that it reminds everyone 'you have enough right now, even while you may be working on more.'

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Letter prompts**

What did they do? Why did it matter? How did it affect you? One page, once a week, sending it optional.

- **Night routine**
  Keep a journal by your bed and write three things from today. Specific beats generic: 'the deer in the yard' rather than 'my family.'
- **Supersize the group text**
  Send this idea to two or three favorite people, start a chain for one gratitude each a day, and hold each other accountable.
- **Morning version**
  Before checking your phone, name things you're grateful for in bed: sheets, pillow, quiet. Settle into gratitude before 'the rest of the world comes in.'

This One Study Will Change How You Think About Your Entire Life: The Cornell Legacy Project

Guest: Dr. Karl Pillemer
Date: 2025-11-20 · Duration: 1:22:37
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IF0QIfwYQnw

KEYPOINTS

• Older people are an untapped source of practical life advice.
After about 25 years as a gerontologist, Karl Pillemer realized in his early 50s that he had only studied 'older people as problems.' So he asked what they know that younger people don't. He points out that only in the last 150 years or so have people stopped going to the oldest person they knew for advice. Anthropological research shows elders, who knew what to do in a drought or famine, were key to human survival. Today's highly age-segregated society risks losing that knowledge.

• The near-universal lesson: life is short, so you can't put it off.
The older people were, the more likely they were to say 'life is really, really short.' One retired engineer said it passed by 'in a nanosecond.' A 99-year-old told him, 'next thing you know you're 100.' Knowing you don't have 50 more years narrows the focus to what matters.

• No one wished they had more things. People value people and experiences.
Not a single person among the thousands interviewed said they wished they had spent more time accumulating possessions. The things within your control: invest time in relationships, value experiences over stuff, and make a daily decision to set mindless worry aside.

• Stop worrying about what you can't control.
Picture '2,000 grandparents yelling at you' to stop worrying, because you'll regret wasting the time. You can't control exactly how your kids turn out, how your aging parents treat you, or how long you'll live 'no matter how much you believe in body hacking.' Focus your action on what you can control.

• Lesson 1: always be honest, 'fair and square.'
Mel admits it sounds like a cliché, but deception, and being betrayed, were deep sources of regret. Mel also connects honesty with yourself: admitting you're unhappy in your job, your major or your habits is the first step to changing.

• Lesson 2: unless you have a compelling reason to say no, say yes.
When offered a new responsibility or opportunity, let your default be yes even if it takes you out of your comfort zone. 'Thousands of people told me this': you are much more likely to regret what you didn't do than what you did.

• Lesson 3: travel more, and cram it in.
Travel, big or small, became some of the richest memories. Don't wait for retirement or the perfect time.

• Lesson 4: choose a partner with extreme care.
Don't rush. Take all the time you need to get to know the person and judge long-term compatibility. Pillemer notes that surveys still show most young people want a lifelong marriage, even if they marry later or live together first.

• Lesson 5: say it now.
Some of the deepest regrets were not saying 'I love you' more and not asking for forgiveness, 'a truly time-limited possibility.' Waiting for the right moment is like wearing a heavy backpack. Mel and Chris have a rule: don't go to bed angry. They talk it through and apologize first.

• Use 'anticipatory regret' to avoid family estrangement.
Many estrangements develop slowly from small cuts and resentment. Permanently estranged older people said, 'I need a time machine.' Ask yourself: if I let this happen, will I regret it? A sibling cutoff ripples down the generations, meaning cousins who don't know each other and no reunions. Pillemer says that where there's abuse or real danger, stepping back is right, ideally with professional help, but those are a minority of cases.

• Older people are happier on average, partly by choice, and your midlife habits matter.
Across hundreds of studies, people over 60 to 65 report more happiness than younger people, despite accumulating losses. Elders describe consciously choosing to be happy: focusing on what works and savoring small things. On health, he warns that the risk isn't dropping dead but spending a decade or two with burdensome chronic disease, so heart-healthy habits in your 30s to 50s count.

EXAMPLES

• The woman whose kids stopped calling
An older woman tapped the arm of her chair and said she never heard from her children. The estrangement grew slowly after she married a second husband the kids disliked, and they traveled and lost touch. At the end of her life it was her deepest regret.

• 'I don't have to think about why I don't talk to my brother Ed'
One man finally called his brother after 10 years of silence. The next morning he realized the 'backpack' was gone. Several people used that same image.

• Mel's math on visits
At 56, with her dad in his 80s, Mel realized that if you see someone a couple of times a year, you may have only a dozen to 30 visits left.

• Mel's motor-home summer
Her most vivid childhood memory is a roughly two-week motor-home trip to national parks, along with fishing trips an hour from home. They weren't fancy, but they lasted in memory, supporting 'travel more.'

• Small things elders savor
A colorful bird on the lawn, a phone call from a friend, the dog's silly antics. They treat time with loved ones as precious, not routine.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **30 Lessons for Living**
  Pillemer's book. The five lessons on page 193: always be honest, say yes to opportunities, travel more, choose a mate with extreme care, say it now.
- **Anticipatory regret check**
  Before a cutoff or a grudge hardens, ask: 'At 90, will I regret letting this happen?'
- **The relationship is your job**
  Mel's view as a parent of three adult kids: the relationship is 100% her responsibility, so she reaches out instead of waiting to hear from them.
- **Default-yes rule**
  Without a compelling reason to say no, take the opportunity.

The Exact Words You Need to Hear Today If It Feels Like Nothing’s Working

Guest: Mark Nepo
Date: 2025-11-13 · Duration: 1:13:53
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1iSw8rrTdyk

KEYPOINTS

• When you feel powerless, start by admitting what's true.

Poet and author Mark Nepo says we often fear things that have already happened: 'I'm afraid of being lonely, and I already am. I'm afraid things are going to change. They've already changed.' Naming the truth stops you from spending energy dreading it. His shorthand, from one of his poems: 'Fear wastes air.'

• Life is always where you are. There is no 'there.'

Nepo calls the modern belief that real life is happening somewhere else (FOMO) one of our most menacing assumptions. 'There's only here.' He adds that the difficulty of any moment is only half of reality. The other half is what's still beautiful and alive right now.

• People learn by willfully shedding or by being broken open.

'If you don't willfully shed, don't worry, you'll be broken open.' Great love and great suffering are the two great teachers. Hard times are often what open us to grace, he says, because pain lowers our defenses.

• Ask a struggling person two questions: 'What's it like to be you right now?' and 'What do you care about?'

These are non-judgmental questions for loved ones and students who've lost their spark. Don't tell them they're stuck or to cheer up: 'Did that ever work?' Invite their story instead. The questions open connection both with others and with yourself.

• Love comes from tending your own soul, not reinventing yourself to be desirable.

In 'The Bee Comes' (May 19), which made Mel cry: 'The flower doesn't dream of the bee, it blossoms and the bee comes.' Nepo describes reinventing himself to seem more deserving of love, only to learn again and again that caring for his own inner life is what invites love in.

• Follow what makes you come alive, even if it keeps changing.

His mentor Joel Elkes told him: 'You have a gift. Honor it and let it be your teacher.' Nepo's friend Paul followed his aliveness from running an art gallery in Albany, New York, to sumi painting to apprenticing with a foreign-car mechanic. Your 'gift' might be watching the sky, cooking for friends or stamp collecting.

• A ritual is a habit done with an open heart.

The same act can be a dull habit or a grounding ritual depending on whether you're present for it. If you notice you're on autopilot midday: 'Stop. No judgment. Back up. Do the simple thing openheartedly.' Some days it will still feel like a chore, and that's being human.

• Do what matters first.

For years Nepo did the tedious things first and saved the sacred things for after. He calls that backwards. Starting with what matters widens your 'aperture of heart and mind,' and the tedious tasks lose their edge. It doesn't make them wonderful, but they become easier to carry.

• Aging is like a meteor: flaking off while getting brighter.

From his book The Fifth Season, on creativity in the second half of life: most meteors burn up, getting brighter as they shed until only light remains. At 74, with back surgery and arthritis, he sees each loss as flaking off while his light grows. Since more years are behind him than ahead, he says the real purpose of looking back or forward is to make that light brighter.

EXAMPLES

• The cancer that started The Book of Awakening

In his early 30s, just out of graduate school, Nepo was diagnosed with a rare lymphoma in his skull that had grown to the size of a grapefruit. He also had a rib removed. One night, vomiting every half hour from oral chemotherapy, he watched the sun come up and realized that somewhere nearby a baby was being born and a couple was making love for the first time. Life was still going on beyond his pain.

• 'The land where nothing is true'

At a retreat at the Sophia Institute in Charleston, a mother said she and her 28-year-old son, Jack, were 'stuck' because he thought nothing was true. Nepo suggested that if Jack had moved to China, she'd ask what it's like there and what brought him. So why not ask him, 'What's it like to live in the land where nothing is true?'

• Feeding his father applesauce

Nepo was estranged from his parents for many years and reconnected with his father, a master woodworker, in his 80s. His father lived to 93. After a stroke, in a noisy, beeping hospital ward, Nepo fed him applesauce with a spoon, a 'sad and beautiful and bittersweet' moment that felt like his whole life in a single act.

• Nepo's three morning rituals

He opens the blinds to let light in, takes care of something living by feeding his yellow lab Zuzu, and does something for someone he loves by making coffee for his wife Susan, a night owl, before she wakes.

• Two Monkeys Sleeping (June 6)

He read an entry about two monkeys at the Central Park Zoo sleeping peacefully with their heads bowed toward each other, while tourists tapped on the glass. Mel and Chris each keep their own copy of the book by their beds because they don't want to share.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Choose three simple rituals

Morning, midday or evening: open the blinds, water the flowers, make someone coffee. Pick three and stay present for them.

- **The Book of Awakening**
  Daily reflections, one per date. Mel reads a page most mornings. Nepo says it's fine to skip days, and an entry opened a month later can greet you 'like an old friend.'
- **Lines to keep**
  'Fear wastes air.' 'What's it like to be you right now?' 'Life is more than anything we could dream of if we truly meet each other and meet ourselves right here, right now.'

3 Questions to Ask Yourself to Figure Out What You Really Want

Date: 2025-11-03 · Duration: 1:02:03
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APw7h-z2mxk

KEYPOINTS

- **Three questions from Stanford's 'Designing Your Life' course can show you what you actually want next.**
  Mel walks through the Odyssey Plan from Stanford professors Bill Burnett and Dave Evans, who have taught the hugely popular course for 15 years and wrote the book Designing Your Life. The questions: (1) What does life look like if you stay on your current path? (2) If that path disappeared tomorrow, what would you do? (3) What would life look like if nothing were holding you back? Her pitch is that you're capable, and your mindset is what's holding you back.
- **Q1: Project your current path five years out, honestly and without judgment.**
  If nothing changes about your job, home, major, friends, relationship and daily routine, where does it lead? Mel notes this isn't a dream-life visualization. It's a mirror, and she asks you to treat the question as neutral, like checking the route on a road trip. If you're grinding your teeth, waking up with a sore shoulder and running on 15 cups of coffee, picture that for three more years.
- **Many people 'slide' into a life they didn't choose.**
  Mel's example is a friend dating a genuinely good person after dozens of dates without a spark. Play it forward: a year later you're living together, two years later you feel you have to get engaged 'because here we are.' The same goes for staying in a major you've already paid for because you don't want to admit you've changed your mind.
- **Q1 can also confirm you're on a good path.**
  Mel ran her own habits forward: 100 grams of protein a day, resistance training, and reaching out to a friend daily. Five years out, she sees energy, aging well, being able to lift a suitcase into the overhead bin at 90, dancing at her grandkids' weddings, and staying connected.
- **Q2, the 'rug-pull' question, is meant to free you, not scare you.**
  If your job, business or role vanished tomorrow, what's the first step you'd take? Plan B is usually already there, but we wait for Plan A to blow up before considering it. Mel also applies it to caregivers: if the kids were at school and your parents were cared for, what would you want to do with your time? Freelance, start a business, learn a skill? Running this drill early gives you options before you get fired or a friendship fades.
- **Q3: if money, other people's opinions and guilt weren't factors, what would you do?**
  Mel says the single biggest obstacle usually isn't money. It's fear of what people will think. This is where the Let Them idea applies: let them laugh at your dream. Write the answer down even if it sounds silly.
- **You're happiest living by your own inner values.**
  Mel cites a 2015 study by Tim Kasser of Knox College, published in the Journal of Positive Psychology: people focused on contribution, connection, relationships and meaning reported higher life satisfaction and less anxiety than people chasing status or wealth.
- **Picturing your future vividly increases commitment and progress.**
  A University of Munich study in Current Psychology found that forming vivid images of your future boosted positive emotion, which helped people set worthwhile goals, commit to them and make more progress.
- **Change your path with one small habit, then test it cheaply.**
  Adding a single daily habit, like writing, walking, or 15 minutes researching something that interests you, changes where you're heading. Then try the dream out small: talk to someone who lives the life, take a short trip, or 'cruise' a town on Google Street View. Seeing what matters also exposes where you're wasting time and money.

EXAMPLES

- **Mel's own podcast decision**
  About six years ago she traveled 150 days a year giving corporate keynotes, including 51 for JP Morgan, about seven for Microsoft, and events for Starbucks, plus writing books like The 5 Second Rule and The High 5 Habit. Her rug-pull answer was clear: start a podcast. The excuses were 6 million podcasts on Spotify, few that make money, payroll and her mortgage. She let herself envision a Boston-based show anyway.
- **Chris's 5:15 a.m. writing**
  Mel's husband realized through the exercise that he wanted to write. He first added 15 to 20 minutes of daily writing. Now he wakes at 5:15, meditates and writes before walking the dogs. Mel's framing: 'Writing isn't a nice-to-have. Writing is who I am.'
- **Henry's farmhouse full of cats**
  A producer's friend named Henry imagined an old farmhouse full of cats named after movie stars, like 'the Great Catsby,' plus an 86-inch TV and a vending machine with endless free Italian ice. Mel's point: write it down even if it sounds ridiculous.
- **Plan B pivots**
  A woman blindsided by losing her corporate marketing job started freelancing social media for local shops and now runs a consulting business. A dancer with a career-ending injury now teaches kids' dance at community centers.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Write all three answers down**
  Spend real time on each question, especially Q3. Writing them out reveals your 'unfinished business.'
- **15-minute research habit**
  Look into flower farms (what the finances look like, how people start), online nursing or EMT programs, or a ski resort job, one small step a day.
- **Crowdsource the first move**
  Post that you're considering a pivot, for example becoming a yoga instructor, and ask people already in that field what their

first step would be.

- **Designing Your Life**
  The book by Bill Burnett and Dave Evans that the Odyssey Plan comes from.

It’s Not Too Late: How to Transform Your Life at Any Moment

Guest: Rich Roll
Date: 2025-10-09 · Duration: 1:18:02
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9UU5N0k0XY

KEYPOINTS

• It's not too late; that's a story we've internalised
Rich Roll, an ultra-endurance athlete, author and podcaster now 58, read a post he wrote six years earlier: athletic peak at 43, first book at 44, podcast at 45. 'At 30 I thought my life was over. At 52, I know it's just beginning.' He calls 'I blew it at 25' or 'I missed the window' a story we delude ourselves into believing.

• People change when pain exceeds the fear of doing something different
He rejects 'people don't change', saying change is hardwired and the only impossible thing is not changing. The question is whether you'll have a relationship with your own internal arc of change. 'Change wants you to want it.'

• Rock bottom is whatever you decide it is
'If the elevator's going down, there is no ground level' until you're dead. He had jail, two DUIs within six to eight weeks and a marriage that 'exploded on the honeymoon', yet none of those changed him. The day he finally became willing was an ordinary hungover morning, though he believes the pain of earlier lows built up to it.

• Over-achievement can mask a deep sense of unworthiness
A shy, bullied kid, he found swimming felt 'womblike' and learned at 12 or 13 he could close a talent gap by outworking everyone. He got into all eight colleges he applied to, including Harvard and Princeton, and swam at Stanford, then the top men's programme. But he says chasing external rewards to feel worthy of love was 'jamming a square peg into a round hole'.

• Alcohol first felt like the comfort he'd always lacked
He didn't drink until 20 or 21, after a high-school routine of 4:30am practice, school, two more hours in the pool and lights out at 9. His first buzz made the lifelong 'low-grade dissonance' evaporate, like being wrapped in a warm blanket, and he wanted that feeling all the time. He's grateful his alcoholism was severe enough to leave no choice.

• Recognise the 'moment of willingness' and act before it passes
Before his 40th birthday he felt not just that he needed to change but that he was willing to, and wrote that such moments should be 'seized at all costs'. He says we're all visited by them. Cultivate awareness, and promise yourself in advance that next time you'll act rather than let it pass or commiserate.

• Mood follows action
Change is 'an action-based affair'; you can't ruminate your way there. Behaviour comes first and thoughts and feelings follow, as when you only feel energetic after making yourself go to the gym. If you say 'I'll start tomorrow morning', 'you've already lost the plot.'

• Go all in if that's you, but know most people aren't
His first step was changing his relationship with food: a seven-day juice cleanse as a reset, experiments with diets, and eventually a 100% plant-based diet that gave him energy he hadn't felt since his teens. He stresses he's extreme by nature and that his approach doesn't work for everyone.

• Self-care is the most selfless act
It's the oxygen mask principle: your capacity to serve others depends on how well you're living. He got into ultra-endurance not to win but because it's 'the perfect template for self-discovery'. The lesson: we're all far more capable than we let ourselves believe.

• With someone spiralling, love the person, not the behaviour
You can't make someone change, and he admits lines like Mel's 'Do you want to get worse before you get better?' wouldn't have landed with him. The instinct to rush in and rescue often backfires. Set boundaries: 'I love you. You're clearly suffering. What you're doing, I'm not down with.' His parents stopped talking to him, which he calls the most painful thing they had to endure.

EXAMPLES

• 100 days in treatment at 31
He got sober by checking himself into treatment for 100 days, 'no 28-day rinse and wash', which he jokes is a polite word for a mental institution. 'It saved my life.'

• The staircase at 39
The day before his 40th birthday, about 50 pounds overweight at 208 lb, he got winded climbing a flight of stairs. An existential crisis about his life collided with a health scare, and he recognised it as another 'big moment' like the morning he chose sobriety.

• From winded to elite endurance racer in about two years
Within about two years he placed top 10 in a 3-day, 320-mile race around Hawaii's Big Island, and at 43 was the top American finisher. The next year he did five iron-distance triathlons on five Hawaiian islands in about six days. Men's Fitness named him one of the 25 fittest men in the world.

• Driving garbage to a dumpster
Around 2012, with four kids, a podcast just starting and a book advance coming, the family couldn't pay $80 for waste removal. The bins were taken, so they drove their garbage in a beat-up minivan to a dumpster behind a grocery store, and could barely afford food. He calls it embarrassing, and proof that reinvention looks messy from the inside.

• Spinal fusion 47 days before taping
Roll recorded the episode 47 days after spinal fusion surgery that required opening his body from front and back. He describes needing his body opened up on both sides to be ready to hear the lesson it taught.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **'Mood follows action' as a phrase to repeat**
  When you think 'I need to stop vaping' or 'get off the apps', take one action now instead of waiting for motivation.
- **Pre-commit to your next moment of clarity**
  Decide now that the next time you feel the pull to change, you'll act that day rather than tomorrow.
- **Boundaries script for a loved one in addiction**
  Separate the person from the behaviour, state your love, name their suffering, and refuse to participate in or enable the behaviour.
- **Look for happiness clues**
  He notes that your happiest moments probably involve people you care about, doing something you enjoy, likely outdoors. Build toward more of that.

Try It for 1 Week: 6 Small Ways to Bring Back the Happiness, Energy, and Fun

Date: 2025-10-06 · Duration: 0:43:34
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9A5kNKzfpVs

KEYPOINTS

- **Adults have turned the volume down on fun**
  Mel opens with a viral post by a writer and editor at The Hindu, India's national newspaper: people are 'tired, polite, curated,' couples eat in silence, friends scroll reels while drinks sweat, and everyone is 'emotionally on airplane mode,' trading personality for polish. The post ends, 'Bring back the chaos... bring back the fun.' That it came from halfway around the world suggests to Mel the shift is global.
- **Fun is a necessity, not a luxury**
  Mel acknowledges there are very real problems in the world, but argues fun energizes you, helps you connect, lowers stress and makes you healthier. Exhaustion makes fun feel like work, which is exactly why it gets dropped.
- **Missing small moments of joy can contribute to burnout and numbness**
  Mel cites double-board-certified psychiatrist Dr. Judith Joseph, known for research on high-functioning depression. Her work finds small daily moments of joy, silliness and laughter are essential for health and resilience, that happiness is built by increasing them, and that their absence can contribute to burnout, numbness and sadness. Joseph prescribes these 'points of joy' to patients.
- **Laughter has measurable health effects**
  Mel cites the National Cancer Institute: regular laughter strengthens the immune system by lowering stress hormones and increases natural killer cells and activated T cells. She flags laughter as a topic for a future expert episode.
- **Fun has three ingredients: playfulness, connection and flow**
  From Catherine Price's book The Power of Fun. Playfulness is not taking yourself too seriously, or as Mel's daughter Kendall says, 'Mom, it's not that deep.' Connection means fun usually involves others, even for introverts. Flow means you're so immersed that time disappears, along with worries about the past, anxiety about the future and your to-do list.
- **Way 1: 'Wear the pink glasses' by making one small fun change**
  Mel swaps her black frames for neon pink aviators on air. Fun needn't be a production: different socks, a funny story before a meeting, 70s disco, Motown or a live concert track while doing dishes, a lunchtime walk with coworkers, a crossword or cards, a funky desk plant, the joke you usually swallow, or the funniest thing from your weekend instead of 'not much.'
- **Way 2: Say yes to fun, and 'do it for the plot'**
  Stop skipping the comedy show because it's late, the company outing because socializing feels like work, or the cake. Say yes to the dance class or the cringy speed-dating night. If you're nervous, ask what the main character of a movie would do; even a bad night gives you a hilarious story.
- **Way 3: Be bad at it**
  The person crushing everyone at pickleball or nailing every note like Whitney Houston is chasing perfection, not having fun. Mel argues social media has made us terrified of looking stupid or ending up on an embarrassing TikTok page. Being bad removes pressure and gives others permission to laugh at themselves.
- **Way 4: Drive the fun bus**
  Stop waiting for someone else to throw the party or crack the joke. One person dancing at a mellow concert, starting the wave or hitting the empty wedding dance floor breaks the seal, because seeing others have fun makes us want to join. If going first isn't natural, assign yourself the role for the day; pretending quickly becomes real.
- **Way 5: Let them judge you**
  Fear of being cringe is why most of us don't have fun. Applying her Let Them Theory, Mel says people who judge you for dancing first or laughing loudly are probably miserable or uptight, so let them. Focus on 'let me': let me have fun because it matters for my health and happiness. Unapologetic people are the ones everyone wants to be around.
- **Way 6: Stop saying you're too old**
  Kids jump in foam pits, sing loudly, wear costumes and decorate in clashing colors; adults turn beige for Instagram. Mel's list: a quirky hobby, a crazy haircut, a theme dinner, bad karaoke, a hip-hop class, glitter or nail art. 'You're never going to be younger than you are right now.'

EXAMPLES

- **The 1970s-legends golf scramble**
  Mel's friend Char, 'the ambassador of fun,' hosted four couples at a nine-hole themed tournament. Non-golfer Mel went as photographer Slim Aarons in 1970s ski gear; Chris wore a leftover red sequin tuxedo jacket. Others came as Ricky Bobby from Talladega Nights with a pit-crew wife and Evel Knievel, and Char played in a sequined minidress, wig and white go-go boots. Of about 100 players, roughly 12 dressed up, and Mel says they had far more fun.
- **Mel's dancing reality check**
  Mel believes she's a great dancer, until Chris filmed her and she saw how awkward she actually looks. She found it hilarious and keeps dancing.
- **Yuna's backflip birthday**
  For her 30th, producer Yuna rented a gymnastics gym with two coaches so friends could attempt backflips. One turned out to be a secret gymnastics prodigy, most face-planted, and the waivers said 'child's name.' As they left, a line of 5-year-olds dressed as mermaids and princesses walked in.
- **Mel's mom's pink living room**
  Visiting her parents in Michigan, Mel's mother explained her pink living room: 'Everybody's house is beige. It's so boring.'

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Test yourself: when did you last wear a costume?**
  Halloween doesn't count. If you can't remember, or can't recall your last belly laugh or board game night, Mel says that's a sign you need more playfulness.
- **Bring the games yourself**
  Mel brings yard games and after-dinner games to family gatherings, such as Salad Bowl, a charades-style game using famous names. At work, one colleague keeps challenging people to handstands, headstands and jiu-jitsu moves, which makes the office more fun.
- **Thank your fun friend**
  Think of the person who always brings the fun, with the playlist, the elaborate appetizer and the story, and tell them you appreciate it. Then copy what they do.

This Shocking Truth About Other People Will Change Your Life

Guest: Dr. Todd Rose
Date: 2025-09-29 · Duration: 1:27:57
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=asojiVtJ7F0

KEYPOINTS

• A collective illusion is groupthink where you're wrong about what the group thinks

Dr. Todd Rose, former Harvard Graduate School of Education professor and CEO of the think tank Populace, says most people privately reject a norm but go along because they wrongly believe most others accept it. He argues we're the first generation dealing with these illusions at scale, because of social media.

• Your brain punishes you for disagreeing with the group

In a 2009 Dutch fMRI study, agreeing with the group triggered a reward signal in the same areas hard drugs activate. Disagreeing fired an 'error signal' that disrupts memory and attention, telling you to stop because you might be in danger. Most people later shifted their own ratings toward the fake group without realising it.

• The loudest 10% make the extreme look like the majority

He cites research that about 80% of content on X (formerly Twitter) comes from about 10% of users. Pew found that group isn't remotely representative and is extreme on almost every social issue. If 10% hold a view but you think it's 80%, you self-silence, feel alienated and resentful, and lose trust, producing a 'false polarisation' that becomes self-fulfilling.

• Privately, most people want the same things

Populace's large private-opinion studies, which ask what people admit privately rather than say publicly, found Americans agreed on eight of the top 10 national aspirations. Examples included individual rights, free speech, treating each other with respect, and high-quality healthcare for everyone. People still disagree on how, for example Medicare for All versus other models, but share the destination.

• Our public definition of success isn't our private one

Publicly people assume success means fame, a big house and a fancy car. Privately, across demographics, the top 10 priorities were contributing through work, relationships, family, character, growth, and being engaged in community. Community involvement was the least achieved of those priorities; more people reported being debt-free than involved in their community.

• Living by your private priorities raises life satisfaction

People are currently achieving about 50% of their own priorities, he says, and modestly raising that has a large effect on life satisfaction. Achieving on what you secretly value, not on what you think others value, is what makes the difference.

• Self-silencing is bad for your health

He cites longitudinal research, which tracked women because they self-silence at much higher rates, linking self-silencing to dramatically higher cardiovascular disease, stroke and high cholesterol. His proposed mechanism is cognitive dissonance that keeps cortisol elevated and damages blood vessels. Treat this as his summary of the research rather than settled causation.

• Self-silencers have far lower trust in others

Social trust, meaning trust in strangers, is in his view the single best predictor of a healthy democracy, and good things happen above about 50%. The US is in the low-to-mid 30s. People who self-silence sit in the low 30s, while the roughly one-third who don't have levels rivalling Scandinavian countries.

• Authenticity is a process, and it's never too late

You never finish being authentic; a flourishing life keeps growing, so locking in who you are today would make you inauthentic later. He says research shows the benefits accrue quickly at any age. The only truly bad decision is violating your values to conform to a group that didn't want that from you in the first place.

• Illusions collapse fast when people start living in truth

Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution in the late 1980s fell after about 12 days of protests. Months earlier Václav Havel had said he might not live to see change; three months later he was the first democratically elected president. 'If a poet can overthrow communism', imagine your own life.

EXAMPLES

• Mel's midweek glass of wine

Mel had a rule of no drinking on weeknights, but when a colleague asked 'Want a glass of wine?' she said yes on reflex. Rose explains it as belonging pressure plus a stereotype that non-drinkers aren't fun. If she'd said 'I'm not drinking during the week', the colleague likely would have skipped it too.

• Six years of Sizzler

As a boy Rose loved Yahtzee sleepovers with his grandparents, but they began going to Sizzler once a month for six years. On her deathbed in 2015 his grandmother said she knew Sizzler mattered most to him, and admitted she and his grandfather never liked it. Nobody wanted to go; everyone thought the others did.

• From a 0.9 GPA to Harvard

Rose failed out of high school in rural Utah with a 0.9 GPA. His girlfriend, later his wife of 29 years, became pregnant; they were on welfare with two kids by the time he was 20. It took seven years to reach a Harvard doctorate and seven more to become a professor, by asking only 'what's the next step?'

• The book that changed his life

On a lunch break from a Circuit City job he found Nathaniel Branden's The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem in a Barnes & Noble. Its idea that self-esteem is the alignment of beliefs and behaviour made him realise that his beliefs, which were religious in his case, not his behaviour, might be what needed to change.

• Tragedy reveals common ground

When Rose lost his wife a couple of years ago, people he thought he had 'beefs' with showed up. Mel adds that family members divided by politics for years come together in a health crisis.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Ask 'why' about what you believe**
  Your genuine beliefs come with reasons you can state; Rose's example is human dignity and human rights. If you can't say why you hold a belief, it may just be a social norm you never questioned.
- **Say the true thing in small moments**
  One honest statement, like 'I'm not drinking this week', gives others permission and helps dissolve illusions. Small acts become habit, then identity.
- **Read The Power of the Powerless**
  Rose recommends Havel's essay, which he says is about 80 pages, on how ordinary people 'living in truth' bring change.
- **Happiness spreads**
  He cites research that when people in your network become happier you get about a 25% boost, so your authenticity helps others too.

How to Build the Life You Want (Even When You Feel Overloaded, Exhausted, & Uncertain)

Guest: Kellie Gerardi
Date: 2025-09-25 · Duration: 1:07:17
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EUJ85tlfybw

KEYPOINTS

• Adjust the 'limiter' on your imagination
Kellie Gerardi, an astronaut and bioastronautics researcher, says ordinary people can make themselves capable of extraordinary things, and it's never too late. Take your current vision board and zoom out 30, 50 or 100 times; the only one applying the limit is you. Ask: if every limitation were removed and everything went right, what would my life look like? Mel adds: who made up the rules anyway?

• Get close to what you want, even in the humblest role
Fascinated by space as a student in New York, she took a coat-check job at the Explorers Club. Its members were first to the North Pole, the South Pole, the Moon's surface and the deepest point of the ocean, and she hoped some of it would 'rub off by osmosis'. Mel's takeaway: get as close as you can to what interests you, paid or not.

• Give 150% to unglamorous work and you design your reputation
She treated coat check seriously, with a system, remembering names and staying organised, because you must 'seek the important work, not just the glamorous work'. It showed follow-through, attention to detail and readiness for more responsibility. Mel's version: 'How you do anything is how you do everything.'

• When you hit a brick wall, change the approach, not the goal
She applies this from her career to her personal life. Through dashed hopes and failures she keeps the destination fixed and keeps changing tactics.

• 'Why not me?' is quiet confidence, not entitlement
She has trained her inner monologue to ask 'If I work hard enough for long enough, why not me?' She stresses it's not 'I deserve this' but a blend of humility and confidence. It gives her permission to pursue the whole vision board, not one quadrant at a time, accepting that she has to toggle between areas.

• Seeing Earth from space forces a perspective shift
After more than a decade of preparation, she focused first on getting her science team's data on her one shot. Then she looked out the window and felt awe she still can't describe: Earth as a planet, and herself 'not on the same planet as my baby'. It made 'don't sweat the small stuff' concrete and gave her an inner peace; she calls it her mental screensaver until she dies.

• Mothers get told to shrink the dreams they were raised on
'We have astronaut Barbie dolls… we want our girls to know they can be anything, until they grow up and become mothers.' She gets online criticism to 'pick one, motherhood or space'. Her mother grew up when US women weren't eligible to fly to space, then watched her daughter's flight a generation later. She shares the juggle openly, including when 'the scales don't perfectly balance'.

• Suffering in silence is a rule worth breaking
After nearly eight years of secondary infertility and recurrent loss, she's been pregnant five times but has one child. She has tried every approach: silence through an early loss, and waiting the 'safe' 12 weeks only to unannounce in the second trimester. She rejected the idea that loss is a private burden. Mel argues that bracing in silence doesn't spare you pain, because 'there is no assurance in life'.

• Hold grief and hope at the same time
About 10 days from her next IVF transfer during taping, with another research mission planned for 2026, she keeps moving both forward. Her test for whether to continue something is whether it energises her and gives her a spark; if yes, she keeps trying.

• You can reserve the right to reinvent yourself
The dream she crystallised at 20 doesn't have to be the edge of her 'visual field'. At 36 she sees further stars from a new vantage point. To find a direction, start by noticing what drains you and what energises you, so you can at least rule things out.

EXAMPLES

• Coat check to the board
Her reputation led the Explorers Club to ask her to chair its biggest event, the annual dinner, which she calls New York City's longest-running charity event. About a decade later she was appointed to its board of directors and executive board.

• About 150 microgravity research flights
While earning a master's at the International Institute for Astronautical Sciences, she ran research on parabolic flights with partners at the National Research Council of Canada. Each freefall gives roughly 20–22 seconds of weightlessness to study fluid dynamics and human health. Researchers dream of minutes, and of flying their own experiments.

• Reading her own pre-flight obituary
Before launch she came across an obituary prepared in case the mission failed, never meant for her eyes. Seeing 'she is survived by' with her daughter's and husband's names made her feel her family's perspective, but she still felt confident in the engineers and the cabin converted into a suborbital lab.

• Twenty-six eggs, one embryo
Hormone medications made everything 'technicolor in the worst way'. One retrieval yielded 26 eggs, then attrition through fertilisation, day-5 blastocysts and genetic testing left a single embryo. She later miscarried at 8 weeks after a transfer, shared in real time with more than 10 million followers, and faced comments that she'd announced too soon.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Zoom-out vision board exercise**
  Write your current goals, then imagine them 30 to 100 times bigger with every limitation removed, and ask what one path toward that would look like.
- **Drain/energise audit**
  List what currently drains your battery and what sparks you, cut what drains you, and keep investing in what energises you.
- **Advice to her 20-year-old self**
  The trick with big dreams isn't figuring it out as fast as possible but keeping yourself moving forward on several fronts at once.
- **'Why not me?' self-talk**
  Pair the question with effort and time ('if I work hard enough for long enough') so it builds confidence without ego.

How to Design Your Life (A Full Step-by-Step Process)

Guest: Debbie Millman
Date: 2025-09-08 · Duration: 1:09:16
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yKkjU63iAVY

KEYPOINTS

• Design your life around what is possible, not what is probable.
Debbie Millman, a designer who has taught a life-design course at the School of Visual Arts for over a decade, says most people only plan for the likely outcome, which keeps their ambitions small. Her process gives you a way to make decisions about what you want even if those wants change later. Thinking in possibilities lets you start experimenting with what different lives might feel like before committing to one.

• The core exercise: write a detailed essay about one ordinary day, ten years from now, in a life where you got everything you wanted.
You write from the moment you wake up until you close your eyes at night. Millman learned a five-year version from designer Milton Glaser and now uses ten years. Mel, at 56, imagined herself at 66; a teenager would picture their 20s. The point is to be specific about a single day rather than listing abstract goals.

• Focus only on the outcome. Asking 'how will I do this?' kills the exercise.
Millman insists the essay is your dream, your fantasy of the life you'd have if you could get everything. Working out logistics while you write pulls you back into probability. She is clear it won't get you everything, but she says it will get you more than you have now, and that part she 'can guarantee.'

• Start with your surroundings and let surprising images be clues.
The first question is where you live and what's around you. Mel immediately saw the ocean, even though she doesn't live near it now; Millman called that 'a cue.' If what you picture makes no sense with your current life, don't edit it out. That mismatch may be pointing to something you want but haven't admitted.

• Most people aren't unclear about what they want; they're afraid to let themselves imagine it.
When Mel asked whether people get stuck because they don't know what they want, Millman pushed back: the real problem is fear of wanting. Admitting a desire makes it real and puts you at risk of disappointment. For some, it also conflicts with family expectations, like realizing you may not want kids, may not want to live in your hometown, may be gay, or may not want the career your parents chose.

• Saying it out loud is the most powerful part.
Glaser made his students read their essays to the class, and Millman does the same: students get a week to write, then come back and share. Some charge to the front eagerly; others are shaky and scared. She believes declaring what you want somehow folds it into your intentions, and hearing other people's dreams encourages everyone in the room.

• After writing it, read it, put it away, and read it again in a year.
Millman doesn't recommend pinning it up or checking it every day. She suggests putting it away and revisiting it a year later. When things start coming true, she says to notice it privately as reassurance that you did something meaningful for yourself, rather than announcing it publicly.

• Self-sabotage shows up as the things you tell yourself you can't do.
One of her prompts is 'What are you telling yourself you can't do that you can?' She says people answer with 'breathtaking self-sabotage': they'll never meet the right person, never get the house by the ocean, never run their own business. These 'circling restrictions' keep people from even trying.

• Not being in the mood is not a permission slip.
Millman asks her students what matters more: keeping a promise to themselves or watching the new season of a TV show. Her view is that finishing things you start is a form of accountability to yourself, and that our stories about not finishing are part of what life design brings to the surface.

• You don't have to pick just one thing.
Millman has worked in design, branding, teaching, writing and podcasting, and doesn't regret not narrowing down; she says doing only one or two things would have limited her creativity. If you know you want to be a doctor or a skater, focus. If you don't know, she encourages trying as many things as you like.

• 'Make it till you make it,' don't fake it.
Millman rejects 'fake it till you make it' as pretending and inauthentic. Making it until you make it means you are actively building, which is intentional design. She also turns hope into action: instead of praying or being desperate for something, you create the opportunity to try. Nothing is guaranteed, but she argues trying gives you far better odds than waiting.

EXAMPLES

• Millman's own 2005 essay largely came true.
In Glaser's class she wrote about teaching at the School of Visual Arts, being a leader in the American Institute of Graphic Arts, writing a book and curating an art exhibit. By 2006 she was teaching at SVA, had her first book deal and was on the board of AIGA's New York chapter, even though she had forgotten writing most of it.

• Milton Glaser taught the exercise for about 50 years.
The designer behind the I &e NY logo and the famous Bob Dylan silhouette poster told his class this exercise was the most important thing he did with his life. Millman was struck that such a famous designer cared most about it.

• What people picture changes by decade.
In her classes, people in their 20s usually write about a job, a relationship and a place to live. In their 30s it's family, children and mastering their work. In their 40s people want to create more and to have more time and balance.

• Mel's producers found it stressful.
Several producers in their mid-to-late 20s tried it ahead of the episode and found simply imagining waking up ten years older

very stressful. Millman says that difficulty is exactly the fear of wanting she's describing.

• Students write back years later.

Millman has run the exercise in roughly 45–50 classes of 18–25 students each. Former students send emails and cards saying that 5 to 15 years later they got the most important things, or everything, on their list, or learned what they didn't want and redesigned from there.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Prompt questions to answer in your essay

Where do you live, and what's around you? How do you define happiness? What are your career goals? What kind of love do you need? Describe who you love most and why. Describe your physical self: how is your health and how do you take care of it? What are you telling yourself you can't do that you can?

• Open-ended prompts if you prefer less structure

Her other set of prompts is deliberately abstract, like 'Imagine immensities' and 'Make the impossible possible,' for people who want to wander in directions they hadn't planned.

• The 100-day project

Millman has students make something every day for 100 days, without a client or anyone to please. It builds a body of work and shows you what you tell yourself about finishing.

• How to run it

Give yourself about a week. Write in the present tense from waking to sleeping. Read it out loud to at least one trusted person. Put it away, then reread it in a year and redesign as needed. In Millman's words, redesigning is as much fun as designing.

4 Steps to Unlock Your Creativity & Feel More Inspired Every Day

Guest: Phil Cook
Date: 2025-08-28 · Duration: 0:55:12
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HpreATdUSZA

KEYPOINTS

• Creativity is the exhale to all the information you take in.
Musician and songwriter Phil Cook describes daily life as one long inhale of noise and distraction. Creativity is how you breathe some of it back out. He ties it to intuition, the inner voice that can guide decisions 'like tuning a guitar string to exactly the right pitch of you.' The two feed each other: intuition shapes what you make, and making things sharpens your intuition.

• You're already creative; you just don't count it.
Cook pushes back on 'I can't draw, I'm not creative.' The song you cranked on the drive to work, the sandwich you knew would hit, the way you've learned to do Friday pizza night with different toppings on each half for each kid: these are all choices that express you. Making something that wasn't there before, even dinner, is creating.

• Many 'I'm not creative' stories come from small childhood wounds.
Someone made an offhand remark in elementary school, or you watched a person play Beethoven and decided it would never be you. Cook calls these 'micro traumas' that harden into 'this is never for me.' Part of creativity is noticing those stories and questioning them.

• Principle 1: shed the weight of expectations.
For Cook this is about worthiness. Notice what keeps calling to you over the years, like woodworking or a pottery class you keep saying you'll take 'someday,' and ask why you haven't. Usually the answer is a story about who you're allowed to be.

• Parents often hand their unlived creativity to their kids.
A common pattern: you quit piano in middle school, later regret it, then sign your kids up instead. Cook says the kids feel the recital pressure and also the weight of your regret, which turns many of them off. The better move is to take the lessons yourself.

• Principle 2: lower the stakes and assign your own value.
Mel admits that when she hears 'creativity' she thinks about the finished product and how people will react, and that's why so many people edit themselves out. Cook calls your inner creative life 'your realm,' outside society's clock and judgment, where you decide what something is worth. He notes the critical 'drill sergeant' voice lives in there too, and you have to stop letting it set the stakes.

• Principle 3: bring yourself to the work, limitations included.
Cook is clumsy ('my gross motor skills are gross') and trips in public, so he walks looking down, which is how he started noticing rocks. Now he keeps trays of them, and calls them 'not work to me.' He knows that after he dies someone might toss them back on the ground. Mel's point: they were never for anyone else.

• Principle 4: find your sanctuary, a place where the world falls away.
It doesn't have to be a studio. It could be cooking, a walk, three minutes singing along in your car, or a rock in your pocket that reminds you of something meaningful. Cook says what counts as sanctuary is whatever it means to you.

• Start with the landscape you live in.
Whether your life is city hustle, desert, countryside or ocean, Cook says that environment is what your senses are reading every day, and it's where your material comes from. Begin by paying attention to what you notice.

• Creativity can be healing, in a different way than therapy or exercise.
Cook's closing advice is to know that you belong to yourself and to talk to yourself the way a good friend would. Therapy, meditation and running help, he says, but making things gives your soul a different kind of expression. These are his personal beliefs about meaning, not clinical claims.

EXAMPLES

• The worry stone carved by firelight
Cook had always wanted to work with wood. His grandfather's carving knife sat unused above his mantle because he assumed he'd cut a finger off. Last fall, up all night at a fire with his friend Daniel, he talked about worrying for his girlfriend, whose father had just died suddenly, while whittling by feel in the dark. By the end of the hour he had carved something shaped to the inside of his hand, with a smooth groove for the thumb, and he gave it to her.

• A family chain
Cook realized the carving connected him to his grandfather, who had given him a worry stone as a kid. At 45, he felt his intuition had 'taken care of it' once he got out of his own way. He now makes them privately, including one engraved with an M for Mel, and says he'll never sell them.

• The 98% to 2% creativity figure
Mel cited a 'landmark' 1968 study in which 98% of five-year-olds scored very high on creativity but only 2% of adults did. She paired it with Picasso's line that all children are born artists, and the problem is staying one. She cited the figure without details on how the study measured creativity.

• Pizza night as creative work
Cook's everyday example: you find your own way to make the family pizza, feed your kids, and their hunger is satisfied. Something that wasn't there before now exists. Recreating a dish your grandma made is the same impulse.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Find what's calling you
List the things you've wanted to try for years, like pottery, woodworking, singing or piano. For each one, write down the story you tell yourself about why you haven't done it yet.

- **Do it badly on purpose**
  Cook happily admits other people can whittle a perfect loon while his pieces are crude. Make things that are only for you, with no audience and no standard.
- **Build a tiny sanctuary**
  Pick one daily window, like a walk, a song in the car or cooking, and protect it as time where nothing else happens. Even three minutes counts.
- **Don't pass your regrets to your kids**
  If you're tempted to sign your kids up for the thing you quit, consider taking it up again yourself first.

5 Powerful Questions to Ask Yourself Right Now

Date: 2025-08-14 · Duration: 0:56:51
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KTvI4yUnJjY

KEYPOINTS

• A solo check-in, framed as a walk with a friend

No experts or interviews here: Mel goes back to the podcast's format from two and a half years earlier, when it was just her at a microphone in Vermont, recording in her closet or above the garage. She records straight after her morning walk, still in workout clothes. Her premise is that you already know what's working, what drains you and what brings you joy, but busyness hijacks you. Pausing to ask good questions brings that clarity back quickly.

• Question 1: How are you really doing right now?

Skip the automatic 'fine.' Close your mouth, breathe through your nose and ask more than once, because the answer comes in layers. Name the feeling (overwhelmed, content, restless, frustrated) without trying to fix it. If the answer is good, that's a clue about what to keep doing. If it's bad, saying it out loud is the first step to whatever comes next.

• Problems feel lighter outside your head than inside it

Mel cites a New York Times piece by clinical psychologist Dr. Lisa Damour, whose work changed how Mel relates to her adult kids. Damour wrote that adolescents, like adults, feel relief just from putting their worries into words, and that psychologists say problems feel better outside than inside. Many big problems can't be solved, Mel adds, but having one isn't nearly as bad as feeling alone with it.

• Question 2: Who have you spent time with lately, or wish you had?

Looking back over 56 years, Mel says the periods when she put family and friends first felt clearly better than the ones when work or school came first. The question surfaces people you take for granted because 'they're always there.' She cites Dr. Robert Waldinger, director of the 84-year Harvard Study of Adult Development: relationship quality is the strongest predictor of lifelong happiness and health, not money, success or status.

• Stop waiting to be invited, and keep connection small

Mel is annoyed by families waiting for a formal invitation: call and say 'I miss you, how about this weekend?' Put a date in the calendar. She also argues that connection doesn't need a big weekend or a $10,000 trip. A six-minute call while running errands counts, and one visit often leads to the next.

• Question 3: What brought you joy recently, and how can you do more of it?

Joy is usually something small, not the promotion or the renovation. Mel argues joy can happen on purpose, so build it into your schedule: keep a puzzle on the coffee table, a deck of cards or Bananagrams handy. She treats joy as a life raft, not a mood you have to feel all the time.

• Small doses of joy can help during depression and burnout

For listeners too burned out to know what brings them joy, Mel points to NYU psychiatrist Dr. Judith Joseph, whose research looks at how small moments of intentional joy can be a lifeline even in hard periods of depression. Finding joy when things are going well is easy. Mel calls building it in when they aren't a superpower.

• Your camera roll shows you what used to bring you joy

If you're drawing a blank, scroll back through your photos. In her worst burnout years Mel had to scroll back several years to find herself content: running road races with girlfriends, a book club, singing in a church choir, meditating, scrapbooking. You can even feel 'jealous of a former version of yourself' who made time for those things. That's your evidence of what to bring back.

• Question 4: What have you been putting off that's draining your energy?

It's usually something small that nags you every time you see it: a dentist appointment, an overdue bill, school physicals, the couch you meant to list on Facebook Marketplace, a car registration. Mel's challenge is to pick one, set a timer and time how long it actually takes, inspired by a TikTok account called How Long Does It Actually Take?, where a young woman named Christy times tasks she has put off.

• Question 5: What's something new you can try during the week?

Saving all the fun for weekends backfires, Mel says, because you sleep until 11 and the day disappears into errands. Try a weekday dance, cooking, art or online class, with bonus points for bringing or making a friend and extra points if you expect to be bad at it. Having somewhere to be also gives you a reason to leave work instead of drifting back to the laptop.

EXAMPLES

• Bodie and Homie's reunion

Mel's brother Derek had never visited her Vermont home in four years, partly because his wife, Mel's business partner, visits three or four times a year while he stays home with their twins. He insisted on a nearly 15-hour drive from Chicago so their Australian Shepherd Bodie could meet his littermate, Mel's dog Homie, for the first time since they were eight weeks old. The two dogs ignored the other dogs for four days. The families played cards, cooked and hiked.

• Harry Potter Monopoly in house-elf voices

With all three adult kids home, the family played 'high-low' at dinner (everyone shares the day's high and low), then a Harry Potter Monopoly game her daughter picked up at Walmart. They read the cards in character voices. Mel, a proud Gryffindor, was told she sounds like Dobby.

• Deadheading and the lupine seed pods

Gardening is Mel's other big joy. After her morning walk she does a three-minute loop around the house to deadhead flowers. She, her daughter and her daughter's boyfriend pulled hundreds of lupine seed pods in the field and scattered them along the driveway, hoping for blooms next spring.

• Mel's three put-off tasks

A placemat drawer that has needed sorting for four years, sometimes with pasta sauce still on the mats. Carpet in Oakley's room that Mr. Noodle the cat peed on for months after he left for college; a carpet cleaner told her to rip it out. And a basal-cell

spot she has had covered with a Band-Aid for two weeks. She commits to booking the Mohs appointment, which she estimates takes five to ten minutes.

• The Oxford juggling study and her 5:30 hip-hop class

Mel cites an Oxford study in which half the participants took a juggling class for six weeks. Their visual and spatial brain regions became thicker. Her own new thing: a 5:30 p.m. hip-hop class, despite being dyslexic, bad at choreography and 'the person who turns the wrong way' in wedding line dances.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Bookmark the five questions for when you feel off

Use them when you feel lonely, can't remember the last time you laughed or feel adrift. There are no right answers. Mel's own answers shifted between the first time she asked and the recap, and that's part of the point.

• Act on question two immediately

Send the episode to the person who came to mind with a note asking for a date or even a 10-minute call. If no one comes to mind, flip through your contacts. Mel keeps a printed contact list by her desk and sends texts or voice memos between Zoom calls.

• Cheap concert tickets on the day

Mel now sees two concerts a year because live music brings her so much joy. Her tip is to wait until the day of the show, when resellers often slash prices for good seats.

The Best Advice I Wish I Knew in My 20s

Guest: Dr. Meg Jay
Date: 2025-08-11 · Duration: 1:20:01
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wSrcr91JYA

KEYPOINTS

• Your 20s are the most defining decade, and often the hardest one.
Clinical psychologist Dr. Meg Jay says the idea that your 20s are the best, most carefree years is 'empirically not true.' It's a decade of firsts and worsts: first and worst jobs, relationships and breakups. Older adults see no mortgage or kids and wonder why 20-somethings are stressed. They miss that work, love, money, brain development and emotional stability are all uncertain at the same time.

• The brain reads uncertainty as danger, so many 20-somethings live in low-level chronic stress.
Without adult sources of security, everything can feel risky, from talking to a roommate (people text instead) to talking to a boss. Jay presents this as normal for the stage, not a personal failing, and says confidence comes from building experience.

• Life usually gets better after your 20s, if you put in the work.
Jay tells crying clients, 'If the 20s turn out to be the best years of your life, something has gone terribly wrong.' She says studies show life gets better on average with each decade of adulthood. In 25 years of practice, no former client has told her they wish they were back in their 20s. Mel agreed, calling her own 20s her worst decade.

• Build your career one piece of 'identity capital' at a time.
Identity capital means anything that adds value to who you are: the best job you can get even if it isn't great, a degree, a certification, a skill. You don't need to know at 24 who you'll be forever. Young adults average nine jobs by 35, and many end up in careers that didn't exist when they were in college. Treat early jobs as getting paid to learn, because the learning curve slows after your 20s.

• Doing nothing isn't safe; underemployment is sticky.
Jay says 75% of underemployed 20-somethings are still underemployed a decade later. The good news is the other 25% get out, and people who already have a few directions to test can move quickly. Her image: 20-somethings are like planes just after takeoff, easy to correct. The hardest cases are people whose lives never took off after college.

• In college: go to class, map every deadline, and get an internship.
Jay teaches at UVA and says parents shouldn't assume their kids attend class, since technology makes skipping easy. Going to class gives structure and can lead to relationships with professors. Put every syllabus, reading and deadline into one calendar, which most students don't do. She calls an internship one of the biggest predictors of whether college pays off: 'the best preparation for work is work.'

• Staying single through your 20s usually doesn't feel good.
Jay cites a study that followed people from their early to late 20s. Among those who dated or hooked up but avoided commitment, 80% were unhappy with their dating lives and only 10% didn't wish they had a partner. Men who stayed single throughout their 20s showed a significant dip in self-esteem near 30.

• Decide what you want before asking 'who wants me?'
Many young adults date by seeing who picks them. Jay compares this to grocery shopping hungry: you grab things without knowing what you came for. Her '29 conversations' cover marriage, religion, money, kids, and work after kids. You should have them with a partner, but first with yourself.

• A partner turns life into a three-legged race.
Who you partner with shapes where you live, your job, vacations, even paint colors. When the relationship is going well, you're doing well; when it isn't, you're not. That's why Jay thinks choosing a partner deserves as much intention as choosing a career.

• Growing up in an unhappy family doesn't rule out building a happy one.
Many clients believe 'happy families are for other people.' Jay says people who grew up with adversity are often the most motivated and the clearest about what they do and don't want. Part of the work is shifting them toward 'you get to do it differently.'

• Often what feels like social anxiety is really social uncertainty, and the fix is skills.
'I'm worried other people don't like me' is the most commonly endorsed item on a questionnaire given at student health centers nationwide. Jay separates clinical anxiety from uncertainty, like not knowing if what you said was stupid or whether you'll have plans Saturday. Her motto is 'skills over pills': medication or not, everyone needs social and work skills, and confidence follows.

EXAMPLES

• Mark, 25, three years as a barista
A listener took a 'temporary' barista job that lasted three years. He wanted to try architecture or graphic design but felt that trying and hating it was scarier than not trying. Jay's answer: inaction is the dangerous choice. Pick one direction and start testing it now.

• Hannah's fear of never finding the same life goals
A listener worried that no one she wanted would want the same things, or not until it was too late. Jay said this is so common she added the '29 conversations' chapter to the updated edition of her book, and told Hannah to slow down and get clear on her own answers first.

• The numbers Jay leads with
80% of life's most defining moments happen by 35. Earning power is largely set in your first ten years of work. More than half of people are married to, dating or living with their future partner by 30. The brain and personality change more in your 20s than at any other time.

• Waiting for kids isn't automatically a win

Jay, who had her kids in her 30s, says having a baby is a beginning, not an end. Once you have kids, you want to be around for them as long as possible, so pushing it to 40 or 42 has real costs that people rarely talk about.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Help a stuck 20-something start thinking about change**
  Jay draws on research about how people change: the key shift is from not even considering change to thinking about it. Give them something to think about, like a book or a podcast, rather than a lecture.
- **Ask yourself the anxiety-or-uncertainty question**
  Is this clinical anxiety, or am I just uncertain whether people like me? If it's uncertainty, build skills through practice. If it's more, get professional help.
- **Collect identity capital on purpose**
  Choose jobs for what you'll learn, add credentials you can build on, and test two or three interests before your mid-20s instead of waiting to be sure.
- **College checklist**
  Attend class, use office hours, keep one master calendar, and get at least one internship.

Feeling Lost in Your 20s? You Need to Hear This

Date: 2025-06-30 · Duration: 0:53:21
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ZLWq1uDCZ0

KEYPOINTS

• Feeling lost in your 20s is normal, and the research backs it

After asking her Instagram followers what they struggle with in their 20s and reading thousands of replies, Mel opens with one message: feeling lost now is normal. She cites the Harvard Study of Adult Development, running for over 80 years, as showing that the 20s are one of the most uncertain and anxious decades of life. She frames three hidden forces as the cause, so the struggle reflects your circumstances, not you.

• Force one: the Great Scattering

Mel coined the term in The Let Them Theory, co-written with her daughter Sawyer, and reads from pages 158 and 161. For about 20 years, school, sports, dorms and calendars kept you in step with peers. Then everyone scatters to different cities, jobs and timelines, the structure you measured yourself by disappears, and loneliness hits. She adds that 60% of 20-somethings in the U.S. live back in their hometown, and that hybrid work removes the after-work social life she had at that age.

• Scattering keeps happening, so learn to measure by your own timeline

Friends scatter again when people marry, have kids, move to the suburbs, divorce, retire or become empty nesters. When a friend gets engaged or promoted, Mel's replacement thought is: 'I'm not behind. I'm on my own timeline, and it hasn't happened yet because it's not supposed to happen yet.' Naming it as 'the Great Scattering' makes it feel less personal.

• Force two: so many options that you're paralyzed

In her 20s Mel had no feeds showing what anyone else was doing; her choice was 'this or that.' Today, dating apps offer 500 matches in two minutes, LinkedIn shows 5,000 jobs and Instagram shows a hundred countries. She compares it to a grocery store stocked with 10,000 brands of milk, where you end up buying the one you always buy. Feeling paralyzed by that, she says, is a sign you're mentally well.

• Force three: pressure to cram everything into one decade

Mel's generation was pushed to pick a career, climb the ladder and save for a house, and job-hoppers were seen as 'freaks.' Now the pressure runs the other way: staying in one job looks like losing, and adventure, constant change and 'performing your life' are glamorized. Recognizing that the pressure is an external social construct, she says, lets you separate from it. She expects it to get worse as AI-driven accounts glamorize lives no one is actually living.

• Truth one: you don't have to do it all in your 20s

Your 20s are about one-eighth of your life. Mel suggests keeping a lifelong dream list in your notes app or saved-post folders, with no deadlines. She already has a wedding folder for daughters who aren't engaged. 'You can have everything, you just can't have it all at once.' She warns that putting a deadline on a dream is the fastest way to kill it.

• Truth two: there are no wrong decisions if you learn from them

Mel argues the skill to build is making a decision, not making the right one. A decision that solves your current problem or teaches you something is the right one, and no decision is still a decision. Her tools are the 5 Second Rule (count 5-4-3-2-1 and decide) and the six-word question 'What if it all works out?', which bets on your ability to figure it out either way.

• Truth three: commit to a one-month project on the thing you dread most

Pick the part of your life that makes your stomach drop and go all in for a month. For work, show up like it matters or start your resume. For loneliness, text first and plan the night. For money, skip the daily latte, sell something on Depop or open a budget. For love, go on two dates a week. For mental health, start therapy, get outside or quit social media for a month. Mel says momentum comes from facing one thing you've avoided, not from a haircut or a move.

EXAMPLES

• The paradox-of-choice jam study

Mel cites the Columbia and Stanford grocery-store experiment. With six jams on the sampling table, 30% of shoppers bought a jar; with 24, only 3% did. People were 10 times more likely to buy with fewer options. She applies it to how many ways a 20-something could spend a single afternoon.

• Stamping papers for dinner

Mel's first job in her 20s was a year of temp work in a windowless law-firm conference room, hand-stamping class-action documents 12 hours a day. She and the other temps stayed until 7 p.m. because the firm would then buy dinner, and none of them had money.

• A career built from 'wrong' decisions

Mel lists her path: public defender in New York City, a law firm in Boston she hated, two tech startups (fired from the second), ad-agency business development she was bad at, coach training through MIT, radio host, a cancelled reality show, CNN, speaking on the 5 Second Rule, author, a cancelled daytime talk show, then the podcast. She calls each one right because she learned from it. The hated law job, taken to pay bills because she wasn't licensed in Massachusetts, taught her a read-and-write desk job wasn't for her.

• Life after 30

In her 30s Mel and Chris took their six- and eight-year-olds on a week-long backpacking trip in Wyoming's Wind River Range with rented llamas carrying packs. In her late 30s they owned a paint-your-own-pottery studio that 'didn't make any money.' She got serious about social media in her late 40s and learned a backflip at 48. A friend from Chicago lived in Tanzania until her son was six.

OTHER RELEVANT

• If you don't know where to start, make it your health

Mel's default one-month project is your body: 30 minutes a day of a streamed workout or a walk, meal prep, a food journal, no

drinking or vaping, in bed by 9 reading, and something green daily. Her logic is that you feel different, then think and act differently, and your body has to carry you through every other change.

- **For parents of 20-somethings: swap orders for support**

  Barking 'get a job, get a boyfriend, stick to a budget' makes it worse. Mel suggests saying that it's normal to feel overwhelmed by endless options, then asking how you can help and offering to sit with them while they work on a resume or applications.

- **Ask for company on the stuck tasks**

  If you're in your 20s and frozen, Mel suggests asking someone to sit with you while you tackle the resume or applications. A little support creates momentum.

Once You Learn THIS, You Will Never Be The Same (Life Lessons From 88 Year Old Frank Caprio)

Guest: Judge Frank Caprio
Date: 2025-06-23 · Duration: 0:47:09
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qAbfWI5gz6Q

KEYPOINTS

• The core lesson: lift people up, often with just a hand on the shoulder

Asked what 40 years on the bench and 88 years of life taught him, Judge Frank Caprio says to help other people, especially the poor, disabled, hungry and those in crisis. It rarely takes much. Put a hand on someone's shoulder and tell them you love them and believe in them. What's a small effort for you can feel like lifting a mountain for them.

• Authority calls for more compassion, not less

Caprio says some judges put on the robe and believe it entitles them to excesses. He always pictured the person in front of him, a working man with four kids or a trembling mother, scared of what would happen. He rejected the 'I'm the boss here' posture and put himself in their shoes.

• Everyone needs a second chance

His question back: who doesn't? Think of every break you've been given. He says 'compassion' and 'understanding' are just pleasant words until you practice them. 'I'd rather go overboard with compassion than go overboard with punishment.' If someone deserved a six in sympathy, he gave them a ten, hoping it might change their life.

• Being a judge is more about the person than the law

After a hard lesson on his first day, Caprio always tried to find out what was really going on with the person in front of him. He considered how his ruling would affect their whole family, such as whether paying a fine meant the kids wouldn't eat that night. He says he never repeated that first-day mistake in more than 30 years.

• Children rise to the expectations you voice

Caprio deliberately focused on children in his courtroom, which can terrify a 12-year-old with its robes, armed officers and oak paneling. He told them he expected them to go on and do great things. He believes he became a lawyer and judge because his parents told him he could, and that encouragement beats berating every time.

• Teach by example, not speeches

His father never lectured about generosity. Young Frank simply watched him quietly pay customers' milk bills. Caprio says he learned morality by watching his mother and father and his 18 compassionate aunts and uncles, and he calls the family the basic unit of society.

• Be honorable and tell the truth

His most important advice is 'just be honorable.' He asked everyone who came before him simply to tell the truth, and he says it pays off in the end. He criticizes public figures who preach charity and service without practicing them.

• A good life is family, friends and service

Caprio's definition: be a good family person and have good friends. Wealth doesn't confer special privileges; 'we're all in the same boat.' He takes great joy in helping people. For older or retired listeners, he recommends civic involvement, such as volunteering at a home for the elderly or driving people who need rides.

EXAMPLES

• The milkman who wouldn't stop the milk

His father, Antonio Caprio Jr., was an Italian immigrant and one of 10 children. His family peddled fruit from a pushcart, and he couldn't afford college. His company stopped deliveries after two unpaid weeks, but he refused to cut off families with children and sometimes put a dollar or two of his own toward their bills. He woke Frank and his brother at 4 a.m. to ride the route despite the 'No Riders' sign.

• The autograph book

When Frank left sixth grade, his tired father stared at the book for minutes before writing: 'The street is wide, the road is long and very bumpy and very tough going, but I know that you will proceed along it honorably with your head held high to the end of the highest learning.' He signed his full legal name. Caprio still keeps the book in the right-hand drawer of his desk.

• 'You can't charge poor people like us'

At 12, in a cold-water flat heated by a potbelly stove with the oven door open, his father said, 'You're a good talker; you're going to be a lawyer.' He added that Frank must never charge poor people like them, joking that he'd make it up with rich people. Caprio says his law office has never charged a poor family. He taught high school and coached wrestling for six years while attending law school at night for four, once hitchhiking to class.

• The first-day boot case

Newly appointed and 'full of myself,' Caprio refused to remove a boot from a mother's car over a few hundred dollars in tickets, even though she said she had four kids to get to school. His father, watching from the courtroom, asked how he could do that, since she might not be able to feed her kids that night. 'You weren't brought up that way.' The case still bothers him.

• 'Guilty'

Caprio liked inviting children up to help decide their parents' cases. A 10-year-old whose family had arrived from Africa six months earlier was asked if his father was guilty of speeding and immediately said 'Guilty,' bringing the house down. Caprio dismissed the case because the father had four children, was just getting started and was respectful. He also dismissed $500 in tickets for a woman with a bullet still in her leg so she could pay medical bills.

• Facing pancreatic cancer

Treated by teams at Dana-Farber and in Miami, Caprio calls his diagnosis incurable but says he hasn't given up. It has drawn him closer to the people he loves and to prayer as a practicing Catholic, and has pushed him to examine his life and make

amends. His advice to others facing a scary diagnosis is to follow expert medical advice and ask doctors to be honest.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Before judging, picture yourself in their seat**
  When the news feels overwhelming or kindness seems pointless, Caprio's practice is simply to imagine you're the one sitting there, since it could happen to anyone tomorrow.
- **Say 'I believe in you' to someone today**
  Encourage gently, especially your children. He says one minute of belief can change the course of someone's life.
- **In marriage, nobody is the boss**
  Married to Joyce for over 60 years with five children, Caprio says marriage is give and take and nobody should act like the judge at home. They still have small disagreements and go quiet for a day or so, but they've stopped having skirmishes.

The Exact Words You Need to Hear Today

Guest: Bryan Stevenson
Date: 2025-06-05 · Duration: 1:33:15
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4RNQk77Qro

KEYPOINTS

• Justice is ongoing work, not a place you arrive

Bryan Stevenson, founder of the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), which has won reversals or release for more than 140 people on death row, describes justice as how we handle conflict in a world where some people have less power. Like a relationship, it needs constant checking in: was that fair, could we do better? People with more power have an obligation to make sure others aren't harmed more than necessary.

• Mercy depends on who you are, not on someone else earning it

Stevenson used to think mercy was for people who showed enough remorse. He now believes you give it even when you don't see the regret you'd like, because wanting mercy for your own mistakes means giving it to others. He's clear this doesn't mean giving up accountability or letting people walk over you. It means not looking for the worst in others or building 'us versus them' walls.

• Getting close to people changes what you understand

His grandmother told him you can't understand important things from a distance. Stevenson applies this beyond poverty and injustice: good leaders, parents and teachers have to be close to the people they serve, because from far away 'we judge'. He says that if he's helped anyone in 40 years, it's because he 'got close enough to a condemned man to hear his song'.

• Each of us is more than the worst thing we've done

A liar isn't only a liar, and he argues that even someone who kills isn't only a killer. Legislators talk as if they can 'put crimes in prison', but they can only imprison people. His example: a woman abused for 20 years who finally reacts violently is someone surviving decades of abuse, not just a 'violent offender'. He says he has never represented anyone who was only their crime. Mel adds that people can also become more than their worst act.

• Be a 'stone catcher'

In Just Mercy he retells 'let he who is without sin cast the first stone' and asks people to catch stones thrown at those who fall. Catching one helps the target and also the thrower, who is spared the consequences of harsh judgment made in fear and anger. He believes each stone you catch makes the next easier, until it becomes a way of life.

• Children are always changing, so treating them as adults is a mistake

Stevenson says 13 US states have no minimum age for trying a child as an adult, and he has represented eight- and nine-year-olds facing 50- and 60-year sentences. He blames the 1980s 'super predator' label pushed by criminologists and policy makers, along with zero-tolerance policies and the pipeline from school to jail. His view: our commitment to children shows in how we treat poor, abused and neglected kids, not gifted ones.

• Decisions driven by fear and anger produce harm

Before the 1970s, he says, fewer than 300,000 people were in US jails and prisons. Politicians of all parties then treated drug dependency as a crime, and today there are about 2 million, the highest incarceration rate in the world, while opioid addiction rates stay among the highest. He argues addiction needed a health-care response, not punishment.

• Hopelessness is the enemy of justice

Stevenson calls hope 'our superpower', the thing that makes people stand up when told to sit down. Quoting Václav Havel, he says it isn't preferring optimism to pessimism but 'an orientation of the spirit': being willing to stand in a hopeless place and bear witness. He can't give clients hope he doesn't have himself.

EXAMPLES

• The man who sang 'Higher Ground'

As a Harvard law student frustrated by classes that ignored the poor, he spent a month with the Southern Prisoners Defense Committee in Atlanta. Sent alone to death row in Jackson, Georgia, he told a man, born the same day as him, that he faced no execution date within a year. The man could now let his wife and kids visit. They talked for three hours until guards roughly re-shackled the man, who closed his eyes and sang 'Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.' Stevenson then 'couldn't be dragged out of the library'.

• The client who struggled to say thank you

Courts told an intellectually disabled client it was 'too late' to raise his disability. On their last call, the man stuttered too badly to speak, and Stevenson remembered his mother making him apologize to, hug, and say 'I love you' to a boy he had laughed at. The client finally said 'I love you for trying to save my life' and was executed. Stevenson says that night he realized he does the work 'because I'm broken, too'.

• The 14-year-old held in an adult jail

A boy under 5 feet and 100 pounds, with no record, believed his mother's violent boyfriend had killed her and shot the man. Because the man was a deputy sheriff, the boy was tried as an adult and was sexually assaulted in jail over several nights. Stevenson got him out the day he visited and later won his release. The boy became an engineer, and for 18 years he has called on the 11th of every month at 8 a.m. to say he's doing great.

• Walter McMillan and Miss Williams

McMillan was convicted in Monroeville, Alabama, even though 30 to 35 people, including a police officer who bought a sandwich from him at a fish fry, placed him 11 miles from the murder. A coerced witness was recorded saying 'you want me to frame an innocent man'. The jury chose life, and the judge overrode it to death. During six years of death and bomb threats, Miss Williams was turned back by a police dog that reminded her of Selma in 1965. She came back the next day saying 'I ain't scared of no dog' and stood up in court to declare 'I'm here'.

• A jar of soil from a lynching site

An older Black woman collecting soil for EJI's exhibit of about 800 jars was approached on a remote road by a white man in a pickup. She told him the truth: a Black man was lynched there in 1937. He read the memo, dug with his bare hands, and wept, worried his grandfather might have taken part. He followed her to the museum in Montgomery. Stevenson adds that he isn't naive about this: telling the truth doesn't always end so beautifully.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Treat learning about hope as an action

Stevenson trains for hope the way you'd train for a race, by learning stories of people who stayed hopeful against the odds. He didn't talk about his enslaved great-grandfather, who risked his life to learn to read in the 1850s, until he was in his 40s. Now he draws strength from that history all the time.

• Concrete ways to help

Volunteer with local groups helping people leave prison with clothes, jobs and counseling. Many have never used an ATM or a cell phone. Support education for kids with fewer resources, push prosecutors to set up conviction integrity units that review innocence claims, and sign up for EJI's free daily history-of-racial-injustice calendar.

• His one-line takeaway

Get proximate, change narratives of fear and anger, stay hopeful, and be willing to do uncomfortable and inconvenient things. When someone is struggling, saying 'I'm here', like Miss Williams, can matter even if you have no answers.

A Process for Finding Purpose: Do THIS to Build the Life You Want | Jay Shetty

Guest: Jay Shetty
Date: 2025-04-21 · Duration: 1:51:17
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOVQponoBmI

KEYPOINTS

• Five steps sit between learning something and changing

Shetty's sequence is learn, experiment, perform, struggle and thrive. Experimenting means a new idea may fail on Tuesday and work on Wednesday, so don't expect it to be perfect tomorrow. Performing is when it becomes automatic, and struggle shows up just before the next level. Reflection runs through the middle steps: ask how you could do it 1% or 2% differently.

• You're not stuck, you're grieving a past version of yourself

Quoting a Zen teaching, 'what's holding you back is what you're holding on to,' he says reality has moved on and you haven't. Empty nesters see memories in every corner of the house. After a breakup people keep rereading old vacation photos while the ex has moved on. Momentum doesn't come from knowing where you're going but from knowing you don't want to stay where you are.

• Fear of your own social circle blocks new identities

'I'm a teacher, I can't be a creator.' 'I'm a nurse, how can I podcast?' 'I'm a mom, I can't run a TikTok shop.' Shetty says the pressure people feel comes from friends who have approved their current role, not from strangers. You can be two things at once without permission, and even when you succeed some people still won't understand, so it was never about their understanding.

• Become a professional quitter, without a full map

Almost no one understood when he became a monk, left the monastery, took a consulting job or left it to make videos. Three podcast production companies told him nobody would listen to him for an hour. He says 14 of 17 publishing imprints rejected the title Think Like a Monk, which went on to sell millions of copies. He has never known where his life was going, and thinks needing everything figured out first is 'the biggest lie we've been told.'

• Treat a job you hate as a launch pad

You can hate where you are and still collect every skill you'll need. Consulting gave him negotiation, communication, presentation and client skills he still uses. Spending eight or nine hours a day thinking 'I hate it here' wastes the only big block of time you have, since evenings might offer one or two hours. Accept that you dislike it, then take everything it offers.

• Find purpose by collecting and connecting

Citing a book about finding purpose through sampling, he describes collecting stories, skills and experiences in every job, then one day connecting them like jigsaw pieces. He sees himself as just as much consultant as monk and media person. School trained us to pick one major and one title, which is why being three things feels complicated.

• Passion plus service equals purpose, at any scale

Passion is what brings you joy. For him it's a weekend 'in a cave of books.' Purpose is using that passion to serve others. A photographer capturing memories for people is already doing it. Purpose isn't defined by reach, doesn't need to be your job, and doesn't need social media. A team member's retired mother found hers by organizing trips for family, friends and couples.

• If you feel numb, follow the whisper and ask people who know you

Signs are quiet: organize a couple more birthdays, help a friend plan a wedding, write one quote a day. You're already good at something that comes so easily you don't count it. Ask three people who know you deeply, such as a colleague, a family member and a friend, what you do that makes them think of you and what you help them solve.

• Judge others by intentions and yourself by actions

His monk teachers taught him to reverse our default of excusing ourselves by intentions while condemning others by actions. When a friend was hurt that he hadn't posted about their podcast, it wasn't neglect: he rarely touches social media while traveling. With people you know, ask directly. A hard conversation with someone you love should bring you closer, and if you're scared to have it, you may not be that close.

• Stop keeping score, and let love arrive in other forms

If you showed up expecting something back, that's a transaction, not love. His teacher said love is a circle: it returns, but not always from the people you gave it to. Shetty pushes back on rigid love languages, arguing that demanding to be loved one way limits what others can offer. Telling people they disappointed you discourages them, while noticing the small things inspires more.

EXAMPLES

• Hospital cleaners who called themselves healers

Shetty cites Yale researcher Amy Wrzesniewski's work with hospital cleaners. Some described their work as low-skilled labor, while others with the same hours, shifts and pay called themselves healers and carers, believing a clean hospital gives patients dignity and draws families to the bedside. That group was happier and more productive. The researchers called it job crafting.

• Radhi's meals before the cookbook

On a spouse visa in America and unable to work, his wife Radhi cooked and delivered meals in LA and joined food distribution programs. She turned down catering because she cooks as an act of love. Her New York Times bestselling cookbook, Joy Full, came much later as a byproduct.

• The Asus instead of the iPad mini

Shetty loved gifts because his breadwinner mom often worked on his birthday but left a wrapped Power Ranger. Radhi's family gives quality time instead. He hinted for an iPad mini and unwrapped an Asus her family said had better specs, and he was upset. Over time he realized he had been ignoring the many other ways she showed love.

• Mel's jealousy became two years of study

Tired of flying to corporate speaking gigs, Mel felt jealous of Shetty's podcast. He told her she'd 'destroy' it if she launched one. His line: weak people envy those ahead of them, strong people study them. She studied him for two years and launched with two episodes a week because of what she learned. For Mel, jealousy points to something meant for you, unlike envy.

• Mr. Buckeridge kept asking why

His art teacher refused 'it looks good' as an answer, which annoyed him at first. Shetty credits him with making him intentional, down to the book by his bed and the quote at his desk. Mel recalled her math teacher Glenn Core, whose class chanted 'Perseverance wins.' Both urge listeners to contact a teacher who shaped them.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Imagine life without something to feel grateful

In hard times, grieve first. When you're ready, instead of listing what you have, ask what life would be like without it, the way a cut finger suddenly makes you grateful for your hand. Mel applied it to her 80-year-old father and shifted from fear about limited holidays to gratitude that he's here.

• Text people when you want nothing

Whenever someone comes to mind, Shetty sends 'Thinking of you, sending lots of love,' and people often reply that they were just thinking of him. If the shades feel drawn, be the one who texts, calls or helps first, and remember Emerson: plant trees whose shade you don't expect to sit in.

• Ask whether life is a school, a hospital, a movie or a mountain

If lessons keep repeating, ask what you need to learn. If you're in pain, ask what needs healing. If things are good, ask what to experience before it passes. If you're on your path, ask what skill you need to climb.

If You’re Feeling Behind in Life, Watch This

Date: 2025-04-14 · Duration: 1:14:46
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tyzOH2tr9_M

KEYPOINTS

• The feeling of being 'behind' comes from a 'social clock'

Mel builds the episode on psychologist Bernice Neugarten's 1960s finding that every society carries an invisible checklist of milestones: graduate by 22, marry by 30, have kids by 35, a midlife crisis at 50, retire at 65. Being 'on time' or 'off time' is measured against that list. Mel's point is that the list is social conditioning, not a law of life.

• The stress comes from feeling you've disappointed someone, not from being 'off time'

Drawing on Robert Waldinger's The Good Life (from the 86-year Harvard Study of Adult Development), Mel says social clocks also come from your family, culture, religion, friends and social media. Being off schedule isn't stressful in itself. What hurts is believing you're failing someone else's expectations. Her test question: behind whom, and by whose standard?

• Many milestones were set for a very different world

Retiring at 65 dates from the 1935 Social Security Act. Mel says life expectancy in the early 1800s was around 29 and that our grandparents' friends were dying in their 50s, which is why they rushed. Following their timeline today can push you into major decisions for approval rather than happiness.

• Your 20s are for exploring, not having it figured out

If you feel lost in your 20s, Mel says, 'you're doing your 20s correctly.' She points to hybrid and 24/7 work, unaffordable housing, a big generational wealth gap and nearly 10 million people behind on student loans (about $250 billion past due). She also cites Dell research that 85% of the jobs that will exist in 10 years haven't been created yet. Her advice is to treat being digitally native, and learning AI, as an asset.

• Your 30s are for getting clear on what you value, not settling down

Mel separates pressure from real deadlines. Citing the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, she notes female fertility starts to decline around 30 and drops more sharply around 35. So if you want biological children, be honest about it and look into options like egg freezing. Don't spend the decade with a partner who doesn't want the same thing, hoping they'll change.

• Dating teaches you what you want, so widen the net

From her Let Them Theory book (page 252), Mel argues that dating isn't only about finding 'the one'. It shows you what you will and won't accept. Clock-driven desperation makes people pickier, when meeting more people works better. She suggests loosening app filters on height, distance and background.

• Buying a home later than your parents isn't failure

Mel says the median 1950 home cost $7,300, about $88,000 in today's money, and calls today's prices roughly 11 times higher. The average US home buyer was 35 in 1991 and is 56 today, and she says Boston prices rose 73% in three years. She blames remote-work migration, pandemic money put into real estate, and private equity buyers.

• Your 40s are a launch pad, not a finish line

Mel says you aren't starting from scratch: past experience, a network and a new sense of urgency all add up. She cites MIT Sloan research putting the average age of a successful startup founder at 45. She warns that beating yourself up about being behind doesn't motivate you; it makes you depressed.

• Your 50s are for reinvention, not crisis

Citing Waldinger, Mel says this stage often brings more freedom, resilience and self-acceptance. She cites OECD figures that 73% of UK job growth over 30 years went to people over 50, and LinkedIn's description of a 'skills-based economy'. She also says research shows this is the decade to prioritise friendship over pure caregiving and career.

• Retire only if you want to, and stay engaged either way

Mel argues that the real question at 60 isn't whether to retire but what brings you energy. She says research links retirement to drops in verbal memory and increases in depression and isolation, because work gave people community, structure and purpose. She adds that people 65 and over are the fastest-growing part of the workforce.

EXAMPLES

• Mel's 14 jobs by 41

Mel says she had about 11 jobs in her 20s: law school she hated, public defender, a big firm she quit after a year, three startups in three years, life coach training, a paint-your-own-pottery business and radio. At 41, her husband's restaurant was failing, she'd been laid off, and they were in debt with liens on the house. At 50 she started a media company, and at 54 she started the podcast.

• Sawyer's crying video at 25

Mel's daughter Sawyer followed a carefully planned path into a cybersecurity job, then worked fully remotely for three years and felt isolated. She hesitated to quit for a four-month solo backpacking trip because of how it might look on her résumé. When she came home broke and living with her parents, she recorded a tearful video saying she had no idea what she was doing.

• Listener questions: Mimi, Shauna, Laura and Alyssa

Mimi, 25 and jobless, thought it was too late for medical or law school. Mel says there's no age limit to apply to medical school, and post-bacc premed programs exist. Shauna, 35, wants children after four years on dating apps. Laura, an empty nester with twins, gets a 'second 20s' of exploring. Alyssa feels pressure to retire.

• Late starts and long lives

Mel lists Vera Wang starting to design wedding dresses at 40, Samuel L. Jackson landing Pulp Fiction at 45 and Julia Child publishing her first cookbook at 49. Later in life: Betty White working until 99, George H.W. Bush skydiving at 90, and 'Grandma Droniak' with 14.8 million TikTok followers. Mel's mother-in-law found love again at 85 after being widowed for 19 years.

• Chris Robbins in his 50s

Mel's husband started a men's retreat called Soul Degree (three a year), trained as a death doula, writes for an hour a day toward a book, and is studying online for a master's in spiritual psychology.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Ask whose clock you're following**

  When you feel behind, name the expectation and where it came from: parents, culture, friends or the 1950s. Then decide whether it reflects what you actually want.

- **Separate real deadlines from made-up ones**

  Fertility has real biological limits, so look at the medical facts and keep your options open. Most other milestones, like a house, a career change or going back to school, have no deadline. Research them and set your own timeline.

- **What to say to someone struggling in their 20s**

  Acknowledge that hybrid work and today's economy make this decade genuinely hard, then remind them they will figure it out. Mel's version: take a breath, go for a walk, take the next right step.

- **Make connection a priority as you age**

  Mel cites orthopaedic surgeon Dr. Vonda Wright's view that muscles and the brain can keep getting stronger throughout life. Into your 60s and 70s, keep moving, stay social, and repair relationships: apologise, forgive, and say 'I love you' while you can.

4 Books That Will Change Your Life

Date: 2025-03-31 · Duration: 0:53:31
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jE5UpWJy9Q

KEYPOINTS

• Listening to a book counts as reading

Mel, who led the 'Great Books' discussion program as a kid, settles the debate: she says research on which parts of the brain are used when reading versus listening shows 'it all counts.' She values books for escape, perspective and calm. She notes that at a time when people average six hours a day on social media, it thrills her that people are excited to read again.

• Pick #1, The Book of Awakening by Mark Nepo, is the book she gives most

It's a collection of one- to two-page daily meditations organized by date, so you can start on any day without losing your place. Mel brings it to dinner parties instead of wine. She has read it since 2016 and says Chris reads it daily and gives it to the men at the retreat he leads. Its message matches hers: the power is inside you, in your attitude, focus and how you process emotions.

• Nepo wrote it after nearly dying of cancer in his 30s

Nepo had tumors in his brain and back, and calls that brush with death 'the opening through which I stared into eternity.' Mel tears up reading his introduction, about building a fire and staring into life. She ties it to 2016, when Chris was struggling with depression and she was trying to earn their way out of debt, and the book gave her hope. She reads a passage Chris highlighted: 'Resisting this process doubles our pain.'

• A book as a gift works as a stand-in for you

Mel says a book on someone's nightstand, especially one with an inscription, tells them they're not alone and that you cared enough to choose it. She sees the same thing when people share a podcast episode, or when listener Aaron and her mother read The Let Them Theory together on a four-day vacation, stopping each night to discuss chapters.

• Pick #2, The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho, is about trusting your inner compass

It follows Santiago, a shepherd in Spain, on a quest for treasure through setbacks and epiphanies. Mel's key quotes: 'When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it,' and 'One is loved because one is loved. No reason is needed for loving.' She also takes a caution from it: you tend to get what you ask for, just not the way you expected. She has read it repeatedly for over 20 years.

• The Alchemist first flopped

Mel reads the 25th-anniversary foreword she quoted on page 217 of The 5 Second Rule. In Brazil, one bookseller sold a single copy the first week and a second copy six months later to the same buyer. The publisher cancelled Coelho's contract. 'I was 41 and desperate,' he wrote, and Mel notes that was exactly her age when she found the 5 Second Rule. A new publisher and word of mouth followed, then an American translator, HarperCollins, and a sitting U.S. president seen with a copy. She cites 65 million copies sold and more than 300 weeks on bestseller lists.

• Pick #3, A Court of Thorns and Roses, is permission to read just for fun

Her daughters pushed the fantasy series (ACOTAR on TikTok) on her, insisting on the dramatized audio with actors and sound effects, which Mel calls 'a movie in your ear.' She listened for about six months while doing dishes, folding laundry and walking, and Chris listened to the whole series too. She says fantasy is good for creativity, emotional intelligence and problem solving, and it revived a fantasy book idea she and her daughters started riffing on ten years ago.

• Pick #4, The Firm by John Grisham, showed her she wasn't stuck

Mel read the 1991 thriller in one night as a miserable first-year at Boston College Law School. She had applied only because people around her did and hated it immediately. Realizing a lawyer had written a page-turner opened her eyes: your degree or profession doesn't lock you in. She didn't think she would write books then, only that she didn't have to practice law.

EXAMPLES

• Grisham's winding road

Mel recounts it: community college for baseball, benched, and failed English. Then he was a walk-on at Delta State and cut. He changed colleges three times, got an accounting degree from Mississippi State in 1977, and was inspired toward law by a Vietnam-veteran classmate. He spent nearly a decade in criminal law in Southaven, Mississippi, and served in the state House. He started A Time to Kill after hearing a 12-year-old's harrowing testimony in 1984, and it was rejected by 28 publishers. He has since sold 300 million books.

• Grisham's 2010 New York Times op-ed

Mel reads that writing wasn't his childhood dream and that A Time to Kill didn't sell, so he kept defending criminals and drafting wills. He called writing harder than his old jobs laying asphalt and 'more frustrating than selling underwear,' but worth it.

• A green cover that 'breaks the rules'

The green-and-yellow paperback of A Court of Mist and Fury inspired The Let Them Theory's cover. Publishing people warned that green books are bad luck, and Mel pointed to Sarah J. Maas's sales.

• The Let Them Theory by the numbers

Mel says the book she wrote with daughter Sawyer sold 3 million copies in two and a half months. It cites 94 books, went through 11½ manuscript versions, and its concepts were tested with experts across 19 podcast episodes. She calls herself 'the villain' in most of its stories.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Make your first input of the day hopeful

Keep a daily-meditation book like Nepo's on your nightstand and read that day's page when you wake up or go to bed. It's quick and centers you on your ability to meet whatever you face.

• Start or join a book club, and include fun books

Mel notes a resurgence of book clubs and says not everything has to be self-improvement. Escapist fiction, especially dramatized audio, can bond families and spark creativity.

- **Read rejection stories when you feel stalled**

Coelho's cancelled contract and Grisham's 28 rejections are Mel's evidence that 'no' isn't the end. She suggests asking 'What if it all works out?' and treating setbacks as nudges.

How to Create the Life You Want: Lessons From the #1 Happiness Researcher

Guest: Dr. Judith Joseph
Date: 2025-02-06 · Duration: 1:04:14
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8UpO9mMu5M

KEYPOINTS

• Collecting the house, the car and the partner doesn't produce happiness

Dr. Judith Joseph, a double board-certified psychiatrist trained at Columbia and on faculty at NYU, says the research shows that once people get the things they're chasing, they still want more. She lived it herself: fancy degrees, marriage, a child, a house and a business, and she still felt empty. Her definition of happiness is connection and purpose, rooted in going out into the community as a child with her father, a pastor.

• High-functioning depression can hide behind productivity

In 2020, halfway through a talk to a hospital system about pandemic fear, she realised, "I think I'm depressed." She began asking patients about it and heard "that is me" from people who were still working, parenting and caring for others while feeling numb, "meh" and unexcited. They didn't fit neatly into a diagnostic box because they were still functioning.

• Happiness is biopsychosocial

Medical students learn that conditions have biological (genes, family history, illness), psychological (trauma, attachment, coping) and social (relationships, work, food, movement, toxins) parts. "If depression were as simple as a pill, we'd put meds in the water." Her Happy Lab project aims to make that framework available to everyone, and each person may need to focus on a different part first.

• The five Vs remove blocks before you add tools

Validation, Venting, Values, Vitals and Vision. Each has a negative side that keeps you unhappy and a positive side that builds happiness. Mel's takeaway is that common advice like taking a walk or calling a friend often doesn't stick because emotional blocks haven't been cleared. Joseph compares it to the early stages of therapy that most people skip.

• V1, Validation: name how you feel

Acknowledging your feelings reduces uncertainty, which lowers stress. Many of us ignore even basic signals: when she asked a room of high-powered women who works through needing the bathroom or eating, hands went up. Avoiding feelings is often a trauma response, but if you don't acknowledge them, you can't break unhealthy patterns. One serial people-pleaser client discovered low self-worth from childhood neglect underneath; naming that painful truth allowed them to work toward more balanced relationships.

• V2, Venting: release the pressure, with care

Venting means getting an emotion out, positive or negative, through prayer, therapy, art, song or, in Joseph's case, social media posts. Her dos and don'ts: don't vent in the heat of the moment, don't trauma-dump, especially on employees who can't push back, start with self-venting, and ask regular confidants whether it's okay and reciprocal.

• V3, Values: what makes you feel "full and fed"

Not what your family or society told you to value. Money and possessions are shallow values: on your deathbed you won't wish for "that pink Porsche." Joseph realised that despite prestigious programmes, what fulfilled her was connecting with and helping people. If you're unsure, look for the last time you felt full and fed.

• V4, Vitals: you have one body

Joseph covers sleep, movement, food and screen time. She says processed foods raise inflammation, which she links to anxiety, depression and poor sleep, while omega-3-rich fish, leafy greens and berries support the brain. In her Happy Lab demonstrations, she tells people a single blueberry increases blood flow to the brain within an hour. The vital doctors most often miss, she says, is relationship quality, which longevity research ranks as the top factor.

• V5, Vision: plan joy and celebrate small wins

Busy people check boxes without anything to look forward to, which keeps them stuck in the past. She suggests celebrating small wins, like getting your kid to school on time, with a sip of coffee and a "wow, I did that."

• Women face more biopsychosocial pressure

Joseph says women have twice the rate of depression and anxiety as men. She attributes this to hormonal vulnerability (periods, postpartum, perimenopause), social load (lower pay, caring for kids and parents) and higher rates of trauma. She plans support around predictable vulnerable windows and stresses that this doesn't mean hormones make women "crazy."

EXAMPLES

• Finding a lost value through nature

A client who couldn't remember what she valued traced it back to camping trips before her parents' divorce. Joseph didn't send her on a hike. She started with reading about a hike, then looking at photos, then buying boots. Her depression wasn't cured, but her "points of joy" increased and she felt hopeful. Mel adds a friend who looked transformed after taking up ballet again as an adult.

• The Prince question

For clients with foggy, traumatic childhoods, Joseph asks who they'd most like to have coffee with. One answered Prince, which led to a value of music and live shows.

• Chris and Oakley were blocked, not lazy

About seven years earlier, after his business failed, Mel's husband Chris was meditating, exercising and volunteering in hospice but couldn't feel happy. He was holding in shame about losing money and "failing to provide" until he named it and started journaling and talking about it. Their son Oakley, lonely at school, kept returning to unhappiness despite Lego and skiing.

• The time capsule

Inspired by shrines she saw while travelling to study how cultures view happiness, Joseph has clients fill a capsule with things they're working toward: a family photo with a note about seeing someone more, a concert goal, a step target. They "dig it

up" together in as little as two months. She says using touch and sight keeps clients present, which helps those who are neurodivergent.

- **"How many bodies did God give you?"**
  Each night Joseph asks her daughter this. The answer: "One." "And what do we do with it?" "Take care of it." She also tells her daughter there will only ever be one of her.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Validate in whatever way fits you**
  Ask "How do I really feel?" in a mirror, in writing, with an emotions face chart if you struggle to identify feelings (alexithymia), or through a song.
- **Colour-code joy in your calendar**
  Busy moms' calendars are full of soccer, work and chores, with no joy. Block joyful activities in a distinct colour as a reminder, a boundary and a priority.
- **Pick one V, and count points of joy**
  The biggest mistake is trying all five at once. Research measures wellbeing as accumulated points such as sleep, connection and energy, so track small wins, like three points of joy today, instead of waiting to be "fixed." Medication can still be part of the picture for some people.
- **Make it yours**
  "Mental health is yours." Joseph, who is Caribbean American, prefers dancing to a StairMaster and says the side-to-side movement helps the two halves of her brain communicate. Bring your own roots and creativity into your routine.

How to Find Your Purpose & Design the Life You Want

Guest: Dr. Martha Beck
Date: 2025-01-23 · Duration: 1:32:34
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZt4ZOy6Z8c

KEYPOINTS

• Feeling stuck can come right before a breakthrough

Life coach Martha Beck now treats an impasse as a signal that a leap is coming. She says to get right down in the mud and admit you're miserable, then go for a walk, take a drive or watch birds out the window, and let another part of your mind come up with an idea you couldn't have imagined. She compares it to a caterpillar that can't imagine becoming a butterfly: stuckness means you're about to be transformed.

• Your body and your suffering are allies

When you feel lost, Beck says to tune into your body and notice your suffering. Find where the 'not peace' sits, name it as mad, sad, glad or scared, then let it grow as big as it wants without resisting. Invite it to sit with you and tell you everything. When Mel tried it, the tightness in her chest grew into a 'nuclear cloud' that, oddly, felt smaller.

• There's clean suffering and dirty suffering

Clean suffering is the pain of the event itself, like being hit. Dirty suffering is the storm of thoughts about it: she hates me, I deserved it, this shouldn't have happened. Beck argues that most of our pain comes from those thoughts rather than events, and that letting the pain tell its story helps you separate from it.

• Flip your most painful thought

Beck's core tool: hear your suffering out until you're tired of it, then state the opposite of your most painful thought and look for ways it could be true. She says that opposite is your next step toward awakening. 'I'll never find love again' becomes 'I'll always find love', in a tree, a cat, a parent, everywhere.

• Follow the feeling of freedom in your body

On her seminars in Africa, Beck takes people rhino tracking, then asks them to track their purpose the same way. The sign to follow is a sense of joy, lightness or relaxation in the body. It never shows you twenty years ahead, only the next step. Something that feels trapping, however slightly, is 'the track of not there'. Over time, the steps add up to a purpose.

• Purpose is personal

Beck defines purpose as what brings you the greatest satisfaction and joy while letting you contribute the most joy to the world, quoting theologian Frederick Buechner's 'where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet'. She says it's as individual as a fingerprint, and that the things that bring tears to your eyes matter more than career or money.

• Creativity can calm anxiety

Beck says there's plenty of evidence that anxiety shuts down creativity, and suggests the reverse is also true, though it's less studied. In her account, anxiety runs in a fear-and-control loop in the verbal, time-tracking left hemisphere, while senses, imagination and making things engage the right. Her line: 'anxiety always lies, but only always.' Her main takeaway is to swap 'what do I do now?' for 'what can I make now?'

• Try a day without lying

After her darkest period, Beck went a year without telling a single lie. She lost friends, and her motto became 'burn every bridge but love.' With clients she's gentler: try one day with no lies, including the small social ones, and notice where you bend the truth to fit in. She says the truth can be told with compassion, but don't lie to yourself.

• Find your community

Beck says we're social primates who look for a safe person in a crisis. She tried to rebuild alone after losing everyone and says it was horrible and took years. She now recommends joining something, like a book club, a church or an online community, to make a safe 'cocoon' while you grieve the old life. She adds that people mid-change often cut their hair or rearrange the furniture first.

• KIST: kind internal self-talk

For deep fear, Beck uses the acronym CAT: kindness, art, then transformation. Kindness comes first, through what she calls KIST, kind internal self-talk: 'I'm here, it's okay, I've got you, tell me everything, would you like some tea?' You don't have to believe it at first. She says this was the only thing that brought her back from her worst fear.

EXAMPLES

• 'What would Martha Beck do?'

In 2005, Mel, then a struggling young mom whose husband had just been laid off, heard Beck speak at an Oprah event in Boston and felt everything go quiet. Later, she saw a two-month-old request from a magazine looking to interview a life coach. She had none of the credentials, asked herself what Martha Beck would do, and hit reply. She says that's when everything began to change.

• From 'something stupid' to 'something brilliant'

Mel shared a fear about money that took her back to nearly going bankrupt 15 years earlier: 'you're about to do something stupid.' Beck flipped it to 'you're about to do something really brilliant,' and Mel felt her chest release. Beck suggests rating options from '' 10 to +10 by how your body responds, even when the difference is subtle.

• Mel's ideal day in 2034

Beck guided Mel using only her senses: waves and children laughing, the smell of salt and coffee, white sheets, worn wide-plank floors, a closet of flip-flops and Birkenstocks, and photos of two weddings and grandchildren. Mel teared up. Beck said those tears point to real purpose, and that Mel's anxiety was at zero throughout.

• Freedom while bedridden

Beck says she spent 12 years bedridden with autoimmune conditions. She flipped 'I'll never get out of this bed' into finding the ways she was already free: books, shows and friends' stories. She credits that shift with her recovery and says that at 61 she

recently walked 75 miles in six days. This is her personal account.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Where your eyes go, you go**
  Beck heard the same lesson from a hockey player, a whitewater rafter and a riding teacher: look at the gaps, not the goalie or the rocks. Your attention steers your life.
- **Selective attention and mirror neurons**
  Beck cites the 'invisible gorilla' experiment to show we miss what we're not looking for. She also suggests that mirror neurons mean your mood spreads to the people around you.
- **Beck's own story**
  Beck shares that she recovered memories of childhood sexual abuse, left the Mormon church, and lost her family, friends, job and marriage. She describes spiritual experiences that shaped her work, and urges anyone with a similar history to reach out for support.

The Science of Well-Being: Powerful Happiness Hacks That 5 Million People Are Using

Guest: Dr. Laurie Santos
Date: 2024-12-12 · Duration: 1:24:57
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=14-DJFPm1_4

KEYPOINTS

• A realistic target: 5–15% happier

Dr. Laurie Santos, the Yale cognitive scientist behind 'The Psychology of a Good Life' (Yale's most popular course in 300 years, with 1,200 sign-ups in three days), says doing the work can raise positive emotion and life satisfaction by about 5–15%. That might move you from a 5 to nearly a 7 out of 10. Mel admits her first thought was that it wasn't enough. Santos says that instinct to go from zero to 100 is part of the problem.

• Happiness is a leaky tire

Like learning violin, French or Guitar Hero on hard, happiness takes ongoing practice. Good habits pump the tire up, then it slowly leaks. Santos says she isn't naturally happy but has become maybe 20–30% happier by doing her own homework. She stresses that happiness can be changed, not fixed at birth.

• Two kinds: happy in your life and happy with your life

Scholars measure both everyday positive emotion and overall satisfaction and meaning. New parents can be deeply satisfied with life while miserable in it, with no sleep and dirty diapers. Someone flying first class and eating at the best restaurants can have plenty of pleasure but feel empty. Many strategies raise both.

• We're wired to survive, not thrive

Evolution favored fear and anger over contentment. The meditating Buddha under a tree would have starved or been eaten. The resulting negativity bias makes us notice the threat in the bush, the bad news on Instagram, and that everyone else in the cafeteria has a friend. Santos says knowing this is a reason for self-compassion: your brain is doing what it was built to do.

• Circumstances matter less than we think, above a floor

Grades, promotions, a new relationship or a new house don't boost happiness as much as we predict. Her caveat: if you can't feed your family or are living in a refugee camp, changing circumstances matters a lot. Mel recalled her bank card bouncing at the gas station and how relentless that stress was.

• Money stops buying daily happiness at a point

Santos cites the late Daniel Kahneman's study, which she dates to around 2009. Higher income raised positive emotion and lowered stress until about $75,000 a year, then leveled off. She puts that at roughly $110,000 today. Reasons include getting busier as you earn more, and hedonic adaptation: first class and trainers become normal.

• Time famine hits as hard as unemployment

Harvard Business School's Ashley Whillans studies 'time affluence.' Santos says feeling chronically time-starved shows up in surveys as a hit to well-being similar to being unemployed. Whillans also finds people at any income level who spend money to buy back time, like the neighbor's kid mowing the lawn or wash-and-fold laundry, end up happier.

• Social connection is the first lever, for introverts too

Happy people spend more time with people they care about. Nick Epley at the University of Chicago paid commuters on the L train, with a $5 Starbucks card, to talk to strangers. They felt more energized and less lonely than people told to enjoy their solitude. Introverts got the same boost. They just predicted it would be far worse. Epley's line: 'Nobody waves, but everybody waves back.'

• Helping others voluntarily makes you feel richer in time

Doing something nice, like offering to take something off a colleague's plate, makes you feel you must have time to spare. It only works when it's chosen, not obligatory caregiving. Her fix for loneliness, which she says is around 60% across groups, is to text whoever you think is loneliest. She cites Kostadin Kushlev at Georgetown finding the happiest people are the ones taking action, and a 'feel good, do good' effect: upbeat gym music made people more likely to volunteer or donate blood.

• Presence and self-compassion

She cites Dan Gilbert's finding that people's minds wander about 48.9% of the time, and that mind wandering, even toward a vacation, goes with lower happiness. Kristin Neff's self-compassion has three steps: notice inwardly that you're struggling, recognize it's common to all humans, then treat yourself like a friend and ask what you can take off your plate. Don't compare your insides to other people's outsides.

EXAMPLES

• Why she built the course

As a head of college living among about 500 students, she saw the crisis up close. Nationally, she says, over 40% of college students report being too depressed to function, over 60% feel very lonely and overwhelmingly anxious, and more than 1 in 10 seriously considered suicide in the past six months. She expected about 30 students. The registration graph's axis had to go to 1,000.

• The Good Samaritan seminarians

In a 1970s study, Princeton seminary students rushed to give a talk on the Good Samaritan and passed a staged person in need. Those in a hurry almost never stopped. Santos uses it to show how time pressure squeezes out kindness.

• The yacht with nowhere to park

Clay Cockrell, a therapist for clients earning over $50 million, described a client whose new yacht caused marital strife because they couldn't find somewhere to park it. Santos compares it to moving her 1987 Corolla for the street sweeper. Possessions come with costs we don't expect.

• The wheelbarrow at dinner

Liz Dunn at the University of British Columbia found about 30% less smiling in waiting rooms when phones were present, even put away. Dunn compares a phone on the table to a wheelbarrow full of every photo since 2015, every email and endless cat videos. You couldn't focus on your husband with that beside you.

• The 45-minute egg sandwich

Santos reframed buying an egg soufflé sandwich as saving at least 45 minutes of shopping and cooking, time she then used for the interview and a walk.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Spend your 'time confetti' well

Journalist Brigid Schulte's term for scattered five-minute gaps. Whillans and colleagues estimate we have more free time than 10–20 years ago, but it comes in fragments we waste scrolling. Use those gaps to connect, savor or practice gratitude.

• Gratitude via negative visualization

Borrowing from the Stoics, imagine the last time you saw your spouse, child or parent was the last time. You'll hug them longer tonight. Or list what you're grateful for while brushing your teeth.

• Savor, especially outdoors

Really taste the coffee, and take in the clouds and the sound of crunching leaves, as in Japan's 'forest bathing.'

• This week's homework: three compliments

Give at least three meaningful compliments to anyone, strangers included. It combines being other-oriented, social connection and savoring, because you had to notice something.

Don’t Learn This Too Late: Make An Authentic Life Now, By Getting Real About The End

Guest: Alua Arthur
Date: 2024-10-31 · Duration: 1:08:30
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDjgt8xRs48

KEYPOINTS

• Thinking about your death shows you clearly who you want to be

Alua Arthur, a death doula and founder of Going with Grace, calls her death her 'best advisor' and 'greatest motivator'. Picturing herself on her deathbed shows her how she is spending her time and whether she is pleased with it; if not, the fact that she is still alive means she can change it. Her line: 'I'm going to be the one who has to meet myself on my deathbed.'

• Silence about death doesn't stop it, it only leaves you unprepared

She says we avoid death because it brings up fear, inadequacy and the certainty of future pain, and some people fear that talking about it will bring it on. Her answer: 'Talking about sex won't make you pregnant, and talking about death won't make you dead.' Not talking just means everything goes unexamined when the time comes.

• A death doula supports anyone who recognizes their mortality

Alua describes the role as non-medical emotional, logistical, practical and spiritual support for the dying person and their circle: helping healthy people write end-of-life plans, supporting people with a serious diagnosis, working alongside hospice near the end, and helping families wrap up affairs afterwards. Many planning clients come after a parent's or friend's death turned into 'a mess'.

• When someone is ill or dying, lead with 'I don't know what to say'

Rather than filling the space with platitudes, she suggests admitting you don't know what to say, acknowledging that it sounds really hard, and asking how they're doing with the news. Avoid 'it'll be okay' (it may not be) and 'I know what you're going through' (you don't). Keep the focus on their experience, keep asking questions and let them steer — even if they'd rather talk about the Kardashians.

• Practical talk about belongings is a doorway, not a deflection

Mel worried her mother's focus on clearing out the house in Michigan was avoidance. Alua says it's an entry point: objects carry memories ('I got this in 1967') that lead to deeper conversation. You might ask whether an object is how she'd like to be remembered. How people talk about cremation — 'I can't think of myself burning' — also reveals how they see the self and body.

• Use deaths around you, and celebrity deaths, to start the talk

For a stoic parent, ask about friends who have died: what happened, how they felt about it. Celebrity deaths work too — around Aretha Franklin's funeral, a group of Black elders Alua was with laid out their own plans on the spot (no glass coffin, no shoes). Funerals, like weddings, show people what they would and wouldn't want.

• The most common deathbed regrets

In her experience, regrets center on authenticity (living for parents, society, a partner or kids rather than yourself), how time was spent (too much at the office, not enough doing what they loved) and, far more often, not showing up for the people they loved — not saying 'I love you', 'thank you' or 'please forgive me'.

• Don't make the dead into saints

Dying doesn't undo someone's impact, she says, and you don't have to forgive just because a person is dying. Glowing obituaries where everyone 'lit up the room' disenfranchise the grief of people who experienced the person differently. Honest grieving includes what you got from the relationship and what it took from you; sometimes healing is reconciling your own choice rather than speaking forgiveness.

• Grief changes form and can become fuel

Alua says grief never leaves, it changes form. Hers came out as anger — an emotion she says women, and especially Black women facing the 'angry' trope, are taught to swap for sadness. She was angry at the medical system and how society handles dying, and that anger led her to train as a doula and build a company. She's careful to say she isn't 'bright-siding' the loss.

EXAMPLES

• The bus ride in Cuba

At 34, after about eight years as a Legal Aid attorney, Alua was severely depressed and on medical leave. In Cuba, after nearly being hit by a car, she met a 36-year-old woman with uterine cancer visiting six places she wanted to see before she died. The woman's family kept urging her to focus on hope and healing; on the bus they talked openly about death. Picturing her own deathbed, Alua 'didn't like what I saw' — and felt alive again.

• Ken's ashes in film canisters

Mel's mother-in-law spooned her late husband Ken's ashes into hundreds of film canisters and invited guests at his celebration to take one, on the condition that they place him somewhere and send her a letter and photo. He's been on bike trips, overseas, and onto a hole of the US Open course. Mel's husband tucks his canister under his bike seat on rides. Mel says she wants the same.

• The grandmother who wanted her children to come

A client in her late 80s had three children and nine grandchildren; only the grandchild paying for her care was there. She'd been a harsh parent and her children had made their peace, but she refused to die until they came. Alua helped her, nearly nonverbal, write letters — part apology, part 'you should be grateful'. She died soon after; Alua never learned how they landed.

• Peter's death

Alua's brother-in-law Peter, gregarious, stubborn and her sparring partner on politics, was diagnosed with Burkitt lymphoma in June; by October doctors said they could no longer treat him. He died at 43, four days before his 44th birthday, while she held his feet. Nearly 11 years later she still gets emotional and says she 'learned how to do love through Peter'.

- **The 400-person funeral**
  A woman asked for help planning a funeral for an unhoused man she'd chatted with every morning at her coffee spot. They expected a small service; about 400 people came, because of how she'd talked about him. Alua's point: legacy isn't optional, and it's about who you are, not money or accomplishments.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Do a yearly birthday review**
  Each birthday, revisit the practical (who makes decisions if you can't, feelings on life support, what happens to your body, services, possessions, dependents, key information) and the deeper questions: who do I need to say I love you to, who do I need to forgive? Mel admits her own plans hadn't been looked at in three or four years.
- **Draw your lifespan as a line**
  Mark birth at one end and death at the other, place yourself on it at your current age, and ask what you want to experience in the time left. When Mel said she'd like to reach 100 'vibrant, active, engaged and connected to my family', Alua noted those are values that can guide later decisions.
- **Ask the three questions now**
  Who did I love? How did I love? Was I loved? Alua frames them in the past tense as if on a deathbed, but urges asking them today — especially about what's still 'sticky' between you and someone — rather than waiting for a reconciliation that may never come.
- **Support an estranged friend without rewriting history**
  When a friend's estranged father died, Mel offered to fly with her to the funeral or simply be there if she didn't go, and sent flowers with a card: you cut ties not because you didn't love him, but because you loved yourself enough to know you deserved better. Alua praised it for reinforcing the friend's choice.

How to Become a Better Human: Lessons on Kindness, Love, and Happiness (From a 10-Year-Old)

Guest: Elton
Date: 2024-09-19 · Duration: 0:42:31
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dL79htOIvZU

KEYPOINTS

• Kindness comes back to you

Elton, a 10-year-old about to start fifth grade whom Mel has known his whole life, describes it as karma: pick on a kid and they won't want to be your friend; be kind and they might. "We only get one chance and you got to make it good." If you're a jerk your whole life, he asks, what have you really accomplished? You'll have fewer friends, he adds, and friends help your mental state.

• Bottling feelings is like eating too many grapes

Six grapes are fine; twenty and your stomach hurts. Elton says he has bottled small things without harm, but bottling too much hurt him. Talking to someone is how you let feelings go.

• Therapy is like dropping off a dirty shirt

Elton started therapy because he wasn't happy, didn't have many friends and was being picked on, and he still goes. He compares it to handing over a filthy shirt and getting it back clean after a couple of weeks, which "in therapy is like a year." Mel says it's often easier to open up to someone who isn't family or a friend, and that therapists know you can get better because they've seen it.

• Have "safe keeps" for sad days

When Elton feels sad or lonely, he tells his mom and dad, his "safe keeps," rather than just anyone, and he spends time with adults as a safe place. His advice for sad adults runs the other way: hang out with young kids, since even shaking a cup makes them laugh, and laughter is contagious.

• "I can't learn" is different from "I don't want to learn"

In fourth grade, before his dysgraphia diagnosis, Elton skipped class because he couldn't learn the way he was being taught, and teachers misjudged him as a bad kid. Now he types and uses voice typing. Mel connects this to her son Oakley, diagnosed in fourth grade, and to her own dyslexia, which wasn't identified until she was 46. She still dictates her books and edits on paper.

• If you've been up before, you can get there again

Asked what he'd tell Mel's daughter Kendall about uneven reactions to her songs, Elton said that after a high you know you're capable of highs. If he's thrown a ball 60 yards, practice may take him farther, but he won't go lower.

• Life isn't fair, and differences are what make friends interesting

If life were fair, everyone would share a birthday and like the same things, and you need differences to have something new to bring to a friendship. He can practice basketball, but he can't practice away dysgraphia. He tries his hardest, and sometimes that isn't enough. That's fine.

• Aim for good enough, and always try

Elton isn't trying to be Steph Curry. Aim too high and it gets so hard you're more likely to quit, and Mel agrees most of us quit when we aim too high. His "lifestyle" is to always try, even things he doesn't want to do, because you may discover you're good at them and come to like them. There's a job for almost everything, so build momentum from what you're good at.

• Parents need fun, and kids want to choose their own success

Kids' biggest complaint, he says, is "my mom and dad are always trying to control me." Let kids choose their path, even dentistry over basketball or math, then help them. He also says parenting isn't a reason to stop having fun; an unhappy parent makes kids unhappy too. Mel adds that she believes happiness is the best form of success.

EXAMPLES

• Guess Who in his therapist's office

Elton found therapy boring at first. His therapist plays Guess Who with him ("Does this person have orange hair?") and slips in "How's school been?" between turns, so talking about feelings happens naturally.

• The pizza strategy for gossip

When a group chat starts trashing someone, say Ashley, Elton doesn't lecture, which he worries would get him ditched as a goody-two-shoes. He redirects, like distracting a baby: "Where are we going for pizza tomorrow?" Or he just doesn't respond to the comment. Mel calls it standing up for someone without the confrontation most of us avoid.

• Making friends at camp

In kindergarten he just asked kids, "Want to be friends?" At camp he'll join a clinic, team or play, since everyone who signed up shares that interest. Then he floats around rather than sticking to one person (if your one apple goes bad, you've got nowhere to turn), invests more in people he clicks with, and brings those friends along when meeting new ones.

• The sand bridge in Maine

Elton built a little sand bridge to help an older woman across a puddle. Doing it made him feel kind, and otherwise "that grandma now just has wet socks." He hopes to help create a kinder world.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Check on a struggling kid privately

Don't ask "Are you sad?" in front of the class. Try to make them smile first. If that doesn't work, take them aside and ask "Is everything all right? You don't seem like yourself." Suggest talking to someone with "Do you think it would help to talk to somebody?" rather than "You need therapy," which can feel like an accusation.

• Work on one change at a time

Elton used to tell himself he wasn't good enough. Trying to fix everything at once is like his brother watching six animes at the same time and finishing none. Elton's current focus is lying less. He used to think lying made him cooler, and it didn't.

• Feeling stuck? Go meet people

His dad didn't find his passion until about 40. Everyone has a role, the way bees pollinate. New people could introduce you to your future job or partner. Spend less time scrolling, and when you hate a task, deal with it early rather than letting it build.

• Encourage kids with a "double whammy"

Tell children they can do anything, and also warn them that some people may treat them differently, like picking on them for a learning difference, so it doesn't knock them down. Elton wishes his parents had sometimes pushed him more.

Living With Purpose: Timeless Wisdom for a More Meaningful Life

Date: 2024-09-16 · Duration: 1:03:28
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1AtCrdD5MY

KEYPOINTS

• An anniversary drive turned into a moment Mel will never forget

Driving home in pitch-black, pouring rain after dinner on their 27th wedding anniversary in Southern Vermont, Mel saw a flash of white swoop onto the road and get hit by an oncoming car. She yelled for Chris to stop and ran out in heels and a dress, lit by headlights through the rain, to find an adult barred owl with a wingspan she estimates at three and a half to four feet and one wing flipped backwards.

• Time stopped when the owl looked at her

As Mel crouched over it, the owl slowly turned its head and locked eyes with her. She describes it as the craziest experience of her life — a few seconds that felt like years — and compares it to meeting Gandalf. She believes darkness and drama made it feel otherworldly in a way daylight might not have.

• Mel's family read it as a message

The Robbins family are devoted Harry Potter fans — Chris read the series to the kids nightly, and they've watched the films about nine times — and Mel had always wanted a Hedwig. In those stories owls carry messages between worlds, so holding one in her lap on her anniversary, Mel was convinced it meant something. Online, she read that owls are seen as messengers who usher in change.

• Lesson 1: look up

On an owl walk Mel learned you can't spot owls looking down; you scan the canopy for a shadowy, foot-tall shape. She applies it to life: we spend so much time staring at phones and the ground that we miss things. She now hikes with her phone zipped away instead of filming videos, texting or listening to audiobooks.

• Lesson 2: open yourself up to magic

Mel now steps into the woods expecting to see an owl. She admits she's seen only one in the wild in a year, but hears barred owls calling 'who cooks for you' at night and believes expecting something draws it to you.

• Lesson 3: be interested, and your life gets interesting

Owls symbolize wisdom, but Mel concluded the real gift was the family's curiosity. Learning that barred owls nest in hollow, rotting trees changed how she sees the woods: she used to want dead wood cleared, now she wants it left for owls and the chipmunks they eat. She contrasts a friend's husband who studied soccer and enjoys it more with her own nine years at her daughters' lacrosse games without learning the positions.

• Lesson 4: don't let meaning turn into clutter

Mel went from loving owls to 'the owl lady': a 20-pound cement owl on the porch, owl statues, two owl jigsaw puzzles, Chris's owl swim trunks, owl socks, and finally an owl item bought at a friend's store in Middlebury. One or two objects keep something symbolic; dozens dilute its meaning. She declared a family moratorium and asked listeners not to send her owl gifts.

• Lesson 5: experiences beat objects

'You'll never see a hearse pulling a U-Haul.' Mel can't recall her 2nd, 11th or 23rd anniversaries but will never forget the owl. She says she has wasted a lot of money and effort chasing stuff, and that time and money spent on experiences enrich life far more.

EXAMPLES

• The rescue, step by step

A driver behind them offered a big Caribbean-blue beach towel — just as Mel was about to scoop up a bird with a beak and talons that could hurt her. She wrapped it, tucked in the broken wing, and held it on her lap while Chris stretched the seatbelt around both of them. Their vet, Dr. Bob, called back within minutes and pointed them to the Vermont Institute of Natural Science (VINS). Following online rescue videos, they put the owl in a laundry basket in Chris's tractor barn with plywood on top.

• Why the owl was hit, and how it ended

Mel later learned owls' eyes are fixed, so they turn their heads — up to 270 degrees — to track prey while flying silently. She thinks it locked onto a small creature hopping across the road and never saw the car. It survived the night; VINS volunteers took it after about four hours, saying it looked like a broken clavicle. Three days later Mel learned it hadn't made it. She was crushed, and says the loss sparked the family's obsession.

• The 'owl house'

Christopher Robbins shares a name with Winnie the Pooh's friend, who goes to Owl's house for advice, so the family started calling their home the owl house. Chris and Sawyer spent a weekend building a three-foot plywood nest box, then hauled the roughly 40-pound box about 25 feet up a tree with an extension ladder.

• Chris the 'owl whisperer'

On a hike near home, Chris found a barred owl about 10 feet away, which called to a second owl; they swapped branches and the second stared at him. A psychic Mel consulted, Kim Russo, said owls represent higher wisdom and a new chapter. Mel notes Chris has since been finishing a master's in spiritual psychology, leading men's retreats, certifying as a death doula and in holotropic breathwork — during which, he said, he spent two hours feeling like an owl in flight.

• The 28th anniversary

Searching 'owl experience Vermont', Mel booked a 90-minute private session at New England Falconry in Woodstock. At their hotel, the welcome box held a small hand-painted pottery dish — with an owl, one of 12 animal designs. The next day a tiny burrowing owl flew between their gloves, and trainer Anastasia's barn owl circled and returned when they raised a hand.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Pick a subject to learn deeply

Mel's father, who hustled pool in college and medical school, moved to Muskegon, Michigan, home of Brunswick, and became a billiards collector; his garage room now looks like a museum, and he told her one cue is worth $11,000. Interest, she says, makes you more interesting too.

• Keep one or two symbols, not a collection

If an experience moves you, mark it with a single meaningful object and put the rest of your money toward doing things.

• Start the day expecting something good

Try Mel's line for Oakley: 'I'm going to meet somebody cool today' or 'discover something cool today'. She believes it points your attention toward the good, making it far more likely you'll notice when it happens.

8 Truths About College That Nobody Tells You

Date: 2024-08-29 · Duration: 0:44:50
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7FOgolNYuX0

KEYPOINTS

- **'Don't let studying get in the way of your education'**
  Mel's dad said this to her in the parking lot when her parents dropped her at college in 1986, after an 18-hour drive from Michigan. She first thought it was permission to party. He meant college teaches life skills no textbook can: being with yourself, advocating for yourself, meeting people, doing embarrassing things and moving forward. All eight truths, gathered with her daughters (24 and 25) and shared with her son Oakley at drop-off, are lessons from that 'education of life.'
- **Truth 1: If you're bored, you're doing college right**
  Even once classes start, you'll have days with five free hours and whole Saturdays with no plan, especially in the first couple of months. That's normal during a big change. The mistake is defaulting to your dorm room and phone. When you're bored, walk out: try a new café or dining hall, read the event posters, go to free swim hours, watch a team practice, or sit in the back of a lecture. Mel says graduates most often regret not exploring.
- **Truth 2: College changes how it feels to be in your body**
  Mel compares the first month to jumping into an ice-cold pool: new smells, lighting, bed, roommate, communal bathroom, food, weather and sleep schedule overload every sense. Everyone deals with it differently, but everyone tries to look like they have it together. That weird feeling often turns into 'I'm at the wrong school.' Her answer: you're not in the wrong place; you're just not used to it yet, and within about a month it settles.
- **The hack: a morning routine that moves your body**
  Without a routine, your day starts by chance: wake up feeling off, scroll, rot in bed, wait for your roommate to decide what to do. Instead, pick one thing you do every morning that gets you out the door and moving: a walk, the gym, a workout class, or a meditation in your headphones on the way to breakfast. Mel calls it the fastest way for your body to adjust to the new environment.
- **Truth 3: The change is fast, so go slow**
  Many students with newfound freedom drink far too much that first month because they can't handle the change. The night Oakley moved in, he texted his sisters that ambulances came to his dorm all night for students who had drunk too much; neither sister was surprised. Mel's message: you have four years of freedom, so slow down.
- **Slow down on hookups too**
  Her daughters stressed this repeatedly, for all genders. Emotions and hormones run high in the first weeks, and upperclassmen offering attention are usually after someone new. People aren't acting like themselves while they process change, so you're not hooking up with who they really are, and you may end up sitting next to them in Spanish class or seeing them date someone across the hall.
- **Truth 4: Take a flexible approach to friendship**
  It can seem as if everyone clicked into a group instantly, often through roommates, orientation, or shared backgrounds like camps and prep schools. People cling to others because it feels safe. Mel says those fast friend groups usually don't last; your friends may look different sophomore, junior and senior year, and finding your people can take two or three years. Let people come and go, and don't grip.
- **Inclusion creates more friendships**
  Invite the quiet roommate to lunch instead of worrying they'll hurt your chances of meeting others. In Mel's words, exclusion creates toxicity and expectation limits invitations. Her daughters saw friends lock into rigid freshman groups and four-year rooming plans that turned toxic, leaving them dreading sophomore year.
- **Truth 5: Your best college experience is at your college**
  Stop watching high school friends' party highlights, tailgates and big-school games, then deciding your school is worse. Stop clinging to your high school friends and partner. Mel says every hour spent feeling bad over someone else's posts destroys about ten hours of fun you could be having on your own campus.
- **Truth 6: Do things alone**
  Go to the club meeting, the info session, lunch in the cafeteria or intramural tryouts without a friend, and introduce yourself without a roommate standing there 'like a little blankie.' Mel says it's better to show up alone: you learn to trust you can handle it, and the confidence carries into your career.
- **Truth 7: You're not stuck**
  Nobody will create your experience for you. If your roommate is toxic, messy, never gets up, or keeps their partner over, you can change roommates. You can change classes and majors too. Talk to your RA, adviser, dean or a professor; they're paid to help. Mel calls transferring because of a roommate a cop-out, and suggests giving it a year and steering before you jump ship.
- **Truth 8: Every year of college is different**
  Each fall brings new housing, a new class of freshmen, new routines, and friends leaving for study abroad or internships. You may feel the same overwhelm, weirdness and boredom as a sophomore or senior. Mel says that's the real lesson: life keeps changing, people come and go, and you can ride it.

EXAMPLES

- **The basement jewelry studio**
  Two weeks into freshman year, Mel got a letter from home, felt homesick in a crowded campus center, and ducked into a stairwell so no one would see her cry. On a lower level she'd never noticed, she found a photo lab, a woodshop, a print workshop and a jewelry studio, where a bearded man was working on a silver ring. She sat down, went back daily, and worked there sophomore year.
- **Feeling like 'a gnome on the island of Giants'**

Mel arrived at Dartmouth from a small Midwestern public high school that had never sent anyone there. Classmates talked about Cape Cod, Nantucket, sleepaway camp, prep school and crew. She clung to her randomly assigned New York roommate 'like a life jacket.' Her daughter had a similar shock arriving in Los Angeles from a small Massachusetts town.

- **Mel's own first morning**

  She woke up on her first day of college in a full-blown anxiety and dissociative meltdown and held back tears so her roommate wouldn't know. That memory is why she texted Oakley at 6:47 a.m.

- **The text she sent Oakley**

  She told him to be patient, that a weird boredom in the first weeks is something everyone feels, and to keep telling himself he's in the right place. Soon he'd know his schedule, the best cafeteria food, a few friends and the ultimate team. 'Home is just a text away,' she wrote, and she could be there in two hours.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Send your student a first-morning text**

  Mel's model for parents: say you're proud, normalize the strangeness and boredom, remind them it takes a few weeks to find a rhythm, and that home is a text away.

- **Your first-week checklist**

  Get out the door every morning and move. Explore one new spot whenever you're bored. Keep the drinking and hooking up slow. Invite someone along. Do one thing alone. If something isn't working, take it to your RA or adviser.

- **If you're listening from your dorm bed**

  Mel's closing instruction: get out of bed, get out the door, and put this advice to work.

7 Lessons To Learn Once That Will Improve Your Life Forever

Date: 2024-08-26 · Duration: 0:45:30
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U2RwmuW5IJw

KEYPOINTS

• Switch to problem-solving mode instead of giving up

Driving away from the Baxter State Park ranger station, Mel realized her hiking boots were on her back porch in Vermont and all she had were Birkenstocks. She says the old Mel would have sulked, played the victim and stayed in the tent. This time she decided she wasn't going to miss the climb and was going to figure it out. She calls that declaration one of the most important mindset shifts she's made.

• Picture the good outcome before you know how it will go

Friends texted warnings about blisters from brand-new boots. Mel deliberately refused to feed the fear and told them instead that she'd text after the hike to say these were the best boots ever. She leaned on her habit of asking 'what if it all works out?' and pictured David Goggins running ultramarathons on ruined feet, telling herself she would 'Goggins this thing.' Her reasoning was that expecting disaster mostly makes things feel worse.

• Don't go to bed angry; talk it out

After an eight-hour drive turned into a 45-minute detour in silence, everyone was furious and on edge. At the campfire, Chris asked everyone to share the high and low of their day. Mel said the real low was feeling like a little kid in trouble during the silent drive, and wished they'd paused to make a plan before everyone blew up. Chris said he blamed himself for not running through a checklist. Talking 'put a pin in the balloon,' and they ended with a group hug.

• Ask for a reset when you need it

Fifteen minutes into the dark trail, the stiff new boots had Mel doubting she could last 12 hours. Instead of suffering in silence as she normally would, she asked Chris to call a family huddle: everyone shoulder to shoulder, one deep breath together. She says she was proud of herself for asking.

• 'You carry your baggage with you'

Near the summit, Mel asked a thru-hiker finishing day 172 of the 2,190-mile Appalachian Trail what he'd learned. He said he had assumed he had nothing to learn and was wrong. His first lesson was that you carry your baggage with you. Mel takes that to mean you can't outrun, out-hike or out-drink unresolved issues. You have to consciously decide to put them down, through therapy, self-awareness and learning about yourself.

• Never underestimate patience, and stay teachable

Walking past, the same thru-hiker added 'patience.' Chris and Mel talked about how people tend to think they know it all, and Mel calls life 'the single greatest school you'll ever attend' if you keep that mindset.

• Keep moving and good things come

On the way down, Mel met two more thru-hikers, trail names Riverrun and Wood, finishing a dream they'd chipped away at in sections over 45 years. Their first lesson was that if you keep moving, eventually good things come: good people, good weather, good views, good luck. They also said nature is the original healer, and that at their core people are good, citing strangers who gave them the shirt off their back or the last bite of a meal.

• Ask for specific help with a fear

Mel has a fear of heights and vertigo, and the descent through the boulder field meant looking down at sheer drops. She asked Oakley to go in front so he could catch her and Chris to go behind. Then she realized what she actually needed was Chris showing her one step at a time while she looked only at the next step, not the whole drop. She says five years ago she couldn't have done it.

EXAMPLES

• The boots from the farm-supply store

The ranger pointed them to a store about 40 minutes away, with no cell service to call ahead. It turned out to be a hardware and farm-supply store full of Muck Boots and work boots, with exactly one hiking-style pair in Mel's size, a little snug. She wore them all evening to break them in. After a 12-hour climb she had sore feet, wobbly legs and zero blisters.

• Planning six months out

Katahdin is about 5,200 feet, the northern end of the Appalachian Trail, and takes about 10 to 12 hours round trip. Campsites at the trailhead have to be booked six months ahead online at a set time. Chris spent three days on logistics for five people over two nights with no drinkable water or cell service. The store then sold him the wrong tents, so Sawyer and Kendall had to squeeze into a one-person tent.

• Buzz and Mel's 80-year-old dad

Mel's dad once mentioned he'd always wanted to hike the Appalachian Trail. His friend Buzz, who died suddenly this year, retired at 65 and hiked from Georgia to Pennsylvania. He flew to a family wedding, then went to Katahdin and hiked south back to Pennsylvania to avoid finishing on an icy mountain in late November. Her dad doesn't want to be away from her mom for six months, so Mel suggested he hike a section with Chris and Oakley. His face lit up: 'it's never too late.'

• The golden lake

After the hike, Mel and her daughters drove 35 minutes for the beer Chris had forgotten. Sawyer suggested jumping into a glistening mountain lake at sunset, and Mel calls it one of the core memories of her life.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Use a checklist

Mel's most practical lesson: for a long family road trip ending in a major hike, make a checklist and go through it before leaving. It would have saved both the boots and the beer.

• Do the high-low ritual

When a day goes wrong, have everyone share a high and a low before bed. It lets each person say how they felt and clears the air without assigning blame.

- **Take on the thing you've always wanted to do, in pieces if needed**

The 45-year section hikers and Mel's father show that a big dream can be done in sections. Start now with a manageable piece rather than waiting for the perfect time.

How to Figure Out What You Really Want: Use This Life-Changing Hack

Date: 2024-08-15 · Duration: 0:45:17
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1S1LEoZ_KOg

KEYPOINTS

• If you don't know what you want, other people's priorities win

Mel runs this episode as a free workshop and argues that much of feeling stuck or lost comes from not knowing what you want. Without a direction, you can't know what you value or prioritize, so people who do know what they want 'are always going to come before you.' People can advise you on how to get something, but no one can tell you what to want.

• Clarity is a skill, and your answer will change

Changing your mind is 'not only normal, it's unavoidable.' A college student may outgrow a major, and a couple may find their priorities have shifted since they fell in love. Mel says what she wanted with three kids in middle and high school is very different from what she wants as she and Chris become empty nesters. Without that clarity, you're 'a sailboat without a rudder,' moving fast but going nowhere.

• Clarity gave her the podcast

The High Five Habit, published in 2021, has a chapter about Mel dreaming of a podcast. Using this framework, she got clear that she truly wanted to launch one. She spent about two years studying others and building a game plan, then started the show about 18 months before this episode. By then it was nearing 150 million downloads, and what she wanted from it had grown 'on a totally different level.'

• Use the 5 Whys

Ask yourself 'What do I really want?' and then ask why four more times. Each 'why' forces you deeper, toward the root emotion. It also tests whether you want the thing itself or something underneath it. Mel says Sakichi Toyota, founder of Toyota Industries, developed the technique in the 1930s, that Toyota still uses it and that business schools teach it for root-cause problem solving.

• Include 'why now?'

In Mel's version, one of the whys is about timing. When she asked Sawyer why it mattered to move this year, Sawyer said she had always pictured herself living in New York in her 20s and was at the stage where it felt right. Asking about timing helps separate a someday wish from the most important thing right now. Sawyer could have said 'start a business' but chose New York.

• The surface goal can cost you the real one

If Christine had chased the lake house, she'd have spent years saving for it and then renovating and painting it, missing the time with her sons that she actually wanted. Often, Mel says, what you really want is 'right in front of your face.'

• The deeper answer is something you can act on now

You can still buy the lake house, move or write the novel. But knowing the root reason (time slipping away, a promise to your younger self, needing time for you) lets you bring that into your life immediately instead of waiting for the big goal.

• Your turn: what do you really want, and why?

Mel closes by asking you to answer the question honestly, ask why repeatedly and 'let yourself go there.' Then decide how to bring the deeper need into your days. The free companion workbook at melrobbins.com/what walks through the exercise in more depth.

EXAMPLES

• Christine's surprise breakthrough in a manifesting class

After the 143 Studios team made 104 episodes in a year, they went on a no-work, no-phones retreat. Christine, Mel's sister-in-law, business partner, CFO and COO, is 'a numbers gal' who isn't into 'touchy-feely' things. She walked into a manifesting class expecting to sit in the back. It turned out to be just her, the instructor and one man trying to sell a rental property.

• The lake house wasn't the point

Christine offhandedly said she wanted a lake house. Asked why, she said for family time, because her high-school sons were busy with sports and friends. Asked again, she found she missed how life used to revolve around family. The instructor pointed out the boys would be gone before she could save up. In tears, Christine realized she wanted time with her sons now. She told them so and set weekly time together, including car rides and practices. Does she still want the house? 'It'd be nice, but it's not the point anymore.'

• Sawyer, 25, and New York

Mel walks her daughter through the 5 Whys live. Moving to New York has felt like an 'energetic pull' since childhood. After 25 years in Boston, she wants something 'bigger and more uncomfortable.' The root: keeping a promise she made to herself as a little girl. Her other childhood promises include backpacking Asia (just done, for four months) and someday starting a business.

• The eulogy assignment

In Boston College's 'Courage to Know' class with Luke Jorgensen, freshmen wrote their own eulogies and read them aloud on parents' weekend. Classmates listed cures for cancer and trips to space. Sawyer's described moving to New York to live with her sister, three kids, two Australian shepherds, a 60-year marriage and dying surrounded by family. She thought she'd done it wrong. Mel calls it what we all want.

• Mel's fantasy novel

Mel's answer was a fantasy series she dreamed up with Sawyer and Kendall on a beach 12 years ago, and she still has the handwritten notes. Asking why led to wanting joy without deadlines, then to escape from constant demands. Her real want was more time to herself, so writing another project would have been ironic. Her fixes: a 30-minute walk instead of 10 minutes, unhurried garden time, a book instead of TV, maybe a solo meditation weekend.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Who to share this with

Mel suggests sending it to a college student choosing a major, someone facing a big decision or someone you see a bigger future for than they see for themselves. She has used the same process for current decisions in her business.

• Part of a workshop series

She mentions earlier free workshops on the science of setting goals and on moving from thought to action, each completed by close to a million people.

• Saying it out loud keeps you on course

Christine's way of sticking to it was telling her sons honestly that she missed their time together and then making it a priority. She suspects they missed it too, even if it sometimes feels like 'Sunday not-so-fun day.'

How To Make Your Life Exciting Again | Mel Robbins

Guest: Dr. Tali Sharot
Date: 2024-07-18 · Duration: 0:38:47
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awLRiNhrNis

KEYPOINTS

• Habituation is why good things stop feeling good.

Dr. Tali Sharot, a behavioral neuroscientist who directs the Affective Brain Lab at University College London and also works at MIT, calls habituation a fundamental rule of how every neuron works. We respond less and less to things that are constant, frequent or change only gradually. Her examples: studies show you stop smelling a bakery within about 20 minutes; you stop smelling your own perfume a month after buying it; a cold pool stops feeling cold after a few minutes. The same happens with a new romance, a new home, a new job or a promotion.

• Your brain works like the front page of a newspaper.

Sharot says the brain cares most about what just happened, because something new might need a reaction or be a threat. Once something has been around a while and turned out fine, neurons save their resources for the next new thing. That's why we notice the new most and the familiar least.

• Habituation cuts both ways.

It also dulls bad things, which helps: we adapt even to a loss or a breakup, so we don't stay stuck in that first wave of pain and can move forward. The downside is that long-standing problems fade into the background, such as cracks in a relationship, inefficiencies at work, or societal problems like sexism and racism. Once we stop noticing them, we're less motivated to change them.

• Breaks 'dishabituate' you.

Stepping away and coming back resets the response, like walking out of the bakery for ten minutes and smelling it again on your return. After a work trip of a few days or a week, Sharot says, your home, your kitchen and even your partner seem to have 'resparkled'. Mel jokes that Chris comes back looking 'not so bad after all.'

• Novelty is the other way to dishabituate.

Sharot cites relationship expert Esther Perel's research, in which long-term couples said they felt most attracted to their partner in two situations. One was after time apart. The other was seeing them in a new context, such as talking with strangers or on stage. For your sex life, Sharot says, Perel's advice is breaks or novelty, and doing new things together outside the bedroom matters too.

• A varied life is a psychologically rich life.

According to Sharot, people who have lived in different places, worked on different kinds of projects and spent time with different kinds of people tend to have more psychologically rich lives. You can add variety in small, cheap ways: take a different route to work, take a free online course, pick up a new skill or podcast, or befriend someone whose personality isn't your usual type. New inputs dishabituate you, and they also put you in learning mode, which people enjoy.

• Midlife is the low point of the happiness 'U-curve'.

On average, across data from thousands of people, happiness is high in childhood and the teens, falls to its lowest in midlife, then rises again and stays fairly high until the last couple of years of life. Sharot stresses this is a trend, not a rule for every person. One reason she gives is that midlife has the least change. Childhood and your 20s are full of growth and trying new partners, jobs and studies. Midlife is about maintaining. Retirement and an empty nest force you to learn again.

• Changing your surroundings sparks creativity, briefly.

Sharot cites a psychologist's research showing that even small changes, like moving from your office to a coffee shop or holding a walking meeting, boost creativity, but only for about six minutes. Those minutes can be when the breakthrough comes. Companies can rotate people through different divisions or projects: they learn something new, and when they return, they see the old team with fresh eyes, noticing both the good and what needs fixing.

• Anticipation is a big part of happiness.

Sharot calls things you've scheduled but haven't done yet 'anticipatory events'. She says that's also why people prefer Friday to Sunday by far. Friday holds the weekend ahead. On Sunday you may be out on that hike, but you're also anxious about the work week.

EXAMPLES

• The backyard tent

Mel opens by describing a night sleeping in a tent in her Vermont backyard under a full moon with Chris, after nearly 28 years of marriage. Chris noticed the forecast and suggested it. They used to do adventures like that constantly when they were dating. Over coffee the next morning, she wondered when life got boring, then realised: 'maybe life isn't boring, maybe you've gotten boring.'

• The 43-hour vacation peak

When Sharot surveyed guests at resorts for a tourism company, the word they used most to describe the best part was 'first': the first view of the ocean, the first cocktail, the first sandcastle. Happiness peaked 43 hours in, once people had unpacked, then slowly declined. A separate study tracking people before, during and after a holiday found they were happiest the day before leaving, while still at their desks.

• The fading-colour illusion

In Sharot's book with co-author Cass Sunstein, there's an image of colour clouds with a black plus sign in the middle. Stare at it for about 30 seconds without moving your eyes and the colours fade to grey, even white, because each neuron gets an unchanging signal. Move your eyes and the colour rushes back. Mel compares it to staring at your spouse or your job for too long until everything turns grey.

• The kitchen you used to love

Mel describes a kitchen that's perfectly fine until you scroll through renovation posts or see a friend's coffee bar, and suddenly you hate yours. Sharot points out that the friend probably envies your kitchen too, because each of you has habituated to your own. The urge for something new isn't all bad, since it keeps us moving forward, but it takes balance.

• Julia Roberts' 'resparkle'

Sharot and her co-author borrowed the word from Julia Roberts. Roberts has said her ordinary days of school runs, bike rides and after-school activities would be boring if they never changed, but going away to film makes everything look like it has 'pixie dust' on it when she returns.

• Ideas on the walk to the gym

Stuck on a problem in her office, Sharot walked to a nearby gym, less than six minutes away, and the solution came to her on the way. It led to a lot of her later work. She says nearly every big idea she's had, including book topics and research directions, came in a new place.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Take shorter, more frequent vacations

Several long weekends give you more 'firsts', more anticipation and more afterglow than one two-week trip, though Sharot accepts that isn't practical for far-away destinations.

• Imagine your life without it

If you can't get away, Yale professor Laurie Santos suggests closing your eyes and picturing life without your partner, home or job. Mel notes most of us do the opposite and compare outward.

• Book something to look forward to

A trip, a night out, a class or a simple hike all count. Mel is excited about a guided owl walk with Chris.

• Run 'experiments in living'

Sharot's book ends with this idea: like a scientist, you won't know what works until you test it. Try something new, or try removing something, such as social media for a few weeks, and see how it affects you.

5 Fun Ideas to Shake Up Your Life & Get Out Of A Rut

Date: 2024-07-01 · Duration: 0:41:31
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CyN31HaG0P4

KEYPOINTS

• Play 'never been there, never done that' instead of waiting for Bali

Mel's game: make a list of places and experiences near home you've never tried, then pick one a week for the rest of the year. All it takes is about 30 minutes and walking out the door, and it needn't cost anything. Whether you live in a city, suburb or rural area, she argues, there are restaurants, coffee shops, trails, galleries, junk shops, library lectures and leagues you've driven past for years.

• Big trips stay on the horizon; local adventures can happen this week

Mel's executive producer Tracy described a family brainstorm — the Caribbean, Patagonia, a safari, Greece — that ended with no trip, because not a single date worked for everyone. Mel says to keep dreaming big, but notes such trips can take two years to fund and schedule, whereas a local adventure can happen in the next seven days.

• You get a mood boost from planning, and another from doing

Mel cites research that having something to look forward to lifts mood and energy when you plan it and again when you do it. Retelling her own adventures, she says, delivers a third boost as she relives them.

• Small goals give you direction and 'a game worth playing'

Each item on the list is a micro-goal that lifts you off autopilot. Without one, Saturday turns into the usual grocery run, chores and the same coffee stop. With one, you wake up and head to the new nursery or the fly-fishing museum, and the day feels more meaningful.

• Habituation is why routine loses its sparkle

Researchers call it habituation: you get so used to something you stop noticing it — the 20th order of your favorite bolognese doesn't taste as good as the first, and a partner, a backyard or a painting you've looked at for five years stops dazzling. Mel previews an upcoming episode with an MIT neuroscientist on the topic, and says change — of environment, route, people or routine — is what restores wonder.

• Your area is an anthill: it looks dull until you look inside

Someone described Mel's rural corner of Southern Vermont as 'very deceiving': from outside there's nothing to do, but inside is a whole vibrant world. When her son wanted to move there four years earlier, Mel had protested it was 'where people go to die' — she'd only ever visited her in-laws for weekends of hiking, golf and skiing. If you exhaust your town, go one town, neighborhood or block over.

• Mel barely explored Boston in 26 years

Living in the Boston area, she stuck to the same three restaurants and one coffee shop, rarely went to Fenway, visited the Museum of Fine Arts and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum perhaps once or twice, and never made it to the Harbor Islands. She even owned a paint-your-own-pottery shop on Natick's two-and-a-half-block main street — which never made money — without visiting half the neighboring stores.

• A 'fail' still counts

The point is novelty, not perfection — Mel says a mediocre attempt is good enough because doing something different shakes things up. Some detours are amazing and some are 'meh'.

EXAMPLES

• The wooden salad bowl 'shack'

For almost two decades Mel drove Route 2 in western Massachusetts past a shack-like spot with wooden bowls on the lawn and a hand-painted sign. When she finally pulled in, she found a maker she says had been on Oprah's favorite-things list for years. Its bowls are now her go-to wedding gift.

• The Clark Art Institute

Planning a three-day visit for her parents around Oakley's high-school graduation, Mel discovered the Clark, about an hour away in Williamstown, Massachusetts, a town of about 7,000. She describes around 40 Renoirs in one room, works by Winslow Homer, Degas, Remington and her favorite portraitist, John Singer Sargent, 19 rooms and 145 landscaped acres — more impressive to her than the Musée d'Orsay she'd just seen in Paris.

• Dolene, the sourdough starter

Oakley wanted to learn sourdough, so they made a starter from scratch — a tedious seven-day process of feeding and dividing. Listeners named it Dolene. Mel left for Boston on day four; Oakley stopped feeding it, and it died — he hid the jar outside. They never baked bread, but she calls it a gloriously fun failure (despite her Austrian immigrant grandparents having owned a bakery).

• The 'beer and tinned fish' place

Mel drove past a spot for seven years, dismissing it as a beer garden. When she finally went in, she found hand-rolled croissants that sell out within 15 minutes on weekends, great coffee and matcha, and al fresco sourdough pizza and oysters out back. She now goes about three times a week. Her mother's line: 'Try it, you might like it.'

• Oakley and the 'chat and chop' grandmas

As a high-school freshman, Oakley wandered into the cafeteria to find older women from Grateful Hearts cooking donated farm food for food-insecure neighbors. He asked to help, put on an apron and stayed four years — which is how he got into cooking. Chris volunteers every Thursday delivering donated restaurant meals to hospice patients.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Five prompts to fill your list

Walk into a store you've never entered (or try the neighboring town's Thursday farmers market); turn down a street you've

never taken — Mel's colleague Amy and her daughter do this and find farms and fruit stands; visit a museum, gallery, library or green space; try a new restaurant, market or recipe; join a sports league, community group or volunteer.

- **Start with what's already on your radar**

  Mel's own additions: the National Fly Fishing History Museum she'd passed for 28 years, a garden center her colleague raves about, candlelit cross-country ski trails, a local CrossFit gym and a new Tuesday-night barre class.

- **Find volunteer and league options locally**

  If you're new in a city, Mel recommends a kickball league — no athletic skill needed. For volunteering, check your town's Facebook group, call the town clerk or ask at the library.

This One Hack Will Unlock Your Happier Life

Date: 2024-06-17 · Duration: 0:58:10
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fz7xalJJBDs

KEYPOINTS

• Fresh flowers at home measurably lifted mood in a Harvard study

Mel, who calls herself 'kind of a flower freak' and keeps a cutting garden instead of a vegetable garden, cites Dr. Nancy Etcoff of Harvard Medical School and Mass General. People lived with fresh cut flowers for less than a week and were measured before and after. They reported more compassion and kindness toward others, less anxiety and worry, and fewer negative feelings.

• Flowers gave people something to look forward to and more energy

Participants in that study said they looked forward to seeing the blooms first thing in the morning and reported a boost in energy. Mel's explanation is awe: a tulip bursting from a dried brown bulb, and the fragility of petals you could tear with one touch, soften you. She won't get out of bed for donuts or bacon, she jokes, but she will for dahlias she cut blooming in the kitchen.

• Giving flowers deepens the giver's sense of connection

Mel cites Rutgers research finding that giving flowers made givers feel more emotionally connected to the person receiving them. She thinks of a bouquet as a living stand-in for you, and says the card gives the flowers the full meaning of what you wrote: I love you, I miss you, get better, congratulations.

• Flowers get real smiles and lead people to reach out

According to the research Mel describes, people who receive flowers respond with a genuine smile, unlike the polite smile for wine you don't drink or a framed picture you'll never hang. Recipients reported good moods lasting for days, and people who send flowers tend to be seen as successful, caring and emotionally intelligent. The flowers also led to more contact with family and friends, which Mel says explains why you text a photo to the sender right away.

• Buying yourself flowers is evidence that you matter

Mel dares listeners to keep fresh flowers somewhere they'll see them. A stem you give yourself, she says, is proof you're kind to yourself and believe you deserve beautiful things. She treats it as a small, concrete way to build self-worth through action, and suggests never leaving the grocery store, if your budget allows, without $5 of flowers.

• Looking closely at a flower works like a moving meditation

You can't worry about a deadline or tear yourself down while studying the speckles inside a lily or the shading on a daffodil. Mel keeps a single cut flower in a jar by her sink so washing dishes becomes a moment of being present. The free version: stop for one minute at a neighbor's garden, a flowering tree or a restaurant's planters.

• Nature restores attention, and a little bit counts

In a clip from an earlier episode, NYU professor Adam Alter describes attention restoration research. Natural environments draw a softer kind of attention that replenishes the energy focused work uses up, and he calls nature 'one of the best forms of medicine we have.' He values its timelessness and suggests about five minutes a day taking in even a small houseplant or a tabletop fountain if you live in a city.

• A plant on your desk may sharpen focus

Mel cites UK research finding that plants near your workspace can boost concentration by up to 20%, partly by lowering CO2. She links it to a Harvard T.H. Chan School study across six countries (the UK, US, China, India, Mexico and Thailand) that found higher office CO2 slowed response times and hurt focus and productivity.

• Digging in soil and harvesting trigger feel-good chemistry

Mel shares research that contact with a soil bacterium, Mycobacterium vaccae, triggers serotonin release, and that harvesting anything you've grown releases a little dopamine. Researchers theorize the picking reward evolved over roughly 200,000 years of hunting and gathering, which may explain pick-your-own orchards. She says the same reward process is linked to compulsive shopping, a modern 'hunt' for deals.

EXAMPLES

• Dr. Judith Joseph's exercise-ball-sized bouquet

During a burnout-heavy week of fast company growth, writing her next book and her daughter Oakley's graduation, Mel got a three-foot jewel-toned arrangement of coral peonies and roses at her Boston studio while she was in Vermont. Sad to miss it, she gave it to Charlotte, a teammate who had been burning the midnight oil. Charlotte sent photos all weekend as it opened.

• Christine's surprise copy

That Friday, a matching arrangement was waiting on Mel's great-grandmother's marble-topped cabinet in Vermont. Her sister-in-law and COO, Christine, had apparently sent a photo of the Boston bouquet to a local florist. Mel burst into tears, needed Chris to help carry it, and says that for 10 days it felt like Christine was waiting in the kitchen to hug her.

• An orchid for Jodie in Michigan

When Mel's childhood best friend Jodie, 56 and single, left her job and six years in San Diego to move home and help her aging parents, Mel sent an orchid as a 'surrogate.' Six weeks later Jodie texted that it was still blooming and reminded her of Mel.

• The studio CO2 monitor

After about 90 minutes of interviews in their Boston studio, Mel felt her energy and focus drain away. A CO2 monitor showed levels spiking from all the talking. The team added an air filter, started opening windows between interviews, and now plans to bring in plants.

• Memorial Day at the garden center

Growing up in western Michigan, Mel's family loaded into the Jeep Wagoneer every Memorial Day weekend for plants. Now she helps a friend, Annette, and other local women plant 50,000 dahlia bulbs at her flower farm. Mel's mom, who grew up on the family's farm outside Buffalo, refuses to pay to pick produce: 'I grew up picking that crap.'

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Mel's grocery-store flower method**

  Skip the mixed bouquets, which cost more. Buy a single-variety bunch from the buckets, like tulips, lilies or whatever is in season. Trim the stems and split the 5 to 12 stems into small jars around the house. Then ask the floral counter or bodega to rewrap them as a gift. She says they'll do it for free and usually enjoy it.

- **This week's practice**

  Keep fresh flowers where you'll see them, send flowers to one person who is struggling or whom you miss, spend a minute really looking at a bloom, put a plant on your desk, and find a way to get your hands in the dirt, whether in your own yard, a park cleanup or a local farm.

- **Choose flowers when you want them to feel your presence**

  Mel says a book or massage voucher is a fine gift, but a living arrangement keeps the giver in the recipient's mind every time they look at it.

Transform Your Life at Any Moment: The Surprising Science of Happiness

Date: 2024-06-03 · Duration: 0:55:45
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXD7NZRJgI8

KEYPOINTS

• Some of your favorite people are strangers you haven't met yet

Mel opens with a reframe: everyone you love was once a stranger. If you knew for certain that many of your future favorite people are walking past you, sitting next to you at the cafe or pulling into the parking spot beside you, you would move through the day differently. The episode pairs research with five true stories to show how 'unexpected connections' can change a life.

• Warm relationships predict health and happiness at 80

Mel revisits Dr. Robert Waldinger, the Harvard physician who leads the Harvard Study of Adult Development, which she describes as an 86-year study of happiness. People who were most satisfied with their relationships around age 50 turned out to be the healthiest, mentally and physically, at 80. In a clip, Waldinger says people who saw more people in a given week and had warmer relationships lived years longer and developed the diseases of aging later, if at all.

• Warm relationships include people you barely know

Mel's point is that warmth is not limited to your inner circle. The people around you whom you don't know yet also count, and treating them as possible connections is how you build the relationships the Harvard research links to a longer, healthier life.

• Two reasons we stay quiet: it seems pointless and it feels awkward

Mel says we don't say hello because we don't believe it matters, and because the moment right before you go first always feels vulnerable. You tell yourself 'they look busy,' 'I don't want to bother them' or 'I'll look like a creep.' She says the awkward moment never goes away, even at orientations where everyone is new, so you have to go first anyway.

• 'I don't want to bother you' is the most common opener Mel hears

About 90% of listeners who stop her in public start with that sentence, which tells her they expect it to be awkward. She says she loves being approached, and that 90% of the time when you go first, people respond warmly.

• We underestimate how good talking to a stranger will feel

In a University of Chicago study on commuter trains, one group rode as usual, reading or scrolling. The other had to start a conversation with a stranger. The talking group expected not to enjoy it at all, but afterward they were much happier than the group that kept to themselves. Mel says the research also found the stranger felt happier, and that people consistently underpredict how much these conversations will lift them.

• Weak ties matter more than you think

Researchers divide relationships into strong ties, like family, close friends and coworkers who know your birthday, and weak ties: your building superintendent, the person five offices over, your child's teacher, your yoga instructor. Mel says we pour all our energy into strong ties and overlook weak ties, which have real potential to make us happier if we take a bit more interest.

• Small positive moments spread from person to person

Mel cites Dr. Barbara Fredrickson of UNC Chapel Hill, who says small daily interactions release neurotransmitters like dopamine and oxytocin that are tied to positive emotion and bonding. This 'social contagion' means a hello, a compliment or a held door creates a ripple. Mel adds that giving warmth away makes it stronger in you.

• Imagine watching hidden-camera footage of your day

Mel asks you to picture footage of yourself going through a normal day. She predicts you would look closed off: buried in your phone in line, on the commute and at the gym, sending signals that you're not open to talking. If you feel lonely, she says the fix is to start going first instead of waiting.

EXAMPLES

• Sawyer and Naomi in a Bali hostel

Mel's daughter Sawyer, 24, landed alone and jet-lagged in Bali at 7 p.m. at the start of a six-month solo backpacking trip she had dreamed about for a decade. She counted 5-4-3-2-1 and introduced herself to a woman in a towel on her way to the shower: Naomi from London. Later Sawyer worked up the nerve to ask, 'What are you doing tonight?' They traveled together for four months and now talk almost every day.

• Al, 92, and Cheryl on the claims line

Al, a widower living alone in rural Maine, was shaken after hitting a deer. Cheryl, the representative handling his auto claim, got to know him by phone, had an army of coworkers at her office sign a Christmas card, and called him on Christmas Day. His grandson Joe wrote to thank her and sent along 'The Gift,' a poem Al wrote in December 1950. That year he could only afford a small doll for his daughter and nothing for his wife.

• Judy Robbins and Juliet in Paris

Mel's mother-in-law Judy's email kept going to Juliet, an American living in Paris whose address was one letter off. Instead of being annoyed, Juliet answered the misdirected emails with humor ('I'd love to try the eye cream but I'm not going to pay your bill'). They became pen pals for 15 years. Juliet hosted Judy's granddaughter in Paris, and the two finally had lunch in Woodstock, Vermont.

• The pool brunch that became 'Same Day Same Year'

Astrid chatted with a dad named Rich at a community pool. He invited her family to brunch, and weeks later she had forgotten his name and didn't want to go, but went anyway. The two families had both lived in Chicago during graduate school and been in Mexico in the 1980s, and Astrid and Rich shared the exact same birthday and birth year. Her custom-headboard design work and his house flipping turned into a business they named Same Day Same Year.

• Wanda's wrong-number Thanksgiving text

Wanda texted 17-year-old Jamal Hinton by mistake, thinking he was her grandson. After they swapped selfies he asked, 'Can I still get a plate though?' and she said yes. He came to Thanksgiving, became close to Wanda and her husband Lonnie, and kept the tradition going even after Lonnie died in 2020. This past year was their eighth Thanksgiving together.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Mel's openers that don't come across as creepy**

  Compliment someone's nails or shoes, ask what they're reading or what they ordered, or ask their dog's name. Mel always says good morning in elevators, chats with baristas and people in line, and asks customer-support reps how they're doing, which she says often catches them off guard. You don't have to act like you're running for mayor, just do a little more than now.

- **Your assignment: say hello to one person today**

  Borrowing from the University of Chicago study, Mel's challenge is one hello a day. Talk to the person next to you at the coffee shop, the parent beside you at soccer, or a coworker you've never had lunch with, and notice how it feels.

- **Treat mix-ups as openings**

  A wrong-number text or misdirected email can be an inconvenience or the start of something. Juliet and Wanda chose warmth and humor. Judy's phrase for it is 'fall in rather than falling out.'

Understanding This One Idea Changes the Way You See Your Life

Date: 2024-04-22 · Duration: 0:42:34
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLdcQsJaeyA

KEYPOINTS

• Your life follows the hero's journey

Mel borrows Joseph Campbell's story archetype. Campbell was a mythologist who studied religions and myths across cultures and found the same pattern everywhere: a hero leaves home, faces trials, transforms, and returns with wisdom or treasure. George Lucas considered Campbell a mentor, and Mel argues the pattern is why stories like Star Wars, Mulan, The Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter resonate.

• Her therapist uses it to locate her struggles

Mel's therapist and coach regularly tells her which stage of the journey she's in. Hearing that a hard patch is 'the struggle every hero goes through' makes Mel feel less lost and helps her see the challenge as having a purpose. She takes notes and now uses the framework both to make sense of her past and to plan ahead.

• Four of Campbell's 17 stages matter most here

Mel focuses on the Ordinary World, the Call to Adventure, Crossing the Threshold, and the Midpoint.

• In the Ordinary World, you don't yet know your potential

Luke is stuck on the desert planet Tatooine, Mulan's only duty is to marry and bring honor to her family, and Frodo has never left the Shire. Like them, you only know the small slice of the world you live in, which Mel says is fine, as long as you're willing to look around.

• The call probably won't come from a wizard or a droid

There's no Gandalf at the door and no hidden hologram. You have to look for the call yourself. Mel's question: 'What is your life trying to tell you?' Notice what you can't stop thinking about, signs that keep showing up, or something you've wanted to do for years.

• The call can be negative or positive, big or small

Rising rent, a job you quit or a family health crisis can push you; a hobby you're drawn to can pull you. Listeners have told Mel that small calls, like a painting class or returning to a daily journal, made part of them come alive.

• Feeling stuck is evidence of a call you're refusing

Like Luke telling Obi-Wan he can't leave and has work to do at home, we're reluctant heroes. Mel suggests relabeling tension as a call to adventure: a breakup, a surprise layoff, jealousy as friends move or start graduate school, or her own approaching empty nest when Oakley leaves for college.

• Crossing the threshold is where most people fail

There's no journey until you commit. A threshold doesn't have to be a move. It can be saying 'I want something different' out loud, submitting an application, walking into a gym, throwing out the alcohol, booking the doctor's appointment, or calmly stating a boundary. That's why Mel keeps urging the first step and 5-4-3-2-1.

• The midpoint is a long slog, so don't turn back

This is the second half of the movie, full of setbacks, small wins, and allies and mentors who show up once you've set out. Mel says it may be the second half of your life too. 'It's called the hero's journey, not the hero's finish line.'

• Heroes come home changed

Your childhood home feels small when you return because you've outgrown it. Looking back, Mel says you've already completed many journeys: leaving for college, finding strength after a breakup, surviving a health challenge, a layoff or grief, or rebuilding habits over a year. What every hero figures out is who they are and what they're capable of.

EXAMPLES

• A lifelong friend moves home to Michigan

Mel's friend since fourth grade had lived in Santa Barbara for years. Her rent rose, she left a job she disliked, and then both her parents were hospitalized at the same time. She packed the car, put her bulldog in the passenger seat, drove across the country, and is turning her parents' upstairs into an apartment. Nobody asked her to; she texted Mel, 'I just arrived for my next adventure.' Mel expects her midpoint to be full of 'what have I done?'

• Mel's pull toward skinning up the mountain

In winter, Chris and their daughter Sawyer hike up a nearby mountain on skis fitted with grippy skins, then ski down. Chris now organizes 30 to 40 people who meet in a parking lot twice a week. Mel feels the pull but is scared because she's not in great shape and not as good as the group. She calls that pull a call to adventure.

• Chris's seven-year MBA

Early in their marriage, Chris earned an MBA from Babson one class at a time after full workdays. It took seven years, all three of their children were born during it, he felt twice as old as his classmates, and he thought about quitting constantly.

• Mel stuck mid-manuscript

Writing a new book, Mel spent every weekend and evening on it and recently sat in a chair for three days without writing a word. She compared it to Frodo at the grim pond near Mount Doom: 'I don't feel like a hero, I feel like quitting.'

OTHER RELEVANT

• Ask the question daily

'What is your life trying to tell you right now?' Mel suggests labeling each moment of tension as a call instead of a sign that life is falling apart.

• Reject 'it's too late' and 'I'm too busy'

Mel insists you can still go to grad school, move across the country or start a business, and that you'll find the time once you

commit.

- **Look for allies once you've started**

  Frodo had Gandalf and Sam, Luke had Han and Leia, Mulan had Mushu. Mel notes that mentors and helpers tend to appear only after you've crossed the threshold, not before.

- **Mel's framework habit**

  Mel likes borrowing frameworks from other fields, such as engineering, neuroscience, business strategy and physics concepts like momentum, and applying them to everyday life. The hero's journey is one of her all-time favorites.

How to Build the Life You Want: Timeless Wisdom for More Happiness & Purpose

Guest: Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar
Date: 2024-04-18 · Duration: 1:14:59
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NGE8BgxEOd4

KEYPOINTS

• Achievement gives a spike of happiness, not lasting happiness

Ben-Shahar, who taught positive psychology and the psychology of leadership at Harvard, learned this firsthand. He told himself he'd be happy once he won Israel's national squash championship. When he won, he was ecstatic "for about four hours" and then returned to the same stress. Even after becoming a top student at Harvard he was still miserable, which led him to switch from computer science to philosophy and psychology to ask why.

• We are built for the pursuit, not the outcome

Once we reach a goal, our minds check it off and look for the next one. He says to accept this the way we accept gravity and build our lives around it. Believing that achievement will make you happy is, in his view, a major cause of unhappiness, because people end up "climbing up the wrong mountain."

• Valuing happiness directly can make you less happy

He cites research by Professor Iris Mauss showing that people who wake up telling themselves happiness is very important to them become less happy. The answer isn't to fool yourself. His analogy: staring at the sun hurts, but light broken through a prism into a rainbow can be enjoyed. Pursue happiness indirectly, through its parts.

• The SPIRE model: five elements of wholeness

Spiritual (meaning, purpose, presence, with or without religion), Physical (exercise, sleep, rest, touch, nutrition), Intellectual (curiosity and deep learning), Relational (quality time with people who care about us, the number one predictor of happiness) and Emotional (giving yourself permission to feel sadness, anger and frustration). He defines happiness as wholeness across these five areas.

• Goals matter for having them, not for reaching them

He reconciles the future-focused Western model with the present-focused Eastern one. A meaningful goal is like knowing which mountain you're driving toward on a road trip: without one, you meander and worry about cliffs. The goal isn't the end; it frees you to enjoy the present.

• Happiness is a continuum, so aim for happier

Asked whether he is finally happy after 30 years, he says he doesn't know what "happy" would mean as a yes-or-no state. He is a lot happier than he was 30 years ago and hopes to be happier five years from now. For people who are stuck, he recommends kaizen-style 1% improvements and treating life as "experiments with truth," taken from the subtitle of Gandhi's autobiography.

• Minimum viable interventions (MVIs) count

Borrowing from the business idea of a minimum viable product, an MVI is a small change, good enough to make a difference over time when applied consistently. Because helplessness and doing nothing are core features of depression, doing something small works against it.

• Loneliness often comes from divided attention

He calls loneliness the number one predictor of unhappiness, made worse by Covid. Often the problem isn't a lack of people but doing 20 other things while you're with them. Play your two favourite songs at once, his are Whitney Houston's "I Will Always Love You" and Beethoven's Fifth, and you don't get 19.5 out of 10. You get noise. Single-task with the people you love.

• Antifragility: resilience 2.0

Drawing on Nassim Taleb, he explains that a resilient ball bounces back to where it was, while an antifragile one bounces back higher. Muscles grow under stress, and minds can too. Most of his psychology students knew PTSD, but hardly any had heard of post-traumatic growth. Research by Tedeschi, Calhoun and others suggests that simply knowing growth is possible makes it more likely, because it gives hope. "Depression is sadness without hope."

• Painful experiences are part of a full life

When he asks students which experiences they are most grateful for, very few name fun ones; most name hard ones. He is not against psychiatric medication, which he says has saved lives, but believes our culture is too quick to reach for pills to make pain go away. Removing all pain would also remove growth.

EXAMPLES

• A one-minute MVI for each SPIRE element

Spiritual: one minute of deep breathing. Physical: 45-second bursts, like stair climbing or push-ups, three times a day, which he says research shows adds up to the equivalent of a workout. Intellectual: learn one new idea or ask a new question, since curious lifelong learners live longer. Relational: a hug, a thoughtful text, two minutes of real listening. Emotional: write three gratitudes or journal for two minutes.

• Write or talk instead of ruminating

Citing Sonja Lyubomirsky at UC Riverside, he says that thinking over painful experiences tends to make them worse, while writing or talking about them helps people make sense of them and come out stronger. Journaling research by James Pennebaker and others shows that writing often produces an "aha" moment that makes the problem manageable.

• Christine goes back to church alone

Mel's sister-in-law and business partner Christine had stopped going to church when life got busy. After years of thinking about it, she simply went to a service one Sunday without waiting for her husband and sons. That hour a week has restored a sense of wholeness in her spiritual life.

• A friend's death and Nathaniel Branden's words

At 27, living in Asia, Ben-Shahar lost his closest friend in a plane crash between Indonesia and Singapore on 19 December 1997. His mentor Nathaniel Branden, who had lost his own wife in a drowning accident, told him: you won't understand this now, but you will get over it; it will hurt like hell, but we all do. He still recalls those words in every crisis.

• His ordinary happy day

He meditates in bed, reads quality material instead of news, and drives his kids to school, where they ask him for a "message for the day" such as "be generous." He works in the morning, does yoga, has lunch with his wife, and has started playing squash again with his 14-year-old after 25 years away. He admits his kids sometimes tell him, "Daddy, chill."

OTHER RELEVANT

• Use the three Rs of lasting change

Reminders (Post-its, a bracelet, a note on your mirror reading SPIRE), Repetition (recurring calendar entries, such as the gym every Monday, Wednesday and Friday) and Rituals, where repetition makes the behaviour automatic, like brushing your teeth or Serena Williams's forehand.

• Act before you feel like it

Some mornings he wants to stay in bed. What matters is what you do, not what you feel, and over time your actions shape your feelings.

• Find leverage points in your system

In systems thinking, everything is connected, so where you start matters less than starting. Look for a keystone habit, as Charles Duhigg describes, such as daily exercise or a morning breathing practice, that spreads to other areas.

• Read biographies and Helen Keller

He tells students the best self-help books are biographies. He recommends Helen Keller's essay on optimism and "Three Days to See," which he keeps beside him as a reminder to appreciate what he has.

What Makes a Good Life? Lessons From the Longest Study on Happiness

Guest: Dr. Robert Waldinger
Date: 2024-04-04 · Duration: 1:39:26
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5jnEizYzQl0

KEYPOINTS

• The longest study of adult life, now in its 86th year

Dr. Robert Waldinger directs the Harvard Study of Adult Development. He is a psychiatrist, a Harvard Medical School professor, a Zen priest, and co-author of The Good Life. The study began in 1938 with 268 Harvard undergraduates and 456 boys, about 12 years old on average, from Boston's poorest families; spouses and children were added later. It has followed them with questionnaires, home interviews every 10 years and medical records, adding DNA, blood work and MRI brain scans as science advanced.

• The biggest finding: warm relationships mean longer, healthier lives

People with more relationships, and warmer ones, lived longest, stayed healthiest and were happiest. The surprise to the researchers was the physical effect: lower odds of coronary artery disease and type 2 diabetes. Their leading hypothesis is that relationships regulate stress. Without them, the body stays in low-level fight-or-flight, with more circulating stress hormones and white blood cells that gradually wear down body systems.

• Relationship satisfaction at 50 predicted health at 80 better than cholesterol

Looking back from age 80, the team checked what at age 50 best predicted who would be healthy and happy. It was how satisfied people were with their relationships, not cholesterol. They didn't believe it and reanalyzed the data. Waldinger says it only became a scientific truth once other studies of different groups found the same.

• Loneliness is a signal, like hunger, not a verdict on you

Waldinger defines loneliness as feeling less connected than you want to be, so you can be lonely in a marriage or a crowd. Mel recalls feeling deeply disconnected from her husband Chris about five years ago, even while surrounded by people. She had read it as something wrong with her. Waldinger says to stop blaming yourself or anyone else and ask what's making connection hard right now.

• Bring a suggestion, not a complaint

Rather than 'vomiting the problem' (Mel's phrase for what she does with Chris), offer something specific that's easy to say yes to: 'Could we go for a walk after dinner tonight?' or a dinner out for just the two of you this week. Waldinger notes that angry couples are often longing to be closer underneath.

• The quickest way to make friends is to repeat a shared activity

Research shows the fastest route is doing something you love, like gardening, pickleball, bird watching or climate activism, alongside the same people again and again. Treat talking to strangers like batting: one hit in three is great, and most people will respond kindly.

• Culture sells you badges, not happiness

Car ads, pasta ads and face creams promise happiness. People tell Waldinger they feel terrible for not being billionaires, then can't say what the billion is for. He compares it to a watch counting 10,000 steps when what matters is how your body feels. As a Zen roshi, he still wakes up some mornings confused or sad. 'There is nothing to attain.' He quotes Jon Kabat-Zinn: you can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf.

• Money matters up to basic needs, then it's a tool

Food, shelter, medicine and schooling are vital; research estimates of around $75,000 a year in the U.S. are somewhat arbitrary. Making $75 million wouldn't make you much happier than covering the basics. Mel recalls debt and liens on her house. Research also finds that spending on experiences, like a national park or a basketball game, makes people happier for longer than buying things.

• Make connection automatic with a standing date

Waldinger and co-author Marc Schulz, who lives in Philadelphia, have talked every Friday at noon for over 30 years, about research but also kids and marriages. Because it happens by default, someone has to actively cancel. He calls these small daily actions 'social fitness.'

EXAMPLES

• Final regrets and proudest moments

Participants' top regret was too much time at work and too little with people they cared about. The second, voiced more by women, was worrying too much about what others thought. What they were proudest of was being a good mentor, partner, parent or boss, even among those who had won major prizes.

• The 'who would you call at 4 a.m.' question

Asked who they could call in the middle of the night if sick or scared, some participants named no one. Some of them were married and didn't list their spouse. Waldinger says everyone needs at least one secure attachment, like a toddler running back to a parent's leg to 'refuel' before exploring again.

• The Chicago commuter experiment and the hotel elevator

Commuters assigned to talk to a stranger expected to dislike it but ended up much happier than those on their phones. Mel describes cracking open a silent elevator of seven electrical contractors, chatting all the way down 17 floors and recommending the almond croissant.

• Mel's own mini Harvard study

Mel looks at a photo from age 27, hours after getting engaged to Chris, when life felt life-or-death and she was a cash-strapped public defender. Back then she was obsessed with 'the curtains,' how things looked; now she's focused on 'the view.' Waldinger says awareness that life is limited tends to make people happier, not sadder.

• Video games aren't always isolating

Mel and her husband argued about their son's gaming until she found him on a headset with seven friends. Waldinger agrees it can be like basketball with friends, while noting games can become addictive.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Ask: what's here that I've never noticed?

A meditation teacher's question works on friendships too. Point out how someone has changed, as Mel's brother-in-law did with her: 'You're really different than you used to be.'

• Kids need one stable adult crazy about them

Waldinger summarizes child-development research this way. In divorce, fight as little as possible and tell the kids you both still love them. His family's dinner 'interrupting game' made interrupters put an M&M in the middle.

• Introverts need only one or two close people

Lots of relationships can stress an introvert, he says; invest in the few who help you feel good. You don't need a romantic partner either, though living with someone helps with medications and getting off the couch.

13 Things I Wish I Knew in My 20s

Date: 2024-03-11 · Duration: 1:03:19
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ntYJV50biM

KEYPOINTS

• Your 20s may be the hardest decade, not the best

Mel calls the 'world is your oyster' pep talk nonsense; her own 20s were the most confusing, overwhelming years of her life. She cried more then than in any other decade, even after being diagnosed with anxiety and put on Zoloft. You have your act together more than you realize, so give yourself credit.

• 'The great scattering' explains why you feel lost

From birth to about 20, you and your friends follow the same playbook: same grades, milestones, routines, even spring break, with an older class showing you what's next. In your 20s that template disintegrates and everyone scatters to different cities, jobs and timelines. Losing your frame of reference for progress is why the decade feels out of control, regardless of how polished other people's Instagram stories look.

• Stop spending money on stupid stuff

Her only money advice. Your phone is 'the new mall' with three-second ad-to-purchase loops, and most impulse buys are attempts to soothe boredom, sadness or stress with a dopamine hit. She is blunt about influencers: the one selling a $300 red light mask likely got it free, earns a commission, and gets Botox. Spend instead on experiences, skills, your wellbeing or therapy, things you'll actually remember.

• You have more time than social media suggests

Mel says today's pressure is worse than in her day for two reasons: social media makes success look overnight, and people compare themselves to their parents' timelines. She married at 27 and had Sawyer by 30, but her daughters' path is different. She worries couples rush engagements into reality-show moments without asking whether the relationship fits them now. Her line: 'be where your feet are, not where your phone is.'

• Date the person, not their potential

If you're constantly griping in your head about what you wish your partner would change, you're dating a projection. You can make clear, compassionate requests, then let their behavior show you who they are. Ask: if this person never changes, is this the relationship I want? Mel regrets spending her entire 20s in relationships out of insecurity and missing time with female friends.

• Life isn't fair, so never play the victim

A friend's dad gets her a job, a college acquaintance summers in Europe, your sister gets the attention at the bar. Mel agrees it's unfair, but says resentment and 'why not me' only stop you living your own life. A single day or moment can change your entire course, so trust where things are heading.

• Measure career wins by your circle, not your paycheck

Money comes from people: job offers, loans, promotions and introductions all come from another human. Titles and raises don't matter much long term, but connections do. Mel challenges listeners to talk to one new person every day and go beyond hello. Your network is simply the conversations you're willing to have.

• You don't get to want it if you won't ask for it

Roommates, partners and friends can't read your mind, and passive-aggressive texts or drunk conversations don't count. Whether it's dirty dishes, a partner's nicotine habit or friends blasting music after the bars, ask directly like an adult. Mel says you'll feel more in control whether or not you get what you want, because silent brooding tears you apart.

• Be your own person, and try doing things alone

Stop pretending to like things you don't, including drinking. You can order club soda in a wine glass at a bar. After following the pack for 20 years you may not know who you are, and the fastest way to find out is solo: dinner with a Kindle, a movie, an improv or painting class, yoga teacher training. Your relationship with yourself is the foundation for every other one.

• You're not in competition with anyone

Mel didn't learn this until her late 40s. Success, love and friendship are in limitless supply; your only competition is the part of you that talks to you badly. When a friend gets engaged or promoted, 'grab your pom poms' and celebrate even if you're jealous. She believes cheering shows you know your win is coming too.

• Take the biggest risks of your life now, but shrink them if needed

Change is the only constant, so decide your big moves before friends' choices force your hand. Look at who you're jealous of for clues to what you want. If the full dream is too much, do a mini version: five nights alone on part of the Appalachian Trail instead of a girls' trip, PTO volunteering on a farm, a free Canva account to start designing journals.

EXAMPLES

• Mel's daughters and a listener named Eliza

Daughter Kendall, 23, in Los Angeles, FaceTimes daily, swinging from 'met the love of my life' to negative $25 in her account. Daughter Sawyer, 25, lives at home to save before moving to New York and was overheard calling herself 'a depressed gerbil.' Listener Eliza described a year-long 'downward spiral tornado' after college: a breakup, bad friendships, a job she quit, money trouble and family fights. Every 20-something on Mel's team nodded along.

• $25,000 of hidden credit card debt

Overwhelmed and underpaid, Mel soothed herself with spending across five credit cards. At 28, after marrying Chris, she had to disclose $25,000 in credit card debt she hadn't told him about. She says she can't remember a single thing she bought.

• The fly-fishing lie

At 26, on her first date with Chris, he mentioned fly fishing and she claimed she'd grown up fly fishing with her dad. Three months later they visited his best friend, Jeff Clausman, who turned out to be a fly-fishing instructor. Mel says she morphed into every boyfriend's interests, from rap to the Grateful Dead.

• Smoking and Dunkin' on the courthouse steps

As a young lawyer she'd walk into court on her third Marlboro Light, chugging a large Dunkin' coffee, stomach in knots, thinking she had anxiety. Her verdict now: 'You have a crappy morning routine.'

• Sawyer's five-day notes trick

Instead of clicking buy, Sawyer writes the item in her phone's notes app and waits five days. If she still remembers and wants it, she decides then. She finds that simply writing it down satisfies the urge in the moment.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Five-step morning routine you can do hungover

Get up on the alarm with 5-4-3-2-1 instead of replaying last night; get light in your eyes within minutes; walk 10 minutes without music or podcasts; drink water before coffee, since coffee on an empty stomach spikes cortisol; and journal, even just one thing you want to happen. Doing it on 80% of mornings is enough to feel back in control.

• Audit your five closest people, including coworkers

Ask whether they're healthy and driven, how they treat you, and whether you can be yourself with them. Friend breakups are normal in the scattering. Since you'll spend 40+ hours a week with coworkers, choose jobs where people respect your time off and challenge you to grow.

• Easy openers for meeting strangers

Compliment someone's nails or shoes, ask the person behind you in line what's good to order, or ask a train neighbor whether they'd recommend their book. Also be kind, and apologize for past behavior; in Mel's experience about 95% of people forgive.

• For parents of 20-somethings

Validate rather than fix or lecture. Acknowledge how overwhelming this stage is and remind them they're doing better than they think. When panic hits about falling behind, Mel's phrase is 'I trust the timing of my life.'

The #1 Journal Exercise to Become the Person You've Always Wanted to Be

Date: 2024-03-04 · Duration: 0:34:40
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RmsXYFjDqw0

KEYPOINTS

• Your past happier self holds the map

Mel's core idea is that 'you do know how to be happy; that's why you miss feeling it. You can only miss something you know.' The episode is built around a journaling exercise she had kept to herself for years. She uses it to look back at a time she felt happier and bring practical clues from it into her life now.

• The portal metaphor comes from fantasy novels

Mel was hooked on A Court of Thorns and Roses by Sarah J. Maas, and it turned out most of her team at 143 Studios was reading it too. She notes that in stories like Harry Potter, characters cross into another world and always bring something back. She stresses that the exercise isn't meditation, a mantra or 'woo-woo.' It uses your own life experience.

• You don't need to escape your life to be happier

The mistake, Mel says, is thinking happiness requires a permanent escape: a vacation, blowing up your relationships, moving, or quitting your job. Instead, you learn to visit that happier world in your mind while still living day to day in this one.

• Look for just one clue

Mel calls this the most important tip, and says it's grounded in research, though she doesn't name a study. Don't try to rebuild your whole old life. Find one thing from that happier world to bring back now. It doesn't have to be the full version either: for someone who loved daily dance practice, one class a month can be enough.

• The clues are in small, ordinary details

When you picture your happier self, look at the routine. When did you get up? What did your mornings look like? Who were you with? Where did you live? When did you go to bed? What was your favorite part of the day? Mel says it's never the big things. It's what you take for granted: when you wake up, what you look at first, moving your body, a warm coffee, hugging your pets, time outside. 'The little things are everything.'

• If you can't find a happy memory, there are still clues

One team member said she hated the exercise. Her childhood was full of trauma, her happiness depended on another person's moods, and when she looks back she sees survival, not joy. Mel's answer is that these clues show what not to do. If you were conditioned to people-please and track others' moods, you know that doesn't make you happy. Taking that pattern seriously and healing it may be the most powerful clue of all.

• Comparing the two columns makes the gap obvious

Putting 'then' next to 'now' on one page usually reveals the differences right away. Mel says that's why the exercise works so quickly: the happier version of you is right there to see, and the specific missing habits stand out.

• Hearing other people's happy worlds jogs your own memories

Mel shares her team's reflections before guiding listeners through the exercise because, she says, hearing someone else describe their happier world tends to bring up your own memories. She thinks she has missed clues in her own life too, and that hearing yours might show her more.

EXAMPLES

• Sawyer in the kitchen, summer 2020

Sawyer graduated from college during COVID. She had worked for four years to save for a service trip to Cambodia, and it was canceled. She was stuck living at home, drinking every night, gaining weight and sedentary. Swollen-eyed, she told her parents 'I'm so stuck, I'm lost.' Mel answered, 'I think you do know what to do. You're just scared,' and had her draw a line down a page and write 'Happy me' on the left.

• Sawyer's two columns

Her happiest time was senior year of high school. She was up at 6:30 and out by 7, with friends all day, playing varsity lacrosse, exercising six days a week, drinking only on weekends, in a good relationship, and home for dinner about four nights a week. Now she slept until noon, drank nightly, didn't see friends, didn't exercise, ate badly and spent most of the day in bed on social media, with her job six months away. She saw the connection immediately.

• Jenaia's freedom and dance

A video editor on Mel's team said she felt happiest as a kid. School ended at 2, then she went to dance practice every day, which was her creative expression, then home for family dinner. Her clue was dance, or creative expression in some form.

• Maddie realizes she already has it

During her documentary MFA, Maddie exercised at 6:30, went to class, journaled daily at The Thinking Cup on Newbury Street where everyone knew her, and helped classmates shoot films. Doing the exercise, she realized her current life already has the same clues: a 6 a.m. workout, audiobooks on her commute, 45 minutes journaling at a café where she's a regular, creative work, and someone she cares about at home.

• Mel at 24, walking Manhattan

Around 1994, Mel was a Legal Aid public defender earning $19,000 a year and living with girlfriends on West 68th Street. She walked to 100 Canal Street, about 78 blocks, and spent the day on her feet in court or at Rikers Island. Her favorite part was the walk home with her supervisor and best friend Matt Myers, then Chris, whom she was starting to date, from the 30s uptown. Her clues were outdoor walks, walking and talking with people she loves, living near friends, and dynamic work that helps people. She notes that it sounds a lot like her life now.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Do the exercise now, on paper or in your head

Draw a line down a page and write 'Happy me' on the left. Close your eyes, travel back, and describe a typical week in detail.

Write your current week on the right and compare. If you're driving, picture the page.

- **Bring back something small this week**

Mel's suggestions include pulling an old puzzle out of the cupboard, gardening, painting, spending more time outdoors, or even getting the dog you loved as a kid. She calls it an 'invisible string' between that world and this one. Her own example: helping her parents restore the gardens of their fixer-upper in western Michigan explains why flowers make her so happy 50 years later.

- **Use it when you feel lost**

Mel says she's used this exercise over and over when she's felt lost, and it worked for her daughter when nothing else did. Look for the one clue, then act on it today.

3 Simple Ways to Get the Love You Want

Date: 2024-02-12 · Duration: 0:53:44
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IE2w7DegTSg

KEYPOINTS

• Mel's most controversial line is 'I love you'

She ends every episode, newsletter and YouTube video with 'in case no one else tells you, I love you and I believe in you and your ability to create a better life.' Listeners write that they stay to the end just to hear it, and one woman said Mel is the only person in her adult life who has said it to her. Others loathe it. This solo episode explains why she says it and why she means it.

• The line comes from a principal's daily sign-off

In 2013, at one of Mel's first unpaid speaking events, she heard Linda Cliatt-Wayman address about 12,000 women at the Pennsylvania Convention Center. A former special education teacher, Wayman volunteered to lead Strawberry Mansion, a Philadelphia school considered among the most dangerous and failing in the state, after four principals in four years. She ended each day over the PA system: 'If nobody told you they loved you today, you remember I do, and I always will,' adding that she expected them back, in uniform, ready to learn.

• Love, in this sense, is believing in someone's potential

Wayman said her real secret was loving her students and believing in their possibilities unconditionally: 'When I look at them, I can only see what they can become.' Mel says that struck her 'like lightning' and became her definition: seeing somebody's struggles and still seeing the greatness in them.

• Mel defines love as showing people they matter

The dictionary calls love a feeling of affection; Mel calls it demonstrating that someone matters to you, echoing the Dalai Lama's definition as a wish that others be happy. Under that definition, it has nothing to do with sex or chemistry and can extend well beyond family, partners and pets.

• You can love people you don't like

Mel says she sometimes thinks families exist to teach us how to love people we don't like at the moment. You can show someone matters, by calling or hugging them, even when they're frustrating you.

• One committed adult changes outcomes

Mel cites Harvard's National Scientific Council on the Developing Child: every child who does well has had at least one stable, committed relationship with a supportive adult. She extends it to work, saying research shows the single biggest predictor of someone failing at or leaving a job is believing no one in power there believes in them.

• Hostility to being loved often traces to conditional love

Mel reads a newsletter reply from Trish, who said Mel doesn't know her and to stop 'spouting this crap,' then unsubscribed. Mel's response: love isn't transactional, so she still loves her. Her theory is that people who grew up getting attention only when a caregiver was in a good mood or they earned good grades learn that mattering must be earned and comes in limited supply.

• You don't need to know someone to believe in them

To a listener named John who said Mel doesn't even know he exists, Mel replies that everyone wants the same three things: to be seen, to be heard and to matter. Believing there's more to a person than their job, relationship status, bank account or weight doesn't require meeting them.

• To feel more love, give more of it

Mel's formula for anything you want more of is to be generous with it. She invokes the law of reciprocity: when someone holds the first set of double doors for you, you trip over yourself to hold the second. Being the first domino with 'I love that you did that' sets it in motion.

• Don't assume people know how you feel

Mel calls holding back appreciation 'stingy.' Her friend in his late 50s told his father he loved him for decades and first heard it back two weeks earlier, from a hospital bed. Now his dad says it constantly. If your family never says it, she suggests you may be the one meant to break the cycle.

EXAMPLES

• Strawberry Mansion's turnaround numbers

Wayman has turned around three low-performing schools. At one, Mel says, only 3% of students were proficient in math and 9% in reading before she arrived; by the time she was done, 94% of seniors were accepted to college.

• UPS Mike and the birch tree

In snowy Vermont, Mel's UPS driver Mike texts when he can't make it up the driveway, wraps the package in a garbage bag, leaves it behind a birch tree and offers to come back for it. Mel texts back 'I love you, Mike.' She also loves Paul, the always-smiling maintenance man at her Boston studio building.

• The coffee refill conversation

Eating alone at a hotel, Mel asked the server questions and learned he grew up in southern Illinois, dislikes Los Angeles, misses the four seasons, wants to study intellectual property law and just paid $1,800 for an LSAT prep class. She says both walked away feeling they mattered.

• Small acts Mel counts as love

The FedEx driver leaves two dog bones on the packages even when the dogs aren't there; a bus driver wears funny hats; a grocery worker stacks zucchini like art. Mel's point: tell them you love it.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Way one: do something on purpose to make someone feel they matter

Think of someone you haven't talked to, like an old neighbor, ex-sister-in-law or your dog's puppy class teacher, find a photo on your phone and text it with 'I love this because it reminds me of your laugh.' Mel cites Dr. Robert Waldinger of the Harvard

Study of Adult Development: people struggle in relationships because they worry about doing it right, but there's no wrong way to reach out.

- **Talk to strangers**

  Mel cites University of Chicago research finding people underpredict how happy a chat with a stranger on a bus or in a grocery line will make them and overestimate how awkward it will be.

- **Way two: listen**

  Asked how to improve any relationship, Dr. John Gottman said be a good listener. Mel says the Harvard study points to attention as the most basic form of love: put the phone away, look at the person and listen. Not getting a parent's attention is why many people didn't feel loved.

- **Way three: say it**

  Tell people directly, or send them this episode as a stand-in. Mel's request is that you be the one to say it first, at the grocery store, on the bus or to your sister, instead of waiting to hear it.

This One Study Will Change How You Think About Your Entire Life

Date: 2024-02-05 · Duration: 0:47:56
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ih3nIPvCjVI

KEYPOINTS

• The people you remember are the ones who made you feel something

Mel opens with a quiz. Can you name the last five Grammy artists of the year, or the last five Olympic women's gymnastics champions? Most people can't. But you can name your five favorite coworkers, the five people you laugh hardest with, and the friends you miss. Her point: we remember people for how they made us feel, and that's where time matters.

• The data: who Americans spend time with across a lifetime

Mel walks through charts based on about ten years of American Time Use Survey data on how social time changes with age. Her caveat: it's U.S. data and shows averages. Her intention is to 'wake you up' to how time passes, so you choose more deliberately who and what gets it. Averages describe people who drift, she says, and you don't have to be average.

• 1. Time with parents and siblings drops sharply after 18

From birth to 18 is when you spend the most time with family. After 18 it falls steeply until about 26, then flattens for life, typically at under an hour a day unless you live multigenerationally or work in a family business. Family often gets defaulted to holidays: Mel and Chris lived a mile from his brother outside Boston and rarely saw him, and her 86-year-old mother-in-law lives three miles away, yet she sees her about every two weeks.

• Do the math on the time you have left

Mel's father, Bob, turns 80 this year, and she sees him and her mom in Michigan three or four times a year. If he lives ten more years, that's about 30 weekends. Her takeaways: decide what kind of daughter, son, brother or sister you want to be. Always have the next visit booked. Check in regularly. She calls her parents three times a week and finds they soften and feel less forgotten.

• 2. From 20 to 60 you spend the most time with coworkers

For about 40 years, coworkers are the people you see most, so choose work by the people, not just the pay. Mel cites the 'bad apple' effect, where one festering person can bring down a team, and Gallup data that a top reason people quit is their boss. Her advice: don't stay in a job you hate with people you hate. If you can't leave yet, build relationships in other departments while you look, and be the 'ripe apple' yourself.

• 3. Friendship time declines from 21 and drops off at 29

You see friends daily through school. Then moves, jobs, graduate school and new relationships pull people apart, and after about 29 time with friends falls to a low plateau. Friends become the group you see least. Mel says her daughters, 25 and 23, describe friends 'evaporating.' She links this pattern to the loneliness epidemic: people assume they're the problem when it's the drift of time.

• The 'two Ps' of adult friendship

Patterns: overlapping routines like work, a kids' sports team, a pickleball class or the same coffee shop create friendships naturally. Prioritize: nothing happens unless you make the plan, whether a dinner, a museum painting class, or one trip a year with long-distance friends. When she feels lonely, Mel either changes her patterns to bump into people or prioritizes reaching out.

• 4. Your partner is the person you'll spend the most time with

From around 29, time with a partner rises every year until death. After 60 it's who you'll spend most of your days with. Don't settle because friends are marrying or you feel late. Look past the nice car, fake tan, popular friends and dating profile, and ask whether you'd want to be alone with this person every day at 60. Focus on how they make you feel. Her best relationship advice: choose life with yourself first, so you're proud of who you are and drawn to character.

• 5. Time alone rises from 40, and after 70 it's most of the day

Mel normalizes this. Being alone isn't the same as being lonely: when you're present making tea, reading or walking, you're with yourself. She enjoys solitary drives, lunches and dog walks. The takeaway is to learn to enjoy your own company: take yourself to yoga, out to lunch or for a manicure, and be kind to yourself.

• 6. Time with your kids peaks in your 30s and 40s and flattens around 52

Time with kids drops sharply as they reach high school, and after they turn 18 it settles at a level similar to the time adults spend with their own parents. Mel, 55, admits she beat herself up for years of work travel and missed milestones. But she refuses to become the statistic. The glue, she says, echoing many of her expert guests, is that kids feel seen, safe and supported. Grown kids need you differently: as someone they trust to call, laugh with and think out loud with.

EXAMPLES

• Two milestone trips

Over the holidays Mel's family went on two grandparent trips. For her mother-in-law Judy's 85th, three sons, nine cousins and partners shared two sailboats, and it was the first time all 18 had gathered in ten years. Right after, they celebrated her mom's 75th with her whole family. Getting everyone together after 18 is so hard that those moments feel especially happy.

• Her brother on a different calendar

Her brother Derek lives in Chicago with twin high-school freshmen in competitive sports, and their school breaks never line up with her family's. Without a plan, they simply don't see each other.

• Mel's half-joking plan

She plans to bring her kids into her business so they become coworkers, the group you see most between 20 and 60, to show the data can work for you.

• Leaving early for a ski race

Mel ends the episode to make her son Oakley's ski race. He's 18 and leaving for college in the fall. 'Nobody stands up at a funeral and says, boy, I wish they would have worked more hours.'

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Book the next visit**
  Estimate how many visits you have left with a parent or sibling, then put the next date on the calendar before this one ends.
- **Apologize, even for old things**
  Mel says it's never too late to apologize to kids, parents or siblings, and that doing so strengthens rather than weakens the relationship.
- **Send it as an invitation**
  Mel suggests forwarding the episode to a sibling, parent, old coworker or lost-touch friend as a way to say 'I miss you, let's get together.'

Want to Be Happier Right Now? Don’t Make This Mistake (New Surprising Science)

Guest: Dr. Judith Joseph
Date: 2024-02-01 · Duration: 1:08:53
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mdb3anMJRX8

KEYPOINTS

• Stop chasing 'happy' as a state; aim to be happier through points of joy

Psychiatrist Dr. Judith Joseph says the picture-perfect idea of happiness is unattainable, which is why so many people feel they can never reach it. In her framing, happiness is not a destination but the accumulation of small moments of joy across a day. Shifting from 'I need to be happy today' to 'there are points of joy available today' makes the goal reachable, and the moments add up to feeling happier overall.

• Anhedonia is the clinical name for feeling 'meh', 'blah' or numb

Joseph uses the old medical term anhedonia (an = lack of, hedon = pleasure) for the flat, autopilot state many high-functioning people describe as 'I'm okay' when they actually feel nothing. She says most people experience it at some point, but not usually in long stretches. French psychologist Théodule Ribot first described it in the 1800s, linking it with depression, substance use and schizophrenia; Joseph argues it is now showing up far more broadly.

• Naming a feeling lowers stress (affect labeling)

Preschools hang face charts labeling happy, sad, angry and hurt because children need to name feelings to act on them. Joseph says adults stop being trained to do this. If you cannot identify how you feel, you cannot trace it back to the thought or experience that caused it. Knowing what something is makes it less frightening.

• A biopsychosocial lens explains the rise in numbness

Bio: possible effects of the virus on the brain (she cites a figure that about 70% of people were infected), genetics, and diet-driven inflammation from nutritional psychiatry research. Psycho: unprocessed trauma, worsened by 'just world' thinking that blames victims. Social: mixed messages about whether people were safe, isolation, and connection moving online, with CDC reports showing children's mental health declining.

• We 'do, do, do' instead of 'feel, feel, feel', and excess soothing replaces processing

Joseph describes society soothing itself with excess: rising binge drinking in previously protected groups, unhealthy online sexual habits, record online shopping and constant social media. They distract but never satisfy, because the trauma never gets processed. Her image is her daughter hit by wave after wave at the beach without catching her breath: the pandemic, police brutality, political unrest, wars.

• Doctors often miss it because high-functioning people aren't 'impaired'

Clinicians typically code a problem only when it causes impairment. If you are working, caring for your family and nobody is complaining, a vague 'nothing gives me pleasure' tends to get a 'see you next year.' Joseph's focus is on exactly these people who are getting it done and look successful from the outside but carry a low ache inside.

• Memory gaps and constant work can be trauma responses

Many patients, and even Joseph's own lab team, describe 2020 as a blur. She says forgetting large stretches is a recognized trauma response, so you shouldn't blame yourself for it. Numbing is also part of fight, flight or freeze. Many entrepreneurs remain in fight-or-flight, and work that came home 'temporarily' never left.

• Anhedonia, and joy, are contagious

Anxious leadership passes fear down an organization, rewarding people for working more and feeling less. The reverse is also true: when she became more joyful, her lab and her daughter did too.

• Shift the behavior first and the feelings follow

She draws on cognitive behavioral therapy's thought-feeling-behavior triangle. Therapy classically works on thoughts first, but changing a behavior even when you don't feel like it pushes the whole system the other way. She says the effect starts with the first point of joy you savor, and the benefit comes from adding those points up consistently. Not feeling at all is a form of self-gaslighting; validating how you actually feel is where repair begins, even if sadness or tears come first.

• Self-care is basic needs, not elaborate treats (HALTS)

Joseph extends the familiar HALT check (hungry, angry, lonely, tired) with an S for stuck, her everyday word for anhedonia. A rushed manicure, she notes, can be stressful rather than restorative. For the body, she suggests mood-supportive foods such as green vegetables, omega-3-rich fish, antioxidant berries and dark chocolate, while acknowledging you can't control genetics or some disease states.

EXAMPLES

• Mel takes the anhedonia quiz live and scores 'very high'

Joseph runs Mel through her agree/disagree scale, which she modernized from the British SHAPS (Snaith-Hamilton) scale because 'did you enjoy your cup of tea this morning' doesn't fit everyone. Mel agrees she makes 'when I get X I'll be happy' statements, feels restless resting, eats standing up, scrolls while watching TV, struggles with praise and vacations, and can't enjoy her own work because it never feels good enough.

• Mel's candid admissions about burnout

She says her sex life with Chris has taken a hit since the pandemic, socializing now drains her, and a recent family vacation left her more tired. She traces it partly to her talk show being canceled when COVID hit CBS Broadcast Center, with a payroll still to make.

• The one-minute glass-of-water exercise

Joseph demonstrates how she starts her mornings. She notices the clear water and her pink nail polish, feels the cool, hard glass, listens to her nails tap it, notes the fresh rather than mineral taste, and follows it down her throat. Doing one minute for each step of the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding method (five things you see, four you feel, three you hear, two you smell, one you taste)

adds up to 15 minutes. Start smaller if that's too much.

- **'Simmering' as a low-pressure point of joy in intimacy**

  A term from couples counseling: instead of full-on sex, a small gesture such as gently rubbing the small of a partner's back creates a little spark of excitement. She suggests the same idea with pets: touch them more.

- **Joseph's own path and burnout**

  She switched from anesthesiology to psychiatry, which she had resisted as the child of Caribbean-American parents expected to be 'a real doctor.' She later built a lab and became a single mother, and had anhedonia herself. Her lessons: never say never, no is not negative, new can be good, normal is not real.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Pick one quiz item and enjoy it on purpose today**

  Tomorrow is not promised, so ask what you want now rather than down the road. Choose a single simple pleasure, such as reading, a bath, music or savoring coffee, and fully experience it. Joseph suggests treating it as an experiment: compare one savored minute of lunch, noticing the mushrooms, corn and chipotle sauce, with five minutes of shoveling food in before a meeting.

- **Five device-free minutes with your child**

  For a single parent with no spare time, Joseph says the data show that even five consistent minutes a day of one-on-one play where the child leads and you simply listen can sometimes be enough to repair a relationship.

- **Validate what happened to you**

  Say plainly, 'I went through this; something happened to me; it wasn't my fault.' Joseph says this kind of validation is the psychological step everyone can take. People with anxiety, ADHD or other conditions should also get support for those.

- **Push back on martyr culture in small ways**

  Joseph sees anhedonia bred in pre-med tracks, performance careers such as acting, and teaching, where self-sacrifice gets rewarded. Her suggestion to a teacher: take a real lunch break instead of grading through it, just once a week. The world will not fall apart.

The Secret to Success & Happiness Nobody Talks About

Date: 2024-01-15 · Duration: 0:51:21
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYcQIUw5f2E

KEYPOINTS

• The biggest barrier to Mel's happiness was Mel

After three years of therapy, research and honest self-observation, Mel concluded that she had been actively blocking her own happiness. People saw her as positive, but her baseline was feeling agitated, frustrated or disappointed. She frames this episode as a deeper look at what changed for her, not a list of quick happiness hacks, though she says hacks do help.

• Happiness here means being content, present and okay with yourself

Mel isn't talking about a burst of positivity. She means a steady, supportive, optimistic baseline you can reach no matter what's happening around you. Her mistake was looking outside herself, thinking she'd be happy once the bills were paid, once she was in love, once she got into the school. She was miserable at Dartmouth, in law school, and even in a public defender job she liked.

• Money helps only up to a point

Mel has lived through not being able to pay her bills, and she says that pressure is crushing, so reaching the point where you can make ends meet does raise happiness. Past that, more money doesn't fix the real problem, which is not knowing how to be happy. Fixing outside problems like debt, marriage issues or the kids' struggles just exposes what's still unresolved inside.

• Be the eye of the hurricane, not the hurricane

The image comes from Hoda Kotb on the Today Show, who described how still and quiet it is inside the eye of a storm. Mel realized that she had been the hurricane: smiling outside, spinning inside, with moods set by whatever happened around her. Happiness, as she defines it, is being able to reach that stillness whatever is swirling around you.

• 'Happiness is an inside job' means you have to let it in

The phrase used to irritate Mel because she didn't understand it. Now she reads it as: there are plenty of reasons to be happy, and the work is letting them reach you. She calls the habit of fighting this a 'campaign of misery.' She also notes that some people block happiness because they're afraid, for example after a death or tragedy, of feeling good and losing it again.

• Bank-vault door versus swinging kitchen doors

Mel says she used to live behind a thick steel vault door no one could open. She wants to be like the swinging doors between the dining room and kitchen at the Red Rooster Tavern, where she once worked, letting good things flow both ways. Giving happiness out was easy for her. Letting it in was nearly impossible, which she connects to how warm or closed-off the adults were when you were growing up.

• Block one: living in your head instead of your life

You can't take in happiness if you're not mentally present. Mel shows she still struggles with this, using an example from just days before recording.

• Block two: carrying a sword

This means moving through life braced for a fight: hypervigilant, convinced someone is mad at you, annoyed by the slow airport line or the bill in the mailbox. Mel describes herself as having 'a smile on my face and a fight in my belly.' Her advice is to drop the sword. If a real fight comes you'll be ready, and what you actually need to learn is how to be at peace.

• Block three: fixating on what's wrong

The negativity bias magnifies problems. A campaign of misery takes it further: obsessing over the one person who didn't text back or the people who didn't invite you, while ignoring everyone who shows up and speaks well of you.

EXAMPLES

• Pete Shen's slap-in-the-face observation

About three years ago, while Mel was complaining, her friend Pete Shen told her: 'The more successful you've become, the more miserable you are.' He could see the storm under her smile. Mel says he was right, and that moment started her happiness project.

• Mom's 75th birthday trip

On the last full day of a four-day family trip, the last time all five Robbinses would be together until Oakley's graduation in June, Mel spiraled. She worried that Kendall lives in Los Angeles, might marry there and raise kids there. She woke up every hour until her 5:45 a.m. alarm, and says she wasted the last 24 hours together.

• 'Why are you always so mad at Sony?'

While Mel was hosting a daytime talk show at CBS Broadcast Center, her executive producer asked why she always needed an enemy, in this case the production company. Mel recognized a lifelong belief that someone was out to get her.

• The mom who hit her goal 50% of the time

A Today Show viewer with a toddler asked how to do better than 50% on her goal of 15 minutes a day for herself. Mel's answer: finding that time half the time with a toddler is amazing, and counting only the misses is how you shut out the good.

• Oakley's friend and 'I love you'

One of Oakley's friends wrote a college essay about how Oakley always tells his friends he loves them. Now the whole group does it, and the friend has started saying it at home, where his family is saying it back.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Picture the swinging doors every day

Notice whether you're letting good things in. When something good happens, acknowledge it. When someone compliments you, look them in the eye and say thank you.

• Accept help and say 'I love you'

Mel is practicing letting the hotel staff take her bag instead of insisting she dragged it from Boston herself. She's often saddened by how many people say their parents never told them they loved them, and points out it's just three words.

• Pete's friction list

Write down everything in a typical week that gives you friction: bills, commute, health, loneliness, walking the dogs you never wanted. Three years ago, almost everything on Mel's list came back to constant work travel. Today it would be her menopause complaints. Getting the list on paper gets it out of your head and makes it something you can work on.

• Stop complaining and choose to change one thing

Mel's hard truth for herself was: 'You are more committed to your excuses than to fixing it.' Complaining is easier than changing. Anything on your list, whether a job, a business model, drinking, petty friends or your weight, can be a decision to change over the next year.

4 Important Life Lessons I Learned the Hard Way (So That You Don’t Have To)

Date: 2023-12-28 · Duration: 0:42:27
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7u7qdU3sv4w

KEYPOINTS

• A bonus lesson: meaningful change only comes when you slow down

Mel admits she is not someone who sits with a cup of tea, yet she found that the changes you choose for yourself, the ones that take insight and some courage, surface in still moments: a long walk, a hike, a solo road trip, a hot shower. Letting your mind wander is when ideas bubble up from the subconscious. Her way is coffee, a deep breath and a journal.

• An annual audit of the past year comes before any plan

For more than a decade Mel has reviewed her last 12 months before planning work, marriage or life. A year earlier she did it privately with Chris and the kids and saw that 2022 nearly broke her, so she committed to making 2023 about healing and happiness. The four lessons here are what that year taught her.

• Lesson 1: 'Drop the sword' and stop fighting your own happiness

Deciding to be happy didn't make life cooperate; it handed her situations to practice on. Working with her therapist, she realized she brought a sword to every situation, braced for what might go wrong. Picturing gripping a sword makes your body tense; picturing dropping it softens your energy. You can always pick it back up if you truly need to fight.

• Bracing blocks happiness in small, everyday moments

Mel's examples: tensing when your mother or boss calls, bracing as you walk into work, fuming in a coffee line because the person ahead is ordering six drinks, or getting tense because someone hasn't texted back. Stop hunting for what's wrong, assuming things won't work out, and complaining, and you make room for good things.

• Lesson 2: Forget balance and focus on boundaries

Balance assumes every part of life carries equal weight, which puts work, kids and self-care in competition and breeds resentment: you resent a demanding job you love, or your kids when you come home exhausted. Boundaries are active choices based on your top priority and needs in the moment. Balance is something you wish for; boundaries are something you create.

• Your boundaries are for you, and they only work if you say them out loud

Boundaries mark where you say yes and no and reveal what matters to you. People aren't mind readers, so a boundary only works if you communicate it. Paradoxically, Mel says, good boundaries make life feel more balanced, because everything fits where it should.

• Lesson 3: Frustration is a sign you're growing

Frustration doesn't mean things are terrible or that you're broken; it means you've outgrown a situation, system or habit. Mel was frustrated that her 40s habits stopped working in her 50s and in menopause, and concluded she needed to upgrade them. Stop aiming frustration at yourself and treat it as a signal that something has to change.

• Lesson 4: Real change takes a full year

Mel borrows this from her kids, who told a caller whose daughter was anxious and lonely after a sophomore-year move, 'you've got to give it a year.' She applies it to the podcast, the new studios, moving to Vermont and sorting out her gut and hormone health: a year of stopping, starting and experimenting with systems can change your whole life.

EXAMPLES

• The phone boundary at home

To be more present with family, Mel's rule was that her phone isn't on her body when she's with them: in her bag when out, plugged in in the bathroom or kitchen at home. She didn't spend more time with her family than the year before, but was present for it. She cites research on 'phubbing' (phone snubbing) covered by the New York Times: it makes people feel ostracized and less trusting, and spreads, since when Chris scrolls she's tempted to scroll too.

• The coffee boundary

Inspired by Dr. Amy Shah's three appearances on the show, including research on caffeine and adenosine and the gut's role in estrogen and hormone health, Mel went from four to five cups a day to one. She drinks 16 ounces of water on waking, waits at least 90 minutes for coffee, has it with breakfast rather than on an empty stomach, and reports feeling less bloated and more focused.

• The 90-hour weeks

The podcast became the fifth most-followed show of the year on Apple Podcasts, unexpected for a '55-year-old mother of three' who'd never launched one. In a year meant for healing she worked about 90 hours a week, always behind and reinventing the wheel. Slowing down showed her the small team had outgrown its launch systems, which led to new studios in Boston.

• The same fight with Kendall

Her 23-year-old daughter flew home from Los Angeles, and within an hour they were bickering in their familiar dynamic. Mel reads it as a process problem she can address from her side, by dropping the sword or using the Let Them Theory, rather than as proof something is wrong.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Try it for 24 hours: notice where you're holding a sword

In each situation, ask whether you're bracing for what happens next. When you catch it, consciously drop it and soften into the moment.

• Use the three Ps when you're frustrated: project, process, people

Turn the frustration into a project instead of something personal. Identify the broken process, which could be how you communicate, organize your work or run a meeting. Then look at the people, starting with yourself, and ask whether you've outgrown the people or just the dynamic.

• Treat stalled habits as outdated systems, not personal failure

Habits are repeated processes. If your health efforts aren't sticking, change how you shop for groceries, what's in the fridge or your morning routine, or put a new habit on a Post-it on your mirror. Build systems for where you're going, not where you are.

- **Check whether to change your people or your dynamic**

Frustration at work or at home can mean you need different support, or simply a different way of being around the same people. Slowing down lets you respond strategically rather than emotionally.

7 Longevity Secrets From My Rockstar 85 Year Old Mother-in-Law | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Guest: Judie Robbins
Date: 2023-08-28 · Duration: 0:43:40
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXazmvQl-58

KEYPOINTS

• Longevity here means a vibrant, connected life, not just more years

Mel interviews her mother-in-law, Judie Robbins, nearly 86 and widowed at 68 after 45 years of marriage. Judie ran her first marathon at 70 (with Mel), went skydiving for the first time at 81, held a 2.5-minute plank at 82, and lifts heavier weights than Mel in barre class. People routinely guess she's in her early 70s. Mel's question is how Judie built a life where, at 85, her best days still feel ahead of her.

• A morning routine she enjoys

Judie wakes early and turns on her home sauna. She has an Emergen-C drink and a latte back in bed, checks email on her phone and plays a practice hand of bridge (Mel admits that's the opposite of her own advice). She meditates in the sauna for 15–20 minutes, then drinks kombucha with apple cider vinegar and fresh orange juice, and walks five miles. She notes that walking 18 holes of golf counts for the day.

• Movement is a non-negotiable habit, and missing it makes her grouchy

Judie never had an exercise routine until she and her husband started running in their 30s. She switched from running to walking around 75. Her motivation is what Mel calls 'good guilt': if her phone shows less than 10,000 steps, she feels it. She chose a three-floor condo on purpose, with laundry on the bottom floor and the bedroom on top, and always takes the stairs. Her rule is no weeks off, because a week off becomes 10 days.

• Social connection may matter even more than exercise

Judie thinks being social is 'almost more important than exercise' because it makes you feel loved. She says sedentary friends her age seem depressed but won't admit it, and use excuses like rain to stay in. She keeps younger friends as well as old ones, hosts a weekly bridge game for 16 women from a list of about 40, and has a longtime group she calls the Vermont Chicks.

• If you feel unloved, create love by caring for someone

Asked what she'd tell someone with no one who loves them, Judie answered right away: take hospice training and care for someone. She has volunteered in hospice for more than 40 years and calls it the most rewarding thing she does. She also visits a friend with Parkinson's, and says even 15 minutes matters. 'You can't say you're too busy.'

• Don't wait for others to call

Judie admits she has wondered why her kids don't call more. She has decided that because she's healthy and busy, they wait for her to call, and she'd rather that than calls driven by worry. Mel points out how Judie gives people freedom to live their lives without keeping score, which saves her a lot of resentment.

• Talk to people, not about them

When a friend with early Alzheimer's began insisting she didn't have it, another friend asked Judie whether to tell a mutual friend. Judie said to call the woman's husband directly. Her rule: if you're worried about someone, call them. She plans to ask another friend directly whether she's worried about herself, because 'everybody's talking about her but nobody's talking to her.'

• Gratitude and the present moment keep her young at heart

Judie doesn't take any day for granted, because nobody is guaranteed tomorrow. She's grateful for her family, her health and her original knees and hips. She thinks stress comes from expecting what you don't have, and quotes her mother: 'You're going to wish your life away.' She adds that the process and anticipation are often the best part.

• Keep love and adventure in your life

Judie has 'always had a man in my life' since being widowed. About a year and a half after her husband's death came Bill. Then came Hans, with whom she had a 10-year relationship before he moved to a retirement community, and they're still close friends. Now she's with John, whom she asked out herself at a local event. At 85 the two went on a cattle drive at a Montana dude ranch, her first time on a horse in about 40 years.

EXAMPLES

• Teaching English in Cambodia at 69

After a bike trip through Vietnam and Cambodia, Judie contacted the NGO Cambodia Living Arts and got placed teaching English at an after-school program, with no teaching experience. Her students included monks and mothers. She went for years, spending nearly three months at a time teaching seven days a week. A granddaughter who joined her in eighth grade fell in love with the country too.

• Mel's advice that stuck

After her husband died, Judie rented an apartment alone in New York and found big-city solitude lonely. Before she headed to Florida, Mel told her to call friends and fill her calendar before she landed. Judie says having things to look forward to kept her from a 'blank slate' of self-pity.

• The Sa Ta Na Ma sauna mantra

Judie chants 'Sa Ta Na Ma' aloud, then in a whisper, then silently, touching each fingertip to her thumb. A local yoga teacher says she's taught it worldwide to people with Alzheimer's and dementia. Mel connects it to 'neurobics,' pairing focused thought with movement. Judie is candid about the results: 'I think I'm convincing myself that I'm remembering more.'

• Audiobooks on every walk

Judie always has an audiobook going on her walks. She tried training for the marathon without one and couldn't stand 16 miles in her own head. She also reads for an hour or two most afternoons. Mel notes that for lonely people, an audiobook is active company and input, unlike bingeing a show alone on the couch.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Make plans before you need them**
  In a transition such as widowhood, a move or retirement, put things on your calendar ahead of time so you're not facing empty days.
- **Build in movement you can't skip**
  Choose stairs, walk instead of using a golf cart, check your step count, and don't give yourself 'just a week' off.
- **Reach out first and stop keeping score**
  Call the friend you're thinking about, text your family, and accept that others' lives don't revolve around you. If connection is missing, Judie and Mel's advice is to volunteer: giving to someone else brings love back to you.

A Masterclass on Dealing with Change: A 3-Step Process | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Guest: Dr. Luana Marques
Date: 2023-07-20 · Duration: 0:59:49
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lUvC-E3YSxE

KEYPOINTS

• Transitions hurt because you're clinging to the shore while the boat leaves

Harvard clinical psychologist Dr. Luana Marques, author of Bold Move, pictures a transition as a journey toward a new life: you hold on to the familiar shore with one hand and the departing boat with the other, and get stretched thin. That stretch is the panic and uncertainty people feel. Holding on is a form of avoidance; her advice is to let go and start swimming, because there's no ticket to a perfect life.

• In a transition, your values get questioned

Marques defines values as intrinsic motivators — family, faith, wealth, integrity — that should act as your compass, though most of us notice them about as often as house paint. Values drive goals. When an old value no longer fits, pushing harder on it brings misery, and you end up living an emotion-driven life focused on avoiding discomfort rather than a values-driven one.

• Lean toward the pain to find your values

Pain exists, Marques says, because a value that matters is being violated. A stranger's insult stings little; a loved one's hurts because you care. After her health scare she spent early mornings crying and asking why it hurt so much, and found the answer was impact: she wanted to help far more people than research papers reach, citing CDC data she described as roughly 40% of Americans reporting clinical-level anxiety and depression.

• Or notice when you feel your best

The second route to values is studying moments of contentment and flow and asking why they matter. Marques could see Mel light up describing her family under one roof during the pandemic. Her own values include connection and family; her family eats dinner together daily and joined her on a work trip so she wouldn't be away from her son for five days.

• Many people are still forcing pre-pandemic values onto a changed life

Marques sees a global value shift since COVID, with people wanting flexibility because family time was being compromised. Most haven't had the chance to pause and reflect, so they keep doing what used to work, get worse results, and blame their anxiety. In her practice, anxiety is now so high that patients' brains feel "locked" in fight-flight-freeze and can't take in new ideas as easily.

• There's no transition without discomfort

Marques tells Mel her daughter will feel discomfort after graduating, and Mel will too; if they didn't, something would be wrong. Discomfort doesn't mean something bad is happening. The first thing a parent can do is let it exist instead of rushing to fix it, and calmly name it if it gets aimed at you: "It looks like you're upset and throwing it at me, and this isn't my transition."

• Rescuing people from hard feelings robs them

Mel realizes that rushing in with scripts and phone calls to fix her kids' problems took away what they gain from facing discomfort, which is why some lessons kept repeating. Marques adds that avoiding pain only prolongs it. Parenting is imperfect, she notes, joking about a friend's "therapy jar."

• Feeling your feelings shortens them

When her five-year-old has a tantrum, telling him to stop escalates it. Sitting beside him and naming the frustration lets his thinking brain come back online, and it lasts three minutes instead of 20. Marques points out Mel did it live: when asked about her own feelings, she switched to talking about her daughter, a classic avoidance tactic.

• Kids can't regulate themselves yet; adults must

Marques says the brain isn't fully developed until about 30, so kids lack brakes and adults have to model pausing. She hears from teachers so anxious they run out of classrooms and sees parents stepping into normal playground bickering. Her view: everyone who touches a child, from janitors to bus drivers, can teach a little regulation.

EXAMPLES

• Marques's "stroke" at her desk

Ambition got Marques out of poverty in Brazil and up to associate professor at Harvard, but when a colleague asked if full professor was next, she felt hollow, couldn't sleep and gained 40 pounds. While writing a grant, half her face then body went numb. Fearing a stroke, she went to her doctor in tears; it turned out to be a severe migraine, her first ever, and the moment she stopped avoiding change.

• Mel's sadness was about her own graduation

Asked to stay with her feelings, Mel said she felt sad for her daughter — then recalled spending her own college graduation sick under a tree, possibly with meningitis. Marques pointed out her daughter would be singing the national anthem for 18,000 people. Mel was grieving her own lost graduation.

• "It's okay not to be okay"

A best friend Marques calls Mary was fired after 10 years in finance and kept saying she was fine, though she was the main earner. Marques told her it's okay not to be okay; if she weren't uncomfortable, something would be wrong.

• Mel's Post-it note from her worst week

Kicking and screaming about moving to a Vermont town of 3,000 with no Target and an airport 90 minutes away, Mel wrote her "why" on a giant sticky note while sobbing: peace and connection, more time with her son and husband, a simple business that runs like a clock, global impact through higher-leverage use of her time, seeing friends daily. Two years later she says she lives it, and her fear-busting rule on the back read: approach, don't run.

• A boss who held space

When Marques sobbed to her psychiatry chair that she wanted to quit, he asked whether there were parts she still liked, then suggested reducing her time to a day or two a week. He didn't solve it; he let her sit with it.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Use the three steps: shift, approach, align**

  Shift: talk to yourself like a best friend and notice fear's distortions. Approach: move toward the discomfort instead of running. Align: let what the pain reveals become values, then turn them into concrete actions.

- **Do a Sunday values check**

  Marques reviews the coming week each Sunday; if a day doesn't serve impact, family or health, she rearranges it. She says values-driven living is linked to lower stress, depression and anxiety and higher well-being.

- **Write your own North Star note**

  Mel suggests capturing your values and promises on a sticky note while the transition is fresh, even mid-tears.

The REAL Formula For Success and Happiness | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Guest: Shawn Achor
Date: 2023-06-29 · Duration: 1:15:53
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8N9_OYj1qv0

KEYPOINTS

• Happiness is 'the joy you feel moving towards your potential'

Shawn Achor, Harvard-trained researcher and author of The Happiness Advantage, Big Potential and Before Happiness, rejects the pleasure model of happiness because pleasure is fleeting and only shows up when life is good. Joy, as he defines it, is directional: it's the sense of growth that can coexist with fear and pain, which is why it can shorten the troughs of hard seasons. He deliberately wants happiness and joy to be conflated.

• The brain moves the goalposts every time you succeed

Achor says external circumstances are a poor predictor of happiness: get the degree, then you need a job, then a promotion. He saw it in his own career; finishing a book felt like the summit until worries about readers and the next book set in. Echoing Maslow's hierarchy, he argues it's not where you are on the ladder that makes you happy but whether you feel you're moving up.

• Step one is recognizing that 'I'll be happy when' doesn't work

Asked by a listener how to stop relying on money, a job or a partner, Achor says first acknowledge the brain is built to foil the idea that success guarantees happiness. His example is the pandemic: people expected to be happy when it waned, forgetting they weren't 100% happy before it. He adds a caveat: internal change doesn't negate the need to fight inequality, discrimination and racism; it gives you the power to fight them.

• Multiple realities are true at once, so choose which to focus on

The week before recording, Achor went to the ER with chest pains and missed his first talk in two decades. He was fine. In that room, 'I'm in a hospital and not with my family' was true, and so was 'I'm going home today to two kids and a wife I love.' Because the brain's resources are finite, he chooses the reality that helps him take the next step.

• Happiness is a team sport, not a self-help project

His turning point out of depression wasn't the habits but telling eight close friends and family, some of them Harvard peers and competitors. They called, emailed and visited; one brought cupcakes. That connection made the habits feel worth doing. He's skeptical of endless self-analysis without action, describing a fellow plane passenger reciting years of therapy insights to a stranger.

• Loneliness is about meaning, not headcount

Achor cites a Stanford study finding loneliness had nothing to do with how many people are in your life; it's the absence of meaning in those relationships, including whether you're doing anything meaningful for others. His grandmother put it simply: if you want a friend, be a friend.

• Diversify your 'meaning portfolio'

To a 65-year-old mother, four years past breast cancer treatment, whose happiness rests on her unhappy 26-year-old son, Achor says love necessarily involves pain, but she's telling her story as a side character in his. When all meaning is in one 'stock,' a child or work, happiness becomes fragile. Mel recalls promising herself to put the laptop away on planes when work became her only source of meaning.

• You shouldn't feel happy all the time

Achor says constant happiness would signal being divorced from reality. Healthy people swing between days of connection and days of struggle, a point echoed by his mentor Tal Ben-Shahar's line that you're never as great or as bad as you think. Mel adds that the people we love sometimes need to struggle, as she learned watching her husband's depression: you can hold space but can't do the work for them.

• Happiness is an option, not a choice

Achor used to sign books 'happiness is a choice' but stopped, because in a crisis without practice it can feel like a burden. When Mel suggests 'option,' he adopts it. The choice is harder with chronic illness, racism or a depressed child, but still available, and meaning often comes from other people even when your body feels like a prison.

EXAMPLES

• The Harvard depression figures and Achor's journal

Achor applied to Harvard on a dare while a volunteer firefighter, assuming everyone there would be happy. He says 80% of students went through debilitating depression and 10% had contemplated suicide in the last public data he saw. Later, while counseling first-years, he became depressed himself; his first journal entry read 'I don't remember being happy and I don't think I'll ever be happy again.'

• Hills look 20–30% steeper alone

He cites researchers in Virginia who found that people viewing a hill alone perceive it as 20–30% steeper than people standing next to someone they're told will climb with them, evidence to him that challenges expand or shrink depending on whether we feel alone.

• Synchronized fireflies

Fireflies flashing randomly have about a 3% nightly mating success rate. Two species, in Indonesia and Tennessee's Smoky Mountains, flash in unison; per the MIT research he cites, success jumps to 82% per bug because the combined light attracts more mates. Breadth, depth and meaning of social connection is one of the biggest predictors of long-term happiness.

• The teachers in Flint, Michigan

With funding only for teachers, Achor's team found that in classrooms where teacher happiness rose, students' and parents' well-being scores and student test scores improved too. On a random-kindness day during a blizzard, teachers handed out doughnuts to road crews at 4 a.m., visited hospices and handed out happiness kits at the DMV until a manager kicked them out.

• The two-minute email and day eight

Isolated, introverted participants told to email a new person daily tend to stall on day eight, after their favorites list and 'my mom twice.' That's when they recall forgotten mentors, teachers or a child's first-grade teacher. Achor says 21 days of these notes lifts social connection scores into the top 15% worldwide.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Achor's four habits for 21 days

(1) Write three new things you're grateful for from the past 24 hours, no repeats for 21 days; the scanning matters more than the items. (2) A 15-minute brisk walk four to five times a week, which he says matched an antidepressant over six months with a 30% lower relapse rate over two years. (3) Two minutes watching your breath, which he says raises accuracy 10%, lowers stress and even shifts cortisol in people around you. (4) A two-minute email praising or thanking a different person daily.

• Mel's version and a practical tweak

Mel maps these onto her own advice: look for wins, walk like you're late (she says 10 minutes, outside, nothing in your ears), and reach out to one person daily. She plans to borrow the breathing habit by setting a phone timer to take her hands off the keyboard.

• Don't tiptoe around struggling people

Achor says grief needs a long period of recognition; he'd soften his message for a friend who had just lost a child. Mel pushes back: once someone reaches for a lifeline, simple habits like a thank-you note to someone who helped at the funeral give them guideposts back, alongside empathy and check-ins.

• Leave harmful relationships

Achor stresses that 'meaning comes from other people' doesn't mean staying with someone who harms you; find safe spaces outside that relationship.

Don’t Take Life Too Seriously: How to Have More Fun | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Date: 2023-06-26 · Duration: 0:42:38
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6pOQBBHYXc

KEYPOINTS

• Laughing at yourself is a separate skill from not caring what people think

Mel splits it in two. Not caring is what let her whisper to a friend that she had a wedgie and tell the whole table what happened in the bathroom. Laughing at yourself goes further: you loosen your grip on the moment and find it funny instead of something to replay. She says both matter, and the second is the one that has felt most freeing to her.

• The same embarrassing moment can go one of two ways

Shuffling toward the museum, she could have beaten herself up for buying the wrong size, always getting things wrong, screwing up and running late. Or she could laugh at how ridiculous it was that her first fancy event in about three years came with a wardrobe disaster. She credits herself with choosing the second, and notes that the 'old Mel' would have turned it into self-criticism.

• Letting people in on the joke changes the dynamic

Her producer Jesse points out that Mel doesn't keep these moments private. She announces them. When you do, the people around you stop thinking about their own insecurities and laugh with you, which she calls a gift, especially with people you've only just met. Mel applies the same idea to posting unflattering, real-life photos of herself online.

• Self-deprecating humour works because it's relatable and touches what people don't say

Amy, who performs amateur stand-up and improv, says the story is funny because everyone has been there and because it's the kind of thing nobody talks about. She stresses laughing at yourself in a warm 'that's funny that I always do this' way, not a condescending one. She admits she has always been hard on herself and is still working on it.

• A sense of humour can be developed; it isn't fixed at birth

Mel argues you can get funnier and learn to see the world in a funny way. If you don't think you're funny, you can still laugh at the situation, laugh at someone else's joke, help someone through their day with a smile, or teach your kids to laugh at their own spills.

• Research links an appropriate sense of humour to perceived status and competence

Mel summarises research her team pulled together, and promises links to the studies: people respect funny leaders more, and someone with an appropriate sense of humour is seen as more confident, powerful, intelligent and likeable, with higher status. She qualifies it: this is about appropriate humour, and she wouldn't tell your boss about a thong wedgie.

• Taking yourself too seriously is like wearing a bodysuit that's too small

Her metaphor for the whole episode: refusing to laugh or share your mishaps constricts you and cuts off your 'life force'. 'Unsnapping' judgment, seriousness and the need to be perfect lets more love and connection in, takes pressure off you and, in her view, takes a confident person to pull off.

• Humour turns a painful memory into a lasting good one

Mel says she will remember the day for most of her life, and that what she recalls is the laughing, her friends and the event, not the discomfort. Turning something embarrassing and slightly painful into something hilarious and relatable 'shifted everything about it.'

EXAMPLES

• The untested Skims bodysuit

Mel's daughter Kendall, helping her clear out clothes that no longer fit during menopause, decided the real problem was no shapewear and saggy bras, and ordered pieces from Kim Kardashian's Skims. The thong bodysuit looked like Barbie clothing. Mel tried it on, loved how it looked in the mirror, and took it off without sitting or walking in it.

• The 'human caution tape' outfit at the ICA

For a fundraiser luncheon celebrating women artists at Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art, she wore eight-year-old tailored black pants, heeled boots and a tight ribbed sweater striped white, yellow, brown and black. Getting out of the car started the wedgie. Walking two city blocks in five minutes made it worse, front and back, until she was shuffling.

• The friend who said 'I'll save you a seat'

She hugged her friend and whispered that she had a giant wedgie and needed the bathroom. In there she learned it's a two-hand job: she pulled the sides down for slack, only to find the suit slipping off her chest. It crept up again through a lunch of poached salmon and asparagus.

• The 'Caution: Dead End' photo

In the parking garage she finally unsnapped the suit behind her car door. Her friend Lisa backed her car up to get a picture, hit a plastic pylon, and then snapped Mel posing in exasperated freedom under a black-and-yellow 'Caution Dead End' sign that matched her bumblebee sweater perfectly.

• 98% and 84% of executives

Mel cites one study in which 98% of executives said they would prefer an employee with a sense of humour, and 84% believed people with a sense of humour do better work.

• The office fart

When Mel once farted at work, Jesse laughed so hard they had to stop for three minutes. Mel deliberately let out a second one, knowing it would make Jesse lose it completely.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Test-drive new clothes, especially shapewear

Before an event, sit, stand, walk and get in and out of a car in a new outfit. Mel's mistake was judging the bodysuit from the mirror alone.

• Notice whether you laugh at yourself or at others

Mel's invitation for the week: when something embarrassing happens, whether it's a spill, a mid-sentence belch with your kid's teacher or a mistake at work, notice your reaction and try making the joke yourself instead of ruminating. She doesn't change her shirt when she spills; she jokes about it.

• Keep the humour appropriate to the room

The professional upside of humour depends on reading the setting. A relatable joke builds trust; oversharing to your boss doesn't.

The Science of Gratitude & 6 Surprising Ways You’re Getting It Wrong | Mel Robbins

Date: 2023-06-12 · Duration: 0:58:40
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CWuRB0XuIgA

KEYPOINTS

• Genuine gratitude is deep appreciation for something that comes from outside you

Mel draws on UC Davis psychologist Robert Emmons, whom she calls the field's leading gratitude researcher. In his definition, gratitude is a deep appreciation for what you've received, tangible or intangible, recognizing that it comes from others, nature or a higher power. A key takeaway she cites from his decades of research: gratitude strengthens every relationship, because it trains you to notice how others support you.

• It retrains your brain to scan for the positive

Racing late to class, Mel was scanning for the negative: sweating, bracing for the worst, likely spiking cortisol. Genuine gratitude, she explains, stimulates dopamine, oxytocin and norepinephrine (a word she cheerfully blames her dyslexia for mangling) while reducing cortisol — leaving you calmer, more focused and better at decisions. She felt that shift as soon as she began appreciating the man at the front desk.

• Thankful is transactional; grateful is felt and lingers

Thanks are expected, automatic and forgotten the moment the elevator door closes. Gratitude is unexpected, deeply moving, and its emotion lingers like 'a positive energy buzz' for both people. Mel admits she once bought a 'thankful' pillow off a HomeGoods clearance rack and argues gratitude has 'jumped the shark' now that it's printed on discounted cushions.

• Use gratitude in three directions: past, present, future

Looking back, you acknowledge a heartbreak and see how it shaped you — the mountain now behind you. In the present, you name a blessing as it happens. Facing the future, gratitude doesn't erase fear of a loss, new job or breakup, but balances it with trust that you can climb the next mountain.

• Toxic gratitude #1: posting 'blessed' while ignoring the mess

Think of the friend whose feed is all beach kisses and 'love of my life' posts, who then spends three hours complaining about the relationship in person. Genuine gratitude makes room for the painful and broken alongside the beautiful. Mel suggests posting the truth — such as loving someone because you work through the ups and downs — or nothing.

• #2: gratitude as a sledgehammer

'You should be grateful there's anything on your plate', or telling kids who lost a soccer semifinal to be grateful they got that far. Mel confesses she recently told Oakley, after hosting a party, that he should be 'grateful enough' to help unload the dishwasher. She calls it a generational, transactional parenting habit and says what she was actually expressing was resentment.

• #3: gratitude as a reason to stay stuck

'I hate my job, but I'm grateful to have a paycheck', or 'at least I'm not single'. Ending the sentence there kills any motivation to change and quietly lowers your standards. Mel's fix: add the truth and use 'thankful' — I'm thankful for the paycheck and I deserve to work somewhere I feel appreciated, so I'm going to start looking.

• #4: grabbing gratitude to escape painful feelings

'I'm just grateful he's no longer suffering' can sit on top of 'I'm devastated my father is gone'. When a friend called hours after her husband asked for a divorce, she kept reaching for 'but I'm grateful' — Mel told her she wasn't ready. Mel says research shows that facing and talking about uncomfortable emotions helps them pass faster; being laid off is embarrassing even if you hated the job.

• #5 and #6: forced positivity, and gratitude that erases your effort

'You'll beat it!' to someone with cancer can make them feel unheard. And thanking people for including you at a meeting you earned a seat at diminishes your responsibility. Mel says she isn't 'grateful' for her success — she slept on couches, clawed out of bankruptcy and worked nights and weekends for over a decade — though she is deeply grateful for her listeners.

EXAMPLES

• The 3:48 a.m. fire alarm

In New York for Good Morning America naming her show its podcast of the month, Mel was woken by a hotel fire alarm. Ignoring instructions to stay in her room, she pulled on tights, a T-shirt and sneakers and took eight flights of stairs — and was the only guest in the lobby until a family of six in flattened shoes and two Australian tourists arrived. False alarm. In the elevator mirror she saw her tights were inside out and backwards.

• Judah at the barre studio

Oversleeping after the alarm, Mel sprinted two blocks to a 7 a.m. barre class expecting a strict scolding. Instead Judah, whom she likens to Queer Eye's JVN, greeted her warmly, found her a hair tie and walked her in, arm around her shoulder, to where her colleague Amy had set up rainbow grip socks. He'd been writing his gratitude list when she arrived. Mel later learned his band is called Sunshine and the Fox — after she'd called him 'a human ray of sunshine'.

• Shoveling an elderly neighbor's steps

Shovel a neighbor's walk and you expect a thank-you. Gratitude is when she comes out, holds your shoulders and tells you the last person to shovel her walk was her late son. That unexpected, lingering emotion is the difference Mel wants you to feel.

• Snoop Dogg's Walk of Fame speech

Mel's favorite acceptance speech: Snoop Dogg in 2018 thanking himself for believing in himself, doing the hard work, having no days off and never quitting. She calls it full ownership with no toxic gratitude.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Make your gratitude list specific and emotional

Swap 'health, kids, job' for a named moment and why it moves you. Mel's example: her daughter calling out her outfits, then picking the bell-bottoms and red T-shirt that drew compliments on GMA.

- **When you don't know what to say, say that**

Try 'I don't know what to say — what do you need?' or 'That sucks, you don't deserve this, and you won't go through it alone', which Mel credits to Adam Grant and Sheryl Sandberg's Option B.

- **Judah's grounding practices**

He grounds physically, barefoot on a beach or hike; follows 'do your best', one of The Four Agreements; and keeps a strong why — sharing music with his band as a 'super force of love'. As he put it, with a strong enough why you can withstand any how.

Feeling Stuck Right Now? Stop Looking In The Wrong Place | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Guest: Ricki
Date: 2023-05-15 · Duration: 1:01:52
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zb9yteXYOzc

KEYPOINTS

• If you keep getting stuck, you may be working on the wrong problem

Mel opens with a weed in her old Boston garden: tall fescue clumps that kept appearing among her irises, peonies and daisies. After a week of rain she dug gently instead of yanking and found one root running about 10 feet under the lawn, feeding every clump. Her point is that recurring problems, like dating 'another loser' or the same fight with your mother, often share a deeper root. Cutting them off at the surface only lets them sprout again.

• Ricki's problems all seemed separate

Ricki, 44, told Mel she felt like she was in quicksand despite years of self-help books and programs. Her job paid the bills but wasn't fulfilling. She had gained 30 pounds and was in the worst shape of her life. She had expected to be married with kids by now, and her relationship with herself was poor. From the outside, she said, friends thought her life looked great.

• The 'bad news': your own story is the biggest obstacle

Mel told Ricki she'd have to push through the resignation and emotion that had built up. Ricki said the change felt like an insurmountable mountain. Mel said it only feels that way because she'd convinced herself it was too late. The actual work to get fit, find fulfilling work and like yourself is 'the same work everybody needs to do'.

• Your daily habits come to match what you believe

When Mel said her best years were ahead, Ricki heard a voice calling it 'BS' and saying her best years were her 20s. Mel's explanation: after years of telling herself it wasn't going to happen, Ricki's routines had lined up with someone who believes her best days are behind her. That's why she let her health slide, settled for a draining job and lowered her standards in dating. The fix is to live the daily life of someone who believes the opposite.

• Unresolved grief can quietly change your whole life

Mel guessed something had derailed Ricki in her late 20s or 30s. Ricki's father died when she was 28, followed by depression and a series of painful breakups. Mel suggested she had spent a decade grieving and was stuck in a kind of freeze response: hunkered down, no longer dreaming, focused on getting through each day. Ricki said she'd never connected being stuck to his death and thought she had moved on.

• The relationships may have been about grief, not her worth

Ricki was embarrassed that she kept believing relationships would go somewhere when they didn't, and saw herself as a failure. Mel offered another view: she was entering relationships with a hole that grief had left, wanting to feel safe again. So she fell fast and 'misread the room'. Mel told her there's nothing wrong with her.

• Letting love in is the deeper breakthrough

Mel describes trading her heart's 'impenetrable' castle door for swinging restaurant-kitchen doors that let love go out and come back in. Ricki pushed back: she's the friend and sister who's always there for others. Mel said that being 'the rock' often blocks love coming in, as do self-criticism and lines like 'I'm okay, I can handle this on my own'.

• Ricki had quietly put an expiration date on her dreams

Asked what changed when her dad died, Ricki said she had always wanted to make him proud and felt she'd lost the chance, even though he told her before he died that he was proud. She just wasn't proud of herself. Mel called it 'quietly quitting' on her own ambition and told her Joe is still watching, and that she has her whole life to make herself proud.

EXAMPLES

• The gym locker

Partway through, Ricki remembered she used to love working out and running. She learned of her father's death right after a workout, opening her locker to find several messages from her sister and insisting her sister tell her right then. She kept going to the gym afterward, but it never had the same momentum. Mel said it makes sense that a traumatic moment drained the joy from something she loved.

• Bringing back acting, singing and writing

Asked what she did in her 20s that she no longer does, Ricki said taking risks, acting, singing and writing. Mel suggested acting classes, auditions, community theater or summer stock, and pointed out that these involve love flowing back from castmates and audiences. She said a job change alone wouldn't go deep enough.

• Mel at 44

In 2013, at Ricki's age, Mel was $800,000 in debt with liens on the house. Chris was leaving a failing restaurant that hadn't paid him in six months and was too depressed to function. She was struggling with drinking and working two jobs. She had no book, podcast or social media, and her TEDx talk had only just gone online. That's why she says she means it when she tells Ricki her best years are ahead.

• Ricki's update from the cemetery

Ricki went to her father's grave on what turned out to be the 16th anniversary of his burial. She brought tulips, which he used to plant in their front yard. She read her letter, told him about giving up and not working out, and promised to keep making him proud. She says she believes her life will be 'unrecognizable this time next year'.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Write a letter to the person you lost

Mel's assignment: thank them, say you miss them, and promise what you'll bring back into your life. For Ricki, that was acting, singing, writing and running. If you can, read it aloud at their grave. Mel believes this deeper motivation will do more than any

formula.

- **The 'then vs. now' comparison**

  Draw a line down a page. On the left, describe an average week when you felt most alive: wake time, friends, exercise, hobbies, creative outlets. On the right, describe your weeks now. Compare them, because the gaps show what to add back.

- **Pair your 'why' with a simple 'how'**

  Mel says research shows lasting change needs both a reason and a method. Ricki already knows how to audition and sing. Her 'why' is permission to be happy and proud. Turn it into weekly steps, like one singing group and one audition a week. To get moving, walk 10 minutes a day outside 'like you're late'.

This is Why You're Not Happy and How to Fix It | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Date: 2023-03-13 · Duration: 0:54:25
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nqs6I2kMW8M

KEYPOINTS

• Chasing happiness outside yourself makes you feel short on time and less happy

Mel opens with listener Andrea, who can't remember feeling true happiness and senses something is missing. She cites researchers at Rutgers and the University of Toronto who found that people who actively pursue happiness often feel they don't have enough time in the day. That feeling of time scarcity makes them feel less in control, and so less happy.

• "I'll be happy when..." thinking backfires twice

When you finally lose the weight, land the job or pay off the bills, it feels less good than you expected, and without the big goal your happiness drops. The deeper problem is that it ties your happiness to something that hasn't happened yet, turning it into something you have to earn. Mel argues happiness should be grown where you are now.

• About 40% of your happiness is in your control

Mel presents a formula she describes as research-backed: of your total capacity for happiness, roughly 50% is set by genetics, 10% by current circumstances and 40% by what you do. Whatever your family or situation, she says, that 40% is yours to work with, and the episode focuses on it.

• The ocean metaphor captures happiness's range

Waves are the fun you have to jump into. A still ocean you can float in is the deeper contentment. A stormy day you watch from the beach is about being present to the details. Mel uses the image to make sure she and the listener mean the same thing by "happiness," which can range from laughter to feeling fulfilled.

• Researchers split happiness into hedonic and eudaimonic

Hedonic happiness is moment-to-moment fun, like waves that come and go. Eudaimonic happiness is a sense that life has meaning and that you're thriving. Many people have one without the other, such as plenty of fun but little meaning, or deep work but no fun, and Mel argues you need both.

• Healing journeys can squeeze out all the fun

Listener Rachel journals, reads self-help, exercises and reframes her thoughts, yet still feels stuck. Mel recognises her past self: every book was self-help, and she couldn't remember her last novel, concert or party. Working on trauma and thought patterns matters, but you have to double down on fun while you do it. Research shows happy people prioritise doing things that make them happy.

• Relationships are the number one factor in a happy life

Mel draws on the Harvard Study of Adult Development, formerly the Harvard Men's Study, which has run for 84 years. It began with 724 men and now includes 1,300 descendants across three generations, and is led by its fourth director, Dr. Robert Waldinger. Because it tracks people forward in real time instead of relying on memory, and its results have been replicated in five other large studies, she calls it the most important study of happiness. Its main finding: good relationships keep you happier and healthier.

• Loneliness is an alarm, and it's about quality, not headcount

Warm interactions make the body feel safe, while cold ones trigger fight, flight or freeze. Because early humans survived in tribes, the brain reads loneliness as a threat. You can be lonely in a crowd, a bad marriage or a toxic friendship. Mel cites a figure that 75% of adults feel moderate to high loneliness and says to treat that pang like anxiety: a signal you're missing connection.

• A wandering mind is the opposite of inner peace

Answering listener Steve, Mel defines inner peace as feeling content and secure. She cites Harvard professor Daniel Gilbert's research finding that close to half of our waking moments are spent thinking about something other than what we're doing, and that mind-wandering is linked to unhappiness. Older people, often wrongly seen as grumpy, tend to be happiest because they're more present.

EXAMPLES

• Paddle tennis after a friend's death

After a close friend died suddenly of a heart attack at 47, Mel hadn't left the house in days. Chris booked a 4:30 paddle tennis game with another couple. She fumed the whole drive and almost told him off, but within about five seconds of hitting the ball she felt different. She needed fun and people she likes, not more heaviness.

• Mel's loneliest stretch was her most successful

During a booming period of nonstop speeches, Audible projects and good money, she was on the road constantly, barely saw Chris or her friends, and missed time with her daughters in high school. She was having fun "in the waves" with colleagues but was deeply lonely. Seeing her son Oakley's high school years as a "melting ice cube," she rebuilt her business to work from the studio above her garage.

• Jenna, a mom who misses the joy of the early years

Jenna, a mother of two boys, felt more joyful when her kids were little. Mel suspects that back then she was surrounded by mom groups, school drop-offs and playgroups, meaning more warm relationships. That suggests missing connection, not a personal failing.

• Her mom talks to everyone

Mel used to find it embarrassing, but now admires that her mother comments on strangers' sweatshirts and the weather and ends up swapping restaurant tips. She cites a University of Chicago study finding that people who talk to strangers on trains, planes or at coffee shops are happier afterwards, even when they expected not to be.

• Present-moment rituals at home

Mel eats Trader Joe's blistered peanuts or smoked almonds one at a time to notice how each tastes, gazes at a flower by the kitchen sink, and savoured teaching Oakley her "beef with lots and lots of onions" from the cookbook Six Seasons, baked at

300°F for about five hours. Her 70-something parents' simple days of walks, golf, mahjong and sunsets show the same presence.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Make having more fun a stated goal**
  Set the intention to invest in hedonic happiness this year, especially while grieving or doing heavy personal work. In any group at the beach, someone has to grab the boogie board first, so be that person.
- **Sort people into warm and cold columns**
  Warm people energise you and their texts make you smile, while cold people make you brace yourself. Pour energy into the warm column. Either spend less time with cold people or warm the relationship up through forgiveness, reframing or boundaries. Mel notes research linking time with cold relationships to more loneliness and worse health.
- **Be the one who reaches out**
  If nobody invites you anywhere, check whether you're inviting anyone. Text someone daily, reconnect with cousins, and compliment strangers' nails or ask what they're reading. Remote work removes many small interactions, so you have to replace them deliberately.
- **Listen fully and do single tasks with full attention**
  Listening, not just hearing, shows someone you're present, which Mel calls the most basic form of love. Treat ordinary tasks as "moving meditation" to come back to the present.

How To Reinvent Your Life Starting TODAY | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Date: 2023-03-09 · Duration: 0:47:44
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IoOCnMEYSEg

KEYPOINTS

• You're never starting over; you're starting from experience

Mel's first response to a listener named Sarah: being laid off or ending a relationship doesn't send you back to zero. Every experience, good and bad, is raw material for the next chapter. Mel says about 90% of the questions she's getting right now are about reinvention, even when people don't use the word.

• Picture life as a road trip with mile markers

Everyone starts at mile marker zero, and each year is another marker. Mel was at 54 when she recorded this. Naming your marker reminds you that a lot of road is behind you but plenty of open road is ahead, and that you choose the speed, the route and the next destination. That choice is what she means by reinvention.

• When you're lost or in a storm, pull over first

Driving around doesn't help when you're lost; you stop, check the mile marker, look for landmarks, then decide where to go. Mel calls this a mental strategy: pause, acknowledge where you are, and only then pick a destination.

• Look through the windshield, not the rearview mirror

The windshield is far bigger than the rearview mirror for a reason. Feeling sad after a setback is right, but endlessly replaying what you should have done, like wishing you'd chosen a different major at 24, keeps you from moving forward.

• Treat setbacks as detours, not verdicts on your worth

A breakup, a death, a layoff: Mel frames each as a detour on a path unique to you. She asks you to embrace two truths. Every detour is aligned with what's meant for you, and the best years of your life are on the road ahead. The alternative, she says, is feeling like a victim who is never good enough.

• Feeling 'blah' means you're on autopilot

Nothing's wrong, nothing's right. Mel notes researchers call it languishing. Step one is recognizing it ('that's me'). Step two is picking a specific destination ahead that genuinely excites you.

• Dream about two years out

Mel time-travels about 24 months ahead because that's enough time to make almost anything happen. A destination on the horizon creates energy, gives you something to look forward to, builds momentum, and widens your outlook like opening a camera's aperture so you start to notice possibilities and changes you could make.

• Anticipation gives you two bites of the apple

Mel cites research that planning a trip, say Disney with the kids, lifts your mood before you go, and the trip itself is a second boost. A week before boarding, your boss can pile on work and you won't care, because something good is ahead.

• Adding a meaningful activity makes time feel more abundant

In a 2021 study described in Laura Vanderkam's New York Times essay, overwhelmed participants spent nine weeks adding things rather than cutting back: exercise, small adventures, effortful activities like reading a novel instead of watching TV, and one night a week for themselves (not work or family). They reported feeling they had more time, more energy, and more progress at work and with family.

• Fifteen minutes spent helping felt like more time than fifteen free minutes

Mel describes a study in which some university students were let out of class 15 minutes early, while others stayed 15 minutes to edit essays for at-risk high school students. The helpers reported feeling they had more time. Mel's takeaway: rewarding, engaging activity makes time feel less scarce.

EXAMPLES

• Sarah at 40

A listener who turned 40 described being in a toxic 11-year marriage to a man with serious health problems, being laid off from a job she loved, gaining weight, and wondering if she'd ever been happy. Mel calls it driving through a sideways rain and hail storm, and reminds her the rain doesn't last.

• Jen's breakup

Jen thought she'd found her person and now struggles to get up and dressed. Mel tells her to use 5-4-3-2-1 to get out of bed, and to stop telling herself it happened because she isn't worthy. Her exercise: write down everything you want a partner to do for you and make you feel, then do those things for yourself.

• The family motorhome trip

Mel's father rented a motorhome one summer to hit as many national parks as possible, with stops at the Corn Palace, Wall Drug and Mount Rushmore on the way to the big prize: Old Faithful and the lodge at Yellowstone. As she recorded, her dad, brother, Chris and their son were headed to Yellowstone. The Corn Palace is the near-term excitement; Yellowstone is the dream.

• Busy people adding things

Mel was doing the 75 Hard challenge, and Chris was pursuing a master's in spiritual psychology while volunteering in hospice and launching Soul Degree for his men's retreat. Neither had spare time; both made it.

• Denise, voiceover artist

After 20 years of dreaming about voiceover work while feeling 'a part of me died' in a 9-to-5, Denise set a goal of a live ACX narration profile by June 13. It went live in August, and instead of beating herself up she celebrated progress. Six months in, she had two narration jobs, three auditions under review, and was pitching commercials, aiming to be full-time within a year.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Take responsibility for the response, not the detour

Mel distinguishes between what happens to you and how you navigate next. Grabbing the wheel on the second part is where your power lies.

- **The 'one night for you' rule**

Commit a few hours each week to something you enjoy, like a choir, a softball team, tutoring or pickup soccer. Signing up forces you to solve childcare and logistics you assumed were impossible.

- **Mel's caveat**

The episode is presented for education and entertainment and isn't a substitute for advice from a physician, therapist or other qualified professional.

How to Find Your Purpose and Achieve Your Dreams With Jamie Kern Lima | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Guest: Jamie Kern Lima
Date: 2023-02-09 · Duration: 1:18:38
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L4egtvSr_SI

KEYPOINTS

• 'Our steps are ordered': every job adds to your toolbox

Kern Lima waited tables at Denny's, where the kitchen took an hour to get pancakes out, so she learned to keep customers talking. Some left a dime and a penny. Years later, it taught her to get operations right or nothing else matters. She also pushed grocery carts and sliced deli meat to pay for school. Mel, a former waitress herself, adds that service jobs teach you no work is beneath you.

• Setbacks are often setups

Living her dream as a TV news anchor in Seattle at 28, Kern Lima's rosacea started breaking through her makeup on live air, and producers told her through her earpiece to wipe something off her face. She spent her small paycheck on department-store, professional and drugstore makeup and nothing worked. That frustration became the idea for IT Cosmetics.

• Purpose usually isn't a job title or a big goal

People who reach a long-held goal often find 'this isn't it.' Kern Lima says purpose is often serving the person you once were: becoming the generational cycle-breaker in your family, or saying hi to someone lonely in a coffee line. Her purpose wasn't being an entrepreneur but helping women feel worthy as they are. She notes only about 5% of IT Cosmetics customers had skin issues like hers. The other 95% simply felt seen.

• Your strongest clue to purpose is what hurt you and how you got through it

Her 'aha' came on the news set: she'd never seen a model with red, bumpy skin selling makeup, and the airbrushed ads she loved had always made her feel not enough. She decided to use real models of every age, size, skin tone and skin challenge and to 'call them beautiful and mean it.' Mel credits her with starting the real-beauty movement around 2007-2008, when everything was airbrushed and there were no curvy models.

• 'Someone's already done it' is false, because no one has done it your way

There's only one of you, so anything authentic you make has by definition never been done. The flip side, she warns, is to expect lots of rejection, because experts can't picture something new.

• The pain of regret outweighed the pain of failure

She quit her anchor job to go all in, sensing that otherwise she'd wake up every day for the rest of her life with a 'longing' in her gut. She and her husband wrote a business plan and put all their savings into it, working from their living room. She worked 100-hour weeks, which she does not recommend, and didn't pay herself for three years. Retailers including Sephora, Ulta, department stores and QVC all said no.

• Build intuition like a muscle by looking for patterns

Look back at times you ignored your gut because everyone disagreed, and times you trusted it, and notice how each felt and what happened. For her it's a tiny feeling, a 'still small voice,' and she prays about it. She says girls often learn early to distrust themselves, decide by consensus and people-please. Mel suggests trying to make only decisions that match what you truly want for the rest of the day, from parties to dinner.

• A 'no' versus a 'knowing'

After meeting after meeting, the head of a big investment firm told her, about three feet away, 'I just don't think women will buy makeup from someone who looks like you, with your body and your weight.' She felt no anger, just a strong gut sense that he was wrong. 'This dude gave me a no, but God gave me a knowing.' Her line: your destiny comes down to which one you listen to.

• Inauthenticity guarantees failure

Kern Lima's version: authenticity doesn't guarantee success, but inauthenticity guarantees failure every time. Mel adds that it's your job to keep advocating for your vision, because only you have seen it. Family and investors say no because they only know who you've been.

EXAMPLES

• Cold-calling every brand in Sephora

Manufacturers are closely guarded secrets in makeup, so she wrote down every brand in a Sephora and cold-called them asking who made their products. Most hung up. One small brand's employee gave her the name of a New York manufacturer, which took a chance on making samples. It took about a year and hundreds of formula versions to get a product.

• The QVC Expo ambush

At a cosmetics executive women's event with 6,000 attendees, she kept sneaking away from her three-foot table to QVC's mobbed booth. QVC's beauty head had already turned her down many times. Sweating through her clothes, she pitched a buyer, got a card, flew out and won one 10-minute live segment.

• 23 banks and 6,000 concealers

The deal was consignment: she had to sell over 6,000 units, about $130,000 to $140,000, in 10 minutes or take everything back and likely go under. The website was doing one or two orders a day, so Mel puts it at roughly ten years of sales. Twenty-two banks said no; California Bank and Trust said yes. Consultants urged flawless early-20s models. She cried in a rental car for a week, then went with real women and a bare-faced before shot.

• 'Thank you, sugar' and the sold-out sign

In double Spanx, her hand shook so badly that she couldn't do the wrist demo she'd practiced showing the concealer doesn't crease. The host grabbed her wrist and took over. At the 10-minute mark a sold-out sign appeared. Her husband ran in and said, 'We're not going bankrupt.' That September 2010 airing led to five more that year, 101 the next, then about 250 live shows a year.

- **'Rejection is God's protection'**

  Had the investor said yes, she believes she'd have given up most of the company for almost nothing. Six years later L'Oréal bought IT Cosmetics for $1.2 billion in cash, and she became the first female CEO of a brand in its 107-year history, backed by executive Carol Hamilton. The investor got in touch once, the day the deal was announced: 'I was wrong.' She resisted replying with Pretty Woman's 'Big mistake. Huge.'

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Your purpose can live outside your job**

  If you need a job for health coverage or family reasons, that's fine. Kern Lima says purpose can be found in what you do outside work, guided by what feels aligned.

- **Don't wait for perfect clarity**

  Waiting for clarity is, she says, the biggest excuse for never starting. Take a step and notice how it feels. Their friend Dean's image: it's okay to adjust your aim on a 'fuzzy target' a few times before letting the arrow go.

- **Find friends who pull you toward who you're becoming**

  Loved ones often pull you back toward your past or their comfort zone. Add people who want what's best for you, not what's best for them in you.

8 Simple, Research-Backed Changes That Will Change Your Life | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Guest: Tracey
Date: 2022-12-29 · Duration: 0:44:11
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iVBqNSzRLys

KEYPOINTS

• A research-hour episode with Mel's head of research
Mel introduces Tracey, who has led research for Mel's Audible productions, books and corporate courses for clients like Starbucks and LinkedIn. Tracey often pushes back when a popular study 'technically does not say that.' Together they walk through eight recent studies, each tied to one small behavior change you can start immediately.

• 1. Small acts of kindness matter more than we assume
Tracey describes research from the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Chicago titled 'A Little Good Goes an Unexpectedly Long Way.' It found that people underestimate how much a small kindness means to the person receiving it, and that this underestimation is why random acts of kindness are less common than we think. The giver ends up happier too. Examples include smiling, waving someone into traffic, or looking a barista in the eye to say thank you and tip.

• 2. Lowering slowly builds strength
A study from Edith Cowan University in Australia, with teams in Japan and Brazil, focused on eccentric contractions, the lowering half of a movement. As Tracey summarizes it, a three-second eccentric contraction once a day can increase muscle strength. Mel demonstrates by lowering slowly into a chair and holding an inch above the seat. She notes that when lifting weights she has focused only on the lift, which the research suggests matters less than the controlled lowering.

• 3. Birdsong lifts mood, even through an app
A King's College London study published in Scientific Reports, nicknamed 'Feeling Chirpy', gathered about 20,000 assessments over four years. As described in the episode, hearing or seeing birds was linked to improved mental wellbeing lasting up to eight hours, in healthy people and people with depression. The researchers separated the effect from trees, plants or water, and recordings counted too. Mel wonders whether it reflects evolution, since our ancestors tracked migratory birds.

• 4. Mindfulness matched medication for anxiety in one trial
A Georgetown University Medical Center study in JAMA Psychiatry compared the antidepressant Lexapro with mindfulness-based stress reduction, such as body scans and gratitude journaling, in people with anxiety. Tracey reports that the drop in anxiety was comparable. She adds that the researchers still stress medication has a role, and that the approaches can work together. Mel's theory: anxiety pulls you into a feared future, and writing what you're grateful for pulls you back to the present.

• 5. Don't rely on willpower; set up your environment
A University of Pennsylvania and University of Michigan study of about 20,000 high schoolers preparing for the SAT accounted for socioeconomic status and prior achievement. Students who used strategies did better than those who relied on willpower. The strategies were disabling their phones, studying in a distraction-free place, and scheduling study blocks. Willpower fades, so Mel suggests applying this to any high-stakes preparation.

• 6. Taste and smell can bring back happy memories
Lancaster University researchers asked older adults to recall a treasured memory, then 3D-printed matching tastes and smells onto edible strips, like wedding food, a curry or childhood strawberries. Participants were vividly transported back. The researchers see this as a way to deliberately revisit positive memories.

• 7. Tiny 'mundane secrets' can strengthen a relationship
Research from Indiana University, the University of Connecticut and Duke found about 90% of people recently hid a minor consumer behavior from someone close. Examples: a small online purchase, a slice of cake, watching ahead on a shared show. The small guilt that follows often motivates people to invest more in the relationship, and partners often keep the same secret, like two 'vegetarians' each eating meat on their own. The researchers' definition excludes anything that hurts the partner, like betrayal or a shopping addiction.

• 8. The highest-impact habit is being kind to yourself
Tracey and Mel say the research is conclusive that daily self-kindness has the biggest effect on happiness, meaning and sense of purpose, and yet it's the habit we practice least. Mel previews a full follow-up episode on how to make it a habit.

EXAMPLES

• The music teacher who asked 'Are you okay?'
A reader comment on a New York Times article about the kindness study: a child living in poverty with an abusive parent was stopped in the hallway by a music teacher, who asked if he was okay, shared his lunch, and said, 'You're in a bad spot, but it doesn't have to be your life.' Thirty years later, the commenter says the cycles of abuse and poverty were broken for them, their partner and their children.

• Skip the pay-it-forward line
Mel shares a former barista's post saying pay-it-forward chains confuse busy coffee shops. Instead, thank the person making your coffee and tip them what you would have spent on the stranger's drink.

• Mel's go-to kindnesses
She compliments people's nail art, because they clearly put effort into it, and thanks people cleaning public bathrooms 'for taking care of us.' Most people are floored, she says.

• Tracey closes the laptop
While finalizing the newsletter, Mel was online shopping in another tab. Tracey silently shut her laptop and pushed it away, and they finished quickly.

• The cologne and the math class

Mel recalls a story from a book on trauma, by a psychiatrist she doesn't name: a high schooler's grades and behavior collapsed in one math class because the teacher's new cologne matched the one his abuser had worn. When the teacher stopped wearing it, the problem ended.

• A signature scent at the altar

Tracey, who is engaged, was advised by a recently married friend to choose a scent for the altar. The friend used a large arrangement of her favorite flowers plus a sprayed fragrance, so she can revisit the moment for life. Tracey suggests the same for any big occasion.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Eight small changes to try

Do one small kindness. Lower slowly into a chair once a day. Play birdsong. Write down what you're grateful for. Silence your phone and schedule focused blocks. Choose a scent for big moments. Go easy on yourself about harmless secrets. Practice self-kindness.

• Mel's 2:13 pause

She sets a daily 2:13 p.m. phone alarm labeled 'stop' as a cue to breathe and do nothing for a moment, a simple mindfulness practice.

• Keep medical decisions with your clinician

The anxiety trial compared mindfulness with medication, and the researchers still see a role for medication. Don't change a prescription without talking to your prescriber.

3 Lessons From One of the Hardest Years of My Life | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Date: 2022-12-26 · Duration: 0:54:15
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTVW9ckd89g

KEYPOINTS

• Mel rates the past year a 97 out of 10 for difficulty

Even as the podcast took off, Mel says she was burnt out after years of running on adrenaline, and felt more unhappy the more successful she became. For two years she lived alone in Boston while Chris and their son stayed with her mother-in-law three hours away in southern Vermont, where Oakley chose to attend school during the pandemic. A close person in her inner circle had been stealing from her and lying. She wasn't exercising, reached for alcohol to cope, and says photos show her looking 'grey like a dolphin.'

• Lesson one: life is always trying to teach you something

Mel rejects the 'life is happening for you' cliché she used to hate, but reframes it as school. Easy times teach you what works; hard times show you what's broken. She calls herself a stubborn student: ignore the lesson and life brings out the sledgehammer.

• Friction marks where the lesson is

Anywhere you feel friction (body, relationships, work, bank account) points to one of a few things: a broken process, broken relationships, the wrong people around you, or something no longer aligned with who you are. Mel says friction only grows until you address it. Looking back, she sees years of excusing people who lied to or betrayed her, until the betrayals got big enough to force the lesson.

• Friction even shows up in children

When Oakley was in fourth grade he had full-on tantrums at homework time, cried before school and banged his head on the kitchen island. His body knew something was off. It turned out to be profound dyslexia, dysgraphia, and executive-function and attention issues.

• Lesson two: your excuses are just fear

Too late, too old, too young, missed the window, would be a copycat: Mel says every excuse is fear of rejection, failure or disappointing others. Her examples include not going back to the gym because it's been three months, or skipping white kitchen cabinets because a friend already has them.

• Action is the answer to excuses

Mel says you can reverse-engineer what others did and take one step a day. She finally launched the podcast when she got sick of the friction and denying herself the dream, deciding she didn't care if nobody invited her on their show or if it failed. You're doing it for yourself, not for money or to impress anyone.

• Lesson three: change isn't easy, but it's worth it and you're capable

Go in expecting difficulty. Selling the Boston house where they raised their kids for 26 years, to end the split living, triggered a wave of grief and what Mel calls a big mental breakdown. With therapy and her first antidepressant in 20 years, she got through it. She openly credits Celexa as a ladder and says there's nothing wrong with needing medication.

• Mel ran her career like an emergency for a decade

Her success began in crisis: liens on the house, bills unpaid, and Chris having left his business, getting sober and depressed. She says she never left that 'say yes to everything to stay afloat' mode and always assumed her luck would run out, which is why she eventually hit a wall.

• Even marriage fights can be broken processes

Mel says most breakdowns with Chris come from a communication process failing: he retreats, she keeps going 55 miles an hour, and he feels rejected or taken advantage of. That doesn't mean they're bad people or the marriage is bad. It means a process needs fixing.

EXAMPLES

• The 'things I hate / things I love' page

On December 21, after Mel's friend Pete told her she sounded more miserable than he'd ever heard, he had her draw a line down a page: things she hates on the left, things she loves on the right. Her left column included packing up on Sundays to drive home alone, flying and working alone, generating every idea herself, ADHD-driven disorganisation with no admin support, never seeing friends, and not knowing how her work connected to something bigger. The right side included therapy, time with Chris and Oakley, building a house and the future podcast.

• Begging podcast hosts who never replied

Promoting The High Five Habit a year earlier, Mel recorded custom videos asking the biggest podcast hosts she admired to have her on. Mostly crickets, which she took as proof she'd never make it in podcasting. A year later her show was, she says, the number one education podcast on every platform.

• Jealousy as blocked desire

In The High Five Habit (page 111), Mel admitted being jealous of friends like Lewis Howes, seven years into The School of Greatness. She got her start on a Saturday-morning Boston call-in radio show paid $25 an hour to help cover groceries, and had wanted to return to audio since 2007.

• Oakley streaming to nobody

Oakley loved streaming video games and giving advice but quit for two years after a school move, fearing what new classmates would think. After positive feedback on a podcast appearance, he started again from a closet upstairs with no viewers, telling Mel it takes time and you have to show up consistently.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Make your own two-column list, ideally with a truth-telling friend

Getting friction out of your head and onto paper makes it something you can work on. Also honour what's working and do

more of it.

- **Expect whack-a-mole**
  Mel's left column filled up again with new things. New friction will always show up, so treat lessons as ongoing rather than a one-time fix.
- **Ask for help without shame**
  Whether it's people, medication or new habits, Mel says asking for help is something to be proud of. Don't wait for a breakdown to make the list.

The Secret to Why You’re Unhappy & The ONE Thing You Can Do About It | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Date: 2022-12-05 · Duration: 0:59:05
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PMMdW3tGWRY

KEYPOINTS

• Joy can be wiped out by anticipating loss

Mel woke up flooded with joy because all three of her kids were home for Thanksgiving. Almost immediately, a second wave of grief washed it away, because they would leave in three or four days. "They just got here." Thinking about their departure meant she wasn't actually experiencing them being there, and the realisation turned into the episode.

• The "campaign of misery" is a hidden habit of fighting your own happiness

Mel's name for the constant search for what's wrong or about to go wrong. On the surface she is grateful and positive. Underneath, she realised, "I pick up the sword, I start wielding it, and I'm fighting for misery." Her husband Chris had long told her she was focused on what was wrong and that it was never enough, and she had always rejected that.

• Put down the sword, pick up the mirror

Her producer Amy pulls an oracle card for her each morning, and that day it was the "Garden of Venus." Amy explained that the sword represents always defending yourself, your judgements and how hard things are. Putting it down and picking up the mirror means seeing your natural state of beauty, peace and love. Mel uses the card as a framework, not as evidence.

• We all learn two languages, the spoken one and the emotional one

Mel says she learned English and also learned from her mother to look for what's wrong. One of her mother's sayings was "holidays are women killers." She stresses compassion: her mother grew up in a hard-working farming family that wasn't loving. Amy and Jesse recognise the same pattern: as children, they agreed with a parent's complaints to keep the peace and feel safe.

• The emotional language is absorbed before you have words

Citing what she learned from Dr. Becky, Mel says that from birth to about age five, children absorb their surroundings in a highly receptive learning state. That's why they pick up languages easily, and also how they take in the emotional tone underneath what's said. Amy adds that this pattern is a default you needed, "not who you are at a soul level."

• Changing it is like becoming fluent in a new language

At 54, Mel says the campaign of misery is "as fluent inside of me as English." Learning a new emotional language takes daily practice, and you'll slip back into your native one. She commits to journaling, talking about it and catching the moment she starts picking up the sword, beginning with being kind to herself and to family members who do the same thing without realising.

• It shows up even in success

As the podcast's downloads kept growing, Mel caught herself thinking "it's temporary, it's luck, you're going to plummet," instead of enjoying the fact that it was resonating. Even during the recording, workers hammering on a shed set off her urge to find something wrong.

• Give your mind a new question

Mel's point is that prayer, meditation, oracle cards and daily devotionals like The Book of Awakening all give your mind a different thought to hold onto. Most minds have the job of finding what's horrible. A new prompt trains your subconscious to look for different answers. The aim isn't to answer it perfectly; it's to retrain where your mind looks.

EXAMPLES

• Amy's burn-and-wash ritual

For a long time, Amy wrote three pages of morning pages every day about her family's "tribal" emotional language, what she hated and loved about it. She tore up the pages, burned them in a Pyrex bowl outside while watching from behind the sliding door, then washed her hands up to the elbows. Mel connects the hand-washing to her father, an orthopaedic surgeon, scrubbing in: surgery to remove the old language.

• The prompt: "How can this be easy?"

Amy writes it at the top of every page and has done so for about five years. Mel's and Jesse's first reaction was resistance: they didn't like the question and worried they couldn't fill three pages, which Amy pointed out was the campaign of misery talking. Her advice: write whatever comes up, even "Amy's a jackass," to get through the crust to the "golden Buddha" underneath.

• Jesse's three pages

Jesse started out crying and unsure. Her mirror habit is telling herself "you look like crap," and her family's emotional language centres on victimhood. She ended with "breathe, be still, be present, hug your husband, hug Myrtle my cat," and decided it's fine to spend her first Thanksgiving in her new home with FaceTime: "Your new tribe starts now."

• Mel's pages: from the cat to "stop gripping"

Mel began by venting about a cat peeing on the floor and scratching the new stair runner, then moved on to grief that her parents wouldn't come for Thanksgiving or Christmas. She ended with: let them be who they are, you're in a five-year experiment in healing, "let go, stop gripping, and just love." She realised the cat was in distress and needed love, not resentment.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Name your sword

First, recognise that you have a campaign of misery and that you can put it down. Amy says to give yourself credit just for noticing, even if you don't act on it for months.

• Try the morning ritual

Write "How can this be easy?" at the top of the page, fill three pages of stream of consciousness, then rip and burn them safely and wash your hands. Expect resistance, expect the floodgates to open once you start, and expect to write similar things for a while.

• Look for the small easy joys

Both Jesse and Amy landed on simple things: breathing, being still, hugging their partners. All three admitted they hadn't hugged their spouses that morning, which is an easy fix.