

455: The Stories We Tell About the Numbers



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Jody Moore

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Welcome to episode 455, The Stories We Tell About the Numbers. Okay, we can all agree that there are a lot of things that are subjective, relative or up for interpretation. This is where your mindset and reframing work can make a big difference. But there are some things that are just true, just facts like numbers. The numbers don't lie or do they? You can't argue with the numbers or can you?

Today we're diving into how we can use even something as black and white as numbers and data to either empower us or hold us back. Beginning with my own personal example of how I caught myself using what could be useful data against myself just this week. Let's dive in.

Welcome to better than happy. I'm Jody Moore and I'll be your coach today.

Hello, everybody. We're going to talk about numbers today. And I am not very good at math. And guess what? You don't have to be in order to get a lot out of what I'm going to teach you today. There are certain areas in our lives where all of us are doing some version of tracking. Maybe it's with your budget. Maybe you like to keep an eye on your bank account. Maybe you're doing it with regards to your health goals.

Sometimes people like to track their food, track what they're eating, calories, macros, micronutrients, things like that. I'm doing it in that area as well as with my glucose numbers, which I'm going to talk to you more about in just a minute. Maybe you are an entrepreneur or you work in a business in some function where you are tracking numbers, you might be tracking, again revenue, profits and losses in business expenses, things like that. Or you might be tracking conversion numbers if you're in the field of marketing in some way.

Those are the main areas of my life that I have experience with tracking numbers. You might have others. What I'm going to teach you today I hope you can apply to any situation in your life. I want to begin by telling you a little story about what I observed in myself this week that prompted me to want to do this episode. It was something I observed in me and also

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several different coaching clients that either I worked with or I listened to other coaches working with that really sort of formed this idea in my head, which is often where my ideas come from.

So I am new to tracking my glucose numbers. I am trying to reverse my pre-diabetes insulin resistance and maintain healthy glucose numbers for my health. And so I was listening to the Huberman Lab podcast. And he recommended Levels, which is an app and a program that you can sign up for, where you purchase a continuous glucose monitor. And then you get all this data about where your glucose level is. At any given time I can pull up this handy little app on my phone.

And I'm just trying to open it as I talk to you and tell you that right now my glucose level is at 95, which is great. At any rate I can see all kinds of interesting information. I can see after I eat foods, what happens to my glucose levels. I can see how long it takes it to come back down after it goes up if I eat something that makes it go up, which some foods will. I can see how exercise affects it, interestingly enough. I lifted some pretty heavy weights this morning and I had a pretty big glucose spike when I did that, which they say is normal. So that's interesting to know.

Certain foods that I thought would really give me a spike, don't as much, but others that I wouldn't have expected, do, and that's just good to know. You can see what's happening when you're sleeping. Anyway, you get the idea. There's also in the Levels app, information about how steady your glucose is, how level is your glucose. The goal is to not have big spikes and drops, but to be as level as possible. And it gives you a score every day.

So this is the first thing I noticed is, the Levels app gives you a score that is based on a scale of 100, so it's basically just like being a student in school, 100%, they don't say percentages, it's just numbers. But 100 would be the best score you could get, and so on down, 90, 80, 70, 60 etc. In my mind, those numbers when we're talking about a score are associated with a grade like A, B, C, D or F. And what I discovered is that I have never once gotten an A in the Levels app.

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It's a really good day for me if I get a C, somewhere in the 70s. I've gotten a B in the 80s, I think twice in the 30 days only that I've been using this app. And one day was because, sorry if this is TMI, but I had a colonoscopy the next day. And so I really couldn't eat, other than I think I had some chicken broth or something and that's what took me out of the A range into the B range. Anyway, mostly I score in the low 70s or 60s. So that's the first opportunity I notice to have some drama.

So the whole point of today's episode is, I want you to know that even when we have numbers to back up our drama, we still have the capacity and sometimes a tendency to create a bunch of drama. So the first place my brain went to was, there's something wrong with this app because my glucose isn't that 'high'. I'm doing all kinds of Google research. What is a healthy glucose spike for a non-diabetic person after they eat lunch or whatever, after they eat a meal?

And then I'm looking it up and according to most of the data that I find online, it gives me a range and I'm looking at my glucose and it's within that range. So I'm like, "Why am I getting docked points if my glucose is just going up to what would be a healthy amount after eating food? Why Levels app, are you docking me points and giving me a D today when I'm clearly an A student here?"

So I noticed, I still really don't pay very close attention to that score, even though in the Levels app, they're very kind about trying to explain things. And they explain, don't get overly fixated on the score. The goal is to see improvement. Don't aim for perfection. They say all the right things. But I still notice I want to get dramatic about it, especially because how can you argue with these numbers? It gave me a 66 the other day. That's a D, it's almost failing.

So what I'm trying to do is just notice. Well, first of all, who says we're supposed to get A's? Maybe I just made that up. This is the way I play with it in my mind if I want to be a little bit less dramatic about numbers. There's all kinds of stories I can tell here. I can tell the story of I'm failing or I'm getting mostly C's and D's, and that's not good. Or I can make them a little

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bit more neutral these numbers, they could just be a starting point. I can tell the story that you're not supposed to get A's and you're not supposed to get in the 90s.

I can tell the story that these aren't letter grades. I made that part up where I've been giving them letter grades. There's nowhere in the Levels app where they say then this is just like getting graded in school. I made that part up. So notice how I'm just kind of pulling apart the story a little bit. And even if I want to go to, my glucose is not very level, it's not very healthy, then I can decide what I make that mean. And that's really where I've landed with it is, okay, maybe it's not all that healthy.

I am going to go back to my doctor soon and continue to work with the doctor on my health goals, but so what? It's okay. I'm glad to know that. I'm glad I'm focusing on this. I'm not going to be mad at me. I'm not going to guilt me and shame me and beat myself up and feel discouraged and think that this is hopeless. We are where we are and we can improve. And let's just take it one day at a time.

So notice, even with numbers, we make up so many stories. I just want you to make up the stories intentionally. I don't want you to tell yourself something that you don't believe or something that's not true. We're in the middle of the Make Peace With Food Challenge right now. And we had a really good question come up today that said, "Well, how can you say food is not good and bad? I am trained as a nutritionist or a scientist and I have all this data."

And I'm like, "Okay, but what story are you telling with the data?" And if it serves you, if it's useful to label certain foods good and certain foods bad then I'm in. And we can validate that story with the numbers and the science. I just find that for me that creates a lot of drama and either resistance or giving in and deprivation and just a lot of emotions around food. It makes food really powerful and so I choose not to label it that way.

It actually helps me eat more of the kinds of foods that the doctors and nutritionists say will serve my body and less of the ones that don't, by not

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labeling it good and bad. That's just me. That's a lot of people but that may not be you. So keep in mind that numbers, we use numbers to tell stories. And those of you who are in fields that are pretty numbers driven like science and statistics and accounting and things like that, know that you can craft lots of different stories with the same sets of numbers. This is important to understand.

Today's episode is brought to you by Nail your Niche. If you are a coach or teacher who has the beginnings of a business or intends to soon, you are likely in the thick of niche drama. How do I know? I've worked with hundreds of coaches and they all, myself included, seem to go through it. But there is one difference between the ones who spin for years struggling to gain traction and the ones who accelerate, gain momentum and then succeed. It's their ability to get out of niche drama and nail their niche instead.

Listen, I believe that everyone needs a coach. And most people I know still don't have a coach. So I want to help coaches get their work out into the world. And I've helped so many coaches nail their niches over the years that I decided to create a two hour workshop to help you do the same. Once you nail your niche, your confidence skyrockets and your ability to generate ideas and gain clarity about where you're going do as well.

Come join me for Nail your Niche by heading to jodymoore.com/niche, that's N-I-C-H-E. I will be live online teaching and guiding you, and we'll dive in on April 16th. A replay will be provided, but this is a limited time offer, so don't delay. That's jodymoore.com/niche. I'll see you there.

So another thing, I have to just finish out my own personal story then I want to dive into some examples and give you some tools. So there's the Levels app that gives me my grade every day. But then there's the app that comes with the CGM, the Continuous Glucose Monitor I'm using. And it just gives you a real time, I don't know how often it updates, maybe every couple minutes or so, update of where your glucose is at any given time. I can open up this app and just be like, "Where is my glucose right now?" And it says that right now it's at 95. Okay, that's great.

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This has become something that I am noticing is really empowering information if I use it correctly. It's actually awesome to see. It's fascinating to see that certain foods that I would have thought would really spike my glucose, don't, and others that I wouldn't have suspected, really do. And it's fascinating to see how much just going for a walk impacts it. And how sometimes when I'm sleeping, it goes really low and sometimes it stays medium to high when I'm sleeping.

And I'm trying to pay attention to what this has to do with my menstrual cycle and my hormones and things like that. And anyway, I'm paying attention to how I feel in my body. Is there a difference between low blood sugar and hunger? And for me there is, often they overlap, but not always. So anyway, there's just so much really useful, empowering data to be had here. But if I'm not careful I can be overly fixated on it. I can become sort of obsessed.

I can tend to want to go to perfectionism or all or nothing, or I can get frustrated with it. For the last four days, this monitor, the CGM has been saying that my glucose is just relatively higher than it normally is throughout the day and throughout the night, even my fasting glucose. And I finally took the sensor off and put a new sensor on and now everything's checking out again. So one version of the story could be, oh, my gosh, my glucose is really high and another version is, something might be wrong with the sensor. The data may not even be accurate.

And I do think that's the case. As soon as I switched it out, everything went back to normal. And the company's very transparent about this is all new technology, please don't think that this is perfect and things like that. So interesting, I'm just noticing how my brain wants to sometimes become fixated on numbers because they feel so concrete and they feel like I can use them to validate feeling good or feeling bad. And sometimes there is a use for that, but it's all still so subjective in the end.

So outside of having a glucose monitor that I think was a little faulty, I've had other periods of, this doesn't make sense. Why would it be high here? Why would it be low there? And I have other coaches and experts that I

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work with and people I talk with, and I do research and I listen to podcasts and I talk to people who are more knowledgeable about this than me because I want to learn it all. And it's interesting how you get different perspectives from different people.

And even if we're not disagreeing, sometimes I'm just having conversations with coaches and friends, and we're like maybe this or maybe that. And I notice we can come up with seven or eight different possible believable, realistic stories to tell. And that's just good to know, because it means these numbers aren't as factual as my brain wants to make them or they're not telling me something true. They're giving me data that then I turn into a story.

So I could tell the story, hey, this isn't working. My glucose isn't getting better. My glucose is high. Or I had an expert tell me, "You know what? If you have a lot of sugar stored in your liver, then as you change your eating habits", and I'm doing some intermittent fasting and things, then your liver is trying to get rid of all that sugar. Your body's trying to get rid of the excess sugar that you've stored over the years. And so it makes sense that your glucose levels would be higher than they maybe should be during a fasting state, throughout the day etc., because your body is pushing out all that sugar.

So it might be that I'm right on track and things are getting better when my glucose is high and it might not be. It might be that I've still got a long ways to go. Different stories with the same data. Now, let's take this outside of me. Let's stop talking about me and let's take this to some other examples that might be useful for you. Again, those of you who are entrepreneurs, you've got to really watch your brain around this. First of all, it's great to track numbers in your business.

It's great to be aware of what's going on in your business, but to a certain point and then you either need to manage your mind around it or stop looking at it. If you're looking at the numbers compulsively, obsessively, because you're trying to use numbers to give you permission to believe in something, that might not be your best plan. Sometimes the numbers are

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going to look how you want them and sometimes they're not. And if your belief is hanging on that, then your belief is going to be yoyoing up and down. That's not going to serve you or your business.

So what is an appropriate amount of time that I want to be checking these numbers, how frequently? I'm not saying don't look at them, but let's not obsess about them because if so, that means we have some thought work to do. And when you do look at them, what are you going to make it mean? Are you going to tell me the story, this isn't working?

This is what entrepreneurs bring to me a lot, "My ads aren't working." And I'm like, "What does that mean?" "Well, they're not converting." They think they're just telling me facts. They're telling me data. I'm like, "I don't know what that means. What are we trying to convert to?" And then they'll say something like, "Well, I haven't made any money off of them or I haven't gotten any paying clients."

I'm like, "Okay, well, how much money have you put in and does this mean the ads aren't working or does it mean I don't have my ads set up right? Does it mean your tracking isn't set up right? Does it mean that your offer isn't right? Does it mean that you haven't gotten in front of the right audience yet? Does it mean maybe that there hasn't been enough time go by for me to nurture the leads that are coming in and turn them into clients? Or is it that maybe the ads are working great actually, they're bringing in plenty of possible new clients. I just haven't been able to convert any of them to sales. In which case it has nothing to do with the ads. It has to do with what you do afterwards."

Do you see what I'm saying? So, if you don't run ads or you're not a coach, that might sound a little foreign to you. But I think you get the idea that in some area of your life this might be relevant. It's not working. And then they're like, "Here's the numbers." That still doesn't tell me much. What are your objectives?

And I'll just go back to health for just a minute too. I just coached someone this morning in Make Peace with Food who said, "Well, I'm trying to lose

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weight. I want to lose these 10 pounds and I'm just not losing the weight." Now, she could probably give me data like I weighed this amount on this day and I still weigh that same amount this morning. But even that is so subjective, our weight goes up and down all throughout the day, even. But certainly from day-to-day and week-to-week our weight fluctuates up and down no matter what, whether we're eating healthy or not. Just by nature of how bodies operate.

So as we dove in, we realized some days the scale has been down and other days it's been up. And she's been doing this for 30 days. "So I'm not losing weight or it's not working is the way she said it." And I was like, "Well, what does working mean, first of all? Because in my mind there's a lot more to it than just the scale going down. There's your relationship with yourself, there's your satiety. There's whether or not your habits are healthy." And there's even a whole plethora of data that somebody who is a doctor or a scientist would know to look at that we aren't even looking at here.

Our other, maybe, metrics improving that we want to see improve and is eventually the weight going to catch up with it? It could be that you're right on track. It could be that it is working, we just haven't seen it on the scale, yet. Do you see what I'm saying? So just be careful about it's not working. How about the scale hasn't gone down, that would be more factual, or I've generated x number of dollars in my business and I've spent x number of dollars on ads. Do you see what I'm saying?

If we're going to get factual here, let's get facty because those numbers you can use to tell any story that you want. Anyone who's a statistician will tell us this. Your money is the same, your personal money. We talk a little bit about business and things, but I was listening to a coaching call. I wasn't the coach, but I was listening to it and the client said, "My financial situation depends on the interest rate. And interest rates are still really high. They haven't come down."

Now, it feels like we're just giving a fact because we're talking about interest rates. And we could go pull the data on what the interest rate is

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wherever she lives and whatever she's, if we're talking about mortgages or what have you. But my financial situation depends on this. I was like, "That's a thought I don't want to think ever." When it came right down to it, she had some real estate investments that were being affected due to a variable interest rate loan.

But even so, I still would not want to think the thought, my financial situation depends on the interest rate because it's just not true. Your financial situation depends on you. Now, the interest rate is one factor you might consider as you make decisions. But you get to decide what your financial situation is. So you might decide the interest rate is too high, I'm going to sell this property or I'm not going to take out a loan right now or I'm not going to buy because of the interest rate.

But my financial situation depends on me. It doesn't depend on this really gigantic variable that I have no control over called the interest rate. I know there are people who have been in real estate a long time who are like, "This is not a high interest rate. We've seen much higher than this." And then everyone will give us predictions. It's going to go up, it's going to go down, here's what the market's going to do. Again, I like numbers. I'm not saying that you shouldn't gather data.

I'm saying be careful about what stories you're going to tell with that data. And most people that are going to give you data are going to offer you a story. And maybe it's a story that serves you that you like, great, but if it's not, just be cautious and know that you have a dozen other options as well. And then ask yourself, what story that I believe, I'm not talking about making up stuff that you don't believe. What story that I believe am I going to tell about this data?

I'll tell you. For me, and I have been listening to a lot more just scientists and doctors lately as I am studying more about my own body and nutrition in general and how people's bodies work and glucose and all of this. So I've been listening, like I said, I love Huberman Lab, I listen to him a lot, Andrew Huberman. I have listened to Dr. Mark Hyman a lot the last couple

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of weeks. And both of these people bring on guests and they're all academics and they're all scientists or doctors.

And so they use a lot of terminology, quite frankly, that I don't even understand, but they also are constantly referring to studies, which is a great thing. Except I've never once, that I can recall, heard them say, "In this study this was true 100% of the time." It's usually, well, in 60% of the people in this study, this happened. And they're like, "Whoa, that's huge, 60%, that's huge. There's definitely a correlation here or causation." They use these terms.

And in my mind, I'm like, but that means 40% that didn't have that effect. And I'm not saying it's not still valid and useful information to understand, it definitely is. But in my mind I'm like, but I could be one of the 40%, there's actually a high chance. So this may be true for me what they're saying, or it may not, it may not. That's just important to keep in mind, because it's useful to have data like this, it gives us a starting point.

It gives us some guesses to take about what might be going on in our bodies or in our businesses or in the world, or make again, investments or choices but it's not the end all. Even the people who study this data wouldn't say it's the end all, be all. They're using data to make guesses. That is the scientific method. We make guesses. We call them hypotheses. So keep that in mind. And the best scientists out there know that science is an ongoing practice. It's not, now we understand this and we're done.

It's, this is what we believe to be true as of today and we'll continue to study this topic and we may come out later and say that something different is true. Science by definition and by nature is open to being wrong even though we have data and numbers to back it up. This is what we believe to be true today, but we may discover something else tomorrow. That is the case with numbers. So be careful about the story you tell with the numbers, choose it intentionally my friend.

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And if you want help with this, of course bring it to me in The Lab. I'd love to help you think through the story you want to tell with your numbers. Thanks for joining me today. I'll see you next time.

If you find the podcast to be helpful you're going to love The Lab. *In Better Than Happy: The Lab* we experiment with applying all of it in your real life. Whether you're in the middle of a challenge and ready for some relief or you're ready to commit to pursuing your dream goals and making them a reality, come join me in the lab at jodymoore.com/thelab. That's jodymoore.com/thelab.