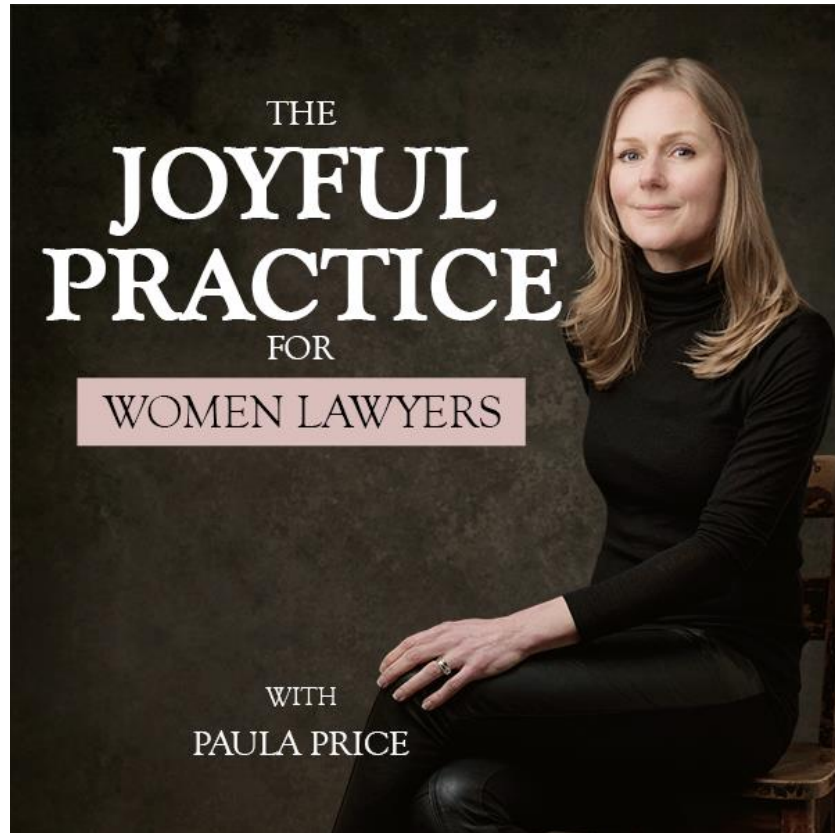


Ep #19: 3 Misconceptions That Keep You Stuck



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Paula Price

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You're listening to *The Joyful Practice for Women Lawyers* Podcast episode number 19.

Welcome to *The Joyful Practice for Women Lawyers* Podcast. I'm your host Paula Price, lawyer turned certified executive coach. This podcast was created to empower women lawyers just like you to create a life and practice you love. Join me every week for a break from the hustle so we can focus on you, what you truly want, and how you can create it.

If you're over the overwhelm, done with putting out fires, and ready to create a life and practice that brings you more joy, you're in the right place. Ready for today's episode? Let's dive in.

Hello, my friends and welcome back to the podcast. For those of you joining for the first time, welcome. My name is Paula Price and I'm a lawyer turned certified executive coach as well as the host of this podcast. In today's episode, we're going to jump into a topic that's near and dear to my heart and central to the work that I do with lawyers.

We're going to be talking about three misconceptions that prevent lawyers and women lawyers in particular from creating a joyful practice. A practice where they feel fulfilled, one that they enjoy, and a practice that allows them to have not only fulfilling work in their professional life but also allows them to have fulfilling relationships in their personal life.

So if that's something that might be of interest to you then you're in the right place. I'm going to start out today's episode by talking about some of the problems that I see with the lawyers that I work with. Then turning to three misconceptions and how you can turn those around.

So to begin, I just wanted to talk about some of what I'm seeing out there among the lawyers that I work with and lawyers that I am friends with or that I talk to. There are a number of you out there who are feeling like

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you've done all this hard work to get to where you are. You've gone through law school. You've gone through articling. You've gone through the junior years. You're at a point now where you really expected to be a lot more fulfilled, but you're not really feeling that way.

It may be that you're in private practice and the work that you're doing just isn't resonating with some of your core values. It could be that you truly love what you are doing. You love the nature of your work, but circumstances in your life have changed. So you're no longer feeling like this environment that you're in is a right fit for you. It could be that you're feeling like you're at a firm, you've been there for a really long time. You've reached a certain level there, but you just don't want to be there anymore. The writing on the wall, the growth opportunities that are there for you aren't necessarily matching up with what you want for yourself in your career.

So if you relate to any of this and if you relate to any of the problems that I'm going to be talking about, then I encourage you to think about how what we're talking about here today might be applicable to you. And how some of the solutions that I'm going to offer are ones that you may start to implement in your practice.

So I think there's a number of reasons why lawyers and why women lawyers in particular find themselves in a situation of being frustrated with where they are. One of those things can be delayed gratification. As lawyers, you had to really learn to develop that skill of delayed gratification to get to where you are now.

As a law student, for example, putting in the long study hours. Sacrificing time with friends and family so that you could do that with the promise that if you put in the hours and you get the grades then you're going to get the job.

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Once you get the job, of course, then you're looking at how do I succeed in that job? What are the steps that I need to do to be promoted, to get the files that I want to work on, to work with the lawyers that I want to work with, to work with the clients that I want to work with? It's this endless cycle of putting off happiness until achieving that thing that you need to achieve next.

So that's one thing that you become very good at. Delayed gratification is a wonderful skill to develop. It can result in you achieving a great number of things. However when the balance tips in favor of more delay and less gratification, and you find that you're unable to enjoy what's happening in the moment, then you find yourself with a problem. It's that problem of feeling unfilled and unsatisfied because you're simply not taking any joy out in the present moment.

Another reason why I think that women lawyers may find themselves in that position of being frustrated with where they are is that you're so driven and committed to what it is that you're doing that you end up feeling like you have the burden of your client's problems on your shoulders. You're so committed to them that you literally take that work home with you. It's almost like compassion fatigue. It depends on what is on your plate at a certain point in time. It may be that you have a very challenging case.

Even when you've left the office literally or figuratively, you've still got this sense on your mind of what's going on in that file. You're thinking about a thorny legal issue that has come up. Maybe there's a conversation that you had with a client that didn't go very well. You're thinking about how you could have done it differently. I mean there are all these things.

It's like your mind is constantly at work. The wheels are always turning. You're always feeling like you're connected in some way to the work that you have. So that might also be taking away from other aspects of your life

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that you want to spend more time on. Whether it's your relationships, whether it's on self-care, whether it's on interests outside of the office.

It may be that you are progressing. You're reaching that next rung on the success ladder. You find that as you advance further to the place where you thought that you wanted to be, you're just not feeling the way that you imagined you would feel. It may be that you really wanted to work towards a partnership, and you finally landed that. Now that you're there, you're feeling like maybe this isn't exactly the right place for you. Maybe there's a way of reworking that so that it is a place for you. Maybe there's a problem there and something you may need to resolve. Maybe there's a different path that is better for you.

It may be that you find that once you're there, you've worked so hard to get to that point. You feel that you can't leave it. You have that feeling of being trapped. That may be because of the financial implications that would arise if you were to leave your position. It may be that your social connections are so well entrenched that it would be like tearing yourself away from your family.

It may be that you have clients who you've formed really close relationships with that if you were to leave, you would no longer be able to help them and you don't want to leave them. It may be that you're in the middle of a trial or you're getting close to a trial. You're on a file where you feel like your continued involvement is essential to the success of what your client is trying to do.

It may also be that you feel very attached to the identity that you have developed with yourself. It may be that you have reached a certain level of prestige or status within your organization or a certain role that you're really proud of. But at the same time is no longer fulfilling to you. You're concerned that if you were to take steps away from that position then you

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would then feel like you are somehow losing a very significant part of your identity.

Meanwhile as you're pushing yourself on a professional front, there are a number of challenges that may come up in terms of your personal life. It could be that you have these very high standards that you've set for yourself in your work, and you apply those same standards to yourself in your personal life. You feel like you're constantly falling short. You're not showing up as the parent you want to show up as. You're not showing up as the spouse or the refined. So you're beating yourself up over that.

It may be that you have others in your life that you hold to that same standard. When they're not acting in the way that you expect or want them to act then you're getting frustrated with them. That causes a strain on those relationships. It may simply be that you don't have the time. You don't have the time for these relationships, and that's causing them to atrophy.

It may be that you're not spending time on your own relationship with yourself. It may be that you're neglecting your health routines. You've stopped exercising. You're not paying as close attention to how you're nourishing yourself. You may find that your energy is slumping, and that is cascading and almost snowballing into a cycle where you just continually feel worse and worse. Instead of feeling like a boss, like somebody who's empowered, who's in control, who has this amazing professional life and this amazing personal life. You're starting to feel more and more like you're at the mercy of your environment and those around you.

It may feel like somebody always wants something from you. Whether it's your clients, whether it's your colleagues, whether it's your children, whether it's your partner, whether it's your family, whether it's your friends. You constantly feel like you're pulled in multiple directions. You are trying to do all of the things, and yet you're really struggling to keep up. It may be

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that you're tired of hearing yourself talk about how busy you are. It may have reached a point where you just feel so depleted that you literally want to crawl under a rock and just be alone for a while.

So if anything sounds familiar to you, if you can relate to any of this, if you feel any of these frustrations. Like you've worked so hard to get to where you are, why are you not happy? You are absolutely not alone. There's nothing wrong with anything that you've done. There's nothing wrong with you. You're certainly not the only person to find yourself in this position. There is definitely hope and a path forward that will bring you more joy, that is better for you.

It may be that you have tried switching jobs and that didn't work. It may be that you tried to work harder, and that only resulted in you having more work and less energy for enjoying your work. For enjoying other aspects of your life outside of work. It may be that in your relationships, you simply decided to give up. That you have sacrificed your social life, your relationship with some of your friends, some of your family in an effort to simply focus on one thing at a time. It may be that you have ended up not caring for yourself the way that you wanted to.

It may be that whatever it is that you've tried, the solutions haven't worked well for you because they haven't really gone to the root of the problem. In today's episode, I'm really hoping that the tools that I've offered to you are tools that can help you overcome that. Ones that can cause a more foundational shift in the way that you're thinking about things so that you feel empowered to go after what it is that you want, and so that you can create a practice that brings you more joy.

So in today's episode, I'm going to talk about three misconceptions that a number of lawyers have about what is standing in your way. What is standing between you and creating a practice that you love. So we're going to start with the first misconception.

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The first one is that the harder you push yourself, the better you will be. The reason that a number of us believe that to be true—and if you believe that to be true, you are definitely not alone. Is because we are living in a society that really reinforces this whole no pain no gain mentality. It may stem back to your early childhood where you were told that you needed to get good grades and you needed to be a good girl. You needed to do all these things and check all the boxes. You felt a lot of pressure, maybe from your family. Maybe from your teachers.

Maybe from your coaches if you played sports. I played on sports teams, and I had some coaches that were amazing and very encouraging. I had other coaches that were a lot tougher. Not to say that there is a problem with being tough sometimes, but the reality is that tough all the time isn't going to end up getting you to where you want to be.

I think I've shared this story before, but I have a girlfriend of mine who was very successful in her industry. She was talking about how she gets really stressed before she delivers a big presentation. But she doesn't want to change that because she associates this process of getting really stressed out and panicking a little bit to delivering an excellent presentation. So there's this link between the pain and the great result.

So it may be that you have that same thinking. That same thinking that if you push yourself, if you make it hard, then you're going to get the results that you want. I hear this in the way that the clients that I work with speak to me.

So when they're telling me about some of the challenges that they have, sometimes there's this negative voice that they have. This negative self-talk that they think maybe is helping them, but it really isn't. Sometimes it comes out like, "I don't know enough." So maybe you're thinking that you have a project that you want to work on. Or somebody hands you a file in an area that you're not super familiar with. Your first reaction, at least

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internally, is I don't know enough to be doing this. I'm not well enough equipped for this.

Maybe there's an opportunity that you want to apply for, and you think to yourself, "I'm just not there yet." So what you do is you put yourself in this state of what I call procrasti-learning where you just try to learn more before actually doing the thing or taking on that next challenge. By doing that, you simply put off the actual doing of something that could help you build your confidence. So that's an example where you've got that negative self-talk and it's actually keeping you from doing the very thing that would help you get further.

It could also be that you're really judging yourself. So some clients have told me that they're afraid to open emails or read what someone has written in response to an argument they've drafted. Effectively what they're scared of is being judged. They're scared of their work being judged and that they, in turn, would feel like they weren't good lawyers as a result. So that type of self-judgment also isn't very effective in terms of helping you get forward.

Another challenge that some of the clients that I have worked with is more of a negative view of the way that they're taking care of themselves. So they may be critical of the fact that they haven't been doing the exercise that they want to or taking care of their nutrition. So they're beating themselves up over that.

The truth behind the myth is that beating yourself up or pushing yourself or trying to convince yourself to move forward by speaking to yourself in this negative way doesn't actually move you forward. Often it will distract you from doing the very things that would get you forward. In addition to that, it doesn't put you in a state that is one that is conducive to learning and to growth.

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I've talked about this in previous podcasts. It's established now at a neurological level that when you are in a state of anxiety, when you're in a state of fight or flight, your brain is no longer functioning in a way that allows you to be creative and to grow and to be expansive. Instead what's happening is you're really focusing in on the survival element of getting through whatever it is that is facing you. That constricted way of thinking is focused simply on survival. You're not looking at an expansive way. You're just trying to get through the day. That is not a place to grow.

So myth number one is really here's the myth, that pushing yourself will get you further. The truth is being kind to yourself will actually get you much further. If that's something that you think you'd like to develop more, I would encourage you to go back to an earlier one of my podcast episodes, episode number 11. It's called how to be your own best boss. In that episode I really talk about how you can take that negative voice, the critical self-talk and turn that around so that you're feeling so much more empowered and so much more effective in your work. So that's number one.

Number two is you need permission to go after what you want. This is a common misperception and one that you may not have even acknowledged that you have at a conscious level. It may be something that kind of follows you around subconsciously. As a lawyer, working in an environment where there are a lot of rules. You're dealing with the law. You've gone through a rigorous process through law school, through your training as a lawyer. You've got rules that you need to follow as a lawyer.

You may come from a family where there were a lot of rules where you were encouraged to follow a certain path. You were given a choice: lawyer, doctor, engineer. You picked lawyer and here you are. It may be that there are a lot of rules that you are following. Conscious rules, real rules, imaginary rules. You feel like one of the rules that you must be following is that you must continue to do what it is that you're doing. Because if you

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were not to be doing that then you might be disappointing somebody. You might be letting somebody else down. You might be breaking an unwritten rule. That can feel really constrictive.

I've worked with a number of lawyers, and I've spoken with a number of lawyers who have felt that need to have permission to do something that is out of the ordinary. Sometimes that feeling like they need permission comes from cultural influence.

So, for example, lawyers who work in law firms where that culture is very strong. I know this can happen sometimes at big law firms. I worked at a big law firm for many years. To me, that was how lawyers practiced. That was all I knew. It wasn't until I left my big law job that I realized that there are so many other ways that you can practice. You can practice as a sole practitioner. You can practice in a smaller firm. You can practice in a lot of different ways and a lot of different organizations.

If you're not in the space where you're aware of all of these different opportunities then you may believe that where you are truly is the only place for you. So you may be at a big law firm. You may have been there for a number of years. You're not truly happy, but you feel like you would need permission to leave that life behind and do something different.

It may also be that you are looking to leave law all together. This is something that I experienced when I decided that I wanted to become a coach. It was a really difficult transition for me because I had been a lawyer. I'd been in law school. It'd been many years since I was entrenched, and I had this identity as a lawyer. The idea of going outside of that was something that felt really scary to me. I know for lawyers that I've worked with that have made that transition from being a lawyer to doing something that is a non-lawyer role, that has also been a big transition for them as well.

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I remember when I was thinking about becoming a coach. I went out for dinner with a friend of mine. I was trying to convince her to go to Seattle with me. We're in Vancouver. So that would have been a bit of a drive for the both of us. I was encouraging her to come with me to a conference where I wanted to see this very well-known coach speak at an event. She asked me. She said, "Paula, why is it that you want me to go and see this person speak with you?"

It was really an ah-ha moment for me. Because I realized that when she asked me that question that I knew exactly what the answer was. The answer was because I wanted that permission to be able to leave the job that I was in and take on this coaching role that I really longed to create for myself.

So in hearing this story, I would encourage you to think about what it is that you are truly longing to do and what you have been waiting for permission to do. Because the truth is that you do not need somebody else's permission to go after that.

So that is tip number two that you don't need anybody's permission to go after what it is that you want. What you need is to really identify for yourself what it is that you desire and to maybe sit with that for a while. But to allow yourself to see that there is something there, and that you are holding back because you feel like you need somebody else to give you that blessing.

The third misconception that I see that holds people back from creating a joyful practice is the idea that when you get to that next milestone, it will all be rainbows and unicorns. The reason that I think this is a misconception that holds people back is that they struggle.

As I mentioned earlier, they have a really strong skill when it comes to delayed gratification. So they are used to seeing the there. They're here. They want to go there. They're used to seeing that other place as the be all

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and end all. It's like you go through law school and you do your exams with the promise of that job. You look at that job, and you think it's going to be so great when I have that job.

Then you're in that job and you think, "It's going to be so great when I get that promotion." Or you think, "It's going to be so great when I get that other job." It may be that this is happening in your personal life, right. Where you start out, maybe you're a young student, and you think, "Oh it's going to be so great when I get married." Then you get married and you think it's going to be so great when we have all these children. Then you have the children, and you think it's going to be so great when these children move out. Whatever it is.

There's always that next stage that lies ahead of us. Sometimes we think that when we get to that stage that our lives are going to be completely different. That things are going to get better. The truth is that no matter where you get to, there's always going to be a mix of good days and bad days.

I would invite you actually to go back to my podcast episode about creating a joyful practice. It's episode number three. In that episode, I talk about Shawn Achor and some of the research that he's done around happiness. What he found was that when it comes to happiness and when it comes to those goal posts that we strive towards, reaching those goal posts will deliver a certain amount of happiness. Once the thrill of novelty has worn off, you will return to a certain base level of happiness.

So I would encourage you to go back to that if you haven't already listened to that episode and to think about how this might be applicable in your life. When you think about some of the milestones that you've reached and the initial satisfaction that you finally got there, but then realizing that wait a minute. Maybe I'm not so happy anymore. If that happens to you, I don't

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want you to think that something has gone wrong or that you're doing it incorrectly. It's far from it. That's exactly how it's supposed to be.

If you think about video games, maybe you have played them recently or in the past. I don't play them, but my children do. So I'm constantly hearing about them. Imagine there was a video game that had just a single level.

The first few times that you were to play that game, you'd probably find it pretty interesting. You'd find it challenging. You'd be figuring out which buttons you need to press. You'd be figuring out which monsters you need to kill. Maybe after several tries, you would finally reach the end of that level. After that, if you never moved on to the next level, you probably wouldn't be interested in playing that same level over and over and over again.

The same is true for the lives that we live. Every stage that we're in is like a different level of that video game. Every time that you move to the next level, you're going to meet new characters. You're going to have new challenges. You're going to learn new techniques. That is part of the excitement and the joy of the work that we do, of the practices that we have, of our lives.

So this myth that when you get to that sort of golden pot or pot of gold at the end of the rainbow that everything is going to be wonderful and static and you're not going to need to grow anymore. That's not actually true. It's not a bad thing. It's actually a wonderful thing. That's where all the fun is.

So if you are able to reframe the way that you look at these three misconceptions and you let go of these misconceptions, then you give yourself permission effectively to create the practice that you want and your life the way that you want. This will allow you to feel empowered to make positive changes.

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You'll start to grow in a direction that resonates with your true desires whether that's getting promoted where you are, whether it's changing lanes in your career. Maybe it's trying out a new practice area. Maybe it's trying a new law firm. Maybe it's taking a break so that you can spend more time at home with your kids. It really, really depends on what speaks to you. If you decide to go after that joyful practice, you will need a few skills.

Number one, you'll need courage. The courage to let go of what's familiar to you. The courage to go outside of your comfort zone. If we look at that first misconception, the one about if it's not hard then it's not going to make your life better. It's not going to move you forward. That can be something that's really hard to let go of. If you're used to pressuring yourself and beating yourself up to get the results that you want then it's going to feel really strange if and when you finally shift away from that. So that's going to take a lot of courage.

Another skill that you're really going to need to develop is to trust yourself. If you're in that place where you're explicitly or implicitly waiting for somebody to give you permission to go after what you want then this will really speak to you. Because when you stop giving other people permission and control over the choices that you make in your life then you fully reclaim responsibility for yourself.

When you reclaim that responsibility, it's empowering, and it can also be terrifying. Because all of a sudden you can't look to somebody else and blame them for what it is that's going on in your own life. You now need to be accountable for yourself, accountable for your successes, accountable for your failures.

This is where you get to really develop a relationship of trust with yourself. Because if you're going to go out and create a life for yourself that is a challenging one to create, it's something that you really want. It's something that you're going to work hard for. Chances are you're going to

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have successes, you're going to have failures, and you're going to need to be there for yourself each step of the way.

As you're there for yourself, as you develop that trust and that accountability with yourself, you'll really strengthen that relationship that you have with yourself. That is one of the skills that is so essential and that is so wonderful that comes out of doing this work.

The third and final skill that I'll mention here is that idea of patience and acceptance. So as you push forward into a new practice for yourself, when you push yourself into that challenge, you may find that it takes a long time for you to develop the results that you want. It may be the road that you take is rocky and it doesn't feel very good. It feels uncomfortable. It's new. That doesn't mean that anything has gone wrong.

You are going to have those good days. You're going to have those rough days. You're going to have days where you try something new, and it doesn't work out the way you wanted it to. Instead of beating yourself up and feeling impatient, I would encourage you and invite you to embrace that as part of the process. That this is part of what you're learning in creating a joyful practice.

When you take these steps then what you will create is a joyful practice where you're conditioned for growth. Where you feel empowered to create what you want. You'll develop your resilience in the face of challenges.

So to recap, the three misconceptions that we are talking about today that I'm hoping to clarify for all of you is that myth number one, you don't need to push or punish yourself to succeed. So you can get just as far. Very likely you can get further by speaking to yourself in a kind way, by giving yourself that encouragement, by coming from a place of growth and openness and optimism as opposed to that place of pushing yourself, beating yourself into what it is you think you must do.

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Myth number two, you don't need anybody's permission to go after what you want. So if you really think about that and you think of what is holding you back from going after that dream that's been calling to you, that challenge that you keep coming back to. Bear that in mind. It doesn't have to come from somebody else. You get to decide.

Myth number three, the truth is there is no magic place that you will get to at the end of your journey. I guess ultimately there is that place that we all end up, but as we move from milestone to milestone it's not the case that when you get to that spot, it's going to be smooth sailing. There's going to be no challenges. The reality is that as you keep moving forward, you're going to have those challenges. That's okay. It's all part of the process.

So hopefully some of what we've talked about today has resonated with you and inspired you to go after what it is you want. To create the practice that's going to be fulfilling to you. I would encourage all of you to go after whatever that is for you. I hope so much that you have enjoyed today's podcast. I would really like to thank you again for tuning in. It's always such a pleasure for me to be able to connect with you. I love hearing from you. I love hearing how this podcast is making an impact for you. What it is about the episodes that you're applying in your day to day.

For all of you, I would encourage you to reach out to me on LinkedIn. I'd love to hear from you. I encourage you to connect with me through thejoyfulpractice.com website. I would very much appreciate if you were to subscribe to the podcast. If you were to leave a review for the podcast. Knowing that whenever you do that, it helps this podcast find other people who would be interested in learning about what we're talking about here. So I would really, really appreciate that.

I continue to do coaching one to one. So if that's something that you are interested in, I encourage you to reach out to me. We can set up a consult call. No pressure whatsoever. It's really an opportunity to learn about

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what's going on in your life and how I can potentially support you. I can share a little bit more with you about how coaching works.

A lot of people have questions about that. They've never worked with a coach before. Often when clients that I work with do learn what coaching is all about and they see the changes that they can make in their professional and their personal lives, they get really excited. They wish they'd done it sooner. So if you have any questions about that, by all means please reach out. I would love to hear from you.

In the coming weeks, I'll be talking about some opportunities that are coming up to work together. I'm really excited about them. I think that they're going to be amazing. I would love for you to join me in some of those opportunities. So stay tuned for that. That's going to be coming up in the next few weeks. So with that, I wish all of you an incredible week. Thank you again for tuning in. I look forward to reconnecting again next week. Bye for now.

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