

Ep #266: Controlling vs. Holding Accountable



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With Your Host

Jody Moore

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I'm Jody Moore, and this is Better Than Happy episode 266: Controlling vs. Holding Accountable.

This podcast is for people who know that living an extraordinary life is not easy or comfortable. It's so much better than that. This is *Better Than Happy*, and I'm your host, Jody Moore.

Hey, everyone. Thanks so much for being here today. I am so appreciative that you're tuning in, that you're applying what you're learning here to better yourself and your life and all the people around you. And I'm excited to teach you about controlling versus holding accountable.

This is a topic that I coach quite a bit on because my clients understand the frustration that we create for ourselves when we try to control other people. They are pretty quick to embrace the idea that, of course, we can't control other people, and that when we try to, we just frustrate ourselves and we distance ourselves. And it's really just not useful.

On the other hand, many of my clients are mothers, and some fathers. And they ask me, "Well, how do I know if I'm trying to control my child, or if I'm just doing what I want to do as a good parent, which is to hold them accountable to things that I think will serve them or that I expect? And it's a really good question.

And so, I want to dive into it today. Now, before we dive into it, I want to mention that I know that you're struggling, I know that you're stressed. And here's why. I want to give you a little story or metaphor to demonstrate what's happening for many of us.

I jog a little bit. I'm a jogger I used to consider myself a runner, but now I have to say I'm a jogger. And sometimes, I only jog a mile. That's all I have the energy for. That's all I have the time for. That's all I can get myself to do. I take what I can get. I run a mile. Other days, I jog between four and five miles.

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And what I've noticed is, depending on what I've decided to do for the day, the last couple of blocks, or the last little bit of my run, depending if I'm on a treadmill or outside, are the hardest part, usually. I start to get tired. I start to run out of steam. I start telling myself, "Come on, Jody. You can do it." I have to coach myself into keeping on going.

And again, that happens whether I'm jogging a mile or jogging four miles. And so, I love to notice that because it's such a good example of how powerful our brains are, how much our mindset matters. When I set my mind to, "I'm going to jog four miles today," then my body responds accordingly.

Of course, some days it's easier than others still, depending on a lot of factors. But nonetheless, I sort of muster up the energy and the motivation and all the things required. And at the last little bit, I start to let go of all those things. They all start to fall off and I can just barely finish it. And I always feel like, "I could not have gone another step." And the same thing happens if I'm only jogging a mile. And yet, I'm capable of jogging four times that at least.

So, the reason I'm giving this example is because this is what a lot of you are experiencing, a lot of us are experiencing, because we thought our kids were going to go back to school in the fall. That's what we were kind of hoping for, right? And summer can get long and challenging.

And many of you were telling yourself, "I've just got to hold on until the kids go back to school. I just have to be patient enough to make it through the summer. I just have to deal with having all these kids home, trying to keep the house clean, and trying to keep them entertained and trying to still make time for the things that I need to do for myself. I just have to do that until school starts."

Only now, in most places anyway, school isn't really starting the way we thought it would. The kids aren't going to be going back to school in most places. And maybe your kids have already started virtual school or they're

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getting ready to. But at any rate, I have a whole bunch of tools I want to offer you.

And one of them is what I'm going to talk to you about today on the podcast. We're going to dive into this topic. I hope it will be helpful for you. But I have way more than that. And I want to go more in depth and I want to answer your questions. So, I decided to offer a free virtual class called Stress Level Zero.

Because did you know, your kids could still be home and you could be at Stress Level Zero? I know this is true because I've got four of my own and I'm able to do this. And I want to teach you how. I want to give you some tools. Even if maybe you just decrease your stress level a little bit. Maybe you don't get all the way to zero. That's okay too. But I have lots of tips and tricks and tools that I want to teach you because there's no reason for you to have to keep running the race you're running.

It feels like you got to the end and someone's like, "By the way, we're going to jog 15 more miles now, let's go." So, if you're feeling that way, it's okay. But you need to come to my free virtual class, webinar, whatever you want to call it. I'm going to be live on Zoom. You get to be live on Zoom from any device you want and I will help you.

And all you need to do is go to jodymoore.com/stress and you can register to join me. It's happening on September 4th, which is a Friday, and I'll only be teaching it one time. And I will send out a replay. So, register and then you'll get the replay if you can't be there live. But you're going to want to come live if you can because there's going to be a special bonus that you can only get if you're there live. So, again, jodymoore.com/stress.

Now, let's talk a little bit about what's going on right now in your head.

It's tough times we're in. So, first of all, I want you to know that however you're feeling about all of this is totally fine. I'm not here to tell you that you should think positively and you should have a better attitude or you should

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make it more fun or any of that. I don't think that's a useful way to think about what I'm teaching you here.

I think that we have to really make space for ourselves to have the experiences that our brains are creating in order to get the leverage and the awareness over them that's necessary to then better direct our brains towards who we want to be.

So, I'm also not trying to turn you into robots who never feel negative emotion, who never have a bad attitude, who never get overwhelmed or stressed or any of the things. That's not the goal here. So, I want to begin with that.

But I was also thinking about what I could offer you guys that might be useful. And one of the topics that I, again, get a lot of questions around is this idea of, "Okay, my kids are outside of me, they're a circumstance. Everything that they think, feel, say, do, et cetera, goes in the circumstance line of the Model."

So, if you don't know the Model, if you're new to the podcast, make sure you go get the podcast roadmap, go to jodymoore.com/map. But you'll be fine, just stick with me for this episode and then go get it and listen to some of the others after. But a lot of you have heard me teach the model or you're in Be Bold, you know the model, you hear me coach with the model. Your kids go in the circumstance line, in other words, they're just a thing, they're people of course, but they exist outside of you. They can't make you feel anything. They don't have control over your emotions. Your own thoughts make you feel what you're feeling.

So a lot of the work I'm trying to do with you guys, here is to teach you that. We put way too much emphasis on trying to control or change circumstances and not enough on just understanding our own thinking, feeling and acting. So one of the questions that comes from that then is okay, well, that makes sense, I should stop trying to control my children because it's

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not working anyway. They have agency, they're making their own choices. In fact us trying to control them often will drive them the other way.

But I also want to be the kind of mother that is responsible, that teaches our kids the things that are important and that holds our kids accountable, and maybe disciplines or however you choose to parent. I want to be a 'good mother' and I think that those things are part of that description. So I'm all in, that's personally how I feel about being a mom. I don't want to try to control my children so that I can feel better. But I also don't want to neglect them and not show up and be the best mother that I could possibly be, that might hopefully serve them well in the end.

So I want us to dive a little bit deeper into this topic today of when am I trying to control my children versus when am I just doing a good job of holding them accountable? So we have to begin with just understanding that these are all thoughts.

I'm going to talk to you about what I see in both myself and my clients that I think is useful and what is not useful. But these are just my thoughts, so I want you to take what I teach you and just use it as a starting point for you to make your own decisions about what you want your thoughts to be about what serves you. Because there is not a one size fits all way to parent, of course.

Even within your own family you might choose to alter yourself and your parenting a little bit based on specific children. So please don't think I'm trying to claim to be the expert here, by any means, use it as a sort of a way to start thinking about these things. Trying to control your children I don't find to be useful, I really don't.

I find that for everybody I've ever coached who's trying to control their children, they come to me telling me that they are frustrated, and overwhelmed, and they feel like they're failing. And they don't know what to do because they can't get that kid to do what they want them to do, when they come to me with a coaching problem. So usually my client and I both agree

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this whole trying to control thing isn't working. But before we step away from it and decide, well, what is going to work better, I do think it's very important that we understand why we do it anyway.

We all know intellectually that our kids have agency, everybody has agency. We can't control them. We're not supposed to control them. I think we pretty well know that. So why is it that we try to do it anyway? We try to do it because we don't really know, not on a deep level, not on the level I try to get my clients to. We don't understand that our children's behavior is not creating our emotions. And we are trying to feel better. So let me give you an example.

My son recently was set to go on a campout with his dad and the other young men from the ward; they were going to be camping out for a couple of nights. And my son came to my husband and I one evening and he said, "I'm really nervous about the campout." He feels like he doesn't know the other boys very well. He's not a big camper. He doesn't like to be cold. He doesn't like to get dirty. He's very picky about food so he often doesn't like the food that's planned on campouts. And so for a lot of reasons he was nervous, he was worried, he was anxious.

Now, when my son comes to me and tells me that he's worried, and anxious, and he's emotional, then I feel emotions. But I'm not feeling that because of what my son's saying, or even because of how he's feeling, I'm feeling that because of my own thoughts about my son and his experience that he's having.

Now, there's nothing wrong with the thoughts that I'm having. In fact I wouldn't really want to not have thoughts that cause me to feel worried or empathetic or whatever I was feeling when my child comes to me like that. I want to keep those thoughts. Therefore, I'm going to create those emotions for myself. But because I understand that, because I've been studying this work so deeply for so long, I also try to be very cautious about now jumping in and trying to change my son so that I don't have to feel the emotions I'm feeling, because I'm not feeling them because of his behavior.

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So here's why I think this is so important. We all love our kids, want to do the best job we can as parents, and if I'm talking to my son about his fear, his anxiety, because I'm in stress, or worry, or fear about him, then it's going to be totally different than if I make peace with him having whatever negative emotion. And sort of at least understand that I'm the creator of my emotion and that I don't need to change him in order for me to feel better. That's us trying to control things outside of our control.

We try to manipulate the people in the world around us so that we can feel better, which is not very fair to my son if I try to do that. Because I'm going to start trying to talk him out of being afraid, I'm going to tell him why he doesn't need to. And here's what happens when I try to talk my child out of being afraid. He sells me on why he should be afraid.

So we kind of start playing tug-of-war, I'm pulling on one side of the rope like, "Don't be afraid, you don't need to be afraid, there's no reason to." And he then pulls back on his side of the rope, meaning he fights even harder for all the thoughts that are causing his fear and his anxiety. That's not going to serve either of us very well. So the alternative is that I first just do a quick little reminder in my head that this is just negative emotion and brains, my brain creating mine, and his creating his, and it's okay. It's not a problem I have to solve.

So I have kind of a default that I go to which is, it's okay for my child to be scared. It's okay for my child to be anxious. It's okay for my child to be unhappy. So I do that quickly, I remind myself of that. In fact here's all the other things I know behind it, is it's actually really useful for him to have experiences where he feels negative emotion. So he's not afraid of negative emotion, and so that he understands that he is the creator of it and so that he becomes stronger in all the ways that we want to see our kids become stronger.

So this isn't a problem to be solved, it's kind of another go to thought I give myself. Then I might start saying some of the same words. I still might offer him new thoughts to think like, "Don't forget, your dad's going to be with

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you, and don't forget all the kids in our ward are super nice," and whatever. I might still offer my son different thoughts, but offering him thoughts is different than me trying to talk him out of being scared. It's a subtle difference but it's still very different.

It often includes a lot of me assuring him that it's okay to be scared. It's okay to be anxious, it's really normal to fear the unknown. And that I don't really love camping either, and I get – I don't like being cold and dirty either. So it's like validating where he's at, allowing him his own emotion, because I don't need to change it for me to feel better. And then if appropriate, offering some different thoughts. But I sort of offer them and if he doesn't want them and he doesn't take them, that's okay. Do you see the difference?

Okay, so now let's talk about a situation when we actually have what we might consider a discipline problem with a child. So maybe a child is behaving in a way that we find to be crossing a boundary, if you will, crossing the line of what we are willing to tolerate or what we allow, or what our expectations are for our home. Because as the parents you're allowed to have expectations and rules, if you want to call them rules, you're allowed to have 'boundaries' about what is allowed and what is not allowed.

If you think of this as like you're the managers of the home as the mom and dad. Then we want the manager in a company to have expectations and guidelines for employees. Good managers will layout exactly what they expect of the employees, and they'll be as specific as possible.

And then if employees don't meet those expectations then a good manager will hold the employee accountable in whatever way has been outlined as the accountability plan. And if one wasn't outlined previously then we have to figure that out, ideally, we do it ahead of time, sometimes we have to do it as we go.

So this is why Human Resources is an entire department, entire field of study, because we have to figure out, okay, what do we expect? Maybe we expect the employees to be on time for work. And if they're not, then what

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happens? What happens after the first time they're not on time? What happens if they're not on time again, the second time, the third time, etc? And does it matter if they're not on time three times within a week versus three times within a year? And we have to think through all of these things, it's a lot.

So as parents we want to think through as many of those things as we can. Now, I'll tell you, I am not a detailed person, I am not an HR person, I do not have rules and accountability plans for all of the things I expect. I sort of take it as it comes.

So, for example, my two younger kids right now are into my phone and my iPad, they're constantly wanting to be on my phone or my iPad, and they fight over who's turn it is to be on which device. And there's just like a lot of contention and drama around it. And I allow them to be on those devices some, but I don't like them to be on them for too long.

So what happens is sometimes I will say, "Hey, it's time to put the screens away, it's time to turn those off, you've been on those long enough." And my daughter especially, my cute little four-year-old, Taylor, gets really mad. She folds her arms and pouts and puts her head down and scowls. Sometimes if I'm not giving it enough attention, she'll pick something up and throw it down on the ground just to make sure I know how mad she is. Sometimes she'll stomp off through the house as loudly as she can possibly stomp, so she gets really mad, or she'll argue with me against it.

So sometimes I say to her, "Hey, listen, if you're going to be upset like that then you're going to need to go to your room until you can settle down." Or if the two of them are fighting over a screen, over an iPad or something, I'll say, "Hey, listen, if you guys can't get along we're going to need to put the iPad away, no one's going to play with it right now, because I don't want it to be a source of contention." So that is me holding them accountable.

It's not the same as me trying to control them, because if I'm doing it right anyway, I'm not trying to control them, it's not to say I'm always perfect at it.

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But when I'm trying to control them, I'm upset, I'm frustrated, I'm irritated, and now I'm trying to get them to change what they're doing so that I can feel better. It doesn't mean that I'm feeling lovely inside when I'm telling them to stop arguing over the iPad, or stop, you know, if you're going to be really mad you need to go to your room. I'm not feeling my happiest by any means in that moment.

But instead of being on this rollercoaster of upset and back down I'm just like on little tiny rolling hills of well, this is kind of not the most favorite part of my day. But I'm not emotional and then trying to control them so that I can feel better. I have to keep in mind that I can't control them. I can't tell Taylor, "Don't get mad at me." She can get mad at me if she wants to. And in fact, me telling her not to is going to make her even more mad.

So I'm not going to try to control her but I am going to hold her accountable like, "Hey, if you're going to throw things on the ground, or you're going to argue with me, or you're going to yell at me, or what have you, then you'll need to go in your room until you can calm down." That is my job, is to hold her accountable to what I expect.

I consider myself to be a person that has very low expectations; I do, of my kids. And I don't mean that I don't think that they have amazing potential and aren't capable of really amazing things, I absolutely do. But I have to manage my brain around every expectation I have, and that is exhausting and draining. And I already have to manage my brain around so many other things. So I purposely choose to let a lot of things go.

If I don't think it's a big problem, if it doesn't cross my 'boundary' then I'm pretty willing to let my kids navigate things. I might be there to teach them and guide them and offer suggestions. But I don't want to be policing them all day long. Now, I'm not saying that's right or wrong, I'm sure that there's a lot of you could tell me why I should have more expectations. We could make a case for that, for sure.

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All I'm saying is any time I have an expectation of my kids then I have an expectation of myself, which is that I am going to show up and do my job and hold them accountable. Because I think what's even more toxic in the home is us throwing out a whole bunch of expectations that we never hold anybody accountable to. Let me give a work example again, this is true in a work environment too.

So I had this one job where they used to say, "If you don't hit certain performance numbers," it was one of the sales job I had. "If you don't perform and hit certain numbers for a certain amount of time then you'll eventually lose your job." So there was this one employee there who just was kind of a goof off, he just wasn't very focused, he didn't work very hard and his results showed it. He didn't sell very much.

And they just kept on giving him chance, after chance, after chance, after chance, to the point where the other employees and I would joke around. "At least we don't have to worry about losing our jobs because we know that doesn't really happen here at this company." So that's – whether it's like blatant like that or just more under the surface that our kids' brains pick up on the fact that they don't really mean what they say. That's sort of what we create if we throw out a whole bunch of expectations that we never hold our kids accountable to, or we're not pretty consistent about it.

Have you heard this in parenting, "Most important is that you're consistent?" Well, I know myself; I'm not going to be able to be consistent at a whole bunch of things. So I'm very careful about selecting the things that I'm like, no, this is where I draw the line. This is not okay. And I will hold you accountable if you cross that line. And sometimes those things are just things that myself and my husband decide we don't like that in our home environment. Sometimes there are things that I think this really could be detrimental to this child. But mostly I just don't try to control them.

And I don't have a whole lot of things I need to hold them accountable to because I hold myself accountable to holding them accountable. See what I'm saying?

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Here is the final thing I want to say about this topic. When you think about your kids I want you to pay attention to how you think about them. I think the parent child dynamic is so fascinating and it's so complicated because we get these little babies, they're precious and adorable and they need us for everything literally. They cannot feed themselves, they can't really go to sleep without our help many times, we have to change diapers and dress them and everything.

And then they slowly or fast, it feels fast and slow at the same time, they grow up and they become more independent. And the things that they need us for change, some of the things they don't need us for at all that they used to, and then suddenly there's brand new things that they need us for. But the level of involvement at which they want from us in their lives is an ever dynamic thing. And the level at which we want to be involved in their lives is dynamic and maybe not always matching up with what they want from us, or think they need from us.

So it's a complicated relationship for sure. But one of the problems I see that many of my clients create for themselves is they start thinking of themselves as a little bit better than those kids. Now, none of us really say it that way, we don't logically have thoughts like, well, I'm better than her. We're not like Mother Gothel on Tangled. But we just think that we know better. And we think that if the kid is acting in a certain way that they're not respecting us, and they should respect us because we're their parents. And maybe that line of thinking is serving you, but it might not be.

So if I have a child who has opinions, I don't care if my child is seven years old or 17 years old, if my child has opinions about what he or she should get to do, I want to hear them out. I want to think of them as a whole complete adult, yes, their brains are still developing. Yes, they don't have the level of experience and knowledge that we do. But they're still worthy of respect. So I want to hear them out, I want to hear why they think they should be allowed to do a certain thing, or they shouldn't have to do a certain other thing.

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And I want to really go into it open-minded, not going into it thinking I'm going to try to talk him into why this matters. I hope I can get him onboard. I hope I can get her to see that this is important. I have to go into it really open, tell me why, maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I should change my mind about this. Tell me why you think that? Because our kids can feel that, they feel whether or not you respect them and think that they have valid opinion, or valid ideas.

We as human beings just have so many preconceived ideas about how kids should be, how we should be as parents, how the world should go, how families should be. And I just like to be in a space of questioning all of it if it's going to serve my relationships better.

So I posted this example on Instagram recently, but my four-year-old daughter came to me and said, "Mom, why can't I have pink hair?" And I was fascinated by the fact that she just assumed immediately that she couldn't. This is the first time she had asked me about it. She assumed I would say no. And my first inclination would be to say no. But when she asked me, "Why can't I have pink hair?" I said, "Hold on, let me think about it for a minute."

And I thought about what would be the reasons why she can't have pink hair. Maybe people would think that looked silly, maybe I wouldn't like how it looked on her. I don't really like those reasons. I'm not trying to impress other people with my child. And my opinion of her hair doesn't matter as much as her opinion of her hair. So I was like, "Those aren't good." I knew it wouldn't cost a lot of money because I knew I could get a temporary hair dye kit at Target for probably \$8, so it wasn't like it's going to be too expensive.

I really sifted through in my head and I couldn't find a reason that I thought was great. So I said, "You know what, you can have pink hair, you want pink hair, let's do it." And then her brother wanted blue hair right after, so now we have two little punk looking kids running around the house. But my point is just I try to pause, even though part of me wants to be like, she's

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four, she doesn't understand, let me explain to her. I try to at least pause and consider that she is a whole complete person even at age four, worthy of respect, worthy of being heard.

I get that there are more heavy things. I just want to show you the process. I want you to pause and think through what is my reason for this? Is this a reason that I like? Is this a reason that I want to keep that is me at my highest self, my most trusting, most loving, most open, most connecting with my child self? Or is there some fear behind this? Is there fear around what people will think or what might happen down the road or other things?

And we just want to consider all of it and view your child as equal to you, because they are, even in their immaturity, even with their undeveloped brains and their lack of experience; they are still equal to us. So, holding your kids accountable, yes, important work to do. You don't have to be mad to do it. It's 10 times better when you're not.

It's so much better when you clean up your thinking so that you're not emotional, you're not mirroring them. You're peaceful, calm and open. And you say, "Well, tell me what you think. Tell me why you think this is appropriate." And if you disagree with them you say, "Well, I'm sorry, we don't agree with that, your dad and I, this is what we expect in our home. But you get to make your own choices, we love you either way. These are the consequences of one behavior, these are the consequences of the other, you pick."

Really important work to do, hold your kids accountable, hold people in your life accountable who you should be holding accountable. You know who those people are, right? Those are the people that are your employees, or are your children, or that you have some kind of authority over for some reason. Hold them accountable only because you love them, because you're willing to show up and do your job to take care of them, not because it's your job to control them.

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You holding them accountable doesn't mean that they will start making the decision you want them to make, it doesn't mean that. So a lot of times people tell me, "I've been holding them accountable and it's not working." "What do you mean it's not working? It always works." The only thing that working means is that you did your part to hold them accountable, you followed through on whatever was going to be the consequence or the reward for what they did, that's it. Or you at least brought it to their attention.

I heard Brené Brown talking about this recently on her podcast, she's like, she wrote a letter to the governor, whoever, in the state of Texas saying, "What's the plan for Covid? Because this is what the Health Department's recommending and this is what's going on and I want to know what you're going to do to make sure that we get ourselves back on track." Somebody said to her, "I can't believe you're shaming him, you of all people." And she said, "That's not shaming, that's me holding him accountable. I am a taxpayer here. He should be accountable to me."

And in this situation, holding accounting is just bringing it up, asking questions, letting him know that you're paying attention and you see what's going on and you want to know what's happening, that's it. Holding accountable doesn't always have to be a reward or a consequence. It can just be a conversation, but an open conversation, she's not coming at him attacking him as a person. And she's not saying, "My way's the right way." She's just like, "I'm curious, I want to know what you're doing given these things going on."

Think about that with your kids. Listen, you guys, this is going to be an amazing year. I really do believe that. I really believe that all of this nonsense that we're going through with Covid that feels so out of sorts, is refining us and that we are going to come out the other side of this better, in our relationships, in our families, in our health if we choose to.

We have opportunities like this where everything gets thrown up in the air and we can either pull the covers up over our head and come out the other side worse off, or we can use it as an opportunity to work on some of the

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things that we've just been coasting through in the past and be more connected in our families, do a better job as parents. And learn to manage our own emotions along the way. That is 100% available to all of us. And I am right here to help you guys, because I know it's easier said than done. But I promise you I can help you get there.

So if you're not following me on Instagram you probably should because we've been having a lot of fun there. I finally figured out how to do a sticker box, so I'm going to take questions on there on occasion. Watch for my sticker box to pop up in my stories. And also if you're not in Be Bold, that's really where everything starts clicking into place. So go check out Be Bold, I will help you through this. We've got this. Have a great rest of your week. I'll see you next time.

Who is your life coach? If you don't have one I would be so honored to be your coach. I created a virtual coaching program called Be Bold that I want to invite you to join me in. We can address challenges, we can work on goals, and we can do it in so many different ways.

We have group coaching, individual private coaching, and online chats along with hundreds of hours of courses and content that I've created just for you. When you're ready to really take what you're learning on the podcast to the 10x level, then come check out Be Bold at JodyMoore.com/membership.