



## Bonus Interview: Julie Dereshinsky, Sober Curious Coach

**Deb Elbaum:** Welcome to *In the Right Direction* podcast, where we believe you get to choose what's on your plate, you can manage the overwhelm, and that change is possible. I'm your host, Deb Elbaum, and I'm here to share insights and strategies to increase your happiness one baby step at a time. Let's dive in.

Hi everyone, it's Deb. Today I have a bonus interview episode with coach Julie Dereshinsky, the founder of Julie Dereshinsky Coaching. Julie coaches sober curious women to explore their relationship with alcohol, to recognize the negative impact that alcohol and drinking might be having on their life, and to determine their path forward. In our conversation, Julie and I discuss what brought her to this purposeful work, phrases like "low bottom," "high bottom," and "gray area drinking," and the book genre of "Quit Lit." Let's dive in. Hi, Julie.

**Julie Dereshinsky:** Hi, Deb. How are you?

**Deb Elbaum:** I'm good. I'm so glad you're here to talk about what you do because it's something that I did not know about and had never heard about. So, you-

**Julie Dereshinsky:** Yeah, thank you...

**Deb Elbaum:** Yeah, you call yourself a sober curious- a coach for sober curious women.

**Julie Dereshinsky:** Yeah, sober curious, gray area drinkers, early exiters.

**Deb Elbaum:** Tell me about those phrases because I've actually never heard those phrases "early exiter" or "sober curious." Where do they come from, and what do they mean?

**Julie Dereshinsky:** Sure. Well, first, I didn't invent any of them, so I can't claim originality there. Sober curious, if you think about those folks who spend a lot of time in Google-land, "Am I," or "Aren't I," "How much is too much?" "What would, like, be, like, on the other side if I stopped drinking?" So that's- that's really kind of sums up sober curious. Early exiter (I consider myself to be an early exiter) so that is someone that does not have a low bottom, does- you know

**Deb Elbaum:** And low bottom- So I'm gonna- I'm gonna have you define all these, right, because it's-

**Julie Dereshinsky:** Okay.

**Deb Elbaum:** You know all these phrases that people-

**Julie Dereshinsky:** Yes.

**Deb Elbaum:** So, what's "lot bottom" mean?

**Julie Dereshinsky:** Okay, so low bottom is somebody that has an addiction - so, for purposes of my work, we're going to talk about alcohol - who has major, major life consequences as a result of that addiction. So, job loss, DUIs, health crises, relationships are decimated. So that- that sums up low bottom. High bottom, on the other end of the spectrum, is someone who on the outside has it all together, right, doesn't miss work, has great relationships, is highly productive, oftentimes - you know - a high-achieving woman or man, but they're questioning their relationship with alcohol, and it is getting in the way of a healthy life. So that's sort of the low bottom/high bottom definition. The gray-

**Deb Elbaum:** Yeah, gray area.

**Julie Dereshinsky:** Yeah, so the gray is the middle. So, it's that extreme between rock bottom, and- and so the gray really is between rock bottom and every now and again social drinking, that negative area that can still impact your life but not in such a profound way, and certainly not to the outside world looking in. Okay?

**Deb Elbaum:** Yeah, it's interesting you use this phrase "relationship with alcohol" because it's true that we all have relationships with things in our life, and most of the time, we don't think about them. We just live with the thing. So how do you talk about this idea that people- some people have- Well, we all have a relationship with alcohol and some people have one that might benefit from looking at it.

**Julie Dereshinsky:** Absolutely. And I guess let me say, too, I- there are, you know, there are a world of people out there who can drink alcohol, (we call them normies) have no unhealthy patterns with alcohol, so I am certainly not an alcohol judger, but I guess I'm speaking from experience because I myself, you know, found myself in a pattern. I'm a mom of two small kids. I found myself for years thinking *Is this too much? Am I- I don't feel great, I feel a little dehydrated in the mornings.* And I found myself going from, you know, a nightly reward, you know, *I deserve this. I'm doing great with my two little babies, and I've- I'm getting promoted at work, and I'm doing great. I'm keeping it all together, so I deserve this glass of wine at night.*

But one turned into two, and two turned into three, and my- my Google searching got a little bit heavier over time. And so, my- What I try to tell folks is "I'm not- I'm here to coach folks who are questioning their relationship with alcohol without attachment." And by that I mean I'm not a sober coach trying to help folks put one foot in front of the other and- and stay off alcohol on a day-to-day basis. I'm really here for people who are questioning their relationship with alcohol, maybe have made a decision to say goodbye to it and help them think forward on what life on the other side might look like.

**Deb Elbaum:** And in coaching, a big part of what we do as coaches is ask questions. What are the questions that you often ask at the beginning to help prompt and start the thinking?

**Julie Dereshinsky:** Yeah, so much like, you know, I coach a lot of folks unrelated to alcohol, and the questions are mostly the same. And so those big powerful questions like, "What is it that you want?" or "What's important about this?" And a lot of times with people questioning their relationship with alcohol, those- those inner critics - or saboteurs, as we like to call them - are, like, screaming on their shoulders. And so, a lot of times, I'll say, ask questions, like, you know, "What's true about that?" For those of us, you know, as a society and as a culture, and particularly where I sit, and a lot of the women that I coach, a lot of them happen to be moms. And as we all know, the mommy wine culture is pervasive. You know, the alcohol industry is just... There's a lot of billionaires out there because of their predatory nature on this- this- this- these moms, and a lot of times what's keeping folks from looking deep is, you know, *Everyone else is doing that. What will people think? How will I- How will I interact with my- my, you know, my mom community.* And so "What's the truth in that?" often can be pretty enlightening because it'll shed a lot of that inner critic of, *I won't be cool. I won't be fun. I won't be liked. I won't belong.*

**Deb Elbaum:** Is there a- an example of a client who you've worked with that you could talk about it in general terms? We get a better sense of this?

**Julie Dereshinsky:** Yeah. So, you know, without- without, you know, breaking any confidentiality, I'll give you a couple of examples. So, I'm working with one client right now that is not ready to make a clean break of it. We call it sometimes harm reduction or moderation. So, she's not ready to make a break but is in that mode of, "I'm going to cut back. Dry January. Just drink on the weekends." And like any coach, my role is to meet her and all of my clients where they are. And so, we- we work where she is today, you know, and dance in the moment, and I let her drive the agenda. So, with- The ahas come with these powerful questions, right, because when you have somebody sitting across from you, or perhaps holding a mirror up to you and asking, "How is this serving you? How was this decision to moderate serving you? Not everybody else around you, but you?" It can be quite powerful.

**Deb Elbaum:** Yeah. When we- I think about- I think about habits, and we have these habits. And if we want to change a habit, we want often to give our brain something to do rather than not do. So, whatever if it's alcohol or food or binge-watching TV, or you know Netflix, it's- it's really hard for our- to say to our brains, "I'm going to stop doing that." And instead, we want to give our brain something to do rather than not do, and I'm curious how that feeds into what you talk about and where you point people if they want to build new habits.

**Julie Dereshinsky:** Yeah, yeah, that's- I'm glad you asked that question. So, whether it's drinking or Netflix or eating or sugar, we are all looking for that off switch, right? So, whatever we're drawn to, it's because we want to just turn it off and numb out and just not feel the things. What I typically- There's also another frame, another phrase out there called patchwork recovery and-

**Deb Elbaum:** Tell us about that.

**Julie Dereshinsky:** And this is- and this is really why I'm drawn to this work, and I sort of got drawn to it by accident. So, I guess to answer your question, first, I recommend that all my clients (and we do a lot of work on this) think through what their toolbox is, right? There's no right or wrong way. You do you. What needs to be in your toolbox to get you where you want to go. And I think about, you know, the generation before us where it was like, you know, 12 steps or no steps, you know, those programs. It was really that, or the highway. And what I'm finding is, and this is true for me, is there is not one size fits all. So, what works for me might not work for the person next to me. So, I really try to hone in with my clients on what- what needs to be in that toolbox to keep them living the life- the life they want to live. And if they're not sure, which many of us aren't, that's really where the work is to figure out what's going to be in this toolbox that's gonna get you to where you want to be.

**Deb Elbaum:** What are some kinds of things in your toolbox?

**Julie Dereshinsky:** Oh yeah, my toolbox is really a mishmash- mishmash of some old rusty tools and some new ones. Well, you brought up a point about sort of replacing - no, you didn't say this, but I thought about replacement addictions, and I have become even more addicted than I already was to reading. So, for me, in my toolbox, like my way to numb out now (And I can say it. I still have to numb out and turn the things off.) is reading. So, I need to kind of constantly be in the throes of a great book. And it could be anything from quit lit which is quit literature, a genre that you might not have known was out there.

**Deb Elbaum:** No, I didn't. What is quit lit, and what are some of the books out there?

**Julie Dereshinsky:** All right, quit lit is a genre for those who are interested in quitting addictions or alcoholism. So, there's- there's a whole movement around it. Ann Dowsett Johnston wrote a book called *Drink*. There's a ton of memoirs. Caroline Knapp wrote a book called *Wishful Drinking: A Love Story*. Laura McKowen, who is a leader in this area, and she's phenomenal, recently wrote a memoir called *We Are the Luckiest*. So, there is a whole plethora of reading to be done in this area.

**Deb Elbaum:** Mostly memoirs? Or fiction, is it fiction too?

**Julie Dereshinsky:** Mostly memoirs. Mostly memoirs and some sort of, I guess, how tos, self-help, personal growth. But I spend a fair amount of time (more than 50%) reading, you know, true crime and all sorts of, you know, beach reads to. Its movement; I know that my body needs to move. And it's- it's- it's what works for me; it's walking; it's bar three; it's yoga. It is- What else is it? Self-care, like pampering. I was never into things like essential oils and skincare before. And I don't mean it from a vanity standpoint. I mean it from a nourishment standpoint. So, I have these new rituals at night, that just keep me grounded and make me feel great about myself.

**Deb Elbaum:** Because that's the goal, right? The goal is to feel comfortable in our own skin, to feel great- great about ourself.

**Julie Dereshinsky:** Absolutely.

**Deb Elbaum:** To own who we are.

**Julie Dereshinsky:** Absolutely. And, you know, when I think I mentioned before, about, you know, the generation before us and you know, my family I- It's no secret that the leaves of my family tree are soaked in alcoholism, again, mostly high bottom, mostly high functioning. Everything looked fine on the outside, but it wasn't fine. And back then (so I'm talking, you know, 70s and 80s) it was either prevention or treatment, right? There really wasn't much for the middle area and treatment was 12 step programs. And I'm not suggesting 12 steps don't work. They are phenomenal, and they work for so many people. So, I have so much respect for that. But they don't work for everybody, and my hope is that for those folks who are sober curious, or in the- in the world of gray area drinking, that they have access to other modalities of recovery, like what we're talking about here. So, I'm super drawn to bringing that work to life for all those folks.

**Deb Elbaum:** Absolutely, we all need all the support we can get, and- and some support resonates with us, and it is more helpful in- at a time in our lives. So, it also might be a time thing that this is a time when one type of support or one type of coaching really helps someone and...

**Julie Dereshinsky:** Absolutely.

**Deb Elbaum:** So, I'm curious about, because you talked about family tree, and you talked about generations, and you have children, how do you talk to your children about- about alcohol?

**Julie Dereshinsky:** Yeah, this is so important for me. I taught- so my children are five and six, so age-appropriate type conversations. You know, we live in a house. So, I stopped drinking in 2018, so my kids were little, just two and just four. And, you know, they, again, I was- I was a high bottom drinker. So, I- It was shiny and fun stuff. It was dinner parties and work trips and things like that. So, they'll never remember. And I don't think I made a- made a pretty good attempt to not, you know, really drink much in front of them. But I grew up in a household where we were not educated on addiction at all. It was known that people drank too much. But it was- it was talked about more from a- from a defect standpoint.

So, with my kids, you know, we talk a lot about things like sugar, and what it does to your brain and how it basically keeps you from being your best- your best learner, your best behavior, your best sleeper. So, with alcohol, you know, they see their dad drink a beer here and there because he is very much a normie. And one time my son, who's six now, said to me, like, "Mom, you never- you only drink water and coffee. That's so boring. Like, do you want a bubbly water?" And they said something about wine, and I said "No mom doesn't

drink wine. I used to." And rather than hiding it, which is certainly how I was groomed: "Everything, everything's fine," I said, you know, "Just like you guys sometimes like sugar a little too much, I liked wine a little bit too much, and I decided this probably isn't good for me. So, I just don't- I just don't drink it anymore." So, I'm honest with them, and that feels really good.

And then as they get a little bit older, I will absolutely- my husband and I will absolutely talk to them about the gene pool, and how they are predisposed to this, and they how they really need to watch for it. But what- what I absolutely love about both my decision to stop drinking and being a coach is that I can talk to them about it. And they're friends about it. And- and I'm- I'm knowledgeable about it which feels wonderful.

**Deb Elbaum:** Yeah, I can see how purposeful this work is for you. That it's really, this is- this is a purpose. This is- this is a mission. What would you say is your big mission?

**Julie Dereshinsky:** Honestly, my big mission is to- is to provide a shoulder for as many women out there as I can. So, all those women that are sitting at their desks right now, you know, getting promoted and climbing up the ranks and doing an awesome job with their kids, that she and they hear me speak, read my writing, or are coached by me, and nod their head and say, "Me too. I want what she's having." And because there's such a ripple effect with that, so for every woman- woman, or person, who decides to make this healthy choice for themselves - again, if they need to, and if they want to - their sons, their daughters, their partners, their employers, their relationships, everybody benefits. And that's really- really what I-what I- what makes the heart swell.

**Deb Elbaum:** Yeah, and as you were talking, it struck me that it's also about bringing it into the light because when we hide things, it can feel really shameful or something that we have to suppress, and when we talk about it, when we say, "It's okay to talk about it; it's okay to look at it, to explore it, to think about it," then it becomes something that we can work with. Something that we have choice over rather than it controlling us.

**Julie Dereshinsky:** Absolutely. Yeah, spot on. And there's another phrase that I didn't coin that's out there in the wild, called recovering out loud. And that's just sharing our stories. Stories are what connect us. And- and so recovering out loud and not being afraid to talk about the shame and the guilt and being vulnerable, I think is so, so important. And to your point, too, about bringing it- bringing it out there, what I'm finding too in my one-on-one coaching is now I'm finding a lot more organizations are coming to me and asking me, you know, to do lunch and learns are to talk to their, you know, women's empowerment groups, for example. Because there's- there's an opportunity, I think, to talk to more women at once that way, (and men) and there's not a ton of research around workers and patterns of drinking and workplace outcomes. I wish there was more, and I'd like to see more, but I do know that there's some pretty scary stats around, you know, employees with alcohol addictions, you know, in regards to productivity, missed days of work, injury related absences. I think they're something like 250% more likely to have low productivity and

missed days of work as a result of alcohol. Now, that's all over the spectrum. But still, it's- it's pretty significant, and it's not talked about that often.

**Deb Elbaum:** This is so fun talking with you and really enlightening for me. I learned phrases that I never heard before. You brought up so many points that I'm really- my brain is chewing on, that I'm thinking about. So, thank you for that. How do people find you? Where can they find you online if they want to work with you as a coach or bring you into their organization for a lunch and learn?

**Julie Dereshinsky:** Sure, sure. Well, thanks, Deb. I really enjoyed this conversation too. They can find me. They can email me at [julie@jwdcoaching.com](mailto:julie@jwdcoaching.com). They can find me on my website, which is [juliedereshinsky.com](http://juliedereshinsky.com). And they can find me on Instagram at [julie\\_dereshinsky](https://www.instagram.com/julie_dereshinsky).

**Deb Elbaum:** All right. Thank you so much, Julie, for being here. And thanks for the purposeful work you do.

**Julie Dereshinsky:** Thank you, Deb. Thanks for having me. It was a pleasure.