

## #75: Creating the Life You Want



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With Your Host

Marissa McKool, MPH

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Hey, you all, I'm Marissa McKool, and you're listening to the Redefining Rest Podcast for Public Health Professionals. Here we believe rest is your right. You don't have to earn it, you just have to learn how to take it and I'm going to teach you. Ready? Come along.

All right y'all. We are just jumping into this episode because I have a lot to say hello. Welcome. If you're new, I'm so happy you're here. This is actually a great episode to start with if you're new. If you have been a listener for a while, I think this is gonna really bring a lot of what we've been talking about together.

I had a recent experience that I've been thinking about a lot. Actually, recently, I was in quite a long car ride really thinking about this. I just had music on. I was just deeply reflecting to the point where I got very emotional because this is such an important topic, of course, but it's also so near and dear to my heart because of my experience.

But also because I care so much about you and every person in public health who is, unbeknownst to them or only with a little bit of consciousness, really not living the life that they want to live. There is nothing more important to me than people being able to create and live the life they want. There is nothing more tragic to me than not being able to do that.

So I had this experience where there was just this clear moment where I was able to see so many things about where I am now compared to where I was before I did therapy and coaching and where I would have been if I had never done my work on myself. As humans, we will always be working to evolve and grow. Even if it's not intentional, even if you never do intentional work. Because as humans, we are wired to adapt, to evolve.

But there is something so different about doing that work intentionally. Whether the work is to stop self-judgment, to forgive yourself, to let go of

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the past, to stop drinking and be sober, to get out of resentment or anything else. When you do intentional work on yourself, this the way I think about it.

There's this first layer of the work. I think of it as like laying the foundation for the house, right? Like we're building a new house for ourselves, how we want to live, how we want to feel on that house, how we want to treat ourselves. The first layer of deep self-development work is building that foundation of self-change and growth. Timelines may vary whether that foundation takes six months or a year or longer. Some folks leave it there, right? Just do that foundation, that's totally fine.

But when you start doing that work, I think a lot of folks really then pick up this desire to consciously continue the path of choosing self-growth and evolution. Approaching life from the perspective of not only recognizing you will always be growing, but wanting, desiring, going after always growing. Choosing things and making decisions and investments in using your time and being intentional about how you're going to grow. Experiencing self-growth, going at self-growth from that space, not from a reactive growth space, but a proactive growth space.

I think what happens is—This is my experience. Others might feel differently. But I would say my foundational growth period, which was about three to four years ago, and ever since I've been diving deeper and deeper and deeper. I think once you've moved past that foundational period, sometimes what happens is you kind of forget what your life felt like all those years ago. Of course, you don't forget what was going on. But I do think you kind of forget how you felt.

You have some memory, like I remember I felt resentful, but I don't really remember, and I don't think about it all the time, the intensity of those feelings, the intensity of those thoughts, right. When I really am able to tap into that memory of what that emotional experience was like, I am blown away by the difference of how stuck I was in feeling anxious and resentful, of how my brain just felt like it harassed me, and I never did anything good

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enough, but I couldn't get away. I kind of forgot what my emotional life was truly like before I did coaching.

Even though I have memory and can remember, to some extent, the ability to really see the picture and feel the picture of the huge emotional difference isn't something that's necessarily top of mind every day. Before I was entrenched in guilt and shame, and I didn't even realize it. My negative self-talk, my self-shame, my judgment, it ruled my life. At the time, I couldn't really see that.

When you have created a completely different emotional experience for yourself, and you created it with coaching tools and other tools or support, and you continue to create it over and over for years. At least this is my experience where I have lived a very different emotional experience for the past four years. I've ended up, and I think naturally, you kind of distance yourself more and more from what your emotional experience was like all those years ago. It can become like a distant memory.

That's not necessarily a bad thing, right? We want to be embodying and living in the emotional experience we're creating now, especially if we're doing that from self-growth, with coaching tools, and the ability to create the experience you want to have.

But this week, I got a big moment of clarity, a reminder, a huge reminder what my life was like, like a flashback almost. Also kind of an image, a prediction of what my life would have been like in the future if I had not gone all in and invested in myself with my time, and, frankly, money into getting help.

So this past week, I learned about this person who I believe was maybe in their 70s. Hearing more about their story and their experience of life over their decades. That's when I realized oh, that experience would have been mine, and it was mine, but it would have continued to be mine if I did not do

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coaching and also therapy. For me, I did therapy for a little bit. Especially if I hadn't done that initial foundational work on myself. My life would look so different now, and then would look so different over the next 10, 20, 30, 40 years.

Maybe not the external things, but the internal experience. This person in their 70s, they reflected on how most of their life they had low self-esteem, were really defensive, resentful, reactive, and built a wall. They described themselves as living in an empty shell and disconnected from several important relationships in their life. They pulled away. They spent much of their life shaming and blaming themselves for that. They expressed at different points that they truly forgot what it was like to feel joy.

I do want to recognize it is possible at different points of their life maybe they experienced depression. I don't know, right? They never got formal help. They never got coaching, not therapy, not anything else. It also appeared that they never really shared with anyone in their life, family, friends, other folks what they were thinking and feeling, even though there were people in their life. They became emotionally isolated. So not only were they feeling terrible and resentful and defensive and the lack of joy and fulfillment, but they were emotionally isolated in that experience.

When we hear those stories, we often imagine someone who has all of a sudden felt that way. But as this person was describing their experience, they described it decade by decade, year by year, and it didn't happen overnight. Yes, of course it can for some folks, especially if you have a certain type of mental health diagnosis or traumatic experience. But I think for so many people, it doesn't happen overnight.

As this person over the decades, I was learning about their experience. I had this moment where I really saw clearly how this happens. Where you get to the end of your career or towards in your life and you look back and you kind of realize you were miserable for so much of it. But while you're in it, you weren't getting help. You weren't trying to change it. Because it's a

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slow change little by little. So much so you don't really notice until it does feel so heavy and hopeless.

Then by that part, it's even harder to reach out and get help sometimes. Because it's gradual. It's a gradual build I think for many folks, again not all, but for many folks to end up at the end of your career or end of life and look back at your adult life and feel like you are unhappy the whole time. Again, I'm not talking about someone who maybe has clinical depression or other mental health diagnoses or maybe extreme trauma. I'm not necessarily talking about that.

But when this starts to happen and it slowly builds, I don't think many of us realize it. I didn't. Looking back in my life before coaching, that's what was happening, but I had no idea. If you would have asked me then, I would have said oh yeah, my life's great or pretty good. Now, looking back, the honest answer would have been I hate my job, and I don't think I should. I think I'm broken because I can't find a boyfriend, but I don't think I should think that or say that. Because A, it makes me look crazy, but also means I'm a bad feminist.

The truth back then was I felt anxious all the time, but thought it was just normal. I questioned my friendships, but didn't want to admit it. I couldn't even see what my actual emotional experience was, or what I wanted it to be. I didn't have a contrast to compare. I didn't have the ability to step out of myself and see what I was going through, truly. So at that time, I would have never described myself as unhappy and miserable.

But looking back now from where I am, after so much growth and development and having these tools and experiencing true emotional freedom, I can say during that period that's what I was feeling. I just didn't know it.

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I think that's where the gradual layers of discontent and resentment and unhappiness start to build in a very subtle way. My emotional experience now is a complete 360, completely different now. I just couldn't see it then that that was even possible. Maybe others could see it, probably, but I couldn't. So many people I talk to in public health, maybe even you, are in that place and don't realize it. Whether you're just a few years out of your MPH or your midcareer.

What you don't realize is you are settling. You are settling emotionally. You recognize maybe you feel stressed, or sometimes you're anxious, or you do feel some frustration, and maybe you have moments of happiness. But the expansion beyond that is small. You just don't realize it. The intensity of the emotions are all over the place, you just don't realize it. That the intensity and the time you spend in stress and frustration and annoyed is so much higher than it has to be, and the intensity you spend in happiness and fulfillment and joy and peace is so much lower than it has to be.

You end up no longer really dreaming big and letting go of goals. You keep yourself small. You kind of become resolved to the life that you have, the emotional life you have. Or you think magically at some point at a random time in the future will all suddenly get better.

Every day you accept your current emotional experience as reality that you believe you cannot change, or require something external to change, like other people are making more money. Then you become a resolved to where your emotional life is right now rather than taking initiative and responsibility for your emotional experience and changing it. Over time that can build up. Then you get into your 70s and 80s and look back and wondered what happened.

Now I'm not fear mongering you. I'm not. I'm saying this because I want you to have a better, more expansive, joyful, fulfilled, and empowering experience, and understanding this person's story this week. Truly, it made me feel very sad that this person did not have a coach who was looking for

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them, who was speaking to them, who was reaching out and saying hey, it can be so different. I can help you. This is safe. This is secure. Seeing over the decades, how they felt, how miserable they felt, the lack of joy, how alone. I don't think anyone, anyone has to feel that way.

To see that made me so sad. To realize that could have been me if it wasn't for the self-development that I found through coaching made me grateful for the work I had done, made me proud for the work I had done. I don't want you to end up like that person, who towards the end of their life over decades just slowly builds into living a life where emotionally they felt lost and alone.

I know for a fact I will not have that experience because I know how to create the life I want, the emotional life I want. I know I will not reflect on my decades and years in that way. I want that for you. I want you to know that you will not have that reflection because you have done the work, because you have gotten the skills or the support or the help to learn how to create the emotional experience you want to have.

It's so much easier for where so many of you are to not take emotional responsibility, to not reach out for help. I know this because that was me. It was so easy for me. I had a lot more access than many people do to support. I didn't think I needed it. I didn't reach out for it. I could have, now looking back, used coaching and therapy years before I started doing it.

Yes, there are access issues. There are barrier issues. There are so many structural things that I also experienced, but many other people, including maybe you experienced, to a different degree. However, you don't have to let those things stop you from getting the tools and skills and support. No matter what age you are, no matter where you are in your career, you can learn how to change your emotional experience. It is never too late, and it's never too early.



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It doesn't matter if you're a high achiever go getter who checked all the boxes of degrees and jobs and marriage and kids and money and all that stuff. That stuff is not what creates your emotional experience. The last thing I want is you to wake up in your 70s, 80s, or 90s, and think what the fuck was all this for? I was so unhappy for decades hustling, hustling, hustling, doing all the things they told me to do to be happy, and I wasn't. I don't want that to be you.

That is why I do this work. I want you to have the ability, to have the support, to have the skills to create the life you want so you know 100% for sure you won't look back on your life saying what the fuck happened? Because you have figured it out. I know for sure when I'm in my 80s and 90s, I will be reflecting on how fucking amazing my life was. Not because of all the things, not because of money or houses or vacations. Because I made it that way with my emotional capacity.

I know for sure I will not end up saying what the fuck? How was I so miserable because I have gained the tools and I use them and practice them and deepen them to change my frame of mind, to manage my mind, to process my emotions, to create emotions, to believe in myself. I want you to have that certainty to through you doing the self-development and growth work of learning how to create the emotional life you want to have.

This isn't about just doing coaching. Whether you do it through therapy, whether you do it through a program, whether you do it through stop drinking, whatever it may be. I know for so many of you, it seems inconsequential and not a big deal. Like oh well once I move or once I get this job, it will be better. No, it matters, and your emotional experience matters right now in this moment. It is a big deal.

Now is the absolute best time to learn how to live a life that emotionally completely fills you. That you know, without a doubt, you will look back when you're 90 and think I lived the best life I could have. I maybe wasn't able to travel everywhere or go to every baseball stadium, but I was able to

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feel the way I wanted to feel. I know I lived the best life I could. Not because I was lucky or worked hard enough, but because I knew how to decide what to feel when based on what I wanted.

When you learn that, you can move through the next decades of your life going after your goals and dreams, feeling joy and excitement, and feeling empowered with resilience to deal with any challenge coming your way. The ability to build deep relationships with other people and to have a deep and loving experience and relationship with yourself. This is the most valuable and empowering tool in the world. To be able to know you can create the experience you want to have.

I want you to have that. I don't want you to wait. You might not be able to see right now where you are that your life can be 10, 20, 50, 100 times better, but it can. I can tell you from the other side. It became so clear to me in this moment where I was learning more about this person's story and how they felt over the decades that that is optional. That is an experience no one has to have.

That experience of having emotional freedom and control and feeling better is not a result of more money or a different job or being in a relationship or anything external. It is a result from knowing how to feel better, how to cultivate emotions you want, how to process the difficult emotions, how to not get stuck in emotions.

People all over the world turn to things like Facebook scrolling, online shopping, to drugs, plastic surgery, extreme exercising, and other forms of escapism to feel better. You might be doing some of these things. I'm not saying all these activities like online shopping or exercising are morally good or bad, right? They are morally neutral.

I am saying think of how much time people spend, including how much time you spend, trying to escape your life. Distract yourself from your life. Think

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of how much money the drug industry makes, the plastic surgery industry make, the diet industry makes. Why? Because people want to feel better, but they believe the way to feel better is through escaping life. But no, the way to feel better is not by escaping your life. It's by being able to embrace your life with tools and skills to emotionally feel better. That's what creating the life you want is about.

I want you to step out of this for a second and go into public health hat. What is one of the hardest things about making change in public health? I'm not talking about funding or not having enough staff, but fundamentally one of the hardest challenges about making change in population and community health. It's getting people to not only want to change, but to believe if they change their life will be better. Whether it's changing behaviors or policy or anything else.

Because when we're talking with individuals, organizations, or policymakers or communities about how policy support or behavior change will help them or their family or their community, a lot of the times they cannot see it. Either they can't really see the full benefit of it, or they can't really see the full harm of not doing it.

Sometimes it can be a hard sell the people. A hard sell to policymakers, to neighbors, to make changes now, not just so that they can feel better or have a little better experience now, but so that in five and 10 years, they will have a transformatively different experience for the better. Right? That's one of the challenges in public health.

Now come back to you right now. That's your challenge right now in creating the life you want. You can totally listen to podcasts and read books to feel better and learn that way. Absolutely. I did some of this work on my own for a little bit. But doing the deep dive work on yourself helps you not feel a little better, 10 times better, 100 times better. Not just now but for the rest of your life because it's a skill.

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When you're doing escapism, you just have to keep going back that exit route, and you're not getting where you want to go. But when you build the skill of creating the route you want to take emotionally and making that happen, that's yours. No one can take that from you. This isn't like a risky stock investment where we put all your money in, and you can lose it all.

When you invest in yourself and your emotional life and learning how to have the skills to be the one who is in control of your own emotional experience no matter what happens outside of you, you get infinite returns on the benefit of that. Guarantee. Your life will be so much better because of it, but you do have to do the work and take the step even if it feels scary or even if it's totally new.

It's not just about seeing and believing it could be so much better. It's about being willing to do the internal work to make that happen rather than waiting for a miracle overnight fix that doesn't exist. That's not a small feat. That first building of the foundation, like I was talking about earlier, the foundational self-growth and change of the new house you want to live in, that is the hardest part, doing that first work, but it is so worth it. So worth it.

To wrap up, I'll say as I was learning about this person's story who really prompted this episode, and really hearing year by year, decade by decade, their emotional experience and where they were at and how alone and isolated they felt and seeing how it was so gradual over time. I think that the truth is, the sad and hard truth is that living in the complex, fucked up messy world that we live in with toxic capitalism and the patriarchy and white supremacy. With generational trauma or historical impacts and all the other things, it is actually easier and more common to end up on that path.

Where over time, it might feel like life is beating you down, but what you don't realize is you're keeping yourself down. The resistance to both believing something better is available, but also figuring out how to make it better for yourself is the main thing standing in your way of creating the life you want.

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Yes, there are challenges. Yes, there are barriers. Yes, we do live in a fucked up messy world, right. It's not perfect. There's a lot of things out of your control. But what's in your control is deciding what life you want to live and how you want to feel in that life and figuring out how to create that emotional experience for yourself. Because it's 100% possible, and I want that for you.

So I want you to think about this. What life do you want? What emotions do you want to feel? If you wrote a journal entry for every decade you live, what do you want it to say? When you're 90, what do you want to be able to say about your life? I'm not talking about the accolades and accomplishments. I'm talking about the emotional experience of your life because that's what matters.

That's what this person was reflecting on. They weren't reflecting on their career, their achievements, their money, their travel, none of that. All of their reflection was about their emotional experience over the year because ultimately that's truly what matters. That's what makes the life you're living. That is what makes the life you want to live. That's what creating the life you want means.

All right y'all, I love you so, so much. I want the best for you. I want you to love your life. I want you to feel better, and I want you to know that you can. You don't have to wait on anyone else or anything externally. You can do this work, and that is true liberation. Have a great week.

If you found this episode helpful then you have to check out my coaching program where I provide you individualized support to create a life centered around rest. Head on over to [mckoolcoaching.com](http://mckoolcoaching.com), that's M-C-K-O-O-L coaching.com to learn more.