

Transcript 193. Heal Unhealthy Striving with Diana and Yael

Diana Hill: When we're in unhealthy striving, we're battling against ourselves and we're battling against the present moment. But when we're in healthy striving, we're battling for what we care about and that's different.

Yael Schonbrun: That was Dr. Diana Hill on psychologists off the clock.

Diana Hill: We are four[clinical psychologists here to bring you cutting edge and science-based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships, work and health.

Debbie Sorensen: I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, practicing in mile high Denver, Colorado, and coauthor of act daily journal.

Diana Hill: I'm Dr. Diana Hill coauthor with Debbie on act daily journal and practicing in seaside, [00:01:00] Santa Barbara, California.

Yael Schonbrun: From coast to coast, am doctor Yael Schonbrun a Boston based clinical psychologist and assistant professor at Brown university.

Jill Stoddard: And from sunny San Diego, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard author of be mighty and the big book of act metaphors

we hope you take what you learned here to build a rich and meaningful life Thank you for listening to psychologists off the clock. We're so happy to be partnered with Praxis, continuing education they offer continuing education for promoting lasting change with evidence-based training.

Diana Hill: And they're the premier provider in continuing education for clinical professionals. Some of their ongoing on demand. Anytime classes include act immersion with Steve Hayes act in practice, and also the DNA VI model, which is with Louis Hayes who works with adolescents and is fantastic.

Debbie Sorensen: yes, and we have big news. We Diana and Debbie here are offering a Praxis training. It's a two hour workshop on Wednesday, April 28th. And you can sign up best of all, [00:02:00] it's free and anyone can join. It's not limited to therapists. And what we're going to do is talk about some of the concepts from our book that we have coming out in may and offer you some practices that you can use from acceptance and commitment therapy to thrive in your own life.

So we're really excited to be offering that. You should check it out and we hope you can join us.

Diana Hill: So go to our website off the clock. psych.com to get a promotion code on live events through practice.

Diana Hill: So this is Diana here, and I have my good friend and colleague with Yael to talk about a topic that I've been thinking about over the course of my life, but also more recently as we're. Kind of launching our lives out of this pandemic. And maybe for some of us were thinking about wanting to restructure them a little

bit, and the concept is striving and how to engage in healthy striving, and maybe some of the ways in which we haven't strived.

So healthily in the past.

Yael Schonbrun: It's such an important topic. And [00:03:00] when that I think is so. Relevant for you and I to be discussing Diana because we met at a time in our lives when striving was sort of core to what our developmental responsibility was. We met early on in grad school, in our early twenties in a fairly competitive, striving oriented academic program.

And so I am excited to sort of dive into the science that I know that you know, so well, but also maybe some of the personal aspects of it. So, I wonder if you can maybe even start the conversation off by talking a little bit about why exploring the healthy versus unhealthy components of striving is for you and how you got into that topic of exploration.

Diana Hill: Well, you mentioned graduate school and that was such a Petri dish for striving for me. And actually when I think about striving in my own life, it's had both positive and negative impacts. I mean, here we are psychologists with degrees pursuing what we care about, but [00:04:00] really. Going back to the roots of striving.

For me, it was actually an unhealthy one. And for many people they can think for themselves of times when they haven't been caught up in pursuing goals or trying to be something other than, uh, who they are in attempts to achieve something that maybe isn't connected to their values. And for me, yeah, I'll, it's been a process of healing.

The unhealthy parts. And when I talk about healing, it's sort of like if you injure your arm, you don't cut off your arm to heal it. You actually need to. Allow the tissue to heal so that it can be mobile again, and you can use it. So for me, it really began before graduate school and something that I haven't shared a lot in my professional career, but a lot of people that know me personally know this about me is that I had a history of eating disorder and.

The reasons why I went into study with, Linda Craig had, were [00:05:00] because I wanted to pursue helping other people with eating disorders. And if you think about eating disorders, they're sort of, you're sort of the Olympian of striving, right?

Yael Schonbrun: a disorder that is a striving disorder. You're striving to be a certain weight, striving to look a particular way. And it tends to my understanding is that it, that category of eating disorders tends to be more prominent among people who are more achievement oriented.

Diana Hill: Yeah, there was a whole layer of perfectionism involved in it. And it's also about trying to, to meet some often white Western standard of beauty and really focused on sort of trying to get somewhere that's other than who you are. And so for me, my own recovery from an eating disorder was really about tackling my own cycle of striving. And I got really involved in Buddhism and I went and studied with **tic non-con** and also became very involved in yoga. But when I got to graduate school, the cues that trigger, my striving showed

[00:06:00] up and those cues tend to be in academic environments where there's a lot of competition.

There was seven women and one man in our program.

Yael Schonbrun: There was definitely a lot of competition. And I think that's true in a lot of academic programs, but certainly we met each other in one of the more intense ones that is out there. And so I can imagine that it was, you know, really a trigger. And it was a very intense experience.

Diana Hill: And I think that part of the intensity of the experience was that there wasn't a lot of room to be vulnerable or to express, uh, you know, Our background or the reasons why we were there studying what we were studying. And it was a very competitive environment. And my commitment to myself before I left for graduate school was that my recovery would come first, no matter what. And that's been a commitment that I've held over the course of my career in my life and has actually really shifted my career in a lot of different ways in different directions. So I actually. That first year of graduate school ended up [00:07:00] withdrawing and went to a yoga ashram in Boulder. And it was there that I reconnected again with my spirituality and the things that really fed me in that were important parts of my recovery, which were things like community.

Uh, I studied keratan so chanting, but also really the, this whole belief system, which is you are whole. As you are, and that there's nothing that you need to do to become whole. And it was really a time of remembering for me of my own values. So when I came back to graduate school, going back to that idea of you don't have to cut off your arm to heal it.

That healing is really a process of, uh, Not just coping or self care, but really getting to the roots of what you need and what you care about that. I went back to graduate school, to study eating disorders in a different way. Then I pursued, uh, mindfulness and acceptance based [00:08:00] approaches like DBT studied with Debra Safer at Stanford, and, uh, ended up really shifting my career more in the direction that was more integrated and embodied and fit.

A cycle that is more based on my values.

Yael Schonbrun: Well, I think something that you're pointing out there that I'd love to have you. Just walk us through is that if you exit unhealthy striving, it doesn't mean that you're not shooting for big goals, you know, trying to make important contributions and push yourself. So how do we know the difference between healthy versus unhealthy striving?

Can you walk us through that?

Diana Hill: Yeah, I made up a list of unhealthy versus healthy striving. And maybe folks can listen to this list and see these, these different signs if they, if they fit for them. So the signs of unhealthy striving are doing more, but never feeling like you do enough competing with others, even if they don't have the same goals you do.

[00:09:00] Neglecting important domains to get ahead and domains that matter less to you listening to your mind. Like it's a drill Sergeant being exhausted, but unable to sleep, feeling chronically burned out, working too much to fill a void and

feeling guilty when you take time off and reaching big achievements and goals, but still feeling like you aren't good enough.

And whether that's striving in the domain of. Parenting or that striving in the domain of work or say you're a high achiever at work, or maybe it's striving in relationship to your own body or striving in relationship to just, can I keep it up with the Joneses of the world? All of those things can lead to feeling dissatisfied in your life, doing a lot, but not really feeling a sense of contentment.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. I mean, as you're reading through those lists, that that list, I can really think about times in my life or [00:10:00] even just elements. Of my life even today where I can totally easily fall into that trap, but it's, it's nice to hear that list because it sort of gives you like a concrete marker that can you sort of feel, or take a look at whether at the end of the day you felt like you worked really, really hard, but never got anywhere.

And could that be something to just take a step back and look at, you know, what is that about? What am I trying for? How value consistent is the goal that I've set for myself. So I love that list because it gives you some of those ways to, um, conduct that analysis.

Diana Hill: And there's neuroscience behind it. Right? So if we look at the neuroscience. Striving and doing that our brains are designed to be in a chronic state of being dissatisfied, because if we were satisfied, we wouldn't be motivated to go out and sort of evolutionarily, go get a mate or go get food. And when they look at sort of the research on the brain, , we experienced the most [00:11:00] pleasure and the most dopamine response and the most activation of the nucleus accumbens right before we actually reach our achievement goal. And when you reach the achievement, go goal those neurochemicals go down. Which means that you actually feel pleasure before you get to the thing that you're trying to get to. And in our modern day, that thing is a Mo is a, is a moving target as well, because we live in a society where there are expectations for us that we can never reach.

And I would say it's important for me to know that I'm a white able-bodied cis-gendered woman. So for me, striving to meet my goals, there aren't as many barriers in the way, external barriers in the way for me, but for some others, There are huge barriers in getting to the goal that you're trying to get to. So that can be a part of both are, you know, the way that our environments are set up our individualistic society systems of [00:12:00] oppression, but also, uh, our own neuroscience that contributes to this state of, of not being able to get to a feeling of being satisfied. So I'd love to talk about the signs of healthy striving and how to a little bit of

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, and before we dive into that, I just want to say one thing that popped into my head is this recent interview that I did with Tal Ben-Shahar, who is a leading voice in the field of happiness science. And he talks about one of the transitions to make in happiness, in, in achieving sort of greater sense of contentment is to move from perfectionism to more, a mindset of good enough. And he had this line that I just, I love, which is. Good enough is really good enough, but I think what you're saying is our brains. Aren't actually wired to buy

that. And so I think it's useful to just recognize that we can realign with the value of setting more healthy, striving goals, but that our brains are tricky. And so the awareness of how tricky our brains are, [00:13:00] can help us to do it more effectively. And so maybe that's a good segue into talking about, like, what does healthy striving look like?

Diana Hill: Absolutely. So healthy. Striving is also it's this combined state of, you know, Rick Hanson's neuro-plasticity right. Of being able to sit in and cultivate feelings of contentedness and wholeness in combination with act, which is all about. Values and being in the process, not the outcome of your life.

So you can find this list. If you're interested on my blog posts at Dr. Diana hill.com and this is what healthy striving looks like. Setting goals based on your values, prioritizing important domains of your life. Pausing to take in the view, being present and working hard balancing effort and surrender, which really comes from my background in yoga and this dialectic between effort and surrender, having wholesome purposes as brick [00:14:00] Hanson would say take time off.

Even if you feel guilty, setting clear boundaries around your work. Giving yourself time at the end of the day, working to benefit a greater whole and choosing cooperation over competition with healthy striving, we're shifting our efforts. So that in, in, in yoga and Buddhism, we often talk about effortless effort.

And it becomes effortless because you're stepping into a remembering of what matters to you living from there. But you're also held by a greater whole, and you're pursuing what matters to you through actions and letting go of outcomes. It really is a place of healing and. What I think is exciting for me is to think about this word strive.

That's been so painful, both to me and many of my [00:15:00] clients and how we can take the word strive and use it in a different way.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, I love that idea of effortless action. Um, In Daoism way. And it always makes me think of the funniest movie. I just have this scene that pops into my head. If anyone has seen forgetting Sarah Marshall, where Paul Reed plays the surfing instructor, and he's trying to teach, um, Jason Segel, how to surf.

And he says, no, try it less hard or try less hard until the guy like doesn't even get up. But I'm curious, you know, if you, if you sort of can give us an example of like, what does effortless action look like? What would it look like to, embody this balance of effort and surrender?

Diana Hill: Yeah. So I'd love to actually give you an example that came from. Where this whole striving conversation started for me, which was actually the summer when I was interviewing, uh, the psychology of radical healing collective. And, uh, [00:16:00] and I was looking up the. APA guidelines for race and ethnicity, because I had some, some, some doing to do.

I had some effort that I needed to, to get, uh, busy on, which is my own understanding of race in the field of psychology.

And when I was reading those guidelines, many of them had the word strive in them. So guidelines like psychologists strive to recognize and engage in the influence of race and ethnicity in all aspects of professional activities as an ongoing process.

Right? So here's this word strive, but it had a different quality. To it, then the kind of striving that I was used to, which is just work really, really hard and try and get to the goal or the achievement. So where does effortless effort come up there? It's there's effort in. Learning pursuing the things that matter to you, but when it becomes effortless is letting go of it, having to be a certain [00:17:00] way.

And that's what showed up when I actually stepped into the interview with the psychology of radical healing collective, because it was an interview where I was not the expert and I'm really comfortable in being an expert position. And I think that is part of how society has also shaped me as a white woman.

And I need to step out of that in order to be in a more collective. Relationship. So in that interview, I actually asked Helen Neville to come on as an individual. And she said, I'm bringing on this group of people who I work collectively with. And when she described how she works with them, which is a really beautiful exchange of ideas and effort I got clear on, Oh, that's effortless effort. That's working within communities and humans. There's a tremendous amount of research on this, that humans do better.

When we work collectively as groups, both mental health wise as individuals, but also we're better to get where we're able to get to better outcomes. So whether that's [00:18:00] on something work-related, or even just in our day to day activities like as parents, where we need to ask for help sometimes, and see that we don't have to do things in this individualistic way, we can lean on others.

That's sort of an example of, um, Effortless effort, I guess,

Yael Schonbrun: Just in, in the parenting sphere. I just recently, um, I'm working on it. Piece collectively with one of our past guests, Rebecca Schrag Hershberg on this term from anthropology called *aloe parenting*. And it's this idea that we parent as a village, right? That it takes a village to raise a child. And the reason that we wrote it up is that throughout this pandemic parents have been so depleted, it's just felt like such a relentless.

Um, year for parents to have to do their work and take care of their kids. Even if you don't have a job outside of the home, there's just so many, there's such little access to support. And through writing this piece, I had the [00:19:00] chance to interview a child anthropologist and an evolutionary psychologist and both of them, it was just so, so, um, eye opening that they said, okay, You know, we, we are wired to do this thing called parenting together.

It's normal. It's not extra ordinary to do it with a team to do it. Um, as one of them said with a small army and two, and I think that so many of the things that we think about as individual goals and aspirations and journeys that we take are redo better. And I think there's a real biological basis for this because we're social creatures.

Collectively. And yet there's this tension between competition and collaboration.

Yael Schonbrun: So how do you move from competition to collaboration? What are your tips there?

Diana Hill: Yeah. Well, I think the first part is some self-study. So if you look at the yamas and the niyamas of yoga, there's eight limbs of yoga Asana,

Or

the postures is just

Diana Hill: one of them, the first

[00:20:00] two limbs

Diana Hill: of yoga

Are

Diana Hill: the yamas and niyamas and thereabout. How you live in the world, as well as your own, how you live with yourself. So one of the niyamas is about self study and looking at your own pattern, your own cycle of striving.

And if it's unhealthy striving, one of the things that you'll notice about it is that it tends to be individualistic in nature and not interconnected. So. Going back to Rick Hanson and his wisdom of the sort of three core human needs, which are to be, to feel safe, to have enough, like have enough resources and also to be interconnected, we can use those three core human needs as a way to exit our striving cycle.

And maybe I could talk a little bit about what sort of, what the striving cycle looks like. So people can start to see how, what would be the process of. Creating a new healthier

[00:21:00] **Yael Schonbrun:** Yeah. So, yeah. So walk us through that cycle.

That'd be awesome.

Diana Hill: So every cycle of behavior as a behaviorist, and this would be your self study of your own striving cycle, right? So every cycle of behavior happens in a queue. That triggers the cycle for you, a behavior that you engage in. So for, for me, my history is around, you know, competition or eating disorder, behavior or overworking for someone else.

Their striving behavior may look different. Right? And then a reward. What is it? That's rewarding you to keep you in this unhealthy cycle. And when you look at the Q part. Of a striving cycle. We can look at those three core human needs. Oftentimes it's feeling like some of those needs aren't being met. So we're not feeling safe.

Maybe we don't feel safe with ourselves. Our own self-critic is showing up, or maybe we don't feel safe. And that we had a history where our striving cycle developed because we were in a trauma, a traumatic environment [00:22:00] early on, I've seen this a lot with my clients that they're super high achievers because of their history of trauma.

They didn't feel safe in the world. And so they worked really, really hard. Right. Um, so that's the cue, like what cues you're striving and I don't know yet AI for you, when you get caught in a striving cycle, what are your

Yael Schonbrun: We're going to **Hughes**. I mean, I definitely get caught in a striving cycle in my professional world. Um, specifically with writing because it's so long been a goal of mine to write a book. And so sometimes I can, you know, work really hard and feel like I'm getting nowhere. And then feel that sense of depletion is as you were reading that list of markers of unhealthy striving, I have definitely experienced that in the past, but I will say that more recently I have felt more that I was in the healthier part of that.

Cycle where, um, I work hard, but I am more tuned into enjoying the journey. . And [00:23:00] in the recent years I have. Just really dived into collaborations with other people, actually, with some of the guests that we've had on the show. Um, I've gotten a lot of, um, assistance from people who have been really generous that are successful writers that have gotten to know, um, I've talked about it with you guys, the co-host and so those kinds of things have helped me, but the, I would say the cues are when I think that I won't be able to be successful.

That's when I get more stuck. And when I. Turn more towards a resource rich kind of mindset. Like there is enough. I just need to be patient and be present in the process that I can exit.

Diana Hill: You've kind of already healed a lot of your striving cycle, right? Because you've been, you're a therapist working on this and you've been doing this self reflection, but for those that maybe feel. Stuck in a cycle of feeling dissatisfied in their lives, but working really hard feeling burned out in their lives, but not knowing why this may be part of it.

And one of those [00:24:00] cues may be feeling threat. One of those cues may be feeling like there's not enough resources. One of the reasons why we compete is because we have a scarcity mindset. If this person does well at writing the needs, I can't do well and succeed at writing. Right. Whatever it is. So those just sort of identifying for yourself.

What are the cues for me that get me into this, like unhealthy competitive drive. And when I go through Paul Gilbert's model of threat and drive and contentment, one of the things that I notice a lot with with clients is that when they feel threatened for some clients, they go right into drive.

They go into doing and notice that for yourself. So that's the cue part. And then the behavior part. Yeah. Well, you, you, you talked about new mapped out so well, like I'm actually doing this behavior differently, so there's a different outcome, but the unhealthy behavior or the unhealthy striving cycle may be engaging in behaviors that are.

Short term rewarding, but not long-term satisfying. And [00:25:00] the way we can tell that is because we may be either rushing through our lives or going for like this sort of dopamine hit, which is very positive reinforcement, or we may be engaging in negatively reinforcing behaviors, which is where using our striving to avoid discomfort in the present moment.

So for some people. The reason why they work so much or why they strive for a different body or they strive to be the perfect parent is more about, I don't. Like

my life and it feels good to be in this striving doing mode. It does to actually feel the anxiety or the loneliness that's underneath the striving. And that is part of the reward part of this driving cycle. So we have cues and then we have the behavior, and then we have the reward of this short-term gratification, number of likes and followers, right in our modern world, but also the negative reinforcement of striving, which is, uh, Really experiential [00:26:00] avoidance. And we're talking about act experientially, avoiding our lives by rushing through or working really hard through

Debbie Sorensen: act daily journal by Diana Hill and Debbie Sorensen is coming out on may. First. It's available to pre-order now at barnesandnoble.com or you can link to it through drdianahill.com or through our podcast webpage. if you want to learn more about act daily and how to use act in your daily life. There's a lot of offerings that I have coming up in April and may.

Diana Hill: I'll be offering a virtual workshop on compassion and act and that's for the general public through inside LA on April 25th.

And then

I'm going to be doing some live book signings outside masked at a distance at some of my favorite places around Santa Barbara on May 1st, I'll be in Summerland at the sacred space, doing a book signing from two to four, and then May 2nd, I'll be at yoga soup, doing a book signing from two to four in Santa Barbara.

So [00:27:00] you can check out more on my events page at Dr. Diana hill.com.

Diana Hill: thing that comes to mind too, is like, I think that the unhealthy striving cycle really crops up in parenting. And I think part of it is. Avoiding the fears that we're not doing a good enough job on behalf of our kids. I think another part of it is like wanting to belong that you see other parents doing certain things and you want to be a part of the community.

Yael Schonbrun: And we worry that we or our children won't be a part of it. And so there's that pressure to kind of follow along with what everybody else is doing and that it really takes some of that solid self-analysis that willingness to look at your own. Values and what's important to you, and then what's not important to you and get comfortable with the fact that you might not fit in perfectly. If you follow your own journey, instead of just joining whatever, what others might be doing.

Diana Hill: And the other part of it is that when you are [00:28:00] perfect or appear. Perfect. It's actually not connecting for folks. And this is actually one of the gifts of the pandemic, right? And I'll work on this a lot with clients where they'll talk about how it used to be.

They'd have to have their house perfect or their lives perfect for someone to come in and how with the pandemic, we just started seeing everyone's imperfections. We saw their messy houses.

Yael Schonbrun: I don't know, the zoom backgrounds can hide a lot of that.

Diana Hill: Yeah. Actually, it's, it's actually that imperfection, which obviously, which connects us. Right. And when we're striving to be someone other than who we are, it disconnects us. So that's part of the, um, the letting go, the effort and the surrender part of the surrender part is surrendering this ideal self that is out there.

That's different from who you are. And actually allowing people to love you, because when, when somebody loves you get sort of these two alternatives, [00:29:00] either someone loves the perfect version of you, , and then you're like, wait a minute. You don't really because you don't really know what's under here or you're working so hard to be perfect that people don't want to be around that. Right. It's actually, doesn't it doesn't

Yael Schonbrun: But can I just anecdote? Cause you and I recently, I recently made a big disclosure on our Slack channel where I said, sometimes I don't feel likable and that I deleted it, but you'd already seen it. And you reached out to me with the sweetest message and you said, you know, yet all the more I get to know you, the more I like you, which is so.

Counterintuitive to me. Cause I, you know, always try to present such a put together happy facade. But what you said was I liked the vulnerable parts of you and it is so hard to eat vulnerable, but the evidence really does suggest that when you open up, you can connect more deeply. I can connect more deeply to you.

For example.

Diana Hill: And then we can start to lean on [00:30:00] each other. More, and I think that's other, another gift of this, people are thinking about what they want to take away from what we've all just been through collectively. And this is actually not everyone's experience of the pandemic was the same. And it was, it was much harder for some people in terms of the challenges associated with the pandemic and.

I would say everyone has an opportunity to learn something from this past year and has, and has had to adapt in certain ways that didn't expect and has seen their limits. I was just reading through the APA stress in America study. You know, I keep a thumb on that.

And one year later we're seeing the impact of this chronic stress on us , uh, you know,

23% of adults are reporting, increased alcohol use to cope , but among parents of school-aged children, it was like 57% increase. It's like Whoa how am I to get through this thing? [00:31:00] Right. Uh, and then we also see, you know, people's sleep and all other things that have changed, but

Yael Schonbrun: and the more cracked teeth, more grinding.

Diana Hill: All of that. But what it also sort of revealed to us is. Where do I want to put my energy? And if we think about values as being a transmission of

energy, I mean, I'm interested in energy from like a yoga perspective, right? But this idea that living your values means taking your energy and putting in places. And a lot of us are thinking about time management and not having enough time. And, and that is true, but ultimately. Where are you placing your attention and your energy in your life and stepping into a healthier striving cycle. If we were to go back to that cycle of striving of there's a cue of behavior and reward, the cues will still continue to show up.

There will be moments where you don't feel likable or moments where your mind tells you that you're not likable. And that's just sort of in there from. Who knows why that started [00:32:00] for you, Alan. I wish I could take it away from you. I would because you're very likable and I like you, but I could tell you that a million times, and it's not going to make it go away.

Right. So, so that cue shows up. But rather than going into the behavior of, I'm going to delete this from Slack, you know, the avoidance behavior or the I'm going to work really, really hard to be likable, right? Both of those are unhealthy striving behaviors. And don't end up getting you what you really, the satisfaction, maybe of just being able to be fully you, you know, and be loved to see you are a healthier striving cycle would be okay.

I'm having that thought that I'm unlikable. And how do I want to, where do I wanna put my energies? How do I want to connect with people? What are my values here that are showing up and then acting on those values and then really letting go of the results, but also, as I've been saying more and more, you are not a work in progress. You are a [00:33:00] life in process and letting yourself be that life that is in process that sometimes has the thought I'm unlikable. And it's painful for you and actually by you telling me that it makes me like you even more that you've had that thought.

Yael Schonbrun: Much more relatable, I guess.

Diana Hill: Yeah. And next year kind of likable.

Yael Schonbrun: There's so much, there's so many paradoxes within the world of psychology. Everything feels kind of backwards sometimes because it is true that the more you sort of show the parts of yourself that you'll unsavory, the more people can connect in. So there is this really, um, Counterintuitive feature of the human mind and emotions that, that we need to really pay attention to because our mind doesn't want to believe it, but, but the evidence is to the contrary.

Diana Hill: and I think there's also work to be done around when we step into a healthier striving cycle to help it stick. And part of [00:34:00] that is when you are engaging in. A new behavior. Like now you have, okay. When my unlikeable thought shows up, I'm actually going to show my vulnerability and reach out to a friend or, , connect with somebody, to help heal my striving cycle around that, the reward won't necessarily be a short term spike in dopamine, but how do we help ourselves really feel satisfied? Part of that is downloading and savoring the experience of living your values. And that's where this real marriage between act and neuroscience and contemplative wisdom happens, which is we can.

Turn towards our values and also savor and remind ourselves, this is what's important to me. This is how I want to be in the world. I'm downloading and getting embodied of what it feels like in my body to live my values, which is a different place because unhealthy striving can be very much in the head, whereas values, [00:35:00] which striving comes more from the heart and from an inner knowing. Of this is how I want to be in the world. And it's like a long exhale of letting go of having to work so hard to be something other than you are.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. I mean that. That clarification of values is one of my favorite parts of acceptance and commitment therapy, because it, it really does just provide such a useful compass. And I wonder is it okay if I read this poem from the doubt of Pooh by Benjamin Hoff, that I think really embodies this orientation towards self knowledge so that you can live a healthier, a healthier striving kind of life.

And it goes as follows out. Can you get very far, if you don't know who you are? How can you do what you art, if you don't know what you've got, and if you don't know which to do of all the things in front of you, then what you'll have when you are through is just a mess without a clue of all the [00:36:00] best that can come true.

If you know what enrich and who weight

Diana Hill: . We've had a number of guests on the show that we've been inspired by, and that are offering you our listeners discounts on their programs. If you go to our website offtheclockpsych.com, you'll be able to find coupon codes for the programs of Dr. Judson Brewer, Dr. Rick Hanson and Jen Lumenlun. So go check it out at, offtheclockpsych.com and start learning today.

I love that. And it's, you know, it's, it's self-study and then it's also truthfulness, which is one of the yamas. Which is not only getting that self study of what's true for you, but then also being truthful in the world around you. And sometimes that's really difficult because going back to graduate school, and for me in the field of academia, it's uncomfortable sometimes where when you feel like what's true for you, doesn't match [00:37:00] the environments that you're in. And it's, it's hard to pursue that actually the origins of the word strive, come, come from the word to battle. And when we're in unhealthy striving, we're battling against ourselves and we're battling against the present moment. But when we're in healthy striving, we're battling for what we care about and that's different. So whether you care about. Your kid and really battling for your kid or you care about balance in the workplace and you're battling for that, or maybe you care about your health and you're really gonna like, like carve out some time to make sure I can I break in a walk today and I'm going to battle for that, or you're battling against inequity and oppression, whatever it is, that's important to you to battle for that's what healthy striving is.

And it's a different kind of battle and effort that effortless effort. And I think that it starts with self study starts with mapping out your striving [00:38:00] cycle, and then it's taking these sort of small moves towards something that you know, is, is right for you. And for me, it's been a whole lifetime of that because I can get caught.

Over and over and over again, when my vulnerabilities show up, I mean, right now I'm launching a book. Or even putting myself into social media, which I have. There's a reason why I have not been on social media up until six months ago or however long ago. Now this whole period of my life, because.

What do you think would be a really big cue for someone that's a recovering striver slash had an eating disorder, right? Social media. Yeah. And so I'm trying to enter into these environments in a different way, in a way that stays to the best of my ability, aligned with what I care about and who I am and not get caught up. And it's hard. I mean, it's, this is challenging.

Yael Schonbrun: So social media is obviously a cue, but I'm just curious, [00:39:00] like, what are your red flags for when you're falling into the unhealthy pattern? And then what do you do? Like, what are some of the practices that work best for you? Can you share those and, and that helped you move more into the healthy form of striving.

Diana Hill: For me unhealthy striving, I, I just start working and I make a lot of mistakes because I'm putting out so much. And then I also start to have this narrowed focus where I don't see people around me that are really important to me, and I don't take the time for them. And that is so out of aligned. Like when you have with what I want to be and how I want to be in the world. So I won't slow down and take a breath to be with my partner. And, so we live in this Canyon where there's a lot of Hawks and one of the things that my partner will do now that we're in the pandemic and we're home and we're working side by side is he'll say [00:40:00] Danna, there's a red tail, hot come outside and look and.

For a long time, I would just kind of like, okay, fine. I'm, you know, I'm going to like finish this note and then I go out there and it would be gone. Right. And I think that during the pandemic, and even in my unhealthy striving, I started to realize that. Going and being with him is a bid for connection.

John Gottman's work. And it's probably the most important part of my day because when I rewind and look at what was most important and meaningful in my day, it isn't about some kind of work accomplished. It's about my relationships. It's about taking care of my self and having some quiet time in my garden.

So for me, Those are my signs of unhealthy striving and, and what I'm practicing more is. And what's really important to me when I get caught up in unhealthy striving is to do a few things. One is to [00:41:00] carve out time, to do my own reflection and spiritual practice. And one of the things that I did during the pandemic was starting to go back to my chanting.

Spending time every morning, learning Sanskrit and learning chance. And so for me, that's what that does is it just focuses my mind and chance are always done in a way that, um, you're chatting to a part of yourself that you want to grow. , so that's part of it. And then really trying to step into a space of feeling interconnected of.

Noticing what's around me noticing what's important to me and being in that space as much as I can, even when things feel stressful, not feeling like I have to hold it all up alone. And that's a lot of what I've learned from, I think my own practices around contemplative practice, but really Non [00:42:00] Western models of psychology that are more about that.

Yael Schonbrun: I think what you offer to this. Area of study. The study of striving is so powerful because you have this really deep, personal history that has been at times quite painful with striving, but you also have such a profound knowledge of science and Eastern philosophy. And, you know, but you're, you know, deep in the modern Western world.

And I think it's so powerful to be able to look at striving through that lens. And I'm so glad that you're able to share that. I hope that, um, people are getting a lot out of this information and I hope you continue to dive into it.

So maybe we can end Diana with you offering us an exercise around striving.

Diana Hill: So I have a fun experiential exercise that we could do. Yeah. Al and, one of the things that we noticed that when we're in our drive cycle is that I mentioned for myself, Our attention [00:43:00] narrows, and we tend to become more egocentric and we tend to activate more of the, sort of the middle parts along from the front of your front of your brain to your back or the default mode network.

One of the ways to get us driving is to, , activate more of a spacious awareness. Interconnection and being present in the life that you're in, which would be activating more of the lateral parts of your brain and less egocentric. So we're going to do the little exercise to help with that.

And this exercise just is, as you mentioned, this intersection between act and, actually to that in Buddhist practice that I learned from, and that's not. So I'd like for you to take your two hands and make them into two circles as if they are, um, like binoculars that you could hold up to your eyes.

And as you hold them up to your eyes, imagine that you're caught in one of the self stories. That's a negative or positive self story about yourself. When you're caught in striving, do you have one y'all that we could use with this

Yael Schonbrun: Well, I can go right to my I'm unlikable story.

[00:44:00] **Diana Hill:** I'm unlikable. Okay. So when you are in the unlikable story, this is what it feels like having these goggles up to your eyes. And what do you notice about your vision and your periphery?

Yael Schonbrun: Well, I'm recording from my closet studios so I can barely see my flannel. My vision is obstructed. I only um, exactly what's in front of me, as opposed to being able to capture images in my peripheral vision.

Diana Hill: So you have this narrowed focus when you're caught in the unlikable self story. And then what I'd like you to do is just move your hands away from

you. And now you have your two circled hands in front of you, and maybe you can even imagine, Oh, we've gotten some space from the self story. And now we have the right hand, which is.

I'm unlikable, but we have the left hand, which is, I am likable. So to Stuart smiley, I'm good enough. I'm smart enough. And gosh, darn it. People like me. So now look down at your two hands. And, and what do [00:45:00] you notice now **Yael Schonbrun:** Yeah. So my, what I can capture through my vision is much broader. I can see my hands where I couldn't really see my hands before they were just obstructing the view, but I can also see more of my flannel.

Diana Hill: And you may also notice that with your hands in front of you, that I'm likable to the right, or that I'm not likable to left. You may have to like choose one to look at or choose the other to look at. And, and that your hands are still occupied. Right? And you were like, your vision is still focused in front of you with these hands.

And what I actually want you to do is I want you to slowly move those hands apart to the side as if you are peeling apart. Your story, creating space, your hands are moving to the side and you're expanding your periphery awareness. Your eyes are still sort of gently focused forward, but your periphery is expanding.

So it almost goes to the side and three 60 behind you all the way to your back. And then you can just let your hands go and let them land wherever they're going to land. And you stand with [00:46:00] an expansive awareness of you. All around you to the room around you connected still with your heart, with you present.

So it's sort of, you can feel yourself present here, but also expanded to a greater whole. And then I'd like for you to look up at me and keep that expansive awareness. And now what do you notice about sort of the self story that's in your hands, but also your experience?

So it's exactly what you described earlier, where the narrowing broadens out and you feel less. Focused on the story, even though the stories are still there, that you can allow them to be, but also take in connection to another person, to the broader room around you. Yeah. And if it's just a small closet can have a sense of your body within that space.

And so it really is sort of a movement from very narrow and restricted to kind of broad and open. And open-hearted it's, you can feel it. [00:47:00]

Yeah. And that's what we'll talk about. Like sitting at the back of our heart. Like sitting at the back of your heart. Right. So you can open and expand, be in a greater place of connection and then use your hands from there, or use your hands and feet from there. And that's effortless effort.

Right that it's like, Oh, okay. Now I can go about my life. Yeah. We didn't cut off your hands. We didn't tie them behind your back. We didn't make them do like fancy things. We just let them be. But then gave you a little bit more room for you to be you, even with this story. About you. So that's an example is sort of a more experiential, one of how to step into a healthier striding cycle, but I've talked a lot about the striving cycle in my Tuesday teachings.

And every Tuesday night I do this mashup. It's like, Trail mix of a little bit of that, of this and a little bit of that. Um, where I give a talk that's related to act and often incorporates neuroscience and contemplative wisdom. We do a little bit of movement because [00:48:00] I really believe in embodiment and getting into our bodies.

It's not movement to become necessarily physically flexible to be, but movement for psychological flexibility. And I incorporate what I'm teaching into the movement. And it's movement for all bodies at all levels. And then we do a meditation or a set. And I actually, if you sign up for my Tuesday talks, you get a recording of all of these, and I've done some meditations on that little expansive awareness thing that we did.

I've done a longer meditation of that recently. And you can download that through my website, through the teachings section there.

Yael Schonbrun: Which is free. Am I right?

Diana Hill: it's free. Yeah. Not everyone can pay for therapy . And so I'm trying to offer free teachings and a lot of different ways so that we can get these words of act and also get access to not psychological care, but just sort of some additional resources for people, especially right now, when many of us are having a hard time.

Yael Schonbrun: Well, thank you so much for having this conversation with me. It was, it was a very powerful one, especially as, as a [00:49:00] striver myself, as so many of us are an a again, just think that the work that you're doing in this area is incredible. And I can't wait to continue to follow what you, what you offer here.

Diana Hill: And thank you for being one of my most likable friends and colleagues. Thanks. Y'all.

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