

442: Future Thinking



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Jody Moore

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Welcome to episode 442, Future Thinking. Are your thoughts coming more from your past or from your future? And how do we get more of our thoughts coming from our future when the future is so unknown? Why is this such an important skill, and how do we strengthen it? That's what we're going to talk about today.

Welcome to *Better Than Happy*. I'm Jody Moore and I'll be your coach today.

Today's episode is brought to you by the *Better Than Happy* Masterclass. If you like what you're learning here, you must come try a masterclass with me. Thanks to technology, we can hang out in real time online, even if you're on the other side of the world from me. And I'm going to give you some exercises to participate in with me, and then bring on volunteers to share and we'll do the work together.

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Hello everybody, welcome to 2024. Isn't it crazy to think that COVID, I mean COVID lasted a long time, but the thick of it was four years ago. It feels like yesterday, how could that be? Anyway, time is interesting. We need to do an episode on time one of these days. I love learning about

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time, how fascinating it is and how non-simple and linear it is as we all think it is.

We're going to talk about future thinking today and I want to tell you that I was prompted to do this episode because I woke up the other morning really early, well, for me it was really early. I don't like to get up early if I can help it. And this was during a holiday break when my kids were out of school and I was taking a little time off work and so I didn't need to get up early. And so 7:00am felt really early to me. I woke up at 7:00, which is not early. At any rate, I had this thought come to my head.

I teach the model here. You guys have probably heard me talk about the model. I'll do a quick review of it if necessary, but at any rate, we talk a lot about the power of thinking. And how our model says that we have circumstances happen outside of us, then our thoughts create our feelings. Those feelings are driving our actions and those thoughts, feelings and actions together are creating our results. There's the quick version of it.

And I was thinking about the thought line of the model and I was thinking about how much our thought line usually comes from our past. And how, if we can shift our thought line to come from our future more often we will create different results because the past has already happened. It's already known, we've already created a lot of different results from our past. And when we keep thinking the same thoughts we thought in the past from our past, in other words, we keep creating the same results that we've had.

And I don't know why, just picturing it this way for me first thing in the morning was kind of a little bit of a light bulb moment. Especially because I've been trying to really work on being more future focused myself, thinking more about the future, thinking bigger in the future. And by bigger, not more complicated, because sometimes when I think big, I turn it into complicated. And so simple and big and opening my mind up to consider things I never have even considered before and just making space for new considerations that haven't occurred to me.

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And anyway, I'm doing a lot of that work and so I had this thought, oh my goodness, if my thought line is constantly just filled with my past then my result line is going to be filled with basically the same thing as my past. And the more I can fill my thought line up with future thoughts, the more I will create a different result. Are you with me? So I'm just going to kind of think through this. Like I said, it was an early morning thought I had. And I have a few things I want to share here. I hope that this makes sense. And then this is a discussion we can continue to have ongoing.

But I wanted to begin by talking about trauma for just a minute. And I need to preface it with saying again, for the record, in case it's not clear that I am not a therapist or a psychologist, nor am I claiming to be. So please don't think I'm saying I'm an expert in this topic, but I do try to educate myself around it. I feel that's my responsibility as a coach to have some understanding of it, especially to know when somebody comes along that I need to refer to a more clinical expert.

And if you get online and you look up trauma, you're going to get a lot of different definitions and there are a lot of people with a lot of ideas and I don't claim to have the right idea. But I want to tell you how I think about trauma and why this is relevant is because it really is the reason why our brains are so past focused. So here's what I mean.

So trauma, basically the way most people define it, has to do with an emotional response to a challenging event in its most simple form. And I like to think of it as an event that occurs that our experience of it is such that it changes our minds a little bit. It changes actually literally even our brain chemistry, because we have different neural pathways that connect in the brain. And so as a result of something we experience, we now view the world differently than we did before that event.

And most of the time we associate trauma with a negative event, something challenging, something hard, something overwhelming, something painful, something damaging. And so your brain chemistry now has been rewired in order to try to protect you in the future. And there can be a lot of different outcomes of trauma. You can experience trauma and it

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can make you more guarded and more afraid. You can experience trauma and in the end, you can become more compassionate.

I'm not saying that we always come out bitter. Sometimes we come out better, and especially with focused work with a therapist or a coach or whatever kind of work you find to be helpful, you can definitely create positive outcomes for yourself on the other side of trauma. And it's not even bad that we sometimes have a rewiring in our brain that says that's dangerous or be careful or be guarded in this situation. That is not a bad thing either. I think of our brains as being the most amazing, complicated AI that's been around long before AI as we are starting to know it today, ever existed.

Because when I think about AI, I think about computers that are super smart and they get smarter. The more input they get and the more feedback and AI software or program gets, the better it gets at doing whatever you're asking it to do. And our brains are that same way. And so the life experiences we have are the feedback and the input that we get that say, "Hey, that event was painful, we should try to avoid that, or that situation we got stuck in, we should be cautious about getting into a situation like that again in the future."

So this is really useful to a certain extent, but I love just having the knowledge that trauma or experiences in life, that trigger emotions then, thoughts and then emotions of course, change our brain chemistry. Now, there are different kinds of trauma. There's acute trauma, which is centered around a single particular event. There's chronic trauma around maybe a series of ongoing events. Acute trauma would be something like maybe some kind of a violent attack or something.

A chronic kind of trauma would be something more like ongoing poverty or exposure to bullying or something like that, would typically probably be considered chronic trauma. And then we have complex trauma which is exposure to varied and multiple types of events. So anyway, like I said, I'm not an expert in trauma.

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The reason I'm bringing it up is because even if you're like, "I don't think I have had trauma. I don't think I've experienced trauma. I've been really fortunate. I've been really blessed. I was raised in a good home. I haven't been in an abusive relationship. I haven't been attacked directly or experienced anything outside of normal challenges in life. I don't think I have trauma."

What I want to offer to you is that every single one of us, if we use this definition of experiences that then change our brains to see the world in a different way, every single one of us has trauma. Now, that doesn't mean we all have trauma to the same extent. Some people have experienced much more severe trauma, much more challenging trauma than others but I think of this the same way I think about physical pain.

So just like maybe I've never had a broken bone or a chronic illness or something really severe when it comes to physical pain, I've still had physical pain in my life. I remember a few years ago, one of my kids was running around barefoot in the summer and he stubbed his toe and he came to me and said, "Mom, I stubbed my toe." And I was like, "Oh, I'm sorry. That hurts."

And I remember having this thought, it hurts living in a body. There just is physical pain sometimes, again, because we're running around without shoes, and sometimes I just wake up with a back ache or a neck ache and I'm not sure why. Sometimes I choose to go exercise or go on a hike or do something and then the next day I'm kind of sore. So for all kinds of reasons, there are at times, there is at times I should say, physical pain that happens when we live in a human body, and there's also emotional pain that happens.

And both the physical and emotional pain, but we're focusing here on emotional pain, especially, rewires our brains to try to prevent it in the future, to try to protect us, if you will, in the future, from pain. And so I like to think of trauma again as something that everyone has to a certain extent. Now, why is this important and why are we talking about this with future

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thinking? Well, because it's one of the reasons that the brain is so tempted to go to the past.

The brain wants to take note and remember especially painful events, but even pleasurable events. It seeks pleasure and it wants to avoid pain. And the pain gets way more weight. Avoiding pain gets way more weight in our brains than seeking pleasure. So that is why your brain is constantly wanting to go to what it already knows from the past because it has learned a lot. You've lived, however many years you've been alive, you have that many different experiences to draw from that have wired your brain to where it is.

And it has a huge database to pull from to make decisions now in the present. And a lot of that is useful, but we want to keep the useful parts and then make more decisions from the future. So you will know you have past thinking happening if and when you hear yourself thinking or saying things like, "That's just what we always do. That's just the way we do it. Or that's just who we are, that's just how our family is. Or this is just how my husband and I are. This is what we do. This is our pattern. This is our tendency."

Notice how I'm telling you about the past, but the way we talk about it is like we're telling you about the present. And we're even kind of predicting the future but we're doing it from the past. We're using past experiences, past knowledge, past stories, past pictures in our minds. Byron Katie would say that the movies that you're watching in your head, they all are coming from the past, when we say things like this. That's just how she is. That's how he is. That's knowledge that we have from the past. So it's not wrong.

Again, our amazingly intelligent AI brains have learned from the past, but still it's coming from the past. Now, this is important because if you want to change something, and I'm not saying you are going to want to change everything. You might be happy keeping a lot of your life the same as it's been in the past. But in the areas where you want to change things, you want to improve something, you want something different, you're going to

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have to stop thinking so many thoughts from the past. You're going to have to start making decisions and thinking more from your future.

Now, this is challenging to do my friends, you know why? The future is like a blank piece of paper. My kids like to run into my office sometimes, interrupting my calls and open up the printer and grab out of the bottom some paper because they like to draw. My daughter's really into folding up little notes and writing little cute messages on them right now. And she'll come in and she'll get a blank piece of paper. Now, you hand me a blank piece of paper and you say, "Go ahead and draw something or make something."

What would happen for you in your mind if I handed you a blank piece of paper and I was like, "Go ahead and make me something or draw me something?" Would you kind of be like, "Uh? Because that's what I do. "Well, what is it for? Am I going to give it to someone? Is it for you? Is it just for fun? Do you want it to be about the holidays, about the new year? Do you want it to be about your family? Do you want it to be my own thoughts?" We desperately want some kind of a starting point, some kind of a guide.

Because just having a blank piece of paper is too many options, too many choices, too much unknown and then we don't trust ourselves because we don't have anything to draw from. We can't go into our huge database of life experience, including pleasure and trauma and make decisions. But if you give me some parameters and some guidelines, I know which file in my brain database to pull from to make a decision that I think will result in whatever I'm trying to create in the end. You see what I'm saying?

It's just so huge and unknown that our brains don't like that. And that's true about the future. Now, I will say there's one time when I hear people operating from the future a lot and I try to tell them to come back and stop thinking so much about the future. And that is when we are in fear or worry. So if you're like, "I think about the future all the time. I worry that my kids aren't going to turn out right, that certain people are never going to forgive

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me, that I'm going to be all alone. That I'm not going to have enough money."

When you think about fear based things, usually the brain is much better at thinking about the future from that standpoint. What if this goes wrong? What if that goes wrong? What if this never gets better? What if that lasts forever? These are all things I hear commonly in coaching. And I say, "Well, why are we making up that about the future? Why don't we just come back to what's happening right now, which is we're okay right now. This is fine right now and I can handle this right now and whatever comes up in the future I'll be able to handle that but for now I don't even have that problem."

So when it comes to problems, we're really good at future thinking but what if you decided, we don't need to think about future problems the way the brain thinks we need to because it's not nearly as preventative as we think it is. But I do want to think more about future wins, future successes. What do you want for your future? What do you want? What do you want to create? What do you want to be different? Who do you want to be?

So I want you to try on thinking about yourself at the end of 2024, because this is the beginning of 2024 right now when you're listening to this. I want you to think about yourself at the end of the year. And I want you to think bigger than you might be thinking right now, think beyond what your brain is telling you is possible. If you could make massive progress in whatever area of your life it is, you want to make progress.

If massive progress was available to you, not just slight incremental changes, but massive transformation, if that was available to you because it is, a year is actually a really long time. You could make major transformation in a year. If that was true, then what do you imagine it would look like? And your brain's going to want to go, "I don't know. I can't even picture it." If you can't even picture it, that's a sign we need to be doing this exercise more often. And whatever you picture right now is going to change. So we're not locking ourselves into something that isn't dynamic.

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It needs to be dynamic because you're going to change what you actually want as you progress throughout the year. But we want to think more about successes. So let's say I'm coaching someone who's like, "I've got this child and I'm really worried, they're not doing well in school. I'm afraid their grades aren't going to improve, and we're going to constantly be fighting like we are right now. We're going to hate each other. They're never going to progress on to college or jobs or life", or whatever.

And I'm like, "Alright, well, let's picture the opposite for just a minute. If everything went beautiful, what would that look like?" That's actually so much harder for people to describe. They're like, "Well, maybe my kid figures things out and turns it around and he or she and I become really close over this situation and we learn how to communicate really well. And we have this close relationship and they go on to succeed in all the ways that they choose to succeed. And I learn how to let go of trying to control them and we both become better people."

Can you tell me that story in as much detail as you can tell me the disaster one? Because if not we just need to work on your brain, we need to teach your brain, it's cool that you have learned from the past, that's a really useful thing, but let's also picture an amazing future. And again, it's not bad that you're able to picture possible disaster because your brain thinks it's going to help you prevent it and maybe in small ways it does. But can we spend more time picturing the amazing future that we want and believing that it's possible? Because that is how you will end up creating it.

So again, imagine yourself at the end of 2024, what will you look like physically? Can you imagine anything different than what you are right now? And I'm not saying that you have to dislike your physical appearance right now in order to picture something different. But we are constantly evolving, even if I love what I look like right now, a year from now I'm going to be a year older. So what am I going to look like?

I like to start with the physical because it's challenging for me at my age. I'll be 50 at the end of 2024. What will I look like? And I don't just mean like my body, but maybe that, because that helps me think about my health

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goals. But also my hair, just my overall self-care routines. How will that impact me? And I don't just also think about my literal appearance, but I think I try to picture myself in my environment, in my world. Will my home look the same? Will I spend time in the same way as I do right now or will I be outdoors more than I am right now? Do you see what I mean?

So I'm trying to picture myself and then I'm trying to picture my environment. And I try to picture it in the way I want it to be, not the way it is necessarily right now, even though a lot of what it is right now I would want to keep. But in any area I would want to change or improve, what might that look like? And when your brain rejects it as it will at times if you're anything like me, with, that's not possible. You've never been able to do that. You're not that kind of person. I just notice it's trying to go to the past again.

So for example, I'm tired of how much clutter I tend to gather in my life, I do. It's easy for me to want to blame it on other people or whatever, but the truth is I still have more clutter than I want to have. So when I picture myself in the future, at the end of the year and I start with my appearance, I think about my health. I think about my body being fit and strong. And I think about whatever else, physical appearance, then I think about my environment. And I like to begin with my home for me because I'm home a lot.

So I'm picturing it in a much more minimalist way. I'm picturing it cleaner more of the time because I have less stuff. I'm picturing my closet being a lot emptier than it is right now. I'm picturing all of these spaces where I know I tend to gather more stuff than I want and need and I'm picturing them cleaner and emptier. And it's hard for my brain to do because I don't have a literal picture from my past to draw from. I have to make it up in my mind. I have to imagine it. And I have to start trying on the idea that I could be the kind of person that has that kind of a home.

And you can do this with other things like your habits. What kinds of habits and routines do you have right now that either you want to get rid of or that you're trying to implement but they're not habitual yet? There's still a challenge that you have to kind of talk yourself into doing it. What will it look

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like when it just is a habit? And then this is kind of taking it in the next level. Are you ready? Then you're going to picture what will be the new habits I'm trying to create at that point that will still be challenging and hard for me?

Because I don't know about you, but I don't think we run out in this lifetime of ways that we might want to continually improve our routines or our habits. So what will be easier for you than it is right now, because it's habitual? And then what will be harder that you'll start working on? Again, this is all just imagination. What will your financial situation be like when it comes to your money or your personal finances or your job or your business? When we get into business, I like you to think about what will be the impact you're making.

And again, depending on what kind of business you have, there's lots of this work you can do around your business, but what will it look like at the end of 2024? And if you notice your brain wanting to just improve it a little bit, ask yourself, what if it's possible to have a complete transformation by the end of a year because a year is a long time and a complete transformation literally is possible.

So if you started picturing that and you let yourself be creative and you let your imagination run wild and maybe what you picture today isn't the same as what you picture next week, that's okay. Let yourself imagine and dream from the future. What will your relationships be like? Especially any relationships you have that are kind of strained or challenging that take a toll on you, what will they look like? If that relationship completely transforms, not just got a little bit better, not just it didn't bother you so much, but it completely transformed.

And I don't know what that means. Maybe that means it becomes one of your best, most nourishing relationships or maybe it means it is no longer a part of your life at all. Maybe it's a relationship that ends, I don't know. But if you could completely transform in a year because you can, then what would that look like?

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So I really want to encourage you as we start a new year here, it's tempting to dive right into the action line. When we set New Year's resolutions, we usually set them around the action line, like I'm going to drink my water every day and I'm going to read my scriptures and I'm going to, whatever. We go right to the action of things we're going to do. And I like you taking action. I like you setting goals around action line things.

But I want you to take just as much time and I want you to have an ongoing practice of picturing the future and imagining a future and continuing to answer the kinds of questions I've given you here today. And when you then have decisions to make about what you should do next, what you should say, how you should approach a certain challenge, whether you should say yes to certain things or no to certain things. All of the decisions that we have to make, ongoing, make them from your future, not from your past so much.

Again, the past is informing us to a certain extent, so we're not throwing the past out altogether. We're taking the useful bits of information, but we're not going to just keep repeating the past. We don't want to anyway. I don't want to. I want to keep creating new futures. So I have to answer questions and make decisions more often from my future. Who is future you? Take a minute right now while it's a new year to leverage the energy of the new year, the excitement of the new year and that kind of let's start fresh feeling of a new year and picture the future that you want at the end of 2024.

The more time you spend picturing that, the closer you will get to creating it. I promise you this is true. I'm not the only one teaching this. You can find it everywhere, but it has been life changing for me and I'm going to dive in and be doing that with you all this year. I'm going to share as I go because I'm trying to really transform myself, transform my business, really go next level in 2024. It's going to be a good year. I hope that you'll join me. Thanks for joining me today on the podcast and I'll see you next time. Take care.

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