

## 550: The Problem with Straight A's



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With Your Host

Jody Moore

[Better Than Happy](#) with Jody Moore

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Straight A's. Way to go, kiddo. Congratulations, you nailed it. Or did they?

I grew up in a world, probably like you, that emphasized that the best thing you could do is to get straight A's in school, certainly if possible. If you're capable of it, you should absolutely be getting the highest grade possible. Now, do I think this is a problem? Maybe not, but sometimes, yes. And this is because I work with a lot of adults who later in life create problems for themselves. Many of them were straight-A students. Today, I want to open your mind up to simply consider other possibilities. Let's go. This is The Problem with Straight A's.

Welcome to *Better Than Happy*, the podcast where we transform our lives by transforming ourselves. My name is Jody Moore. In the decade-plus I've been working with clients as a Master Certified Coach, I've helped tens of thousands of people to become empowered. And from empowered, the things that seemed hard become trivial, and the things that seemed impossible become available, and suddenly, a whole new world of desire and possibility open up to you. And what do you do with that?

Well, that's the question... what will you do? Let's find out.

Sometimes, listening to a podcast is enough. But sometimes, you'll feel inspired to go deeper. If you hear things that speak to you in today's episode, consider it your invitation to a complimentary coaching workshop.

On this live, interactive Zoom call with me, you'll get a taste of the power of this work when applied in real life. You can participate, or be a silent observer. But you have to take a step if you want to truly see change in your life... two steps, actually. Head to [JodyMoore.com/freecoaching](http://JodyMoore.com/freecoaching) and register. Then you just have to show up. Your best life is waiting for you. Will you show up for it? [JodyMoore.com/freecoaching](http://JodyMoore.com/freecoaching). I'll see you there.

What's up, everybody? Welcome to the podcast. Today, I've got what I know is a polarizing topic because anytime I talk about this or post about it, I get a lot of people really upset about it. And it's not my intention to upset anyone. I simply think it's useful for all of us to open up our minds a little bit

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to consider that there are many different possible ways to view any given subject and to give ourselves the option to decide what serves us best. Certainly as we raise children or interact with other people in the world, we want to be open to not everybody's going to operate best from the same set of beliefs that we did necessarily.

And so I think this could be some really useful dialogue. And by dialogue, I mean, you're going to be listening to me. You don't get to participate in this dialogue unless you want to come on to social media. I'd love to hear your thoughts in the comments. If you want to call in to 1-888-HI-JODYM, that's Jody with a Y, M as in Moore, I'd be more than happy to make it a little bit more of a dialogue with you.

But that said, I'm going to share with you some of the things that I've observed, like I said, especially as I've coached a lot of adults who at one point in their life were what they would call very successful, right? Straight-A students, top of their class, always very successful, especially academically.

And the first reason this may be problematic is very simply perfectionism. That's probably the most obvious one, so I wanted to start with that one and just touch on it. The idea that we should achieve the highest level possible success in any given subject is problematic at some point in life because even if as a kid that means I get all A's in my classes, at some point I'm probably going to have something I encounter that I'm not able to earn an A in. And by earn an A, put that in air quotes, if you will, okay?

What if I can't please all the people in my church congregation when I serve in a leadership position? If my brain has turned that into the equivalent of getting an A is that everybody's happy with the work I'm doing in my volunteer church job, then that's going to be a problem, right? Because I probably won't be able to please everybody. Or maybe I decide to go and learn a skill or some kind of a trade or take on something that's challenging for me, right? I remember when my kids used to come home with all A's when they were younger, I would say to them, and this by the

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way was not always the case, they didn't always come home with all A's, but sometimes when they did, I was like, what? School must be too easy for you. You're getting all A's. Good job working hard. I'm so proud of you and I love the effort and I love that you've achieved A's, but also, if at some point you don't get an A, that's okay too.

At some point in life, I hope that you'll be trying things and doing things that will be hard enough for you that you won't be able to get an A. And I want you to know that I love you just as much and I'm just as proud of you then, right? So, I'm not a parenting expert by any means. This is not a conversation about how to best parent your children. My point is, I'm always trying to remind myself, and I would encourage you to remind yourself and maybe at times offer it to your kids, that it's okay not to always be top of the class, not to be able to achieve at the highest level, especially if it's because you're doing things that are extremely hard and challenging. We want to do things that are hard and challenging. That's how we create our best lives. That's how we grow. That's how we evolve. You shouldn't always be able to get A's, or else maybe it's not quite challenging enough.

Okay, let's go on to the second reason. There's a lot more to perfectionism, obviously, than what I just talked about, but I don't want to get off on a perfectionism tangent here. I think we all kind of have an idea of why perfectionism can be problematic, how it holds us back, prevents us from finishing, and even sometimes prevents us from starting. But sometimes my previous straight-A students are my biggest perfectionists, and that becomes something that they then have to overcome.

Okay, but the next thing I want to point out is that when we are students in school, and this for me anyway was true in elementary school, in high school, and even into college, I went on to get a bachelor's degree and even a master's degree. I've not gotten a PhD, but all the way up through my master's degree, there was a roadmap laid out for me of how to get an A, right? There would be instructions given and parameters about how assignments would be graded, what the teacher would be looking for, and

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what scores I needed to get on different assignments or tests or projects or things like that in order to score at the highest level in the class. Everything was laid out in a nice, easy to understand for the most part, roadmap. And then I could just follow those directions, and then I would get the A if I did those things, right? And then we feel the satisfaction of having achieved our goal.

Well, unfortunately, in most of our lives, once we get past traditional education, it is not that way, right? This is the frustration I see with entrepreneurs, for example, is they want to achieve an A in air quotes. What is achieving an A? Having enough clients, making enough revenue, having the success that they want to in their business, right? And they'll say, I'm doing these things that I was taught to do, and it's not working.

And this can be very frustrating when we've grown up in a world that trained us to just follow the steps A through F and you will get whatever G result, right? When it doesn't work that way in life, the brain doesn't like that because we've been trained that if we just do these steps, we get this result. But most things in life are not that way. How do you find a spouse?

Well, there's lots of steps someone could give you, but you're going to have to nuance them and figure them out, and it might not work exactly the way the person told you. You might have to try things multiple times. You might have to change up the steps a little bit. You might have to change the order. You might have to subtract a step that they gave you and add a different one instead. This is true with losing weight and your health goals, right? Is yeah, here's some general guidelines, but we can't map it out exactly for you because you are unique, your body is unique, what's going to get you to comply with the plan is going to be unique to you. And it might take lots of trial and error. It might take multiple times. It's not a simple follow these seven steps and get this result.

And that can be very frustrating. So sometimes I worry that us constantly reinforcing that loop in the brain of just do these things, get this result is problematic. What I want people to understand is how to have setbacks,

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how to have to figure some things out, how to be intentional about what they're trying to create, and then nuance their way there. Now, what would that look like in public school? I don't know.

What does that look like as a parent who has kids that go to traditional schools? It looks like me saying, yeah, well, let's say they come home with a B or a C or even a D or an F. It looks like, huh, so what was your goal for this semester? What did you hope to achieve in this class? And having a more in-depth conversation because here's the thing, if my kid gets a C or a D or even an F, I want to understand why. And sometimes I think there could be a valid reason. I don't know what that reason is for you, but I know I'm open to the idea that there may be a valid reason.

If, for example, they decided that they only needed a B in this class in order to achieve the GPA they're trying to get in order to do whatever they think they want to do next in their life, and so they purposely didn't complete an assignment or didn't put as much in, I'm okay with that. That's what I call strategically choosing how you're going to spend your time and your effort and your brainpower. What are you going to put it into? I don't think that just because the state or a university or something decided that this was important for you to learn, that necessarily means that every part of it is important for you to learn. If there's some critical thinking and some conscious decision-making involved, I'm okay with that grade.

Now, other reasons why might be that the child didn't try, right? They're not showing up, they're not following through, they're not completing tasks, they're bored, they don't like school. I get it. Those are more common reasons. And those might be other issues that we want to address in different ways, okay? I'm not suggesting that we don't want kids to do hard things, that we don't want them to show up and be excellent at times. I'm simply saying this sort of all-or-nothing mentality we have around school and grades, I find to be problematic for people later in life, instead of let's talk about it. Let's talk about why you didn't achieve that highest grade and is there support and tools and help that you need from me? Do we need

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more accountability? Maybe there is some discipline necessary, but there can also be a lot of what I consider to be higher-level reasons for not necessarily getting an A in that class.

So this brings me to the next point, which is that I don't believe, listen up, I don't believe that everything in your life deserves your best effort. I don't believe that. I know some of you just like your heart is racing hearing me say that, and that goes against everything you've been taught. But why would everything in your life deserve your best effort? It doesn't. Some things deserve your best effort, but some things only need good enough effort.

What is it that you're trying to achieve in your life? And what do you want your experience to be like as you achieve it? The people that I see quit on their higher level goals do so because they can't get comfortable with some of it being mediocre. And in order to make everything excellent, they burn out. They get tired. They stop having fun with it. To show up excellent in every area of your life is going to be draining and exhausting. And it just doesn't make sense.

So let me try to give again some higher level examples. I had a coach I worked with for many years and I'm still close friends with her who helped me with my health goals. And one time I said to her, hey, like I'm so delighted with the progress I've made. I am healthier now than I've been in such a long time. I'm leaner, I'm more fit, I feel better, and ironically enough, I'm also older than I've ever been. But at any rate, I'm so delighted with the work that we've done together. But I have this friend who found somebody's Instagram account that helps women of our age, my friend is my age, right, build muscle and put on muscle. And she's going all in on this progressive overload weight program and changing up her eating and she's going to build muscle and have six-pack abs and be all ripped. And part of me knows that is more effort and energy and attention than I have in me to give to my health. But I feel kind of bad about it. Like why can I not get myself?

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You know, she basically was like, I'm following this program. I just do it every day.

And I can't get myself to that level of commitment. And what my brilliant coach said to me was, it's okay. Like, are you capable of that? Is it possible? Yeah. Would that be like me earning an A in this category of my health? Yeah, but that's just not really my priority. I've gotten my health to a certain level. I want to maintain that, and that's still going to require a lot from me. And so that's okay. Like, I don't have to go next level with everything, right? And she's like, you put your effort and your focus into other things and you've gotten your health to a good enough level, and that's okay. And that was such a good reminder to me of, oh yeah, I don't have to get A's in every area. This area, I'm getting a B in right now. And for most of my life, I got a C in or a D in, so I'm really proud of myself and I'm just going to maintain that B and I'm going to give myself permission to put my effort and energy into other places, other subjects, other areas of my life that I feel passionate about, right? Not everything should get your best effort, my friend.

What are you giving your best effort to that maybe doesn't deserve your best effort? It just deserves good enough effort. Okay. The next reason I want you to just question whether straight A's are really the way to go is this all-or-nothing thinking. It reinforces all-or-nothing thinking. And I kind of alluded to this earlier, but I want to flesh it out a little bit more. The clients that I see that have big goals and then they quit on those goals are the ones who were straight-A students in life because they're so used to being top of the class or earning at least the highest possible grade, maybe even being recognized. They have this reputation for being the best of the best. And I don't even mean that it has to be relative to other people that they're outdoing everyone. They just know that they're achieving the highest level of success.

And when that becomes challenging, like we talked about earlier, when there's not a simple seven-step roadmap to get us there, then they quit.

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They quit. They're my most common quitters. Now, there can be good reasons for quitting. I'm not saying you should never quit something. I'm just saying these are people who I know are quitting because they can't tolerate what is, quote-unquote, a B. They can't even tolerate a C or a D or an F until they figure out how to create the A. And that intolerance for less than excellence leads to nothing. That's the all-or-nothing thinking, right?

So I want you in some way in your life to be able to tolerate not exceeding at the highest level, not only tolerate it, but be very kind and compassionate with yourself. This is an opportunity to work on your relationship with yourself, right? These clients who walk away tend to be so hard on themselves. They beat themselves up, they question themselves. If their identity has been highly succeeding at things, and now they're not, it's a huge stab in the heart, right? It feels like you're losing yourself, but guess what? You're not losing yourself. You have an opportunity now to still be excellent, still be successful, and have the capacity to be not good at things at times, to let it take time to get good, or to even chalk some things up to I'm never going to be the best at that, and that's okay. It doesn't have to be all or nothing. I can do some of that. Some of that is better than none of it in my life, right? That's an interesting thing that's hard for my former straight-A students to take on.

Okay. And then the last thing that I worry about with my straight-A students is that getting all A's on our report card is a great form of external reinforcement, right? We tend to get the accolades, we get the awards, we get maybe a certificate, maybe we are valedictorians of the class, etc. We get teachers praising us, we get parents praising us. We get high praise. Maybe we get a certain color sash at graduation or whatever, right? We get a lot of external reinforcement. Now, I have no problem with you getting and giving external reinforcement, but what these students don't know is how to give themselves internal reinforcement in many cases.

They have never learned how to get their own back, how to be proud of themselves, especially when they don't get the A, especially when it doesn't

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work, when they're not succeeding, when they're "failing" according to what might be the visible standards of the world, right? This might be that your social media post isn't performing. This might be whatever, any other number of things, right? Maybe you gain weight, maybe you at least are not losing weight, if that's your goal to lose weight, right? Whatever the topic is, pick any goal. There are going to be some external, meaning visible to the world results or metrics that may not always go the way you want them to go, and other people might see it.

And if you haven't learned the skill of internal reinforcement, internal giving yourself your own validation, then this will be very frightening. What does that look like and what does that sound like? So internal validation sounds like, oh my gosh, I'm so proud of you for trying. Thank you for showing up and trying. And yeah, that didn't go how we wanted it to go. Maybe it didn't go how we didn't want it to go because of things outside of our control or maybe there were things in our control and we just fell short and dropped the ball or aren't capable, don't have the skills yet, whatever the reason. You're allowed to just be proud of yourself for showing up, for trying, for going big, for being willing to develop yourself and become a next-level version of you and create the life that you want to in the process. That is something that most people actually don't do very much of in their lives. They won't. They're too afraid.

You can be proud of yourself for being courageous, and then you get to be curious with yourself. Hey, what do we think happened here? What do we need to make sure we succeed going forward? And by the way, when you do this and you get your own back and you support yourself and you're curious and kind and compassionate and also make space for yourself to feel disappointed or to feel whatever you're feeling. Don't tell yourself you shouldn't feel that way, right? Say, of course you're disappointed. I get that and it's okay to be disappointed and know that I'm proud of you, right? When you do that for yourself a couple of times, guess what happens? You suddenly have the courage and the desire to set bigger goals, to go after more of the things that you want in your life because we think we're afraid

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of failing. We think we're afraid of the world judging us. But what we're really afraid of is our own harsh criticism of ourselves, our own self-loathing, the beating we give ourselves, the negative self-talk we have after something doesn't work. That's what's really painful.

But if you show yourself, hey, listen, I got you. I'm going to be kind to you no matter what. Even if I need to call you out on something and say, hey, that wasn't cool. We're not doing that again. I'm going to do it with kindness and compassion. I'm going to give you the benefit of the doubt. I'm going to hear you out. I'm going to love you better. I'm not going to hate you better. That's never going to work.

So people sometimes who have not always gotten straight A's in life have had to learn to do this for themselves out of pure survival, right? For many people, there comes a point when you get tired of everybody judging you and you say, enough is enough. And you learn how to get your own back. And my straight-A students often, not only are good at school, they're good at sports, they're good at all the things. And again, I'm not saying we don't want to celebrate that, celebrate the effort that took. There's so much good in that, okay?

But what I'm saying is if you're not that way, or your child is not that way, it's okay. There's actually a lot of valuable lessons coming from that as well. And if you have always been that way and you notice it might be holding you back in some area of life, it's not too late to learn those other skills. And you can still celebrate who you were in the past, not that past you did it wrong. We celebrate who you were in the past, and then we simply add to and become who you want to be in the future.

All right. Thanks for joining me today, everyone. I can't wait to hear your thoughts on this subject. Feel free to reach out to me. I'll see you next week with another episode. Bye-bye.

Oh wow, look at that. You made it to the end. Your time and attention is valuable, and I don't take it lightly that you made it this far. In fact, it tells me

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you might be like me; insatiably curious about people and life and potential and connection. Maybe you have big dreams but a small budget and no time. You're tired, but bored. You're content, but dissatisfied. Sound familiar? Come to a free coaching call and see for yourself what's possible: [JodyMoore.com/freecoaching](http://JodyMoore.com/freecoaching) to register. That's [JodyMoore.com/freecoaching](http://JodyMoore.com/freecoaching).