

# 341. Self-Forgiveness with Grant Dewar

[00:00:00] **Grant Dewar:** this is where the skills of compassion come in to allow suffering to be there and to sit with it rather than trying to block it out or suppress it, medicate it, avoid it, do all that sort of stuff. If, if we allow ourselves to have a compassionate presence with our own experience but to allow that suffering to be there without trying to heal it in the first instance, without trying to make it go away, that has its own allowance of the healing process to occur without forcing it.

[00:00:37] **Debbie Sorensen:** That was grant dewar on psychologist off the clock. We are four experts in psychology here to bring you cutting edge and science based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships, work, and health.

I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, a clinical psychologist practicing in Mile High, Denver, Colorado, and author of Act for Burnout, Act Daily Journal, and the Act Daily Card Deck.

[00:01:08] **Emily Edlynn:** From America's Heartland, I'm Dr. Emily Edlynn a clinical psychologist based in Chicago, Illinois, and author of Autonomy Supportive Parenting.

[00:01:16] **Michael Herold:** Calling in from Vienna, Austria. I'm Michael Herold, ACT coach, confidence trainer, and author of an upcoming book on being a better conversationalist and making friends.

[00:01:25] **Jill Stoddard:** And from coastal New England, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard, author of Be Mighty, The Big Book of Act Metaphors, and Impostor No More.

[00:01:32] **Emily Edlynn:** We hope you take what you learned here to build a rich and meaningful life.

[00:01:36] **Michael Herold:** Thank you for listening to Psychologists Off The Clock.

[00:01:44] **Debbie Sorensen:** Hi, everyone. This is Debbie, and I'm bringing you an interview today with Grant Dewar, who wrote The Self Forgiveness

Workbook. And I'm here with Michael today, who actually, I think, may be a little bit, uh What's the word? Are you mad at me or

[00:01:58] **Michael Herold:** Furious, I'm fuming.

[00:02:00] **Debbie Sorensen:** up? I think we all, uh, have met Grant before and adore Grant, at least Jill and Michael and I have. And we all saw the news about his book on self forgiveness, which is really an important contribution. And before I even checked in with the team, I kind of got the ball rolling on an interview. Michael, how did you feel about that?

[00:02:20] **Michael Herold:** Well, I, Grant, uh, got in touch with me as well, uh, talking about his book, telling me about his book. And I was like, oh, Grant, this, this is a great topic. I love this topic. Like, we should have you on Psychologists Off the Clock. And, and before I even knew it. Uh, before he even could reply, I already saw him on the editorial calendar and that he was scheduled with Debbie.

I was like, this is like, uh, some, some of our guests on the podcast, they're a bit like, um, uh, concert tickets to the Backstreet Boys. It's like, you better be really fast or someone else grabs them. So I'm, I'm honored that I can at least, uh, do the co host intro with you today about, uh, our mutual friend.

[00:03:04] **Debbie Sorensen:** yeah, it must be nice to be in such high demand, and it's also pointing to maybe we need to have a better process for checking with each

[00:03:11] **Michael Herold:** We just need more grants. Yeah,

[00:03:14] **Debbie Sorensen:** Yes, and I do think, um, you know, speaking of wishing we had more grants in the world, I think that this is a lovely conversation, because grant, you know, this topic of self forgiveness, I think, is maybe one that people struggle with, sometimes without even realizing it, sometimes they do realize it.

Maybe they're holding themselves in a place of guilt or shame or self blame or self criticism. Um, and Grant is so genuine, I think, in the way he talks about this and talks about his own personal experience. And I actually think, you know, just having the chance to talk to him and bring him on the podcast, um, he really shares, I think, a depth of wisdom that both come from his own experience.

The world, which you'll hear a little bit about and also from this work on self-forgiveness that he's been doing for many years. And so I think he's seen a lot of different versions of this through his work.

[00:04:07] **Michael Herold:** Yea, this was definitely one of those interviews that, uh, needs, at least for me, uh, needs listening more than once. There are so many, uh, insights in there and so many nuggets and so many, uh, lessons he talks about that kind of like clicked with me, but at the same time, I was like, I need to go back and listen to that again because I think I missed half of the wisdom.

That was, was in them.

[00:04:35] **Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah. Well, I think one thing that's really interesting about self forgiveness that Grant just kind of throws this in there somewhere is that there's sort of this idea of pseudo self forgiveness, right?

So, there's a lot of misconception around it, I think, in the popular way that we talk about both forgiveness of others and forgiveness of ourselves, it's, it feels almost like this, oh, just, you know. Forgive and forget. Move on. Um, I know we recently did an episode with Robin Walser as well that was more on forgiving others.

It was anger and forgiveness. And it's so much more complicated than that. And it's such a process that unfolds over time. And I think it's much more nuanced than that. And I actually think Grant really captures that well. That some of our Ideas about how self forgiveness works are probably not really up for the task.

[00:05:28] **Michael Herold:** yeah, I think there's this idea that self forgiveness is a little bit of a switch that you're flipping. So you make the decision and then yeah, you know, I'll forgive myself and then it's done. And for me, one of the big takeaways of this interview was that self forgiveness is not easy. It's complex. It's almost like, uh, something that needs to be trained and trained and trained again to get good at it and to get, like, okay, now let me remind myself that I've actually forgiven myself about this and here is why and then come back to, that was a big takeaway for me.

I remember I had a mentor a couple of years ago who talked about, uh, dealing with grief and, and, and forgiveness. And it's like, okay, so first you try this, then you try that. And if that doesn't work, then you just forgive yourself. And it never sat right with me. It's like, I don't think that works because it didn't work for me ever.

It's like, I don't think it's that simple. And, and Grant beautifully illustrates why it's not simple and what to do instead.

[00:06:28] **Debbie Sorensen:** Well, and I think especially for people who are either shame prone or really highly self critical, that, uh, that's just not gonna, that's not gonna fly. And I, I do think that some, you know, sometimes that idea, Oh, just forgive yourself, move on. It's like, well, yeah, that's not really how the human mind works, so.

If only, but that's,

[00:06:49] **Michael Herold:** If only.

[00:06:51] **Debbie Sorensen:** and I mean life is hard. I think Grant talks about, you know, we're always making choices all the time and we're gonna make mistakes and we're not gonna get it right all the time. But even just recognizing that, right? Usually if we feel like we're feeling guilty or self critical or experiencing regret I think that usually, you know, we're doing the best we can and it's really easy to look back on things and say, oh, I wish I would have done this differently or that differently. But we sometimes are almost forgetting how difficult it is and how in the moment, sure, we make mistakes or we don't always get it right.

Or we're making really hard choices and something's got to give on one side or the other.

[00:07:28] **Michael Herold:** And towards the end of the episode, Grant also talks about how self forgiveness can actually illuminate the things that are important to us. And that was certainly a lightbulb moment for me as well. It's like, whoa, there's something to be learned from the things that I have to forgive myself for. So make sure you stay until the end of the episode because I can promise you it's worth it.

[00:07:55] **Debbie Sorensen:** Yes. And we hope that you enjoy the episode and take out some of these nuggets of wisdom from Grant.

My guest today, Grant Dewar, is a life educator work, health and safety advisor and trainer from Adelaide South Australia. He has a master's degree focused on adult education and a doctorate in researching the science of self-forgiveness as a tool for lifelong learning.

His work in the community, public service, and later in life as a health professional have helped him to develop research and apply his work on self-forgiveness. He's the author of the Self-Forgiveness Workbook, mindfulness and Compassion Skills To Overcome Self Blame and Find True Acceptance. And Grant, you have a new business called an Open Conversation.

Can you tell us a little bit about what you're doing?

[00:08:45] **Grant Dewar:** Yeah, look, I've gone back to my education roots and in researching this book on self-forgiveness, what I've found is that there's a over overemphasize emphasis these days on. Making our difficulties and problems into things that require therapy or diagnosis. Um, and there's sort of this disease medical model around what is in fact natural human responses to very difficult questions.

Um, my philosophy is based on that everyone has their own particular life path. Everyone is, you know, a, a unique miracle. Everyone has a particular path of learning that is theirs and theirs alone. And what I've found is that the tools of self-forgiveness help unlock the great life lessons that people are learning and apply them to what is a meaningful and purposeful life. So that's, my basic philosophy is to use the, um, skills that we both know, and you talk about a lot on the podcast, which is the science of behavior in context. And just to get people to step back and look at the actions they've taken, what the context was at a particular time, how they responded to that context, and how there are alternatives to that.

And sometimes, you know, people get stuck in repeated patterns because life hits us in all sorts of different ways. And if we can sort of step back and get some perspective on that, what is very useful is there's an education in that for the person that's their own textbook for their life.

[00:10:44] **Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah, I think that's actually a really nice, summary, I think, of what your work is in the book and, and how you approach it in the workbook, which people can go through answer questions too. To take a look at self forgiveness in their own life.

And I'm wondering if you could tell us a little bit, as I was reading through your book and also pulling together, you know, your bio, I was looking online to find out more about your history and, and what you do. Um, you mentioned a lot of twists and turn in your life pathway and it, it really felt to me like there was a personal note of how you ended up doing this particular type of work. So I was wondering if you could just tell us a little bit about how you ended up here.

[00:11:28] **Grant Dewar:** Well, I'll, give a bit of a, um, a warning. You know, my life was very dramatically affected by my father's suicide when I was aged 15. And that hooked me for a long, long while because I was the only member of the family still living with him at the time that he took that decision. And there was a lot of self blame, as a, uh

a young man, and I carried that really close for about 20 years until I was in my mid thirties. And then, my wife and I sought some counseling about relationship issues, and the counselor that we saw was a very wise woman, and noted that there's some interesting responses that I was giving.

And she sort of said, look, we need to deal with this issue about your father's suicide. And in fact, what had been going on for me is that I'd almost lived daily, weekly, monthly, certainly with my own demons around self harm. And the thing that sort of kept me afloat was having a loving family responsibilities to two young boys at the time, um, and my wife.

And that sort of was my lifeline. But nevertheless, I was always dealing with this issue around self blame around my father's death. And, um, part of my father's journey was he was in a place where he's being sort of shifted around in his workplace in a way that he didn't like, his marriage had just broken down.

Um, he was not in a happy place and all these things sort of came together for him. And I was interested in sort of saying, okay, well if people are having these sort of setbacks, are they being affected in a way that might make them make poor decisions about the way they take their life? And so I was interested in this process. And then I sort of came across acceptance and commitment therapy in those studies, and I've seen how useful that is in dealing with people in, you know, general life experience, but also in workplace settings and in assisting both the person themselves and the people that are, are trying to assist them to better understand the way in which people can respond effectively to life setbacks and to, transform those setbacks into something that are actually useful, which is what I see as being the essence about self-forgiveness.

Is that, um. The, the thing that was a bit different about my PhD and the study of self-forgiveness, which I brought the elements of acceptance and commitment therapy to that, particular learning journey was that a lot of self-forgiveness literature is focused on people that do something bad to someone else

need to forgive themselves after they've gone through the process of restitution and restoration of that problem. But there wasn't much in the literature of what

we do when we do bad things to ourselves or allow bad things to happen or get involved in stuff that we shouldn't. And people sometimes have done nothing to hurt anyone else, but they will hold incredible bitterness and hatred and animosity towards themselves. And all of that can be very deeply buried. And you know, my experience with seeing a counselor about, communication problems in my marriage revealed just, you know, sort of the depths of burden that I was carrying. And I think okay, that's really opened my eyes about, what could be done to help people. If we look at the full journey around self-forgiveness is what story have I learned about myself? What is the benefit of that, and could that assist someone else in their journey? You know, not the whole answer. It's not suitable for everyone, but someone might benefit from knowing what I know and maybe their pathway towards a meaningful and purposeful life, we made a bit easier by knowing these bits of, um, of evidence that, uh, have been found out from that story.

Does that make sense, Debbie?

[00:16:00] **Debbie Sorensen:** It does, and there's a piece of it that I think I'm, I'm glad you mentioned a little bit, which. Is that sometimes, what would we call the opposite of self-forgiveness, like when people are in place of non-self forgiveness, if that makes sense.

[00:16:15] **Grant Dewar:** Yeah. Well,

[00:16:15] **Debbie Sorensen:** a place of self blame.

[00:16:18] **Grant Dewar:** yeah, well, I, I actually go back to the, they're hooked by a story,

[00:16:22] **Debbie Sorensen:** Okay. Yeah. So they're by a story by themselves. Yeah.

[00:16:26] **Grant Dewar:** right. And that has all sorts of stuff that, that hangs off it. You know, you can go from like ordinary household self-blame to absolute self-loathing and everything in between, you know.

[00:16:38] **Debbie Sorensen:** Absolutely. Yeah. I've noticed in my clinical practice that there is a big range. Sometimes it's something major, you know, some big event happened, maybe a moral violation or something that people feel really guilty about. I think in your book you write about moral injury.

We've had an episode on moral injury before, um, moral dilemmas or mistakes that cause harm, or actions that cause harm, but sometimes it's also much more minor. And I think that sometimes people miss self-forgiveness when it's some of those minor things like, oh, I wasn't you know, the best parent to my kids.

I hear that a lot in my practice. People really in a place of self blame around something, you know, you're doing the best you can as a parent, and 10 years later your kid's having a problem. And those types of things that I think maybe sometimes get overlooked in terms of blame and self-forgiveness.

[00:17:32] **Grant Dewar:** absolutely. In, in, in my experience, very minor things can have very major consequences, and so whatever the burden that people are carrying. You don't know what that is adding to or coming from, and it's might seem minor to us, but people make major decisions based on sometimes very, very scanned evidence.

Right? And so I, I, take everyone's experience seriously, and because one of my things that I've learned is life is, is never want to walk in anyone else's shoes. You just don't know the paths they've trodden both internally and in their real world life. You know, people all carry certain things, so, yeah.

So the what is minor and what is major, it's not for us in terms of this care position. We have to judge. Okay. It's up to that person to think about what's the importance of the message of this story and is it actually serving them effectively? And the thing is, we can hold ourselves to extreme levels of account. In this parenting thing, I, I remember I saw one person once that had, um, an issue with regards to communication in their marriage and they're saying, oh yeah, we, um, my wife and I are fighting all the time. And I said, uh, you know, well, can you describe what all the time means?

Oh, you know, at least once a month we have a disagreement. You think? Okay, that's not. It doesn't sound too bad. And then I said, okay, well look, uh, let's just look at how you've seen issues resolved in marriage before. How did your mom and dad get on? Oh, they never argued. And you think, okay,

[00:19:30] **Debbie Sorensen:** Hmm.

[00:19:32] **Grant Dewar:** they had a lovely home, but there was no process ever that demonstrated how to resolve a problem for that person.

And so you can say these people were perfect parents, but the issue is because there was never any ructions, either things were solved behind closed doors, or



they were buried. That young man had never seen a problem resolved. And so he was carrying this burden that, you know, he was like this somehow a failure in his relationship because two people trying to get along, were having disagreements And so while his parents might've thought they did a perfect job of raising this person. There was some real skills that were lacking for them in the way they resolve problems in their, in their life.

So you just never know what a major problem is and what a minor problem is. We don't know how our parenting contributes to issues, and one of the things I, I love about Jill's work about the imposter syndrome, is that we have such incredibly high standards put upon us, particularly in the parenting game, and that's evident in social media.

It's evident in the blogging community around, you know, parenting and so forth, and people can have such high standards that they place upon themselves that any, um, infraction against those high standards. And they've got this imposter syndrome that's sitting on their shoulder. You know, I'm not a good parent.

I'm not worthy to be, you know, a partner. Um, I, um, I'm a complete failure because I haven't done X, Y, and z that's in the mummy blocks, you know,

[00:21:23] **Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah.

[00:21:24] **Grant Dewar:** so we just dunno what burdens people carry. And what I'm doing with this open conversation is allowing people to have a space to tell their story without it being prejudged to be open, interested, and curious about whatever that story is.

[00:21:42] **Debbie Sorensen:** Well, I think this speaks to how often you know, we come up with or we have these standards that they can be culturally driven or just based on our history, our experience. We may not even realize sometimes that we have them or that we're in that space of, Holding ourself to a standard or blaming ourselves for not getting it just right.

And actually sometimes when I've talked to clients about self-forgiveness, and it sounds like you had a similar experience yourself Grant with that couple's therapist you were talking about. Sometimes I raised that and people had never thought about that that way because they think, they weren't even realizing that that was going on.

They just thought, well, of course this is my fault, or I did this wrong or something, or I made the wrong decision. How would, so let's imagine there's a listener out there who is, interested in this, so they're listening, but they may not be aware of it. in your, clinical experience, what would be maybe an indicator that self-forgiveness is called for with someone?

How would you know it if it was there, regardless of what the actual action was they're stuck on.

[00:22:49] **Grant Dewar:** Yeah. Yeah, so I think self forgiveness is a useful tool and it's it's, it's not the be all and end all, but it's when people are holding themselves to account in a way that is no longer useful.

[00:23:07] **Debbie Sorensen:** Hmm.

[00:23:08] **Grant Dewar:** Right. So for example, one of the people that features in my book was raised in a particular cultural background that was requiring women to be very respectful, To be, you know, good for the family, uh, and to take notice of the leadership of men, right?

[00:23:31] **Debbie Sorensen:** Mm-Hmm.

[00:23:32] **Grant Dewar:** And one of the problems caused by that was when, of course, an abusive person came on the scene and use those particular, um, moral requirements of that culture use it, in an abusive way. Now, what did the person do? They said, I must have done something wrong because I, I mustn't have been good enough according to the cultural standard.

[00:24:00] **Debbie Sorensen:** Mm.

[00:24:00] **Grant Dewar:** And at the time that we had our conversation about where they're heading in their life, they had a, um, a, a marriage that was not working for them. And the issues about should I be doing something about leaving this marriage when that doesn't accord with my cultural standards and that, you know, I've been a bad person because I obviously wasn't good enough in that circumstance to be treated respectfully and they're carrying all this stuff from the past that doesn't actually relate to what's going on in the present, but they're being informed by that story about they must stay, they must be good. Um, they should sort of double down on being respectful and that sort of thing when they weren't being respected themselves.

[00:24:54] **Debbie Sorensen:** Hmm mm-Hmm.

[00:24:55] **Grant Dewar:** They're, they're holding themselves to an unreasonable level of accountability because they're stuck in a story from the past.

[00:25:05] **Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah.

[00:25:07] **Grant Dewar:** in order to make a clear decision about what was right now, it's about untangling that story they're carrying about themselves in the past. And allowing themselves to let that go by process of forgiving themselves.

And look, what often happens is that once we are carrying a story, that that is that powerful. We're doing lots of things in our lives that either we comply with that view of ourselves, or sometimes we're trying to break outta that view of ourselves and doing things that are equally distressing if we are not

open with ourselves about what this is that we're, we're dealing with. And so this is the first step that I see in this journey is about knowing what this story is and being fully present with it, and understanding that there's, there's a power in that story that isn't about being ill.

It's not about actually requiring therapy as such. It's about knowing that there's a story that has its own power trying to uncover the power of that story.

[00:26:19] **Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah, and your very first chapter I think helps people identify that story and be aware of it. And you kind of go through some writing prompts because it's a workbook and you go through some writing to help people because sometimes with those stories we don't even see them as stories.

And so I think that's an important piece of it. And then also just taking a look at, you know, are you holding yourself to this extreme accountability where it's causing some sort of issue in your life, and it's not, I think it's a really important point you're making, that it's not necessarily the case that people will end up feeling like, oh no, I don't think about this at all, or, this doesn't impact me at all.

It's more, you know, if it's keeping you stuck, if you're perseverating on it to a point where it's making it hard to move forward. Is that right?

[00:27:08] **Grant Dewar:** Yeah. Yeah, exactly. And for example, sometimes people aren't very clear about what this story is, but people will put to me, oh

look, I'm in the middle of a conversation with a good friend and all of a sudden. Um, this thing over overwhelms me and I can't move forward. I, I, I can't deal with whatever that conversation's about.

And what I'll do with them in this conversation is to say, look, um, there's, there's obviously something with power in this process that you're going through. If you just sit in a present moment with that experience that you're having, what does that remind you of? If you have that embodied experience, what's the first thing that comes up for you when you actually allow yourself to be present with that story, that's, that might be a physical story within your body. You know? It could be the palpitations in your heart. It could be you, your shoulders feel locked. It could be your head starts spinning, you know? What does that remind you of? Where does that take you to? And often that will then, if they are sitting with that, that will reveal. Experience. Oh, that reminds me of when I saw my parents arguing and, um, you know, people coming to blows. Uh, and I get this sudden experience of overwhelming need to hide. That's, that's where I'm going. Okay. So what's that story? Oh, if we allow that story to be told, it's the little child that never felt they had a place in their home because the parents were so, you know, busy working through their emotional issues.

They were never present for their child. Right. Oh. That's what's informing me when I'm having a disagreement with a friend. Okay, so if we, if we then allow that story of that child to be present and all the stuff that you've done to compensate for that or to avoid it and then allow that to be its own story, and this is where the skills of compassion come in to allow suffering to be there and to sit with it rather than trying to block it out or suppress it, medicate it, avoid it, do all that sort of stuff. If, if we allow ourselves to have a compassionate presence with our own experience to, but to allow that suffering to be there without trying to heal it at the first, in the first instance, without trying to make it go away, that has its own allowance of the healing process to occur without forcing it. I dunno if you know anything about Carl Rogers.

[00:30:12] **Debbie Sorensen:** Oh yes, I remember, yeah. In graduate school studying some of his

work.

[00:30:18] **Grant Dewar:** But the, you know, he, his basic philosophy informs so much of what we do these days, and his basic philosophy was it's only when a person is accepted as they are without requirement to change, the change can then occur.

[00:30:37] **Debbie Sorensen:** Oh, that's one of my favorite quotes.

[00:30:39] **Grant Dewar:** Exactly. well, I'm, what I'm saying is that we have to be able to do that for ourselves. We, we have to be able to turn that inwards and be able to accept ourselves just as we are without a requirement for change in the first instance, to allow us to suffer and to explore what that suffering is trying to reveal to us is part of this process. Now

you know, and I'll just say that these, these steps are all things that can be entered into any stage of this story. You can go into this, into one of the, the processes in this book, and, and you can find uses for it doesn't have to be like step one, step two, step three, these are all ways into the process of self-forgiveness, because basically what we're trying to do in, in self-forgiveness is to try and restore our capacity to function in the world.

To make things as it was before, consider ourselves to be like a newborn baby who needs to learn how to walk. Um, you know, that will only come after they've lived for a few months. Uh, you know, possibly up to a year and so forth. And they've gotta be able to, you know, sort of get up and toddle and, you know, lean on things and fall over.

And we've gotta allow ourselves a space of exploration. And that's what forgiveness is, is we, we, we get so bound up in the stiff inflexible non adaptable ways have been because we get caught up in stories, and partly what we've gotta do is, is return ourselves to a state, if you like, of innocence, and to examine what is the, the pathway, even though we stumble through it.

What's the pathway through this?

[00:32:35] **Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah. And it absolutely is a process, right? I mean, it's not really the case that people say, okay, I've forgiven myself. This is, you know, closed book here. It's, it doesn't quite work like that. It's, you know, you have all these different components of it. You're talking about self, self-compassion, and some of these other processes.

And I think it's a lifelong process. Often. I mean, maybe eventually it will ease up a little bit with practice, but it's, yeah, it's. It's

[00:33:04] **Grant Dewar:** Well

[00:33:05] **Debbie Sorensen:** process in

[00:33:06] **Grant Dewar:** this is an interesting thing in the, in that what I've, I've learned in, um, work, health and safety is that every solution that you give to a problem then becomes a problem in itself, right? So, you know, you, you, you get, um, some sort of new technology entered the workplace to get rid of a problem, okay?

The issue is that you then have to maintain that new solution. You then have to train people on it. You have to make sure that people don't damage themselves with that new solution. Right? every time we enter into a new phase of our life, we have a new challenge. So I see self-forgiveness as a useful tool in which to respond to what life brings.

[00:33:53] **Debbie Sorensen:** Hmm.

[00:33:55] **Grant Dewar:** So that it's, it's just one of those things that we pull out of the box, say, okay, am I stuck in something that doesn't relate to what I'm doing now? How do I do a process that might assist with that? So, for example, um, self-forgiveness I've found doesn't just apply, for example, to failure or moral injury or whatever. Sometimes. People who succeed need to forgive themselves. So I dunno if you've heard about the, uh, the dilemma of the gold medal, the dilemma of the silver medal and the dilemma of the, bronze medal. Have you, have you heard of those, Deb?

[00:34:34] **Debbie Sorensen:** Is, is this the one where the silver medalist is the least? Is that what you're

[00:34:39] **Grant Dewar:** Yeah. Well let, well let there, there's, there's three issues. The gold medalist. Sometimes think, will I ever be this good ever again? The silver medalist is first loser, but the bronze medalist can be, wow, I didn't get a silver or a gold, but I beat everyone else. Right? And, and yet those three people are still the people in the podium and yet each will have their own issues with their level of success,

[00:35:15] **Debbie Sorensen:** Mm-Hmm. Yeah.

[00:35:16] **Grant Dewar:** And we will find that in our lives that, you know, even if we're at the peak of our business acumen and that sort of thing, can I keep myself at this level?

Will I be able to have the people that will support me? Will people change in the way they approach me? And, and you find this with people who find fame and fortune through various means that all of a sudden their relationship with

strangers changes their relationship with people they know changes. You know, wealth can bring its own torches.

Um, and we see this, you know, for example with lottery winners and that sort of thing, that unfortunately there's a lot of people that will, um, make poor decisions when they're given money and end off end up worse than they were before those winnings. So. Success has its own traps and pitfalls, as does failures.

And so I see that the, the usefulness of self-forgiveness is to give us a way in which to examine those things that we're carrying that aren't useful for the present moment and what we're actually facing. So, going back to. Oh, I forgive myself, and it's done.

In the self-forgiveness literature, they talk about pseudo self-forgiveness, which is, oh, that wasn't so important. I'm gonna let that go. Now that's good. If it wasn't important, and it can be let go. It's not good if it was important and you can't let it go, but you're just pretending you're letting it go.

[00:36:59] **Debbie Sorensen:** No, I think that's a really good point and also, I wouldn't even argue that you have your chapter on values and how sometimes, when we're not acting according to our values, it can reveal something about what's really important to us.

And so if you dismiss it easily, too easily and say. Okay, I'm moving on. I'm done with this. You know, there's almost a missed opportunity there to reflect and to learn something and to grow as a person, you can maybe shut it down too quickly, and that's not necessarily the goal either. It's to move on from it as quickly as possible without pausing to reflect.

Right.

[00:37:35] **Grant Dewar:** Well, once again, one of my learnings from Work Health and safety is that if a problem exists and it's not dealt with, once the same conditions occur in your life, it's a hundred percent likely to reoccur. So if you haven't dealt with the predisposing issues with what's led up to that, with those things that have all accumulated to, to bring you to that point, haven't been dealt with, it's gonna happen again.

And so this is one of the, the uses when we do perspective taking and perspective taking might be like if I looked at this particular problem, if I was five years older and I hadn't dealt with it, and it happens again, what would I

feel like in five years time if I hadn't dealt with it now? So, if I was my best friend looking at my behavior, what would my best friend tell me? So we, we, we step outside and we look at issues that we're dealing with, right? And have different ways of looking at it. You know, how is this like something else? How is this like something I see other people doing that I don't like? So there's all sorts of different techniques of perspective taking in behavioral, um, science, and that's really useful.

Now, the. If it's telling us something about what we don't like, that in itself has a value attached to it. If we don't like something, it's usually because there's a value base in that. I don't like, you know when when I get snippy, I treat people rudely. And I really feel disgusted with my own behavior when I'm doing that.

Okay. So the snappiness might come from being raised in a, in a, um, a family where you are always criticized, okay? And if you are being criticized. And you don't like the way that's happening and you treat the person rudely like you treated your big sister, you know, when you were growing up, you know you're caught in that story, right?

There is a value in that, and that is, oh, there's a couple of values. Number one, you might want to be respected. Number two, you want, might want to be heard. You might want what you say to be listened to and taken into account. So there are values in each of those things, and then if you actually understand what those values are, that then becomes the point to which to deal with yourself and say, okay, you've got this story.

You respond rudely when that story overwhelms you. But what is it you really want? And you want to be asked to be treated respectfully. You wanna ask to be listened to and you want what you say, the content of it to be given some reflective effort by the person that's talking.

[00:40:52] **Debbie Sorensen:** Hmm.

[00:40:53] **Grant Dewar:** Now, if you've done that work.

You can then do the work of self-forgiveness, you know, may, and you know, maybe there's an apology involved to a person that you've overreacted to. Okay, well, you can do that. Maybe there's some, you know, some restitution of relationships needed because other people have seen, you know, what's going on with her.



You know, that sort of stuff. Okay? But if you know what your values are, you've then got a better place to actually deal with what the consequences of that previous action is, and also to avoid it in the future in a way that's useful. So this, this is about, okay, I'm now learning my own life lessons and putting them into action.

And that's why I come from, I don't see this so much as it being a therapeutic process, as an educative process.

[00:41:47] **Debbie Sorensen:** As you're talking, I'm thinking of so many examples from my own life. I'm thinking about times when I wasn't very thoughtful to a friend or when I was parenting while distracted or ignoring, you know, just not putting enough attention into my relationships with my friends and family and these, these aren't things I'm really, you know, deeply struggling with right at the moment.

There have been certainly some moments, I forgot a friend's birthday recently. I can think of sometimes when I was stressed out and maybe not showing up for my husband or my kids as much as I wanted to. And I think what's helpful hearing you say this is that I can pause and take a look at that and think there's that little shame of flashback, cringey guilty feeling that shows a little bit. I notice it and, and I can think, okay, what is that telling me about what's important to me that I can learn? So, you know, okay. It really is important to me to tune in with my kids even when I'm busy and stressed. It really is important for me to be thoughtful as a friend and, and the time that that gets derailed is when I'm so busy with my own stuff that I just am not thinking about it.

And, um. I don't know. I, I like what you're saying because it's, there's a little bit of that sense of, you know, kind of looking internally, but then also thinking, what does that tell me? You know, there's this history around all this, and then what does that tell me about how I can move forward?

[00:43:21] **Grant Dewar:** that's right. But also there's a, there's a place for that person that's feeling a bit shame worthy and a bit cringey,

[00:43:29] **Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah.

[00:43:30] **Grant Dewar:** right. To also be given compassion. And love and a perspective, okay? Because if you look at that experience, what, you know, what else was going on? Why, why weren't you able to be present with your family? You you're a busy professional person. You have lots of

responsibilities, you have many things coming from many different directions. And so one value is to be present and attentive and loving towards your family, but there's also another hidden value here in that there's lots to get done in your life.

You have limited resources, and this is where there's like, these are two conflicting rights.

[00:44:22] **Debbie Sorensen:** Hmm.

[00:44:23] **Grant Dewar:** And when sometimes when we get shame worthy and, and cringey, it's because we just are overstretched in how we balance all these things that are coming at us in modern society.

And

[00:44:40] **Debbie Sorensen:** call them impossible choices in your

[00:44:42] **Grant Dewar:** yes, yes,

[00:44:43] **Debbie Sorensen:** you're always choosing,

these choices and they're, to some degree, they are impossible because. There's no way to get it just right where there's no conflict whatsoever. that's just not even an, a thing that doesn't

[00:44:58] **Grant Dewar:** Yeah. And, and the thing is, if, you can forgive the person who has failed to make the right impossible choice, You can also forgive the internal person that's blaming that person for failing no matter. Right. Okay. You want to keep me on track? This is the imposter thing. You know, we wanna be, we wanna be right, you know, without the imposter thing.

It's interesting, I'm looking at, uh. The current stuff about these Boeing aircraft that have got loose bolts in them, right? Well, guess what? We wanted the person who was finicky to the last detail to make sure all those bolts were attached in those aircraft. Right now what I'm trying to say is that. Someone who's finicky gets every detail right, and that sort of thing. We might label 'em with all sorts of labels these days, but we want that skill applied to that thing, right.

[00:45:56] **Debbie Sorensen:** Mm-Hmm.

[00:45:57] **Grant Dewar:** But what's overcome that someone's obviously been told to work quickly, to work faster, to get on with it. Something's happened that has overridden that sense of dedication to getting that thing done and there's always these conflicting issues going on in our life, but our values need to then inform us, say, what is the overwhelming thing, the overarching thing, the most important thing that I need to apply myself to? And the fact that you've identified that you haven't given enough, that then gives you a set of values to say, okay, I need to give more on that, and perhaps I need to. up some of that. Yeah. Maybe your professional life suffers for family, maybe family suffers for professional life. It just depends on what the value set is that allows you to make the best decision for the limited resources you have one of, one of the people mentioned in the book was they've been offered new opportunity. They've gotta go and train and do stuff, and that's gonna take them away from the kids they love. But the kids are, you know, older. Yeah, just, just pre-teen. And they've learn the benefits of social media and they say, oh, well look, mom, we can make a, a blog for the family about what you're doing.

We can post stuff, you can send us pictures of what you're doing, training. Um, and they then become part of that project even though she's not in physical contact with them, she's in, still in emotional contact and giving content to them that allows them to be part of her journey. And so the conflicting values is she needs economic security for the family. And the other value is she wants contact with the family. Something's gotta give. And economic security allows for the future of her family. And so the contact part of it is then what you engage, what she engaged her children with.

And they did that through social media. And, you know, doing fun posts to other members of the family, Hey, this is what mum's doing today. Isn't this crazy? That sort of stuff. Um, and so with these impossible choices, if you identify what the conflicts are, you've then got some ways through to assist you self to respond.

And what people do when they don't do that is they can often do really poisonous stuff. And you know, this is where all sorts of way out behaviors, uh, you know, withdrawal, um, you know, addiction,

[00:48:59] **Debbie Sorensen:** Hmm.

[00:49:00] **Grant Dewar:** you know, um, inappropriate relationships, all that sort of stuff. If we're not actually dealing with the, core of what we want. Is somehow those needs that that need to be addressed will somehow come to the fore.

[00:49:15] **Debbie Sorensen:** You know, you mentioned withdrawn earlier in the conversation, you mixed miss, you mentioned hiding, and I wanna go back to that because in the book you have, give a couple of metaphors for this actually. One is that we often put ourselves into exile when we feel that sense of shame or guilt or self blame.

And you also use the metaphor that what we've done is often not a criminal act. Maybe sometimes, but often it's not. But we have, and this is a quote from your book, A Jail of Inner Shame for years, if not a lifetime. Right. And I think that is one of the things when you talk about what keeps people from moving forward, often they are holding themselves either in exile, in isolation, hiding from others, or sort of keeping their life confined in a way.

[00:50:07] **Grant Dewar:** Exactly. Well, I just had a, a small example given to me when I was working through this, um, I'd been presenting at one of the, um, a, a couple of the A CBS conferences internationally. And one of my colleagues was following my work and actually applying it to themselves in real life. And they had this experience where they, uh, it was the, uh, the hockey mum experience where

they're an experienced counselor and they got collared by, um, a fellow hockey mum who then made every hockey session a free therapy session and. She just was not getting any respite. And she used to use those sessions as like her break from her weekday work and her introduction to her weekend and that sort of stuff.

And anyway, she got really angry about it and she went to text her sister about what this experience was, and of course she sent it to the mom that was giving her grief. And then she was absolutely paralyzed with, um, remorse and self-loathing about hurting that person. And the work she did using this, um, these techniques was to step back and say, okay, um, I didn't deliberately want to hurt that person, but also this has revealed that I wasn't actually doing the right thing to take care of myself. And that's that experience of exile is that often, particularly in the caring communities, people are doing lots and lots and lots for other people, but they're not doing a lot for themselves. And so they are living in exile from their own values when they're not applying these things to themselves,

[00:52:02] **Debbie Sorensen:** Hmm

[00:52:02] **Grant Dewar:** expecting of themselves far more than they would say, expect of a friend in the same sit situation. And then we can have that

compounding shame. We do something that's a mistake like this colleague did. And you've got further reason to put yourself into this experience of, I'm not good enough,

I'm a failure, I'm an imposter.

All those sorts of issues. Right? And that's that experience of inner exile. And sometimes we can do this for many, many years and we hold one, one example has being. an example of just how poor we are as, as people, as professionals, as mothers, as fathers, as parents, as brothers, sisters, friends, all that sort of stuff.

We can use all these sorts of things and then we can shut down and withdraw, but we might do that internally and still have the happy face on outside. And we make it impossible for people to actually assist us and to, to deal with us. So yeah, that, that's a response that really poison poisons us. And if we actually do do this work of self-forgiveness, we actually have to make a, a decision to do that. And that's, a decision that requires a degree of effort.

[00:53:23] **Debbie Sorensen:** Hmm.

[00:53:24] **Grant Dewar:** And we have to forgive ourselves withdrawing, right? So if, if we've done that thing of shutting ourselves down, well we did it for purpose and we have to forgive that. And then once you've actually made that decision to forgive, and this is part of the work that I did with people, uh, working in addictions. One of the, the biggest causes for relapse is when people get out of addiction, is that they then have to deal with the world with a clear head. Uh, without the substance they've used or the means they've used of their addiction to avoid their responsibilities in the world, and then they have to then go out into the world and face their responsibilities, but do it without the support that the substance or behavior did. A case where you need to have an ongoing process of giving yourself a break, that you're allowed to make mistakes. You can forgive yourself for making mistake, learn from it and take the next step. And so this is where we, what we talked about earlier on, self-forgiveness becomes an ongoing lifestyle

that. And if we are actually doing this values work, we're not letting ourselves off the hook. We're not doing the pseudo self forgiveness. We're doing real work of learning from our own life experience to educate ourselves and take ourselves forward to the person, you know, you know, using that metaphor of the baby steps, we're allowed to crawl along the floor.

We're allowed to lean up against the furniture, we're allowed to dribble on it, we're allowed to fall over, but we're also allowed to strengthen our muscles and take those steps. And so this is, this is what I see. Self-forgiveness as enabling continually drawing on those creative forces that make us who we are.

And so that's the new way forward. And then once we confident in that, um. The process of sharing what we've learned with others is a very, very powerful thing. I was listening to a, um, a podcast on aging yesterday, and I was saying one of the most satisfying things for people in their old age is the ability to pass on wisdom and learning and knowledge, and story that has a resolution that has, um, some sort of moral redemptive quality to it and allow people to learn from that. And that's, that is an age old process in the human experience. It's what we've been doing around campfires for the last 300,000 years is sharing story so that we can help the next generation. To move on and to prosper. And, um, a little bit of that is being lost in this internet generation, in this social media space. Um, in that this requires a bit of a longer effort. It requires deep reflection, but there's, there's hope that, that, um, that can be, um, restored by people taking on these principles.

[00:56:50] **Debbie Sorensen:** I love that. I think that's so beautiful. You know, you acquire some wisdom over the course of time by making these mistakes and doing this self-reflection and. It's to also be able to share that with others to get out of the exile and share that experience with others. Others, it's healing for you because then you have support and you can talk about it, but it's also a way of passing on that wisdom of your experience to other people so it goes beyond yourself and trickles into the world. There's so much more in your book that we didn't get to today because I think you talk about some of these emotions like shame and guilt and how to get to a healthier place with some of them if you're really excessively experiencing them, you know how to to free yourself in your life, how to do some perspective taking, of course, self-compassion, which we talked about today, and trusting yourself again. I think that's a big one too. I was actually really happy to read that about that in your book, because I've seen that a lot in my clinical work where people question themselves because they don't know if they can make a good decision in the future or something like that.

And so all of these things, which I think can be such powerful tools for people who are wanting to work towards self forgiveness. And again, your book, because it's a workbook, it's so personal, you can kind of work through some of these processes on your own and I guarantee there's gonna be some, some really helpful ideas in the book that can, can kind of help you start to see some shifts around some of this.

[00:58:25] **Grant Dewar:** Great talking with you.

[00:58:27] **Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah. Well, I really appreciate you coming on again. The name of your book is The Self-Forgiveness Workbook, mindfulness and Compassion Skills To Overcome Self-Blame and Find True Acceptance. And where can people find more information about your work? Grant?

[00:58:42] **Grant Dewar:** Okay, so people can contact me direct on my email. It's Grant Dewar, G-R-A-N-T-D-E-W-A-R aoc@gmail.com. That's sorry. Grant dewar aoc@gmail.com. And hopefully soon I'll have a website up and running. Um. Called, uh, www an open conversation.com au. 'cause I'm down in Australia, as you can tell from my accent. And there there'll be some offerings there for people to work online through these.

Um, and also some online communities will be established and some online trainings as well. And I have to be doing seminars regularly, both online and hopefully at a city near you.

[00:59:30] **Debbie Sorensen:** Great. Well, we'll link to some of these resources and we'll be on the lookout for it when you're in a city and you're, I'll be looking out for you to come to Denver, so keep me

[00:59:39] **Grant Dewar:** I, I would love, I would love to come over.

[00:59:41] **Debbie Sorensen:** Alright, grant, well thank you again so much for sharing all of your wisdom with us today. I really appreciate it.

[00:59:47] **Grant Dewar:** Thanks, Deb. All the best.

[00:59:49] **Debbie Sorensen:** Thank you. You too. thank you for listening to Psychologists Off the Clock. If you enjoy our podcast, you can help us out by leaving a review or contributing on Patreon.

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