

33: Coming to Terms with Risk



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Welcome to The Wealthy Mom MD Podcast, a podcast for women physicians who want to learn how to live a wealthy life. In this podcast you will learn how to make money work for you, how you can have more of it and learn the tools to empower you to live a life on purpose. Get ready to up-level your money and your life. I'm your host, Dr. Bonnie Koo.

Welcome to episode 33. Today, we're going to talk about why physicians are so risk-averse. Now, this is something I've noticed for a while. So, this isn't anything new.

But I've been thinking a lot about it recently because I just see this come up over and over again among my students and clients in terms of their fear of making mistakes, their fear of losing money, and their fear of failure, even though logically, they can get that failing, making mistakes, and even losing money is part of your investing and wealth journey. Ultimately, it's the fear of making the wrong decision, which can lead to losing money. And, well, losing money doesn't feel good, does it?

And so, why is this so pervasive and where does it come from? One of the concepts I talk about with my clients is that traditional school, meaning kindergarten, grade school et cetera, it has literally trained us to believe that money comes from hard work, from studying hard, from getting good grades, getting more education.

I think a lot of us sort of believe that if you want to get a better job, if we want to make more money, we need more school, we need more knowledge. And so, becoming a physician is honestly a culmination of this training.

All of us went through a lot of school. We were the cream of the crop. We got really good grades. We knew how to get As. We went through a lot of school; not just four years of college, but four years of medical school, and then anywhere from three to seven plus years of residency training.

Now, these traits that got us to where we are, they're not bad. But they can often work against us when it comes to money. Because traditional school

33: Coming to Terms with Risk

teaches us that mistakes, that failure is bad. When we get an F or another bad grade, I guess anything below an A is probably not good for a physician-to-be, right? It's not good.

And when we're young, as students, we think there's something wrong with us. We often collapse the grade with our ability, our self-worth, our confidence. All failing means is that you didn't get the result you wanted. It has nothing to do with your value, your worthiness, and your ability. The problem, I think with traditional school, is that it doesn't prepare you for real life and it definitely doesn't prepare you for business if you're someone who wants to start a business because failure is required for success.

Same thing for money and growing wealth. Failure is required for building true wealth. We need to celebrate failures. Can you imagine if teachers, when we were in grade school, celebrated the Fs in the classroom? But they don't. They only celebrate the As.

You know, in entrepreneurship, one of the first things we celebrate is our first bad review. I'm totally serious. When a fellow entrepreneur comes to me upset about their first bad review, maybe it was a comment on their social media, or maybe even an email, of course, it can be upsetting. They think something is wrong. They think their business is wrong. They think they are wrong.

But I actually don't console them. I actually say, "Congratulations. This is a huge milestone. This means you are reaching enough people for people to have an opinion about you. In fact, the bigger you become in business, whether it's a business like mine or a physician practice, the more negative reviews you will get. It's just part of the game. It's only a problem if you make it mean something about you.

Okay, so let's bring this back to money and investing. As I said before, so many of us are afraid of losing money if we make a mistake because we have equated losing money as making a mistake or a failure, and remember, failure is bad and should be avoided at all costs.

33: Coming to Terms with Risk

And I understand this. It seems logical to think this, right? But this type of thinking will not produce financial freedom. Far from it. I like to tell my clients that you're either always winning or learning versus winning or losing.

If we all truly believed that the more we fail, the more we will succeed, we would all be lining up to fail and to fail a lot and to fail big. But we aren't. We are actually lining up not to fail. We are playing not to lose versus playing to win. I'm going to say this again because it seems like I'm saying the same thing, but there's a subtle and important difference here.

Most of us are lining up not to fail, which is playing not to lose. And that is very different than playing to win. And this is not just a distinction that's important for money, but for life in itself.

How many of you are playing not to lose because you're so afraid of losing or failing? The problem with playing not to lose and being so risk-averse is that you'll never experience what it's truly like to win and live your best life. And what's so bad about losing or failing anyway? Like, really?

Because when I coach my clients on this, when we really delve into what they're truly afraid of if they fail, if they lose, whatever you want to call it, it all comes down to feeling horrible; feeling feelings like shame, maybe deep embarrassment. And these are big and negative emotions.

Notice how we go to great lengths to avoid feeling things like shame and embarrassment. I often joke that, with coaching or thought work, whatever you want to call it, it's actually really feeling work. I call it emotion school. And I often joke with my clients that traditional school failed to teach us how to manage our emotions, AKA emotion school. And it also didn't teach us how to manage our money, or money school.

And to be honest, it really comes down to this. The worst thing that can happen is feeling something really bad. Meaning the worst thing that can happen is a feeling. And, so what? Why do we go to such great lengths to avoid feeling a feeling?

33: Coming to Terms with Risk

Now, in coaching, this avoiding a feeling, we call this buffering. And let me just backtrack a little bit because there are four ways to deal with a feeling. And also, many of us think that feelings just happen to us. And so, you may have heard me say this in previous episodes, but just in case you haven't, thoughts create our feelings and feelings create actions and actions create results.

And so, how many of us think that feelings just happen to us? You know, if we're feeling bad about ourselves because someone said something. That gives all power to something else, to something external. We actually do have way more control over our feelings than we think we do.

Okay, so back to feelings. There are four ways to deal with a feeling. Number one, you avoid it. We call this buffering. Everyone buffers. I buffer. Here are some common ways we buffer. We go on social media, meaning we scroll Facebook or Instagram. We get a glass of wine. We eat a little too much, that cupcake. We watch Netflix.

Now, none of these activities in themselves are bad, by the way. It's more of why we do it that we need to examine. Okay, so that's avoiding a feeling or buffering. We've all done it. Number two is we resist the feeling, which is different than avoiding, but it's a subtle difference. Meaning we're using sort of our willpower to kind of resist the feeling. Kind of like when you're trying to lose weight, you see that mac and cheese calling for you and you're literally using your willpower to resist giving into the urge to eat the mac and cheese.

I picked mac and cheese because, honestly, I have a really hard time saying no to mac and cheese. If it's on the menu at a restaurant, for example, I almost always have to order it. Anyway, I digress. So, that's resisting.

Okay, now we've talked about avoiding and resisting, number three is to react to the feeling. And so, this will depend on what the feeling is. So if you're feeling angry, reacting to the feeling is to yell. When I'm looking at

33: Coming to Terms with Risk

mac and cheese and that feeling is basically the desire to eat that mac and cheese, reacting or giving into that feeling is to eat it. That's number three.

And then, the fourth way to deal with a feeling – this is where most of us do not know how to deal with – is to simply allow and experience a feeling. Yeah, you can just literally sit there and allow that feeling to run through your body.

None of us were taught how to deal with our feelings. And if we really think about the world – and I'm not going to go into a whole spiel about drugs and alcohol, but the reason why so many people end up drinking, end up doing drugs or other types of addictive behaviors is because they are literally avoiding feeling their feelings. They're numbing their feelings, so to speak.

Because no one taught us that if we just allow a feeling – and this is not just about bad feelings, by the way, because if you're listening to this, you're probably avoiding feeling good feelings too because I know many of us do not allow the feeling of accomplishment, like truly allowing that feeling, that positive feeling when we accomplish something, when we did something great, we often sort of pretend like it didn't happen or just kind of avoid it because that also feels uncomfortable.

So, this is not just about bad feelings. But let's define what a feeling truly is. We define it as a vibration in your body. So, thoughts create feelings, and then the feeling creates a sensation in the body. A feeling is not a physical sensation, which kind of is the opposite, meaning there's a physical sensation like pain, which then travels to our brain and then triggers a thought. Because then that pain or that physical sensation is a circumstance and then we have a thought about that sensation.

So, back to feelings. A thought creates a feeling and then the feeling is a sensation or even a vibration in our bodies. And so many of us do not allow that feeling to, I like to call it, percolate. Kind of let it just sit in our body. And then to allow it to dissipate. Because all feelings are temporary.

33: Coming to Terms with Risk

I would say about 10 years ago when I was a derm' resident, I remember talking to a friend of mine. His name is Chuck. And he's a therapist. Maybe it was more than 10 years ago because I was in my early 30s. But anyway, I remember asking him, "What's something you wish all adults knew or something you see come up all the time in your practice?"

Because I was just kind of interested in how he talked to his patients. And he said, "The one thing you have to realize or learn as an adult is that all feelings are temporary." And that really stuck with me. And it wasn't until I learned more about thought work and coaching, where that sort of really hit home. Like, truly, all feelings are temporary, even the really bad ones.

And if we really understand this, then we wouldn't have to or want to go to great lengths to avoid the feeling. Because I'll tell you – and you guys know this already from your life experience – avoiding a feeling doesn't make it go away. It just keeps coming back and then we keep having to buffer.

The only way to truly allow the feeling to literally run through you and dissipate is to just allow the feeling. Now, this is something I teach inside my program and this is something a lot of my clients have trouble with because it's such a new concept. And we've spent so much time buffering, resisting et cetera that we don't even know what it's like to just sit with a feeling.

And this is something that I have trouble with. And I like to joke that it's because I'm Asian. Because, you know, in our culture, it's not like normal to be emotional. And so, I can make fun of myself around it, but I do think it's something that a lot of us have trouble with, with honestly just feeling our feelings.

And so, that was a whole thing about feelings. But that's really what failure, mistakes, et cetera, we don't want to feel bad about ourselves. The problem is that losing money, failing, making a mistake, whatever we want to call it, it is part of the game of making lots of money with investments. Whether it's the stock market, whether it's your business, and whether it's real estate.

33: Coming to Terms with Risk

Losing money does not mean you are bad with money or investing. It does not mean that investing doesn't work. I hear so many people saying that they have friends who lost money on real estate, et cetera and then they make it mean, "It doesn't work. It's not for me."

However, they're forgetting about all the people who are making lots of money and who are every successful with real estate, right? All it means is that that thing didn't work out. The real work, like I said, you're always winning or learning. The real work is spending the time to really examine, why didn't it work? What can I learn from this? Versus beating yourself up, which is kind of the default thing that many of us do.

Now, beating yourself up seems useful. I know that sounds strange to hear, but hear me out. It seems useful and almost necessary. Like, we deserve to feel bad because we made a mistake. But I just want to tell you that that is 100% optional and it's 100% not useful. Because when you are beating yourself up, you cannot do the work to learn from the experience because you're too busy feeling bad about yourself.

If you actually think about it, beating yourself up is what I call a self-indulgent emotion or activity. And there's a whole list of things that I consider self-indulgent, which I'll talk about in another episode.

And so, one thing I do all the time inside my business is to do a full evaluation, whether it's from a launch of selling a course or with a coaching client if it didn't go the way I wanted it to.

Now, my brain automatically wants to go into how I messed up, how I'm not good, how all the things. The only difference now is that I might still indulge in that. I'm only human after all. But now, I take the time to learn from that experience.

And what I have learned over time, doing this over and over again, is it comes down to trusting yourself and to have your own back. So many of us are just not that nice to ourselves. You know, I always work with a one on

33: Coming to Terms with Risk

one coach and my current one is subtly pointing out to me how I take little jabs at myself.

I'm less mean to myself than I was like two years ago. But I'll still say little things like, "Yeah, but I'm kind of lazy and, you know, but I can't be bothered." And these sound like nothing special, like they don't really mean anything. But my coach will point out, you know, "It's still not very nice to yourself."

And so, I'm still beating myself up maybe a little bit nicer than I was two years ago, but I'm still doing it. I'm still human. I'm still learning. So, how can you reframe your prior money mistakes, especially if you maybe took the plunge to invest in real estate or maybe try your hand at individual stocks and it didn't work out, meaning you lost money?

Or I hear about physicians that do something and feel like they got swindled. Remember, all of those thoughts about that experience are optional. And I just want you to ask yourself, is it useful for me to keep thinking this about that experience? What am I truly committed to when it comes to money and wealth and freedom?

So many people want that quick fix, that thing that's going to make them rich quickly. It's just human nature. We're impatient. And I think the quicker you understand and truly get that the path to financial freedom, the path to doing what you really want in life without regrets, it's going to take lots of fails. The sooner you get onboard with that, the sooner you can get to where you want to go.

Okay, I hope you learned a lot from this episode and I will see you next week.

Hey, if you enjoyed this episode and don't want to miss out on new episodes, please hit the subscribe button on your favorite podcast app. See you next week.