

EPISODE 78

“MW: Sort of what my work and my message has been to get out there is that there’s so much – We make this such a negative thing. We call it that you’re too high strung, and you’re so stressed, you have imposter syndrome. When actually, that ability to self-reflect and to turn inward is such a strength, yet we villainize it.

If your self-doubt is a part of you and if the more you ignore it, the more you try to crush it, to push it down, push it away, you are splintering yourself rather integrating. I know that sounds super woo-woo-ey. I see so many people who tell me and certainly I’ve been in this position myself where you feel like you wear one mask to work or one mask in front of people, and inside you feel completely different. This sort of approach of just listening to your self-doubt, just even sitting with it rather than trying to run away from it.”

[INTRO]

[0:01:18.9] AS: You know battling food in your body doesn’t work. You want to love and accept yourself, and because you’re insatiable, you want results too. You bring the same intensity to your life, wanting to maximize your time, potential, and experiences you have here on our beautiful and wondrous planet Earth. Fair warning, it will be a rollercoaster. But for those insatiable, this is your primetime to thrive. Here is just saying yes to the hunger of wanting it all.

I’m your host, Ali Shapiro, who is dedicated to pioneering a saner and more empowering approach to health and weight loss.

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:01:58.9] AS: Welcome to episode 78 of the Insatiable Podcast, *Transform Emotions Into Power Not Overeating* with Melody Wilding. Feeling of like self-doubt and inadequacy can drive us to overeat. If we listen to conventional self-help to just ignoring your inner-saboteur and crush your fears, you will lose self-trust. In this nuanced conversation, I talk with Melody Wilding, a licensed social worker, TEDx speaker, and human behavior faculty member at the City University of New York.

In today's episode, we discuss the counterintuitive way to make self-doubt an ally, not an enemy. How being highly conscientious gets you a competitive edge, it can also turn into a weakness and how to mitigate downside of being on so "on the ball". Lastly, the imposter syndrome and how it gets high achievers to question so much about themselves and the solution is not to play to your strength.

In addition to her professional background, Melody helps high achievers navigate the emotional ups and downs to success. She's worked with CEOs and executives running top startups along with published authors and media personalities. For the last 10 years she studied the connection between thoughts, emotions, and actions, and she helps her clients develop concrete strategies to overcome their insecurities, increase confidence and build self-esteem that unleashes their full potential.

Melody is an award-winning expert in Workplace Mental Health and writes for Forbes, Inc., Quartz, and Psych Central. She's also been featured in dozens of media outlets including New York Magazine, Fast Company, Entrepreneur Magazine, and more. She holds a master's from Columbia University and graduated Summa Cum Laude with a degree in psychology from Rutgers University.

I think after today's episode, our community will have a collective exhale. Enjoy the relief of hearing, "It's okay to be emotional."

[INTERVIEW]

[0:03:51.9] AS: All right, welcome everyone today. Today, Melody, I am so glad to have you here and our listeners are as well. We're talking today about emotional intelligence and emotional literacy and the nuances of that. I wanted to have you on because you're one of the people who sees the nuances.

[0:04:09.8] MW: Yeah. Thank you so much for having me, Ali.

[0:04:12.7] AS: Yeah, for sure. One of the things that I find really interesting about your work is that you work with really high achieving women, similar to me and similar to the people that who listen to *Insatiable*. They may not feel high achieving all the time, but we'll get to some of the archetypes of emotional intelligence, like imposter syndrome and highly sensitive people.

What you talk about is that, often, emotional intelligence gives people an edge. It's what's really help propel them, but then you also talk about how that can hold them back with self-doubt. Can you talk about how you saw that and what you see with your own clients in that nuance, when our strength becomes an Achilles' heel?

[0:04:58.1] MW: Yeah, absolutely. First of all, again, thank you so much for having me. It's a pleasure to be on the podcast after being a listener for so long and listening to so many great conversations. I really was led down this path partially through my own experience being a highly sensitive person myself and sort of fumbling my way through that growing up and feeling so much to the point that it's really overwhelming, really being someone who is so driven to achieve, but then at times that being paralyzing.

I have a background in counseling and human behavior research, and for the last six years or so, have been working with entrepreneurs, executives, really high achieving women like you are mentioning and just started seeing this pattern over and over again that their capacity to think and feel deeply was a blessing that it enabled them to get where they were to really have that emotional intelligence to have almost a sixth sense of what was going on in situations; to feel out people, to be empathetic and understand what they needed. Then, on the other hand it led to this sort of overthinking; ruminating, about did they make the right decisions, worrying about what was going to happen next and could they handle it, and just being so difficult on themselves to the point where it almost like they were hitting a glass ceiling on their own potential.

I've really dedicated a lot of my work to figuring out what drives that, what's underneath it, and giving people actionable strategies and tools that are backed up by the research and evidence to work to help people in the moment when you really need to get out of that cycle of perfectionism, of worrying too much, of thinking too much, what can you do to disengage from

that cycle in the moment so you don't get caught up by it and setup a cascade of undesirable habits or behaviors.

[0:07:13.0] AS: Yeah, what is underneath that? What drives this? Like, "Oh my God! I want to achieve, but then I'm also now going to question everything." What drives it and what's underneath it? It'd love to know.

[0:07:25.5] MW: Yeah. I think one of the biggest themes I see among my clients is this high conscientiousness. If you think about the personality measures, you have things like open-mindedness, neuroticism, what they call the ocean, the five personality factors. Among my clients, I just kept noticing over and over again that this conscientiousness where we tend to think of that term as being nice, as being sweet, "Oh, you're conscientious. You're thoughtful."

Really, the term refers to being someone who meets internal and external expectations, is someone who is very discerning with their judgment. Someone who lives very structured. Someone who's goal oriented. All of those things are wrapped up in that conscientiousness, and we all exist, all of our personality measures sort of exist on a spectrum. I'm sure we all know people in our lives who are more optimistic and people who are more pessimistic, and it's the same thing for something like conscientiousness. We all know people who are always late and never do what they say they're going to do. For people who are highly conscientious, that bothers them to the extreme, because you're the exact opposite.

I think that is what underlies this high achieving behavior, this sort of goal orientation, and it's actually a really good thing. I think sort of what my work and my message has been to get out there is that there's so much — We make this such a negative thing. We call it that you're too high strung and you're so stressed, you have imposter syndrome. When actually, that ability to self-reflect and to turn inward is such a strength, yet we villainize it so much to the point that for various reasons a lot of us learn to disregard or deny that emotional spectrum that we have and we start losing the ability to use that as a tool for judgment, to use it as data.

[0:09:37.6] AS: Yeah, and I love that, because you just had a TED Talk and you opened up in talking about flipping through any magazine. It wouldn't be like, "The one thing to live remarkably," or "Just believe in yourself." Basically, overriding this conscientiousness that you're

talking about, which I love the word “discerning”, because I always say that my clients have a high bullshit meter, but what I’m really saying is they’re highly discerning.

When they decide to work with me, this is not their first weight loss rodeo, they’re not their first nutrition rodeo. They want to do their work, and I love that they do that because I want it to be a right thick versus not.

A lot of people, like you said, they tell you to just ignore that, or it’s bad, or to just squash your self-doubt, like, “Don’t listen to that.” What happens when you do that as a highly conscientious or highly achieving reflective person?

[0:10:33.3] MW: Yeah, it leads to self-denial. Where I see it the most is people — It leads to this untrusting of yourself, this fundamental distrust of every single one of your decisions of every — It really connects to imposter syndrome because you, again, connecting to that distrust, you don’t believe that you — You believe that any success you’ve had, any good habit that you’ve been able to put in place, whatever it may be, that that was a fluke and you won’t be able to recreate that, because you don’t trust in your own self-efficacy. You don’t believe in your own mastery. It just leads to that cycle of doubting yourself over and over again.

[0:11:25.9] AS: How do you suggest that people start, because — Another question actually I wanted to ask you do you think that sometimes — Because this is what I see in my work. People may be discerning conscientious reflective, yet then there’s also this conditioned, cultural conditioning, that says, “We can’t fail. Everything has to be shiny out of the gate.”

We were having this conversation in Truce With Food and I love that my client brought this up, is I was talking about growth mindset versus fixed mindset. For everyone listening, we have an episode, it think like 8 or 9, I forgot. It’s on growth mindset. Growth mindset is this, basically, idea that you get praised for your efforts. The less unattached you come to outcomes, you actually surpass them, because you’re purposing on learning, versus fixed mindset puts you in this very success-failure, very lack of trusting, because you think everything is — You’re either smart or you’re not.

What we are talking about in Truce With Food is that, in theory, growth mindset sounds really wonderful. Yet, in a lot of corporations and a lot of public stages, and a lot of social media — Not even social media, because that doesn't feel like the stakes are that high, but especially at work. It feels like you can't really be imperfect. Do you find that we take this consciousness and turn it up to almost a deafening degree because of the cultural conditioning and it's exaggerating that we already are, but if it's to the point where it does become a weakness?

[0:12:57.9] MW: Yeah. I think a lot of — Something that has to do with it and something I hear more and more from my clients every day is the fear of uncertainty. I think that now, more so than ever, I think it was fed by this pressure to perform, by this, “Don't show any cracks in your façade at work.” You always want to seem confident and competent. You always want to get things done, be meeting goals. I think, now, it's becoming much more the ambiguity or situations is becoming much more problematic for people that, “Okay. I used to know that I had certain targets that I had to meet. I used to even know what the expectations were. Now, my organization is changing so fast, my boss was a different boss than last month and I'm not sure what projects are going to get canned. This person texted me at 10:00 at night, what does that mean? Do I respond?”

There are just so much uncertainty on so many different levels that it just amplifies that maybe an underlying torment personality factor that might have been there, where you might have already been a little disposed to feeling a little unconfident based on stories or your backgrounds and the environment that you're in is just triggering that all the more.

That's something I work with clients around too, is really the first step is gathering data, is figuring out a baseline of what you're even working with, because so much of the time, to your point about stories, we just sort of keep telling our self, “Oh, I'm so stressed. I can't handle this.” We don't dig any deeper. We don't pause to say to even get to the level of what's going on a day-to-day basis? What's working? What's not working?

Until you do that — Usually, where I have clients start is doing some sort of a self-tracking for two weeks or even a month to figure out where are you feeling those moments of self-doubt most of all? Is it in meetings? Is it when priorities change, and that comes up for you?

All of that gives you a dataset to work with, to even map to; what are your particular triggers? Are there situations, certain people, to figure out what is within and without of your control. That's the first thing. Like you were saying, it can be partially the social conditioning. To an extent, you can manage that or mitigate it. Let's focus on what we can do internally to emotionally regulate better, knowing that we're going to have to thrive in an uncertain environment. It's figuring out those self-management tools that we can use.

[0:16:04.1] AS: I love that you brought up the rate of change, not just change itself, but the rate of change, because I think as a result of rate of change being so exponential, then other things in your life start to, "Oh my God! Should I have a kid? I'm almost 40," or "Should I move to this city if I can work from anywhere?" We also have all these choices at the same time that things are changing so much and you can't really plan for the future.

I was reading an article the other day how education is preparing kids for a world that doesn't exist. It's like how do we become super nimble in this world where everything is changing, definitely exaggerates the self-doubt? A lot of my clients realize their stories do get triggered when things aren't perfectly planned. On the surface, it's, "Oh my God! If I can't eat what's on my dieting plan." But it's a metaphor for, "Oh my God! What about when I feel different, or what if I'm questioning myself?" It's when life hands them something unexpected as well.

One of the things that you're really bit on and I am as well is this emotional literacy. Can you talk a little bit about that? Because to check in, I find a lot of people who are really high functioning or over-thinkers, to go into their body and try to figure out what they're feeling is just like they feel stuck, like, "I can't get this." Can you talk to that?

[0:17:28.8] MW: Yeah, I think it's connected to that living in the future, anxiety of always trying to project and control what's happening five steps down the line, because that's what you've been used to, or that was a survival mechanism. You need it at home to manage things. You needed to be the one who was hyper-vigilant to make sure that everything was okay, everything is copasetic, and maybe you still have those people pleasing tendencies that work where you're five steps ahead. What that leads to is shoving down, sort of disregarding everything that's happening within you now either because it's not important enough, you don't have time to deal with it, or you don't have the tools to.

Emotional literacy is it's really very simply the ability, the capacity to name, recognize and put labels on emotions so that we can use them as data and a tool, because emotions drive behavior. They do not have the equal behavior, but they can be a source of insight that we can use. That was part of what I spoke to in my TEDx talk that you mentioned, and thank you for watching, was that instead of making our self-doubt the enemy, can we use it as something that's trying to get our attention? I think that can be much more instructive and proactive than it is to just feel like you're scrambling all the time and trying to run away from yourself.

[0:19:09.2] AS: You said something super powerful about, "Okay. We're not going to ignore your self-doubt, which is the equivalent of the pop self-help psychology of saying, "Ignore your inner critic. Don't listen to it. Beat into submission." You're saying, "No! Let's have a voice. Right now, what are you feeling? Let's label that."

Can you expand up on that, because I think — I feel like I can hear all our listeners going, "Ooh! Ha!" I can live with this thing. I don't have to constantly wait till it's done or not paying attention. It can actually be an ally.

[0:19:45.9] MW: Yeah. I hate all of the, like, "Crush your fear!" "Down with self-doubt." It bothers me.

[0:19:55.4] AS: It's hyper-masculine. It's like super war, like, "Fight it! Kill it!"

[0:20:00.5] MW: Yeah, and it fundamentally — Your self-doubt is a part of you, and if the more you ignore it, the more you try to crush it, to push it down, push it away, you are splintering yourself rather than integrating. I know that sounds super woo-woowie. I see so many people who tell me and certainly I've been in this position myself where you feel like you wear one mask to work or one mask in front of people, inside you feel completely different. This sort of approach of just listening to yourself doubt, just even sitting with it rather than trying to run away from it, can shift everything.

It doesn't mean that you have to like it. I'd like to say that it doesn't mean it has to become your best friend, but I think Elizabeth Gilbert says that fear can have a seat in the car, it doesn't have

to take the front seat. It can take the backseat, but it's going to have to ride with you no matter what. It's going to be there. If you don't learn to deal with it, you're just going to keep getting what you've always gotten.

It's only to your benefit, to what we were talking about uncertainty before. That's always going to come up. Life is never going to be linear, or the same. If you look back at any experience you've had, there's always those twists and the road. You can actually lean into these emotions to see if there's anything there. In your work, I know you do a lot of healing around old stories, and emotions are really a reflection of the chemical cocktail that's being triggered in our brain. It's not this sort of ethereal thing, this sort of woo-woo thing. It's actual science in our body, and we would look at our stress reaction, which I know again you do in your work and you work with that a lot. Emotions can be used just as another tool in that toolbox in the same way.

Emotional literacy is really just a way of putting more color around those experiences since, again, we don't — I don't know about you, but I never got a class in school about talking about feelings, except maybe in kindergarten.

[0:22:28.2] AS: No. I never had one either.

[0:22:29.9] MW: Right. We have this one dimensional view of, "I feel good." "I feel bad." "I'm fine today." "How are you?" "I'm stressed. Things suck." We simplify it so much that we almost don't — It's sort of a relearning of a fundamental skill of being human to learn these shades of gray of the emotions that we have. Especially for those of us who deal with perfectionism, imposter syndrome, high achievers in general, we're used to just plowing through all of that. We're used to rely on your will power, and pain is a sign that you're growing without sort of listening to what those emotions have to say, getting into — Are you feeling — Okay, I'm feeling bad. All right, what is that? Is that disappointment? Is that guilty, or shame? What's really there? What's underneath that? That can lead to all sorts of places of; is there something as simple as — I like to mention this tool, it's called HALTS. It's deceptively, almost stupidly simple, but it's really a tool we commonly in counseling and in therapy to interrupt that automatic thought pattern or automatic behaviors.

HALTS stands for hungry, angry, lonely, tired. Whenever you sort of find yourself starting to go down that rabbit hole of feeling like you're getting out of control, whatever that means for you, we all have different triggers for that and what that looks like differently. Ask yourself, just sort of pause, use it as a check-in. Are you hungry, angry, lonely, or tired?

Those are some basic responses, some basic emotions that can help you at least start having that conversation with yourself. It's a starter because, again, being hungry, angry, lonely or tired is kind of high level. For most people, even that level of stopping yourself to check-in with what's going on will be really new. It's a good entry point to then doing deeper work around emotional literacy which there's also sorts of tools you can get out there.

I actually have one on my website that I used with clients so often that I just started giving it to other people and I've been shocked by how many thousands of people come back to me and say, "This changed my life." It's literally an emotional vocabulary sheet and it's a list of maybe a hundred or so, emotional, feeling words. I've had people say they hang it up on their refrigerator, and when they get into a fight with their spouse, they point to the vocabulary sheet and it helps them kind of navigate their way through that conversation a little bit better.

The sheet, again, you might be surprised when you take a look at it. I sort of like to prompt people to ask themselves how many of these feelings can you even say you've had on this sheet. How many can you relate to and connect an experience too. I think that really can be an eye-opening experience to look at for yourself where you might be at, sort of get the baseline of your own emotional literacy rate level to do some work.

[0:26:15.2] AS: I love that. Is that your opt-in in your site if they go to —

[0:26:19.3] MW: Yeah. It's right on my website and I'll give you all link.

[0:26:23.2] AS: Okay great. In the show notes, we'll have I link to Melody's site.

I love that you talked about with HALT, because I can tell you — We do a lot of these in Truce With Food and I actually give the first week an emotional vocabulary tool too, because before people were often — They'll say I'm anxious or I'm overwhelmed that I want them to go a little bit deeper.

One of the things a lot of my clients realize is they think that they love all the sugar, but they start to realize they are tired half the time. There's some emotional stuff as well. Oh my God! Part of this is I'm just depleted and exhausted when I come home, and that's why I want cheese and crackers or wine. It's actually an energy source. I love that you give that HALT, because I think it's a great tool.

I also tell for people who are just starting to tune in, even if you can just label, "Oh, I'm having this thought," or "I'm having a feeling," and just even labeling playing it a feeling, because you're first in it, it feels like reality. It doesn't feel like you're having a feeling. It feels like, "I'm failing," or "I'm unsure," it's always going to be this way. It can be even helpful, I think, for people listening just to start to recognize when you're having a thought versus a feeling.

Yeah, that's a really helpful and very subtle differentiation. Kind of a useful template I find for that, again, to interrupt that, because you can easily go down that spiral of, "I'm overwhelmed," and then you start confirmation bias everything that's overwhelming you in front of you.

To put that sort of space between the reaction and the response I think can be helpful to say, "I am having a feeling that," rather than, "I am stressed. I am having a feeling that I am stressed." It helps — It's really really subtle, but helps kind of retrain your brain that, again, fleeting sensations. Emotions are data but they're not destiny, so to speak.

[0:28:34.2] AS: I love that: emotions are data but not destiny. In the saying; I'm feeling that X, you're able to see the meaning of projected onto that, because what we do in Truce With Food is we label the feelings, but then story is what we're making the feeling mean.

The healing process is to still feel that same feeling — You may still that feeling again. Often times it's less intense the more that you kind of sit with it, but it no longer means that you're feeling. It no longer means that you're going to be alone. It no longer means you have enough space and the tools to realize that. I love that. I'm feeling that I'm not going to finish whatever I have to do today, and it's like, "Wait a second. Just because I got this email doesn't mean my whole day has to be derailed, and how do I fit this?" It keeps you more agency in choice to take a step back, which I'm all about. I love that those are really great tools.

HALT, and then I'm having a thought that, or I'm having a feeling that, and then definitely we'll get Melody's website at the and also at the show notes to get that emotional vocabulary from her.

I want talk about two things that you've referenced; imposter syndrome and highly sensitive people/persons, I don't even know. I wanted you two talk about these because these are two kind of archetypes that I think are really important to understand, because — First of all, if you have imposter syndrome, which I love Melody to expand upon, it means you don't have it. They discovered that in highly functioning people the irony, if you're a sociopath or a narcissist, you can't reflect, and so you would never even think that you have imposter syndrome. I tell clients that and they feel a little relieved, like, "Oh, if I spot it. I don't got it." Exactly.

Talk a little bit about imposter syndrome which self-doubt is often triggered by.

[0:30:30.3] MW: Yeah. First of all, imposter syndrome, it's a misnomer. It's not really much to your point about the fact that if you feel like you have imposter syndrome you actually don't

have it. It's not actually a syndrome. It's a natural response to leveling up to higher levels of success, and it was a phenomenon, really, that researchers in the seventies observed among high achieving women that had a constellation of behaviors that went along with it. A lot of them we've already talked about; perfectionism, conscientiousness, being a sensitive person. Sometimes that procrastination a lot of times, it can actually backfire and lead to underperforming, because fearful of messing up that you perpetually hold back.

Something I think is missing from the conversation about imposter syndrome right now is that it largely refers to a feeling of intellectual fraudulence. It's been most studied in academia and even now it's really seen the most among — We'll speak to women here, but women who have multiple degrees or high levels of technical training, but then feel like at they're still incapable at their jobs or that they won't measure up.

Where I think this can manifest for a lot of people especially on more of a day-to-day personal basis is feeling like we can solve our problems through getting more information, that information will be the solution. We just need to know more. We just need to get another degree or get another training, or find another diet, learn the secrets and then we'll figure it out, but it must be some fault of our own intellect that we can't right now. Therefore, more information will solve that. That's not true.

As I said in my TEDx talk, it's from a quote from the entrepreneur Derek sivers, he says — I'm paraphrasing here, “If more information were the solution, then we'd rock stars with six pack abs,” but we're not.

I think that is sort of missing from imposter syndrome right now that it really refers to an intellectual self-doubt about your own knowledge-based, I guess you could say.

[0:33:15.4] AS: Yeah, I love that you — I always say to my clients, "You don't need more information. You need more understanding," or basically taking them through an adaptive change process where they learn about themselves, not more technical — Not more diet. It's not more ways to exercise. Not more ways to track their calories. It is like totally focused in the wrong direction, and more thinking like when you feel self-doubt, or for some people it's inadequacy, which we'll talk about with HSPs in a second here.

Some people, it's feeling different. Everyone emotional story that triggers them. Often, just thinking like, "I'm going to fail when I feel this way." With your clients, do you start to have them recognize that and then look at the feelings underneath that, or is it always self-doubt, but then the self-doubt triples down into these other tentacles?

[0:34:10.5] MW: Yeah. I think it's something that it certainly varies from person to person. For some people it might be a deep-rooted pattern of; they grew up family where their experiences were denied. They have to be the one caring everybody else, so now they really don't know how to trust their judgment and that leads over into their life today.

For some people it is being in a toxic work environment, like we were mentioning before, where everything is just really ambiguous. There's gas lighting all over the place where you're meant to feel crazy and there's changing expectations constantly and perhaps there's a bullying boss, and those are more external factors that you can beef up your boundaries around that for example.

Kind of works both ways, but I think it comes back to getting that sort of examining for yourself, where it's coming up from a day-to-day basis the most, for you most acutely, and mapping from there to see if there're tools and techniques you can do at the moment as well as doing that examination of what are the stories, the beliefs that I have, my past experiences. How might that be contributing here? But how am I willing? I always say to clients; no matter what, you always

shave a choice. What you did before, how you reacted previously is not how you have to choose to do that next time. Yeah, I think that's a place to start.

[0:35:47.5] AS: Yeah, I know with a lot of my clients, their story gets triggered where there is ambiguity. If they don't know someone so well, it's like, "If I eat here —" Again, on the surface, it's about eating, but it's also social anxiety. It's like, "If I eat here, "Am I going to look like I shouldn't be eating this, because I should be losing weight," or does it look like I'm being rude by not eating — Whenever there's this ambiguity of expectations, and then you rely on past expectations, and then you're so tired from overanalyzing, you go home and eat anyways.

You realize what you've done, but I think for people listening, start to see in your life whether it's work expectations, at social events, meetings, where you may not know what the expectation of the meeting is. That's probably where your imposter syndrome or your self-doubt or you're just questioning in yourself is going to be the highest, because you don't know the expectations. If you're conscientious, that's your worst nightmare.

[0:36:48.2] MW: Yeah, and part of this too is that it becomes a habit, it becomes a habitual way of being and facing the world that you just go into everything doubting yourself. As I'd like to say, it's a thought pattern, your self-doubt, your inner critique. It's not this evil monster inside you that's out to get you, it's just a thought pattern that's plainly been reinforced overtime. Again, you can choose and take steps to decondition that.

One of the places — Again, just sort of that awareness piece starting, but I like to encourage clients to look at what are your greatest hits in terms of what are the same — Whether it's stories. A lot of times I find it a useful tool; is looking at cognitive distortions. This thought patterns that come up with imposter syndrome, or self-doubt in the work place often are things like all or nothing, that I have to crush this project or I'm totally going to be out of a job tomorrow, that will actually — That would be catastrophizing.

All or nothing, I actually seen a lot with clients who are traveling and they're like, "Well, I have to fit in my whole workout." No, not necessarily. Why does it have to be all or nothing? Can't you do 15 minutes, and that's still an accomplishment. Again, getting comfortable with those gray

areas. I mentioned catastrophizing so that I'm going to end up on the street as a bad lady if things don't work out. That's what I opt-in here.

It's looking about these — I call them thought traps, these sort of ruts that you tend to fall into again and again and again. Once you've realized your own patterns, that's the first step, being able to take that control to spot those to undo them.

[0:38:47.2] AS: It's still funny. I literally refer to these thought patterns as greatest hits, seriously, but our work overlaps so much. One thing I want to say to listeners that I'm seeing coming up right now in Truce With Food is I call it the — Rather than the inner critique, I call it the inner protector, because often it will sound very noble as well. Not just critical — We're doing kind of different things, but, "Oh, this is healthy. You should eat that." It sounds so noble, even though often people don't really know what's healthy for them. Oh my God! I was going on and on. I'm like, "Imposter syndrome is my interview right now." No.

Oh! What I was going to say is a lot of people are having trouble — Like you said, it seems simple, but identifying those thought patterns, because they're so close to it. If you're listening, often, your thought patterns are what you think is reality. If you've never kind of taken a step back, you can't even differentiate between your inner critique, or your inner protector, or whatever we're calling it.

I just want for everyone to just start to tune in to, "How am I thinking about this?" Will help you start to get some distance rather than the thinking, "This is who I am," and that distance is so important and it can take a lot of time, because it could sound like common sense, or it could sound logical based on how your — To me, it's based on how someone's story is setup than the thought sound very logical often. I just want for everyone listening to start to just pay attention to maybe my thoughts aren't reality. Maybe I'm just having an experience, or coming up with this thought pattern.

I love that you said kind of spot-lighted, and what are the greatest hits that I'm always hearing. I'm like, "Oh! I'm so tired of myself." "This is so hard," or "I can't do this." I think a tip that I often give my clients, because they're like, "What if it's common sense?" is if that voice is shutting you down, if it's not creating any options, rather it's saying life is black or white, or it's all or nothing,

or rather than saying, “Wait. How do I know that’s true?” or “Where am I getting this from? What’s going on here?” That’s kind of a way to start to question those patterns rather than thinking it. Do you have anything that you might have a different angle?

[0:41:05.5] MW: Yeah, it’s getting a little Freudian. I actually find it’s very useful to sit with a question of, “Is this even my voice, or is this somebody else’s?” When has this come up before? When have you felt this way before? What was that experience? They can be scary questions to ask, but they can unlock a lot of stuff.

[0:41:31.1] AS: Yeah. I have when people are designing their inner protector, I’m like, “Does this voice sound familiar?” I love you gave some really great tools. First of all, if you’re like, “That is me! Imposter syndrome.” No, you don’t have it. As Melody points out, it can be really useful to kind of check in and get clear and whatnot. I love those beginning tools too.

Now, let’s go to highly sensitive people, because I have some questions about this. Talk about this. One of the things that struck me in your — I think it was in one of your articles, if you said that a lot of people who struggle with feeling inadequate, because they feel so much. They feel too little or too much in proportion to the rest of life, the context thing. These are often the people who are highly sensitive. Can you give us a little bit of a descriptor of what highly sensitive people are and what they struggle with?

[0:42:30.3] MW: Yeah, I think a very simplistic definition of a highly sensitive person would be an empath. Someone who feels very deeply, takes in a lot of the world around them. If you’ve ever felt like you’re someone who absorbs the vibes of other people around you or that energy of people around you, you might be someone who’s highly sensitive.

Some people, again, it’s a spectrum, but if you’re on that scale, you might also be really affected by loud noises, or bright lights literally. Taking in sensations is a lot for you. Also being highly sensitive, you’re super attuned to people around you. You can read a room in a second. You’re trying to understand and your brain is sort of active in exploring your own inner world, but also that of other people that you sort have this sense to pick up on nuances and people’s facial expressions and their body language very easily.

That lead, again, sort of the flipside of that strength. You can lead from the very compassionate, emotionally, intelligent place, but it can lead to being very sensitive to criticism, to then feeling like any sort of micro-expression that a person gives. They didn't a period at the end of their text, and that's weird, all of a sudden you take that as feedback to everyone for the rest of the day. It's sort of being sensitive to these signals around you and in yourself.

I work with a highly sensitive people who I sort of summarize it as because they feel a lot, they feel that they are bad when they have so-called negative feelings which a highly sensitive person, you just have much more emotion. You just can go deeper. Therefore, you can go into those shades of gray a lot easier than other people. You can go to places that might be a little darker, or maybe on an offside might be a little brighter than some people. When you get to those places that society calls negative emotions, self-doubt, the feeling sad, feeling disappointment, it can lead to this automatic jumping to a conclusion of, "I am bad, because I feel this way, because I feel these things," because people shouldn't have negative emotions. We have this message that there's something to get rid of, therefore can lead to all sort of feeling inadequate, feeling less than, feeling incapable.

[0:45:13.2] AS: Yeah, I think that's important for people to realize, because, again, we demonize people who are too emotional, period. All of these things that really — Both men and women have them, but estrogen makes women more sensitive in general. Hormonally, you can feel temperate differently, touch feels differently. That's just estrogen, or lack of testosterone, I guess. No, it's estrogen.

It's often been seen as Achilles' heel. Think with Tom Hanks', "We know there's no crying in baseball."

[0:45:49.2] MW: I love that movie.

[0:45:50.2] AS: I know, me too. I grew up playing softball, so I totally love it. Definitely in the workplace. Oh my God! If you were just to be seen as weak. All these things that makes us feel even more sensitive about ourselves. Do you recommend people just have some time to decompress with these sensations? Because the world assaults our senses. Oh my God! You go to a movie theater and there's like blinking lights, and the previews are so loud and then

everyone is on their phone. I'm just like I feel like I've been through something before the movie have even started. You know what I mean?

[0:46:28.8] MW: Yeah. We were talking about before, I'm in New York City very often. For me, I'm definitely a highly sensitive person. It's sort of the sounds of the city, the pollution, the horns and everything. It's very low-grade, but it's this underlying stress that builds up in me to a point where I need a break from it. I know that about myself.

I think for highly sensitive people, it's having that self-knowledge, not villainizing yourself for it, but building your life. I'm saying this more and more to client now, that the bravest thing you can do is protect your time and energy in a world that wants nothing but to, in your words, assault it. It's really an act of courage to do that.

That could be anything from I suggest clients build in buffer time between appointments.

[0:47:30.2] AS: I do that too.

[0:47:31.0] MW: Yeah, and it's something so simple, but in the automatic, just craziness, of the day-to-day, you book things back to back and then by the end of the day you haven't eaten, you're crazed, you're stressed out, and it sets off that spiral. Build in 20 minutes in between to give yourself time to decompress, to organize itself. Again, it's so little, but it can make all the difference.

Another one is just going back to that sort of the imposter syndrome, that drive for more information. Just do a detox for a week or two. If you can't fully disconnect from reading more about every new diet and just focusing on learning about one, in your method, you go through food experiments, and it's that practice of just isolating, but it comes down to focus, not letting outside forces steal your power away from you. It really comes down to — Even if it's doing an information detox.

[0:48:42.7] AS: I love that. Focus is so important these days, and I read a book — Actually, the irony is I started it, I didn't finish it — On deep focus and how we're going to solve the

complicated issues that we're in today. It's not just like, "Oh! I got that." It requires deep focus and thought and what not.

I do have one question about this, and I'm curious, your opinion. I don't think there's a right or wrong. I'm someone who — I probably borderline highly sensitive as I clean up my diet and everything, I can't tolerate perfumes that I used to be able to tolerate. I can't tolerate Glade plugins in cars. I used to handle that stuff. I've also found that as I've transformed my story and I healed, I had much more emotional resilience than I used to.

I feel like a lot of people say they're highly sensitive, but I'm wondering how — I agree with that. Carlos and I considered living in New Work, and we were living in New York and we both decided our nervous systems were not cutout from New York City. Carlos is definitely highly sensitive. We always laugh, his like favorite phrase is, "It's too much! It's too much!"

Where is that line where this can be crippling? To think, "Oh my God! I'm highly sensitive, and just everything is going to knock me off of my center," versus "Maybe I need a little bit more emotional resilience."

[0:50:08.5] MW: Yeah, coming back to grit and growth mindset, two buzzwords of the moment, but I think because they are so knitted, because it's really easy to let your identity become a restricting self-fulfilling prophecy in that respect. That's really hard to hold two different realities in your mind that, "Yes, I might be highly sensitive, but I also need to sort of grin and bear it sometimes and be resilient and work through the challenges and know that I can, that agency, that self-efficacy.

I think it comes back to having a productive approach to — Again, something else that I sort of hate in the self-development world right now is this focus entirely on your strengths, "Just live from your strengths. Just ignore your weaknesses and do only the things you're good at."

No. That is not where greatness comes from. It comes from overcoming challenges and developing that belief in yourself that you can replicate it and do it again and again. To do that, you have to be willing to say that there are — The words I was looking for before, is whole duality in your mind, that being highly sensitive comes with gifts, but it also comes with

challenges. Having a willingness and a drive to face those head on and not be ashamed of them.

[0:51:52.6] AS: I love that you said that, and I think that is just such a — I always say to my nutrition clients and my regular clients when they're in the thick of it. I'm like, "You can do hard things." I think that's the ultimate form of self-trust. Not that you can control your external circumstances, but that you can rise internally to the occasion with when life doesn't go according to plan.

I love that — I think it's such a great place to end, because basically what you're talking about is grit your self-doubt, grit your inner critique. Start to identify what's really going on rather than just thinking like, "I'm going to crush it and kill it." I think there's relief. Initially, it may be like, "Wait. I'm never going to get rid of my inner critique. It does get better at less determining your thoughts, but there's also kind of relief in that, like, "I'm not gunning anywhere. This is not something to fix, it's just something to practice with," and eventually arrive and be really proud of yourself because you did it despite the doubt and despite the challenges.

[0:52:56.8] MW: Yup. It's about coming to that place of realistic self-assessment, setting realistic goals for yourself, because that's what creates that inner resonance rather than that dissonance, because when we go after all of those self-help platitudes of, "Be the best, you're nothing at all."

[0:53:19.7] AS: It's all or nothing. It's the disease mindset. Just that stuff, it's something different.

[0:53:25.7] MW: I'm just sort of this, "Manifest and live your dreams." Deep down you're like, "I don't even believe in myself enough to do that." There's that dissonance there, and you have to come to a place where it's more realistic and it is sort of greeting it head-on and knowing that you're a work in progress, as I like to say.

[0:53:49.9] AS: Yeah, I think you just brought up a good point. Our culture is very bit victim shaming. So that we shame victims. It's like, "If I don't believe in myself, I brought all these on." It's like, "No. That's a whole other thing." I think a lot of people would need to like, "Wait. I've

never believed in myself, so now I'm not manifesting them behind." No. You're saying, "Work with it and you could get better and then you can," — I always say, to remain optimistic we need to be realistic so that we don't feed that self-fulfilling failure prophecy that the imposter mind loves to cling on to.

Melody, this was so great. You gave us so many actionable tools, so much nuance, which I totally appreciate. I think I can just hear our audience a collective exhale of empathy and compassion from you. Where can people find you?

[0:54:41.1] MW: Sure. You can get the Emotional Literacy toolkit at my website; melodywilding.com. I also, for anybody who's interested in going a little deeper on imposter syndrome, I have a five-day free e-course that can take you through and give you some more actionable tips if you're down for that.

[0:55:00.9] AS: Great. Will you spell your website, just —

[0:55:03.7] MW: Sure. It's M-E-L-O-D-Y-W-I-L-D-I-N-G, melodywilding.com.

[0:55:11.9] AS: Great. Are you on social at all?

[0:55:14.3] MW: I am. On Twitter @melodywilding, Instagram @melodywilding. You can find me there.

[0:55:20.7] AS: Wonderful. Thank you so much for stopping by, Melody.

[0:55:23.7] MW: Thank you, Ali. This was an absolutely blast.

[0:55:26.2] AS: Yeah, I had a great time.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:55:30.6] AS: Have questions or reactions about the episode? Reach out to me on Instagram and Twitter @alimshapiro, or Facebook at facebook.com/alimarieshapiro. If you love this show,

please leave an iTunes review and tell one friend this week about how to get the Insatiable Podcast on their phone.

See you on social media.

[END]