



## Episode 12: The “Right” Way to Do Life

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, we're zooming out. We're going really big picture. Today, we're talking about life. My clients sometimes share with me their worries and fears about life. Some tell me they're worried they're falling behind. That they thought they'd be farther along in their career by now. They look at other colleagues and see them more advanced on a career path or more successful.

And this comparing activates thoughts of self doubt, fears, and second guessing. Have you ever had those thoughts that you're behind or not doing life right? Today, we're talking about life truths. I want to reassure you, to remind you that there's not one single definition of success. That life is not linear, that you're not falling behind, and that there are many ways to do life right.

When my clients courageously share their thoughts, I tell them I understand. And I do, because if anyone knows the feeling of being left behind, it's me. Decades ago near the end of medical school, I needed to choose an area of medicine to specialize in. I chose psychiatry because I've always been fascinated by the brain and its relationship to behavior, and I've always wanted to help others feel better and be well.

So I started my psychiatry training. I had a 6-month-old because I'd given birth to my first child before graduating medical school. There I was, a brand new shiny doctor with an adorable 6-month-old baby at home. I tell people that I wish I had had a coach then, because I could not figure out how to navigate it all.

I felt like I needed to be in two places at once. I was spread too thin, physically and emotionally. I was overwhelmed and not thinking effectively. After the first year of training, I informed my director that I would not be back for a year two. I left. I did not have a plan. All I knew was that I wanted out, I wanted to spend more time with my adorable baby, I wanted to not be in a hospital environment, and to not be pushing my body to its limits with work hours and overnight call. At the time, it felt like I did not have a choice; that it was a matter of my mental survival. So I quit. I left. I had no plan. I had no idea what to do next. And if I'm going to be honest with you, back then, I felt like I failed. I felt like I had disappointed myself, my parents, and really everyone.

When I look back now, I can have compassion for myself. I was young, I was exhausted, and my prefrontal cortex was completely impaired. I did not have any good role models for people who left medicine to create another successful career. Of course I felt that way, but at the time I didn't have that perspective.

All I knew then was that I had left what was known to enter something that was not yet known. I had entered a major life transition. I began a period of years full of lows and highs, of stagnating and learning, of constriction and personal transformation that eventually landed me to where I am today: a mother to three amazing children, a founder of a business and purpose I love, and a life with lots of blessings. That's the power of life transition.

Recently I read the book "Life is in the Transitions" by Bruce Feiler on the recommendation of a past client, and I loved this book. These lines from the beginning of the book grabbed me right away. Feiler wrote, "The idea that life follows a series of carefully calibrated progressions-- childhood to young adulthood, to middle age, to old age; dating to marriage, to children, to empty nest; low-level job to mid-level job to senior level, job to retirement-- seems preposterously outdated.

Feiler wrote, instead, "We experience life as a complex swirl of celebrations, setbacks, triumphs, and rebirth across the full span of our years." Amen to that. And if this topic interests you, I highly, highly recommend reading his book.

So let's talk about life. Let's go big picture, because there are a few things that I know to be true. Here are three big ideas that I share with my clients when their conversations arise about their fears and we want to reassure them.

Big idea number one: we get to define success for ourselves. There are so many messages bombarding us all the time with that word "should." We should look a certain way. We should be at this level by now. We should stay on the path we chose. With all of the noisy sheds, it can be hard to hear our inner wisdom that tells us the truth. Part of this truth is defining success for ourselves. This involves asking questions like, what would a successful life be for me? When I come to the end of my life, what's the legacy I want to leave? What do I want to be known for? Taking the time to ask and answer these questions to define or redefine your definition of a successful life. We'll help you make choices with more, ease, more clarity, and more confidence.

Here's big idea number two: You matter. And you're enough just as you are. This is a soul level idea: that we matter just as we are. What I found from talking with so many clients is that we all want that big picture life level reassurance that we're okay, that we're doing okay in life, just as it is right now.

And during the past years, I've read and explored different spiritual thought leaders and practices. I've taken classes. I've learned how to read the Akashic records, which are the records of our soul. And the main message in these readings and practices is that we matter. That we're enough. Now that's not to say that we don't have an obligation to continue putting attention to our personal growth.

This is one of those situations that I describe as a yes AND. Yes, you're enough just as you are AND you get to continue to learn, grow, develop, and challenge yourself. It can be hard to hold both of these thoughts. If it's hard for you, imagine putting one thought in your left hand and the other thought in your right hand, then bring your palms together and see how you can integrate them.

The third big idea I know to be true is this: there are many paths you can choose, not right, not wrong, just different. Each potential path in life will grow us. Each will challenge us, will introduce us to new people and new ideas. Yes, when we choose one path, we might be closing a door to another, either temporarily or permanently, and that's okay.

The key is to choose intentionally the path we want to be on to create our life path in alignment with our values, purpose, and priorities. And remember that if you find yourself on a path that's not working for you, you'll recognize that, and you can make a change because chances are, if you look back over your life, you've had to make changes before. I'm sure there are times that you've had to be resilient and pivot. And if, or when you need to in the future, you'll be able to.

In writing his book, Bruce Feiler interviewed 225 people about their life transitions. He asked them a series of questions that he shared at the end of the book. One of these intrigued me.

He asked everyone this, looking back over your life story in a slightly different way, what shape embodies your life? If I had to choose a shape that embodied my life, it would be a spiraling line, a line that spirals in and out, that flows backward and forward, up and down, because I feel like life is always moving, although it's sometimes hard to tell exactly in which direction.

When I asked some clients this question, what shape embodies your life? I got an interesting range of answers, from a jagged line that represents the rise and fall of the stock market, to a balloon that's inflated and deflated at various points, to a mountain range that someone felt like they were climbing.

The shape we choose says something about our beliefs about ourself, as well as the narrative, the story, that we tell about our life experiences. Speaking of life narrative, I want to leave you with this last big thought. That we get to tell the narrative of our life the way we want. We get to tell our life story in a way that's meaningful for us, in a way that we're satisfied with, in a way that honors our core beliefs.

There are three different ways that we can tell our stories. We can tell a victim story. We can tell an overcoming story, and we can tell a great big picture story. Here's an example of how you might tell your life story in these three ways. If I think back to my life, when I left medicine, and I was going to share my victim story, I might say this: I left medicine because I couldn't hack being a doctor. I gave up.

If I were going to tell that story from an overcoming perspective, my overcoming story, I might say this: I left medicine. I embarked on a period of self exploration. I created a life and a business that's meaningful and helps others.

The third way to tell the story is the great story, the big picture story. If I were going to tell about my life from the great story perspective, I might say this: the journey of my life helped develop my empathy, my bravery, and my knowledge that change is absolutely possible. And because I went through what I went through, I am uniquely capable of bringing these beliefs into my coaching to help others.

So let's bring this to you. In the next few weeks, I invite you to take some time to think about your life and these big ideas. And here are some questions you might answer:

what life transitions have you navigated?

What life transitions might you be in right now?

How do you tell the story of your life?

Lastly, if your life were a shape, what shape would it be?

Thank you so much for being you, and thanks for being part of my community. Please subscribe to my podcast and please reach out to me anytime. I appreciate you and what you bring to the world. Until next time! .