

## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Bonnie Koo, MD**

## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

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 168. So, in today's conversation we're going to talk about how being a type A perfectionist, how it really impedes us in reaching goals like money and weight loss. And the reason why I say weight loss is because my good friend today is Priyanka and she is a weight loss coach for high-achieving moms.

And since both of us have clients who are high-achieving perfectionistic women, we decided to put our heads together and see how this plays out with our clients. And so what I really hope you take away from this episode is to see yourself in the things that we talk about and think about how you can solve for it when it gets in the way of pursuing wealth.

This is something I always have to have in check. I don't think perfectionism ever goes away, it's more that I have an awareness around it now and many times I have to pause and really notice it, right? It can be so insidious because it's just the way we have been our whole life. But when I notice that I'm stalling, and what I mean by stalling is I'm not getting closer to the goal that I want, that's an opportunity to examine why. Why did I stop taking action?

Now, at the time of this recording it's actually right before my birthday, which is the end of June. And one thing I decided to do for myself is I actually booked two nights at a luxury spa resort, Miraval actually. Not the Miraval that I'm having the conference at but another Miraval, there are I think three across the country now. And I'm going by myself, without the family. Kids aren't allowed anyway.

## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

And I really want to encourage if you're listening and you haven't done something for yourself, it doesn't have to be what I'm doing because I think what fills our cup and our desires looks different for everyone. Like some people going away by themselves is not something they want to do. But maybe it's going away with some girlfriends, maybe it's spending more time with your loved ones, it can look like many things.

And so I guess the point of my story here is spending some time thinking about what you need, what you'd really like and try to separate that from what you think you can do or any guilt you might feel about doing it.

Besides the fact that it's my birthday I was also like, well, this is a good time to do it because Jack is starting camp. And we enrolled him in a camp where they pick them up, they feed them, they drop them off. It's priceless to have that kind support and not have to worry about any of those details. So I at least timed it where it would be less stressful for my partner.

Anyway, that's what is going on. I will tell you more about how the trip went. I do plan to do some self-reflection and relax. Okay, here's my episode with Priyanka.

Bonnie: All right, Priyanka, welcome.

Priyanka: Thanks for having me.

Bonnie: So, before we get started why don't you introduce yourself?

Priyanka: Absolutely. So I am Priyanka Venugopal, I am an OB/GYN physician turned a mind and body health coach for high-achieving professional moms who really want to feel better in their body, lose weight without a calculator and ultimately feel better at work and home. And I'm the founder of the Unstoppable Mom Brain. And friends with you, which is so fun.

## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

Bonnie: Yes, Priyanka and I are friends. There's like a theme here, I basically bring my friends on who I feel like we could have a very interesting and valuable conversation for my listeners.

So, in case everyone is wondering why she is here on the show when it on the surface does not look like money. But since we are friends we've been talking a lot about things that we have seen show up for our clients because they're both type A, perfectionistic women. Obviously physicians aren't the only people who are perfectionists, right?

So I think this is going to be an amazing conversation and we'll both make analogies to how it applies to our clients. And I think what's great about that is I think having examples helps people learn better, right? That's really what it comes down to. Examples, metaphors, et cetera.

Okay, so since I led with our clients being perfectionistic women, it shows up in so many ways, right? And actually, I was just coaching yesterday and I noticed that this client was having what we call all or none thinking, I don't know if you call it black and white thinking. But she was looking to start a business. And basically her thinking is, well, I can't start it until I have all the pieces in place.

So in her mind it was like the website, she was uncomfortable having her name out there, her picture. So in her mind she had to figure that all out before she could start a blog. And so I explained to her the concept of all or none thinking, I'm like, but there's so many things in between. It's fine if you're not comfortable.

I was like, you could just start the blog and use your first name, or I did recommend not being anonymous because people don't generally want to work with people if they don't know your name and who you are. But that was just an example of needing to have everything perfectly in place before taking action. So how do you see that in your clients, Priyanka?

## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

Priyanka: Yeah, I think this is such a good topic because I find that with high-achieving professional women especially, there are a few key and common trends that hold back hitting goals and I think you just kind of touched on one.

So perfectionism is a big one and procrastination, which is interesting, they seem almost like two different ends of the spectrum but they go very hand in hand. Because we have these perfectionist brains, which I want to just define that the way that I think about perfectionism is not just that you want to do really well. I think high-achievers think I want to get the A+, the gold star, the accolades, the recognition.

The other side of perfectionism is avoiding imperfection, avoiding mistakes and avoiding the possibility of failure. And I find that that, actually that second half, is the real reason that high achievers will hesitate on taking needle moving action.

So what I find a lot of the time is we have this idea, this desire to hit a goal, whether it's to start a business, to lose weight, to maybe create something more for yourself at work or at home. And the only reason that we want to have every single piece in place, again, this is like the planner's dream, like you want to plan it all out, is simply because we want to avoid the discomfort of possibly failing.

The discomfort of possibly making a mistake because we think that that is going to be associated with a really terrible feeling. And we imply that mistakes and that terrible feeling means we're not going to actually achieve the goal. And so it's almost like very protective, if you think about it.

The idea of mistakes might mean that I'm not going to hit my goal, but it's like let's just not start. Let's just spend a lot of time, and high-achievers do this a lot, in consumption and in planning because we think it's super useful. But what it ends up doing is it puts high achievers in consumption, a lot of non-needle moving action. And so then their goals stall.

## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

Bonnie: Right. And how we define this is passive action versus massive action. Obviously, some passive action is necessary, but I'm sure you see like my clients are stuck in like, well, I've got to learn more. Especially like, I need to learn more about real estate or I need to learn more about XYZ before I can invest in it. And so they're just spending months learning without doing something but it feels like you are doing something because you are taking "action."

Priyanka: Absolutely.

Bonnie: But they're not taking needle moving action, right? That's so good.

Priyanka: I mean, you tell me, Bonnie, but does it feel like people – At least I know this was me, like just this addiction to learning and planning because learning feels so useful, right? It's like, but don't take away my learning and planning because it feels so useful that it sometimes is hard to stop learning to take the massive action that you're talking about.

Bonnie: Yeah, And I'm totally into planners and I still remember studying for step one, like I had a very elaborate table and plan. One thing I was proud of is I built in some wiggle room because a plan looks good on paper, but then that assumes you are going to execute perfectly. So I put in a few, and I'm only saying this because I have a funny example of I think two or three days where if I fall off track. And one day I ended up staying literally all night watching 24. Do you remember that show?

Priyanka: Oh yes. Oh yeah.

Bonnie: So literally I was just like binge watching it and went to bed at like three or 4am. So that obviously derailed the whole day. And I was like, I'm so glad I did this.

Priyanka: That was Alias and West Wing for me. So I would have my study schedule, and for me I didn't use book planners because I knew that I was going to redo it and we don't want red marks on the planner. So I used to

## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

print out monthly calendars. You know those monthly, you could just go to Google and print it out.

Bonnie: Yeah.

Priyanka: So I'd print out this calendar, I would have my study schedule, this was for boards after medical school. And I would write out all the chapters and practice bulletins that I had to read by specific dates. But Alias and West Wing just took over my life. And then I would reprint out brand new calendars because, again, perfectionist brain, I wanted a fresh start. I didn't want red lines. And I know I want the green check marks, so yeah, I mean, absolutely.

Bonnie: Have you heard of erasable pens?

Priyanka: Listen, erasable pens don't fully erase the pen. You know what I'm saying? Like you can see the redness underneath.

Bonnie: The marks. Yeah, you couldn't have that. You couldn't have the dents.

Priyanka: Oh no. Oh no, I don't want that. It needs to be perfect. Clean, crisp paper, it feels really good. I love fresh starts.

Bonnie: All right, so speaking of plans, you and I talked about how when you are so elaborately planning, it's almost as if you think or they think the plan is what's going to be the thing that gets them to the goal. And that's just one part of it, right? And they kind of ignore the part that isn't the plan. So let's talk about that a little bit.

Priyanka: Yeah, so I think that the plan or the strategy that we have is 30% of what's required to hit a goal. So we don't want to poo poo the plan or brush it under the rug, your strategy really does matter. But I think instead of us spending 30% of our bandwidth on the plan, most high achievers are

## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

spending 95% of their bandwidth on the plan that's only going to create 30% of the impact.

So the other pieces that I think are really important are to know that the plan is 30%. The other piece of it has to be implemented consistently, so really following through on what you said you were going to do. That's the other 30 or let's be 33.333%. And then the last piece of it that I find, again, for my clients and high-achievers that want to hit goals is leveraging imperfect moments.

So you're going to have this plan. If you follow it, you're not going to follow it perfectly because, again, we're humans and have human brains. We're going to have mistakes, we might go off plan, we might again have an Alias West Wing or 24 binge and go off plan.

And most high achievers don't have a very clear and specific process for how they're going to evaluate that. Evaluate their results, evaluate the fact that they've gotten behind and then, again, what most of us will do is we'll go back to the plan, fresh start, print out a brand new calendar rather than leveraging and understanding, I wonder why I went off plan.

Bonnie: Or they just throw the plan away and say, I can't do this.

Priyanka: Throw it away. Yeah, exactly. Or they'll give up on the goal. And then eventually some point will come along where they're like, actually, I do want the goal and then again, fresh start again. So I think that's a big piece of it that most high achievers don't have part of their plan is to evaluate implementation and to evaluate results routinely.

But the other one that I find creates a lot of wobble is most high achievers haven't truly visualized where they want to go. They have this kind of vague idea of what their goal is, but maybe there's a little bit of fear. Like I don't want to say it out loud because if I say it out loud, if I don't hit it, I'm going to be disappointed. There's that piece of it.



## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

And then I think high achievers are so practically minded that they can't imagine or visualize themselves at a goal. So then they just don't set the goal. And when you don't set a goal, you have a lot of wobble in your strategy and in your plan because you don't have direction. So that's the other piece of it.

Bonnie: Yeah, I literally just coached someone on this this week. So when I work with clients, obviously, the goal at large is financial freedom, more money, work less et cetera, right? And those all sound great, but they're very vague. And so I literally asked her like, well, what do you actually want? And I just said, you might not know what that is, but we have to pick something specific.

And then she was saying that she works locums and is starting this new business. And I was like, okay, well, what do you want your life to look like? What do you want it to look like? And she was like, I would love to work maybe half the locums shifts and have more time to work on our business. I was like, okay. And she wants to maintain the same level of income, right? Because that's also important too.

And so I asked her like, okay, so if you drop by half, what is that amount? Like that's something you could calculate. And then she was like, oh, and then she told me the number. I don't remember, it was like 100k. It doesn't matter, right? And I said, okay, so then the question is, how can you have 100k of income that's not coming from locums, right? It's such a very specific question. And then I was like, and by when? I'm like, you have to pick a date.

Priyanka: Absolutely.

Bonnie: So she picked five years. And then I explained to her why this is so important. This is going to be valuable for everyone listening, is like I think of, and I'm curious to hear how you explain it to your clients. I'm like, a goal

## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

gives you direction because if it's just work less, it's like you're in a forest. You're like I don't know where work less is.

Priyanka: What does work less mean? Yeah, absolutely. Yeah.

Bonnie: And then I said the timeline, because I told her you're going to make very different decisions now if the goal is one year versus five, versus 10. So that's how I explain it. How do you explain it?

Priyanka: Yeah, so I think about if you imagine running a marathon or running a long race and you have this goal at the end. Then I think about having a timeline as like the mile markers along which you're going to get to that goal.

And I think that this is especially important, at least I see this with weight loss and I'm sure it's also true with business. But let's say you have 10 pounds to lose or 50 pounds to lose. You can see they're both very different goals, but we want to attach a timeline because that's how we are going to evaluate more with higher quality evaluations.

If I don't set a timeline for my 10 pounds down or my 50 pounds down, then the evaluation also becomes vague. So that's, again, remember that 33% of hitting goals is being able to evaluate. I wonder how the last mile went? Did I slow down? Did I get really tired? Did I not pace myself well? Did I forget to drink water? Am I not breathing the way –

I mean, I'm not a runner, by the way, for anyone listening. I'm not a runner, but there are certain pieces of your implementation for the last mile that you might want to evaluate. And I think that having the timeline allows the quality of our evaluation to level up. If we don't put the timeline, then I think that we stop really giving ourselves the information of the last mile that's going to help us run better the next mile.

## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

So it's not just a timeline for the goal. But I think the other piece of timelines is having regular intervals that you're evaluating and putting that to a timeline as well.

Bonnie: Yeah, no, I love the mile marker analogy. Yeah, I remember giving a talk and asking people what they would love to do. And someone said to travel more, which is a very common answer. And I was like, well, how much more? Let's get specific. And she was like, oh. Right? Because people don't think about that. Basically I was like, well, how will you know that you're traveling more to the extent of what you just said?

Priyanka: Yeah.

Bonnie: But exactly, I think the punchline here is to get really specific with your goals. So I've been helping people do that, you know, just like, oh, this is what I want, what is that number because it comes down to a number that's like, well, how fast do you want to get there? And then I was explaining, and then she was telling me she wants to look into this type of investing.

And I just was like, in order to reach the timeline you want, you know, different investment vehicles have different speeds of making money is really what it comes down to. And unfortunately, the ones that make money the fastest require a lot more time and effort. But you have to remember that right now you're doing a direct time for money exchange and that's never going to change. The increments aren't going to change. In fact, you get paid less the longer you are a doctor per unit of time.

Priyanka: Right.

Bonnie: We're like the only profession where this happens, I believe. It's like reverse inflation.

Priyanka: Yeah.

## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

Bonnie: Anyway, that's a whole other conversation. And I was like, yeah, there's going to be some initial effort, you're going to have to learn things. Which type A experts, doctors, they're used to being experts, so to be a beginner is not exactly pleasure inducing. But I try to remind them like, it's not like you have to do this sustained effort and time in order to do that.

And so, actually, I was posing to this client the question is, are you willing to do that to get the result that you want? Because we know what's going to happen if you don't, right?

Priyanka: We already know that, yeah.

Bonnie: Yeah.

Priyanka: And I think the other thing that I love that you just said about the timeline is it really helps you see whether you've hit what you wanted to hit. I had a client, this was so fascinating. Her goal was, before we started working together, that she wanted to lose I think it was like 1.4 pounds a week. And we evaluate every week and every month.

Bonnie: Such a weird number, by the way.

Priyanka: I know. I think that she had done some, again, as we do, we do some random math, you reverse divide and you come up with a number. So she had 1.4 pounds. And again, evaluation is a very key part of what I do with my clients, so we evaluate every week and every month.

So in our monthly evaluation she said I'm so disappointed in my results. I thought I would be, these were her words, "I thought I would be further along. I feel so disappointed. I kind of feel like it's not working." And I was like let's evaluate this. What's the math? She lost 1.4 pounds per week over the month. And when she actually saw the numbers –

Bonnie: Which was her goal.

## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

Priyanka: But in her mind and, again, I think high achievers do this, we have this lens of thinking that what we're creating is not good enough. But having specific goals to set to a timeline, we had to show her brain how she was so steeped in it's not going to work, it's not working, it's not fast enough.

Because, again, listen, we all wanted results yesterday. We all wanted more money yesterday. We wanted to have lost the weight by yesterday. So it makes a lot of sense that our brain is like, it's not fast enough. I'm like, but you hit your goal. And literally her mind was blown.

She was like, oh my gosh, I didn't even see it like that. I wasn't even looking at the numbers, I just had this perception. Because that's what vagary does. Vagary is just like, my perception is something is not working. And I think getting specific is actually being like, wait, actually maybe it is.

Bonnie: Yeah. Yeah because exactly, when it's vague you can't measure it. Like the sample of travel more, I'm like what does that mean? Does that mean like a week more? Does it mean like half the year, et cetera?

Priyanka: Yeah.

Bonnie: Yeah. Okay, awesome. So one thing that you told me that I thought was really, I just love the way you thought about it, is what you call future-aligned decision-making. So let's talk about that.

Priyanka: Yeah.

Bonnie: Actually, you explain it since this is your thing.

Priyanka: Yeah, so I think about future-aligned decision-making as kind of getting wisdom from the version of you that has achieved the goal. So the way that I think about this from, I'm going to use weight loss as an example.

## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

If your goal is to lose 10 pounds, I want you to imagine that that's done. You're living in the life of someone that is 10 pounds lighter. You feel better in your body. Maybe you feel more energized. And that version of you is the version of you that you can imagine sustaining that lifestyle.

So you're not doing a crash diet or a juice cleanse to lose 10 pounds. You're eating in a way that truly feels like your ride-or-die BFF lover for life, you can sustain it forever. Imagine that that was done. And now reverse engineer how you got there.

So I think about a lot of times what high achievers do is we set into plan making now, looking at our results now. And we think about all the things we have to do. So we end up overloading our action plan to create the goal, rather than the reverse, which is what I call future-aligned decision-making.

Imagine you're already there. It's sustainable. It's done. How did she create that? That version of you that's 10 pounds down, how did she get there in a way that felt simple and sustainable? What hard decisions did she have to make? What decisions did she make that felt really simple?

And I think it was nice for me to think about this in my own personal journey. A big part of what I had to say no to is I used to love Cool Ranch Doritos. And what I would often do is make Cool Ranch Doritos dinner. Cool Ranch Doritos dinner was my thing.

Bonnie: What is that?

Priyanka: Okay, so for those of you that really want to know, you take a Kraft cheddar cheese, the shredded kind, and you sprinkle it on top of Cool Ranch Doritos. You make a nice big plate of it, you pour a glass of wine, you settle in with Netflix and you just have a night. You have a night of it.

Bonnie: Do you melt it first?

## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

Priyanka: Of course. Oh yeah, you have to microwave it for about like 45 seconds. You don't want it to get too, too melted because the cheese burns and then that messes up the whole thing. So 45 seconds is like the perfect melted cheese. But I used to do this all the time.

I used to get home from work after a busy shift at the hospital or maybe a late-night delivery and I felt like I just wanted a break, I wanted to treat myself. And this was my best way of doing it. I had no other ways, until I discovered coaching, that this was how I got to treat myself.

So that plan that I had made Monday morning, which was like let's eat really healthy breakfast, lunch and dinner. And we're going to do no flour, no sugar. I had all these ideas Monday morning. Wednesday night I was like, screw that. Cool Ranch Doritos dinner and a glass of wine sounds really good.

It was very easy for me to kind of quit on the decisions that I made Monday morning because those decisions, I had made those decisions from hating where I was right now as opposed to like future-aligned decisions. I want you to think about it like, okay, for me, I wanted to lose 60 pounds. I used to weigh 200 pounds when I created this.

I was like what is the version of me, she's lost the weight and she's learned how to take care of herself. She's lost the weight and she's had this late-night delivery and she wants to feel better. How did she solve this without the Cool Ranch Doritos dinner? Like I wonder.

And all of a sudden, you'd be surprised how brilliant our brains are at solving that problem. So I still, I mean, let me just be honest, I still do Cool Ranch Doritos dinner every now and then.

Bonnie: I was going to ask that.

Priyanka: I totally do. And again, I totally still enjoy two glasses of wine, my margaritas, and I'll do Cool Ranch Doritos dinners every now and then. But

## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

I'm able to do it in a way that doesn't affect my goal because of this future aligned decision making that I'm talking about.

Bonnie: Yeah, so I do something, it's basically the same concept, like a future self meditation or visualization. And you said it so well, it is amazing how much wisdom and knowledge that people already have once they just put themselves there and they can see that version.

Priyanka: Yeah.

Bonnie: I remember doing this at my retreat last year and I had everyone share. And I'm just laughing because she was like, because I had them visualize this person, like what is she wearing? How does she look, et cetera? And then she was like, "She looked just like me."

Priyanka: Oh, I love that.

Bonnie: I'm like, well, of course, it is you, right?

Priyanka: Yeah.

Bonnie: But I think sometimes we think like – Anyway, I thought that was just funny.

Priyanka: It's like a whole different person.

Bonnie: Yeah.

Priyanka: And I think the other piece of the future-aligned decision-making, the reason that it's so powerful in following through in the moment, like that Wednesday night that you're like, oh, I just deserve a break. The reason that it's easier to follow through when you're thinking about your future is that your brain is naturally hardwired for immediate gratification.

So, you know that. I'm sure you've talked about this on your podcast, that the motivational triad drives us to have an immediate reward. And the



## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

reason for that is because we have given delayed rewards no value and no significance.

It's like evolutionarily I think humans are just like, I might get eaten by a lion or a bear, so immediate reward is more valued. So we have to do the lifting, the heavy lifting, the work of giving it more significance and more value on a daily basis. It's a natural way of following through when you don't feel like it when you remember delayed reward.

Bonnie: Yeah, and I think especially with, well probably your clients too, I think they have this thought like, well, I've worked so hard to be where I'm at, I've already delayed my gratification. And so there's that sort of micro quit that happens, right?

Priyanka: Absolutely, because they want to feel taken care of. And eating, drinking, scrolling, shopping, spending, you name it, is a very, very quick way of solving the problem. So it makes a lot of sense that we have these habits of overeating or overspending in the moment because it does help you. There's a reason that we've developed those habits.

But what we're talking about is, if those habits are creating undesirable results, they might be worth challenging. And what if there was a way to be taken care of now, but it means doing the work of un-wiring your brain, unlearning habits and learning new ones so you can actually also have the results that you want. Maybe that's more wealth, maybe it's to hit your body goal, maybe it's to feel better at work, at home, bringing that back into the mix.

Bonnie: Yeah, and one thing you said that I really liked is you talked about how you think about yourself in the future who has the result and is also taking care of yourself because you were saying that a lot of us make these plans from a place of, what was it? I don't have it or something like that. I forget exactly what you said.

## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

Priyanka: Yeah, we make decisions from like right now. We kind of hate where we are right now.

Bonnie: Yes, hate where you are, that's it.

Priyanka: And we're so desperate to get to the goal. Like I remember for my wedding I worked out six days a week, I did those 100 calorie oatmeal packets. I was like, I have to hit, like it's my wedding day, the photos. It was like a big vanity metric. I want the photos, who cares what angle it is? I wanted to feel comfortable and confident.

I was willing to, I counted every point and calorie I ate. And I remember every time that we would go out on a date I was like, oh, I might go over my calorie allotment, let's just really be super strict with it because I was in such a rush. And I was willing to eat 100 calorie oatmeal packets for months to hit my goal weight.

And then not surprisingly, the day after the wedding you better believe I stopped eating the 100 calorie oatmeal packets and gained 60 pounds over 10 years because I had a strategy that was not sustainable, a strategy that I didn't love. Of course it wasn't sustainable.

So it's very interesting how we make plans from our current self, hating where we are now because we're in such a rush. Versus what small tweaks would happen if your future self was making these decisions in a way that felt so sustainable.

Bonnie: Yeah. And one thing, as you were talking I also think it's hating where you are but also hating yourself, right? It's like a form of these plans that are completely unrealistic and unsustainable, like no spend months, for example. Like everyone in January was doing a no spend month. I'm sure they're doing some version of that for weight loss.

Priyanka: Yeah, absolutely.

## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

Bonnie: And yeah, it comes from, I think, a combination of hating where you are, but also it's a way to beat yourself up by creating these crazy, unrealistic action plans that are 100% destined to crash and burn, which then creates more beating of the self, right? You're like, well I couldn't even follow this plan that was completely unrealistic and would require a super human or robot to do, right?

Priyanka: Absolutely. And it's actually, I feel like a piece of that, the hating yourself piece, which I think again for some high achievers this is very obvious, you have a very strong negative self-talk. For someone like me, my negative self-talk was very subtle. So it was very, very subtle. It wasn't very obvious. But the one for me was, you should have figured this out by now. You should be further along.

And that would be the reason that I would be like, maybe if I did like 800 calories a day, maybe if I did no carb, maybe if I stopped eating potatoes, which is like literally my favorite food of all time, then I will lose the weight. So that was my way of having negative self-talk or not loving myself, was I should have figured this out. Everybody else seems to be figuring this out so easily. It must just be this unique defect of mine and so let's punish ourselves.

I didn't think of it as punishment at the time. I was like, this is just what I have to do.

Bonnie: Yeah, no, I totally see that. I think a lot of my "negative" self-talk was, part of it was like it didn't seem that mean to me. But also what I've realized is you get used to that way of thinking, it doesn't even seem mean.

Priyanka: Exactly.

Bonnie: Until you say it out loud because even just verbalizing it out loud, you can just be like, oh, that's not nice, right?

## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

Priyanka: But it's so common because you see other people doing it, right? You see other people doing no spend months so you're like, oh, that must be just the thing we do nowadays. Or you see people being like no carbs, right? Like high protein, what is it? Keto, like I'm going to do protein. It seems so normalized and I think that that creates this conditioning.

For women, we look around us thinking that, oh, that's the right way or that's the normal way. So I might as well hop on that bandwagon and try that out. The idea of challenging that, I think, is very uncomfortable.

Bonnie: So another thing that I thought would be really good to talk about, and I don't even think I've specifically talked about it this way. So the money analogy is that it's like giving money all the responsibility for making you feel secure, right? Because everyone's trying to feel – They want more money because they think it's going to make them feel secure, right? Even though there's evidence that that didn't happen when you went from a resident to an attending, right?

And I do this too, we're abdicating everything to money as if money is going to make you feel better, as if it has nothing to do with you. And I think basically what you and I are helping our clients with is like, it's not money's job, it's your job to feel secure.

Priyanka: Yeah.

Bonnie: But it's so tempting.

Priyanka: I love that you're saying that. That's so good.

Bonnie: Once I have a certain amount of money, then I will feel safe and secure. And then people are surprised when they don't feel better. I mean, maybe you'll feel a little bit better, right? For sure. But then this is kind of also a bit of scarcity, having not enough money. I've seen it just morph into I'm afraid I'm going to lose all my money.

## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

Priyanka: And I think it also turns into like a line in sand, it kind of keeps moving. So you might make 100k. And you think that, oh, that's when I'll feel secure. And then you make 100k. And you're like, actually, because I don't feel secure yet, maybe it's 200k. And then you'll make 200k and maybe you'll feel that security for maybe all of a day, and then your brain is like, maybe half a million.

And I think the same thing happens, I think, with any goal. If you think that the goal, losing the weight, making the money, is what's going to create your feeling of security or certainty, it's going to be the constant hustle because it's constantly a moving line because humans are designed to keep growing. So your brain is naturally thinking about the next thing.

And I think my Cool Ranch Doritos dinner is a good example. Cool Ranch Doritos, a glass of wine and Netflix was my way of feeling taken care of. So that's the language that I would use for me. It was like I wanted to feel taken care of, I wanted to feel relaxed and secure. I finally put my kid to bed and I've been dealing with maybe some difficult cases in the OR or that challenging patient or something my colleague or boss said. I'm like this is my time, I just want to relax.

And what we've done, and this has been, again, socialized in every part of our culture, is we've just given food a job or money a job that it was not meant to have. We've just given these jobs away that we didn't know was actually our responsibility.

And what I think you and I are talking about in our podcasts and what we want to share with the universe is what would it look like to take that responsibility back? What if it didn't have to be so hard, but what if we took the responsibility back? Then you could actually just enjoy your Doritos dinner or spending that money on something and take it or leave it? You're taken care of. You feel secure either way. I mean, to me that is just priceless.

## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

Bonnie: Yeah, well, it's basically having agency. Realizing that it's in your power because it's a very powerless position if it's something else outside of you that you feel like, well, that is external, right?

So I'm curious, we're not going to, obviously, be able to explain this all at once on a podcast, but this is obviously part of the work that we have to help our clients with, right? So I'm curious, what are some of the first things that you do with your clients to take that responsibility back?

I think maybe number one is just even telling them like, hey, this is what we're going to work on because it's not food's job, it's not money's job.

Priyanka: Yeah. Well, I think it's important. Yeah, so I think that that's an important piece. But again, I think for our high achiever brains, we do better when we have tangible, specific strategies ready to go. Like a framework that we know that we can follow.

So the first thing that I like to do with my clients is actually help them create a strategy. And I use the word strategy on purpose because it's not just a meal plan, it's a strategy that has folded in your way of eating. Remember that ride or die BFF lover for life. And eating in a way that will promote fat loss.

So I teach my clients a very specific way of eating that they can fit into their real life where they eat the cuisines that they love that they can customize to them, that they can actually imagine eating in the long run. So that's the first thing.

And what that does, I think that that creates a kind of security and safety like, okay, I'm not going to be eating canned green beans or, I don't know, frozen peas as my way of eating. I can eat potatoes. I can have a glass of wine. I can even have Doritos if I want them. There's a way of eating that will support me hitting my goal. And that, I think, creates, again, that safety and security.

## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

And now what we get to do once that plan is secure, is now we also have to fold into our strategy how are we going to be evaluating this on a regular basis? That goes into our game plan. Where on your calendar are you putting this? I think, again, what we do is like, yeah, yeah, yeah, I'm going to evaluate. And it's like, when? Where? How long are you going to take?

Bonnie: And how?

Priyanka: How are you going to do it? So I really want my clients, and again I think it's so important to get super specific about this. When do you have 30 minutes in your whole week that you're not folding laundry or checking your email that you can actually dedicate to this? To this goal that you really want. And putting it on your calendar, blocking it off like it's the most important meeting you're going to have with the CEO of your life, which is you.

So it's these other pieces that I think we often overlook because we go right to the plan that I help my clients do. And then what I really like to share is guess what we get to do now? We get to go implement messily, which they hate. Which I think, again, high achievers hate messy implementation, we want to implement perfectly. But I'm like, it's just not going to be the way that it goes.

I want you to have imperfect moments. I know, you don't want to have imperfect moments. I want you to have imperfect moments so that I can now coach you on exactly what happened and we can iterate on it and leverage those moments and then go again and again and again. Imagine if you did that, where you're going to be six months from now. It's like so far.

Bonnie: Yeah. It's so funny, I was thinking about, like as you were talking I was like, did we take imperfect messy action in our medical training? I mean, for sure, none of it was perfect. I mean, I feel like we all had that person in our class that seemed to do everything perfect.

## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

Priyanka: I think that this is so good for physicians especially. And this was why this was probably one of the biggest personal barriers I had to overcome to lose the weight. With my physician's brain, we are, I mean, imperfect moments are absolutely not recommended. A patient's life is on the line or your patient's health, which is important, is on the line. Imagine as a surgeon you're like, let's take imperfect moments in the OR. No, right?

There's a reason that I think physicians especially really strive for perfect moments, to have perfect implementation. But what we're talking about is imperfect moments is not the goal, it's just a part of being human. So I think what's important to know is that we've been steeped in the tea of wanting to do perfectly because of our physician upbringing, our physician education.

But what would it look like if we stopped really hiding from the mistakes we have made? Like even with a patient, in the OR, with your colleague or boss? What if we stopped hiding from those imperfect moments that actually do end up happening and didn't make it mean anything about our capability, about our skills, about ourselves as humans? What would we then get to learn from moving forward? So there's a reason that physicians are so focused on doing perfectly, it's like part of our training.

Bonnie: Oh, yeah, no, for sure. And also minimizing risk as much as possible, which unfortunately does not work when it comes to growing your money, I should say specifically because I guess you could just keep working as a physician.

Yeah, as you were talking, and this is completely like a side note. And the public, I think, expects perfection out of doctors. Like we're not seen as humans. And so the unfortunate reality is no doctor is going to be 100% perfect. Things happen, mistakes are made and I think that almost reinforces our need to be perfect.



## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

Priyanka: Absolutely. And it's like this impossible standard. When you hear, and it's not just in a couple of places, people in general are like, doctors should not make mistakes, right? I think that's probably a pretty common standard phrase that you might hear someone say. And the trouble is that physicians start believing it too and start operating from this impossible standard that I'm not supposed to make any mistakes.

Again, this is not to say that we are trying to make mistakes, right? Again, that would be very all or nothing to think I'm being complacent now, I don't care. That's not what we're saying. I think what we're saying is that we don't want to make mistakes but know that they will happen. And we don't have to hold ourselves to an impossible standard, we can just challenge the standard and start feeling better right now.

Bonnie: And one thing that I think is sort of weaved into everything we talked about, is helping our clients like themselves more, love themselves more. The word love feels weird to me, that's probably my own, like that's what I have to work on, right? But just like themselves more, taking care of themselves more, right? Because you can't reach these goals hating yourself the whole time. It just doesn't work.

Priyanka: Yeah. I actually think it's kind of funny because, and I was like this too, this idea of self-love. I'm like, what does that even mean? Like self-love, what is that, right? I mean, I know I love my kids and I can feel that for them. But I mean, self-love feels a little bit indulgent or a little silly.

Bonnie: Weird.

Priyanka: And I realized over, I think, the last few years and especially as I was losing all of the weight, it wasn't just feeling love for myself because that felt, again, foreign to me. What, for me, it turned into was how I talk to myself generally on a day to day basis.

So before coaching and before a lot of this work that we're talking about, I didn't even realize this but I had kind of this not enough, critical lens,

## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

pressuring like go get more, go do more, go do better was the constant monologue that I had in my mind, which feels, if you feel the energy and the texture of that, it just doesn't feel very good.

Rather than what I've really worked on over the last few years is like, I always have your back. I've got you all the time. Like, let's go, let's go hit that big goal. Let's go do this hard thing. I've got you, I've got you. And it's like this constant monologue of I've got you. I mean, I just feel so taken care of and cared for.

And I think that that's been my expression of self-love. Even for me, self-love is still like, what is that? But it's that monologue of how I talk to myself now that has really shifted. And it's not surprising, it's kind of crazy, but I don't crave Doritos dinners anymore. I'm like, I don't need it anymore because I'm like, listen, the way that I talk to myself is so different. I naturally feel more taken care of. And it feels so much better.

Can you imagine with your kid, it's like I use children's analogies a lot because I work with professional moms.

Bonnie: Me too.

Priyanka: And I think that they're so good because the care that we have for our child is so available to us. Like, would you ever say to your kid like, "I cannot believe you screwed up. You're probably never going to make that team. I can't believe you. It didn't work, don't even try again." You would never say that to your child. But do you know how often we're saying that to ourselves? It's like all the time.

Bonnie: No, totally.

Priyanka: Which is crazy.

Bonnie: Yeah. So it's funny, again, I'm like, self-love, it just felt like something high up there or like super like granola crunchy stuff.

## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

Priyanka: Yeah, yeah.

Bonnie: And I love what you said, like it's the way you're talking to yourself. And actually the way one of my mentor coaches said, and this is great, she's like, self-love is not a destination. And she said that and I was like, oh. Because I think in our minds we think it's this destination that once we get, well, I don't know. I'm not even sure what we think is going to happen, but something great.

And she said it's simply the relationship you have with yourself. And as you and I know, relationships are basically thoughts about a person. And so self-love is really the relationship you have with yourself. And the way you know how your relationship is, is by how you talk to yourself.

Priyanka: Absolutely.

Bonnie: And it's so funny, when I meet new people who are newer to coaching, they're like, what do you mean talking to yourself? I'm like, all the sentences in your brain that are happening right now.

Priyanka: They're like, what do you mean?

Bonnie: Yeah, they're like that –

Priyanka: This is so crazy, I remember before I discovered coaching I was like, this is just who I am. I mean I was like, that's just me. That's just me, My husband calls me, I'm like so stubborn. I'm like, I'm just a stubborn person. I'm just rigid.

And it was so crazy when I first discovered coaching, which was through a podcast like this, I was like, "Wait a second, my thoughts are optional? What?" It really blew my mind to even understand as a concept that thoughts are just sentences in our brain that we have on repeat that we've been so unconscious of, which I think is crazy.

## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

And just one thing that came to me when you were speaking about our monologue, the analogy that we had at the beginning, the race that you're running, you have this goal. And as you're the runner in the race, the way that I like to think about your monologue is your coach running alongside you is yourself.

So every time that you're running, can you imagine that coach being like, "Let's go, you've got this. Let's go. You know what? That meter, let's just amp it up. Let's get 10 seconds off our goal. Come on, let's go, let's go, let's go." Or like you fumble, what will that coach say to you? They're not going to be like, "You loser. I can't believe you didn't figure that one out, just quit the race now."

That version of you is going to be like, "Listen, okay, you stumbled on it. Let's figure this out. Let's go." That is how you hit goals. It is fundamentally changing that relationship with yourself. But I think people are so unaware of how to do that, which is why coaching is magic.

Bonnie: Yeah.

Priyanka: That's my thoughts about it.

Bonnie: Yeah, no, totally. Obviously, we wouldn't be coaches if we didn't see the magic in it. And yeah, a lot of us think that the way to get to our goal is by shitting on ourselves.

Priyanka: Yeah.

Bonnie: As if that's going to create the motivation, right? And it might get you started but, again, as we've been talking about, it's unsustainable.

Okay. This is such a good conversation and. It has been really good for me because, obviously, I'm a perfectionist.

Priyanka: As we all are. I mean me too, I still have that.

## 168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal

Bonnie: Yeah. So it's not about never being, you know, I think it's something that's always going to sort of be there, but it's more like the reminding of ourselves and getting out of that perfectionist thinking.

Okay, so is there anything that you think?

Priyanka: I think that this last piece is important. The goal is not to not be a perfectionist. The goal is to recognize your tendencies and how they might be creating obstacles and become so aware of them that you can engage with them and change the way you show up.

So I still hate failing. I still hate mistakes. I hate imperfect moments. I hate it. But now, instead of hiding from them, I'm like, ooh, that felt terrible. Ooh, that feels kind of vulnerable. Ooh, that's kind of embarrassing. And I can just, again, imagine the person talking to me like, "Okay, it makes a lot of sense you hate this because, remember, we love perfect things. And also, let's just go solve this."

So I think the goal is not, again, it's very all or nothing to assume that coaching will change all of that because this is not something to be fixed. It's just the way that I think humans are designed and high achievers just have a higher amped up volume on the perfectionist tendencies. But it's not to get rid of it, it's just to know it and understand how to manage it.

Bonnie: Right. Awesome. Okay, how can people find you, Priyanka? Because obviously, you're awesome and amazing.

Priyanka: Yeah, so I am the Unstoppable Mom Brain everywhere on the internet. I have my podcast, *The Unstoppable Mom Brain Podcast*. And The Unstoppable Mom Brain on Instagram and on the worldwide web. On the Google's.

Bonnie: On the Googles, yeah. No, it's easy when it's all the same thing.

## **168: Perfectionism and Pursuing Goals with Dr. Priyanka Venugopal**

Priyanka: It's all the same. And I do have training on this specific topic, on perfectionism and procrastination. So if anyone here is interested in that, you can get that at [theunstoppablemombrain.com/training](http://theunstoppablemombrain.com/training). And I kind of walk you through how to manage your perfectionist brain.

Bonnie: Okay, Priyanka, thank you so much for being here.

Priyanka: Thank you so much for having me. This was awesome.

Hey there, thanks so much for tuning in. If you loved what you heard, be sure to subscribe so you don't miss an episode. And if you're listening to this on Apple Podcasts, I'd love for you to leave a review. Reviews tell Apple that this podcast is, well, awesome. And it will help women find this podcast so that they too can live a wealthy life. And finally, you can learn more about me and what I do at [wealthymommd.com](http://wealthymommd.com). See you next week.