

If Only with Robert Leahy

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Yael Schonbrun: that was Robert Lehe on Psychologists off the clock.

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Debbie Sorensen: I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, practicing in Mile High Denver, Colorado. Co-author of ACT Daily Journal, and an upcoming book on act for burnout.

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Jill Stoddard: from coastal New England, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard, author of Be Mighty, the big book of Act metaphors and the [00:01:00] Upcoming Imposter. No more.

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Yael Schonbrun: Thank you for listening to psychologists Off the clock. I am here with Jill today to introduce an episode on the topic of regret, which is a really important topic that we should be talking more about because it contributes so much to this, the challenges that we have in making decisions, and in a sense, a lot of the field of mental health and wellbeing is really dedicated to helping people make good decisions about their behaviors, about their partner choices about.

How they choose to, uh, organize their professional trajectories and regret is one of these emotions that comes up that tries to protect our decision making, but can sometimes hijack it. And so this conversation that I had with a very well known psychologist, , Robert Lehe was a really thought-provoking conversation

for me, and the book just really sent me into all sorts of deep thoughts about the function and role of [00:02:00] regret in in our lives.

And so, Jill, I was curious what came up for you as you were listening.

Jill Stoddard: Yes, I totally agree. When I found out you were doing this episode, I was so excited because I had actually just taken Robert Leahy's webinar about regret for very similar reasons to what you just said. As I was seeing a lot of clients who really struggled in this area, both in terms of decision making, because of the uncertainty of not knowing how something was, To turn out.

And then what hadn't occurred to me that Lehe talks about in, in the interview and he talked about in the webinar, is that there's like this anticipatory regret, like the fear that I might have regret down the road gets in the way of me being able to make decisions and move forward. And I thought that was just a really compelling and interesting layer that I hadn't really thought about in terms of decision making. Um, and then the other piece that struck me is, My clients, and I think probably me as well, um, [00:03:00] have, we're sort of like conceptualizing regret as I'll, I'll even tell you personally, like I have been known to say before, I don't believe in regret because, you know, you can't get in the way back machine.

You can't go back and redo something. And every choice I've made, even if the consequences haven't, What I want. They've all landed me here and I'm like, happy with myself and my life and da da da. So, you know, regret is pointless. That's sort of like the attitude that I, that I had in my own life and Bob Lehe really made me rethink that, that there are some real benefits to regret. And I think he even talks about the evolutionary nature of regret in the episode. And I just loved the way this episode made me totally rethink the construct.

That's like my favorite thing that happens on our podcast when I get to just think about something in a whole new way that I hadn't thought about before. And I really think listeners will, will get that from this.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, it is. It is funny how we can get very dichotomous about [00:04:00] how we view experiences, like regret that they're all good or all bad,

Jill Stoddard: Mm-hmm

Yael Schonbrun: that we should pay. exclusive attention to the fear of regret or that we should totally ignore it because it doesn't provide us any useful information. And he really does talk about the sweet spot of regret, of paying attention to it enough that it informs you, but also not getting so consumed by it that it paralyzes you.

Another piece that I thought was refresh. And I'm curious how people will feel about this is the, the sense of tough love that comes with this conversation and he, he basically says that part of what can contribute to a lot of regret experiences is this feeling like we should. Have better outcomes that we should have.

All the things that other people have. And it is, it, it feels like a little bit of tough love, but also it's sort of a reconnection to reality that nobody has everything that they want, that everybody has made choices that [00:05:00] have gone imperfectly.

In fact, there, there's no. To have any choice go totally perfectly. That just isn't how real life works. And I'm curious for you as a listener, Jill, if, if that feeling of tough love came across.

Jill Stoddard: It did, and what it made me think of is when you know, sometimes we find ourselves saying, why me? You know when something bad has happened? Me. Well, the flip side of that is, well, why not me? Right? Like, who am I that, that, you know, bad things should only happen to other people and not to me. You know, life is hard and difficult things happen. and so that's kind of what it made me feel like is sometimes we have these just kind. impossibly high standards for things, and I just thought, gosh, wouldn't we all just be it? It just have so much more peace if we could learn how to do things good enough, if everything could just be good enough, you know?

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. , and that ties into the part of the conversation that we had about maximizing versus satisfying.

So I hope that people listen all the way through [00:06:00] because there's a lot of really great tools that he offers that you can practice to make more skillful decisions that are informed by regret rather than hampered by regret. So we hope you get a lot out of this episode.

Yael Schonbrun: Robert I Lehe is the founder and director of the American Institute for Cognitive Therapy in New York City. He's clinical professor of Psychology in psychiatry at Weill Cornell Medical College and past president of

the Association of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies, the Academy of Cognitive Therapy and the International Association of Cognitive Therapy.

He is a recipient of the Erin t Beck Award for outstanding contributions. In C B T is the author of 29 books and is a frequent keynote speaker and presenter of workshops worldwide. , his new book is If Only Finding Freedom From Regret and I'm so excited to have him here to talk about it with me today.

Welcome, Bob.

Robert Leahy: Well, thank you Yale for having me on. It's great to meet you and to talk to your audience as well.

Yael Schoonbrun: You've had a long and distinguished career and have made so many [00:07:00] valuable contributions, but I'm so excited about your new book because this topic of regret touches all of our lives. Your book has so many great quotes.

I just wanted to start off with this one and then dive into like defining what is regret and what can we do about it? What should we do about it? So you write, regret cancels out what is in favor of what could have been, what could have been, becomes the enemy of what is true in your life. So that, that sort of gives us a hint as to how we can hopefully define regret.

But I wonder if you can expand upon that. What is regret? We know it as a universal experience, but how do you define it most clearly?

Robert Leahy: So, so regret is a set of, uh, negative thoughts and feelings related to a decision. that you've made or anticipate making. And it could be about something that you decide to do or decide not to do. So it's a combination of [00:08:00] feelings, emotions like sadness and remorse. , anger, anxiety, uh, hopelessness.

It's not just one emotion. It could be a whole range of emotions. And it's related to the thoughts that you have about your decision. so a person can regret that they, uh, married somebody or did not marry somebody. and they can have a range of emotions related to it.

Yael Schoonbrun: Yeah, so, and what's so interesting about regret and you know, it's, it's both this thinking process and a set of feeling experiences. The other piece I'll kind of point out, which is really evident in your, in your book is that it can. Reflectives or a decision that you've made in the past, or it can

almost be anticipatory, this fear of regretting that really contributes to some of the challenges we have in making decisions.

Robert Leahy: right? Yeah. So, you know, we as therapists are trying to get our patients to make decisions, to [00:09:00] change their behavior or to stop doing something. And one way of thinking about what we might call anticipatory or perspective regret is, if I do this, what's gonna happen? Or if I don't do this, what's gonna happen?

So, for example, in the area of behavioral medicine, half the people who are prescribed medication for, high blood pressure a year later don't take the medication. The research shows, if you ask them to imagine what they would be like if they have a stroke, and they're paralyzed or they can't speak or whatever it is, it dramatically increases compliance.

And the same thing is true for savings. So if you ask relatively young people, lets say people about 30, uh, to think about what their life would be like when they're 65 and they have to live on their savings, it increases the rate of savings. So this is where you can think about prospective regret, anticipating it and using [00:10:00] it in a productive way, to think about, oh, I would regret if I were 65, I had no money to live on, or I would regret if I had a stroke.

So one of the things that I try to urge people to think about is even though we know there are a lot of negative consequences of excessive regret, there are a lot of productive and positive qualities of regret. , which is probably why it's evolved.

Yael Schoonbrun: Yeah. So I wanna talk a bit about that. But first, I, I wanted to just make mention of something that occurred to me as you were talking, which is that, so I and my co-host Practice Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, which is, uh, sort of one of the branches of cognitive therapy, um, that has added into it some of these more explicit mindfulness, uh, strategies.

But one of the really traditional, prototypical exercises in acceptance and commitment therapy is something called the eulogy exercise. And it is almost that, using the anticipatory or perspective regret to really think through in [00:11:00] this moment in my life, what do I wanna stand for, given.

at my funeral. I want people to be talking about me in such and such way. And so you're really using that as a therapeutic tool to help people think forward so that they can inform their present day decisions.

Robert Leahy: Well, people have actually studied the deathbed regrets that people have. And, what they tend to be is, I wish I had spent more time, uh, with my friends. I wish I didn't work as hard. I wish I had more fun. I wish I was true to my feelings. So, you know, in interesting the idea of a, of the deathbed regrets, it kind of goes back to a short novel by Tolstoy, the Death of Ivan Illich, uh, where he's lying in his deathbed and thinking about how he had worked so hard, but what a waste of time.

It was , you know, so it's, I think it's important to some, sometimes, you know, we often think live in the present. But one could argue the only [00:12:00] creature that lives completely in a present moment is a mosquito. One, one way of thinking about your life is a series of selves, what was called multiple selves. So I can think of myself when I was five years old, or 10 years old, or 20, I can think of myself now.

I can think of myself 10 years from now, whatever. And what we often do when we make decisions, we often think about the immediate self. For example, uh, let's take, the use of productive regret. People who over drink or misuse drugs or, or who overspend or who act out sexually in dangerous ways. those people are focused on immediate gratification.

If you were to ask yourself, look at your future self, like let's say six months from now or a year from now, 10 years from now, what would your future self advise you to do? This kind of multiple self-concept is something that's used in, in philosophy and in, in behavioral economics. [00:13:00] Uh, but it's something that I think we can use for, uh, people who are likely to make decisions, uh, that will lead to regret.

I mean, one of the reasons why some people have a lot of regrets is they make very bad decisions. You know, it's kind of like, you know, if you are drinking all the time, uh, and you're 50 years old, uh, you're gonna probably regret, you know, having a history of alcoholism because you'll have a lot of medical problems and failed relationships and a failed career.

So, thinking about multiple selves, thinking about what would my future self advise me to do, um, usually your future self is not looking for immediate gratification. It's actually informed by the possibility of regret.

Yael Schoonbrun: Yeah. One, one thing that occurs to me as you're talking is that there are certain psychological disorders that are really associated with, Lack of contemplation about future regret. And [00:14:00] then there's certain disorders that are really associated with rumination about regret. So like the

anxiety disorders might have people really stuck in worrying about regret and feeling kind of paralyzed about making decisions.

Whereas folks who are more likely to engage in impulsive unhealthy behaviors might not have enough connection to productive regret.

Robert Leahy: I, I absolutely agree. And yeah, I mean, so for example, we know that people who are bipolar in a manic phase don't anticipate regret. They think they can handle anything they're playing to win at all costs. Uh, they think they're totally resilient. It's not gonna backfire. People who overspend, people who, act impulsively, uh, don't seem to, um, to anticipate the regret that they'll have later.

And I think, I mean, one of the things I describe in the book is that two things can, two opposite things can lead people to have more regrets. People who, [00:15:00] who overestimate risk and so who never make a change. So those people, oh, anything I do is not gonna work out. Like people who are depressed are very reluctant to make a change.

So they have an overestimation of the risk and their inability to handle, uh, the downside. But on the other hand, you have people who, underestimate risk, you know, who spend too much money, who are unfaithful in their relationships, who act out, who are aggressive, uh, who, uh, who abuse substances. And so you have regret on both sides.

It's not like there's one way of avoiding regret. Uh, you have to sort of think about, you know, are you always playing to win at all costs? , you know, that sounds good. Sounds very American. You're ambitious. You climb to the top and step on the people below. But, uh, that kind of way of living actually leads you to take enormous risks.

And when you look at this, story about, this very, very brilliant guy who, [00:16:00] without judging who he is, but he certainly took a lot of risks. And he might end up going to prison for 20 or 30 years. And you have a lot of other people who speculate and take too many risks. But one of the things I describe in the book though, are people who are afraid of taking risks, the depressive style of decision making, and the people who are depressed often think, um, you know, almost by definition they're pessimistic.

But what they think is that, if you have a, like a scale from zero to a hundred, where I'm really happy at a hundred, I'm at 20. So I'm really feeling pretty low.

If I lose another 10, I may as well kill myself. So people who are depressed are very conservative in their style of decision making.

They require a lot of information. They're risk averse. They look at the downside, and it makes sense if you take, if you assume that, uh, I have few resources, I don't enjoy the [00:17:00] positives that you might enjoy. I suffer the negatives more because I also add on regret and self-criticism. I can't stay in it. I can't replicate the behavior and persist.

Uh, so you have styles of decision making that lead to more or less regret. And I think it's something that we need to contemplate you. You can't just simply say, uh, as a lot of people will say on social media, I don't regret anything because I made my decision. And I'm thinking, don't you learn from your mistakes?

don't you ever apologize to anybody? . You know, so it's, it becomes a, it's, it's far more complicated than, uh, sort of popular psychology. Might, uh, might think it is.

Yael Schoonbrun: Right. It's, it's like that a Aristotelian idea. And you have this in your book of like, you wanna have the right amount of regret in the right way, at the right time, in the right place, right? That we want to be connected to regret, but there are more and less helpful ways to do [00:18:00] that. And that's kind of what, as you write about, that's what distinguishes productive regret from less helpful regret.

From unproductive regret. Um, and so I wonder if you can maybe outline some of those differences, like how can we tell productive regret, apart from unproductive regret, what are sort of the hallmark features?

Robert Leahy: Yeah. So unproductive regret is that, , I recognize that I've made a mistake, uh, and I go into this unproductive series of thoughts. . I recognize I'm make a mistake. , I don't accept that it's okay to make a mistake. I then criticize myself for making a mistake. I catastrophize the mistake, I ruminate about it.

And then I avoid things in the future. So, uh, so unproductive regret is, it's like you're learning how to play tennis and you hit the ball on the net and your coach comes out, takes the racket, hands it to you and says, Yale hit [00:19:00] yourself over the head 50 times. That'll teach you how to play tennis.

That's not gonna be a good way to learn how to play tennis. Productive regret is you do acknowledge that you made a mistake. You normalize and humanize

mistakes. We all make mistakes in, in a, in a full life. We all have mistakes. We all have regrets. You try to think about what you can learn from it. You develop a plan and carry it out.

And if possible, one of the things that I think helps people cope with regret is what I call adaptive humility. Adaptive humility is I'm a human being. , no matter what I do, I'm gonna make mistakes. I don't deserve any better treatment than anybody else. , and smart people make mistakes. Par smart people have regrets, but they learn from them and they make themselves better from them.

Uh, one way of thinking about productive regret and the cheapest way of using regret is to use the regrets of other people. So when I look at some of the [00:20:00] people I knew when I was, uh, in my, uh, in college or my early twenties, people who were abusing drugs and alcohol, and I thought, Gina, I don't want to end up like that.

You know? So using the regrets that other people either have or should have. That's a great way. It's a very inexpensive way of using regret. You don't have to criticize yourself. You don't have to carry out the experiment and suffer the consequences. You can just simply observe. And I think that's a, uh, you know, it's a funny thing.

We, we don't, we don't really focus on, uh, who would be the most adaptive role models, right? Like, for example, if we take the idea of adaptive humility, there's actually, uh, uh, research on humility. People who have adaptive humility on normal, uh, make mistakes. I'm not perfect. Uh, uh, I should apologize. People who have adaptive humility have better marital relationships and better [00:21:00] friendships, but it stands to reason they, they don't think they're right all the time.

I mean, how many times have you done therapy with a couple, with a family where the major issue, somebody has to be right all the time, right? , So, you know, it's, and apologizing is, is something that some people have a very hard time doing, but apologizing is a productive use of regret. I made a mistake, I'm sorry I did it.

Try to make it up for you to you, uh, you know, to try to be a better person. And that's where we could use regret in a productive way.

Yael Schoonbrun: I love that. I love that concept of adaptive humility, that sort of recognition that of course you're not above making mistakes or not having the full information or not knowing, you know, all the, all the things that were

important for you to know, or maybe even not knowing yourself and what was important and recognizing that you're human in these ways that are, [00:22:00] um, not good or bad, but just human allows you to figure out what to do in the moment rather than Getting caught up in self-criticism or in trying to double down, like I, I, you know, right.

Prove of them. Right. An interesting question though is that, if you're somebody who often feels uncomfortable about decisions because they feel final, right? You're sort of prone to regret and you question like, was that the right choice?

What was I considering the right and important things? So, but how do you know if it's important and actionable information, your thoughts and your feelings in that moment versus fear of regret that isn't productive and so said differently? I mean, is there a time when after you've made a decision, having gone through all the information, all the data, that it is okay to revisit a decision?

Or is that just kind of getting caught in your own cycle? And how do you know when you are caught in that unproductive cycle versus when you're using regret productively?[00:23:00]

Robert Leahy: that's a good question. So, fir first, what we know from the research by Gilbert at Harvard is that we pr we predict far more regrets than we actually have in in the future. The second is generally speaking, uh, whatever decision we make, , like let's say you make a decision to move to, a particular city or take a particular job or whatever, that , we have this what's called the hedonic treadmill, that we basically, we think, oh my life would be so much better if I'm in Boston or New York or la, whatever.

We basically find from the research that a lot of research in the hedonic treadmill and the happiness area. , you basically return to your, your, your level of psychological wellbeing before the decision, after a period of time you sort of get used to it. , so we basically are resilient and there's a lot of research for almost everything that shows that, even after major life events, like the loss of a limb or bankruptcy [00:24:00] or loss of a job or divorce, that about 85% of people, uh, a year after are back to their preexisting psychological wellbeing.

So one is that we get used to to second is that you're never gonna get everything you want. You know, we live in a world of, you know, we, we kind of brand the idea of a completely fulfilling life. I don't know anybody who has a completely fulfilling life. This is like

Yael Schoonbrun: except on social media. . I'm just kidding.

Robert Leahy: media, right? Yeah. And what's interesting, the more time you spend on social media, the more depressed you get.

So, uh, , so it's like the holy grail gone bad, right? So nobody has a perfect life. You don't need a perfect life. , for 99% of the history of mankind, people live close to subsistence, you know, . So, I mean, in the 1780s, , people in Paris spent 25% of their annual income on bread. So if you, we often have this kind, what I call existential [00:25:00] perfectionism, that I'm gonna have this fulfilled life.

My work is gonna be exciting, my relationship's gonna be wonderful, everything's gonna be great all the time, and gonna be happy. And I'm gonna take all of these retreats and be completely fulfilled. You know, it's all a fiction. Or I'll take these drugs and that'll change my life. I'll have a great insight.

You know, what we don't realize is that you have to live in the real world, and no matter what you do, bad things are gonna happen. Everybody's gonna die. You're gonna be disappointed. You're gonna be disillusioned. That doesn't mean you're a cynic or you're pessimistic. It just means that you're, you're living in the real world.

Like, you know, I'm living in New York City and it's expensive, uh, you know, crowded at times. It's not as beautiful as the countryside, but everything is a matter of trade-offs. And so the idea of that, a good decision and a bad decision, or a good outcome, bad outcome, it's really about trade-offs. The other part of it [00:26:00] is all decisions are made under uncertainty.

This is what's, what's, uh, you know, decision making theorists called bounded rationality. We only have a certain amount of information. We make decisions in real time. So if a person's thinking about taking a job, you don't know what that job is going to be like until after the fact. , you don't know what your life will be like without that job.

Until after the fact. So we always make decisions under uncertainty. No matter how much information we seek out, uh, we still won't have all the information. The other part of it is if we spent a lot of time seeking out information. for example, uh, a young man, uh, a number of years ago, was, putting off, making a commitment of relationship and said, well, I, maybe I need, you can do this woman for five years.

And I'm thinking, you know, if you keep putting this off, she might leave. And this would be the opportunity cost, right? So if he keeps putting it off and she says, well, why, why [00:27:00] not wanna marry somebody who can't make a decision to get married to me? , of course he thought, well, you know, maybe, uh, maybe somebody better will come along.

This is again, the holy grail, the perfectionistic, the maximizer that, you know, Herbert Simon talked about in 1950. , I have to have the very best. There are 8 billion people in the world. I have to have the very best. How's that gonna happen? And by the way, if you found the very best, why would she want to be with you?

So, so it's kinda like, you know, so you don't need the very best, and this is where satisfying is so much more effective. It's kind of like, uh, you know, people think that, oh, somebody else comes along, who's better? Therefore I have to be miserable. No, you don't. What you have to do is make your relationship better than it is now, and that's something you should be doing all the time.

And second, you should be focused [00:28:00] on gratitude. Like I grew up very poor. I lived in a housing project. My mother was on welfare, my parents were divorced, my father was an alcoholic. And I think rather than feeling sorry for myself, I actually think I had a certain benefit. I never took anything for granted.

I appreciate almost everything I have cuz I didn't have any of these things before. And it allows me to relate to people who have less and people who are marginalized and so forth. And it gave me a work ethic. So you don't need, you don't need everything that you can dream of. And I think this is what adds to the tendency to regret is this maximization fantasy that, you know, what we know from the research, Yale, is that people who are maximizers take longer to make decisions.

They require more information and they're less satisfied with the outcomes, which means they've regretted more. And even in the objective case where they get a better outcome, they regret it because they're [00:29:00] comparing it not to the better outcome. They're comparing it to the best thing that they can imagine at no cost.

So we, we get ourselves caught up in this fantasy of like engineering our lives. So we're gonna be happy all the time. It's just not gonna happen.

Yael Schoonbrun: I love so much of what you're saying and I have so many thoughts, but when I just wanna point out the, this maximizing versus satisfying framework that's talked about extensively in Barry Schwartz's awesome book. The Paradox of Choices, one that I often recommend to clients and those who aren't into books.

I always recommend the TED Talk and willing to it in our show notes because we do, we like, we want the best outcome. And you talk about this bias of emotional perfectionism or existential perfectionism.

And I do think we're taught that, you know, if we're dissatisfied with the choice that we should take that as information. Like we should have something better. And then we get into this if only think.

Robert Leahy: Yeah.

Yael Schoonbrun: It reminds me a lot of a, a clinical situation that I see often, which is, [00:30:00] um, that, so I do a lot of couples therapy and the reality is even the, even the couples that don't come into therapy fight, right?

Healthy couples fight conflict is a part of healthy relationships. But there's a temptation when we're unhappy with our partner, which inevitably is going to happen to think maybe I married the wrong person. Right? If only, which is such a beautiful title. I, I love the title of your book. If only I had dated longer and I had found the right person, if only I had married that person that I had that spark with, I nstead of quote unquote settling and I think.

On the one hand, it is useful to reflect on the quality of our relationship and to note like, how often are we fighting with our partner. On the other hand, exactly as you're saying, there's this tendency that we have to drop into this if only thinking that suggests that there's a better outcome. That is really not anchored to reality because the reality is we are [00:31:00] gonna fight with our partner.

The reality is there isn't, um, the perfect person for us out there because we're gonna, you know, butt heads with any partner that we have. And it, this is kind of a multiple, layered question because I think what you're saying is offering a bit of tough love to people, which is regret is inevitable. Like life isn't perfect and we can never make the perfect decision.

and you had this quote that actually made me laugh because it's, it's, it's tough love and you write, the world was not constructed to conform to your expectations. It is what it is. And I'm just curious how clients who are stuck in

indecision respond when you suggest this truth, this hard, tough love truth to them.

Robert Leahy: Well, I think, I think they're relieved because I'm not promising nirvana, I'm not promising the ideal life I'm in, insisting that they live in the real world, uh, which has its positives and negatives. And I, I think, I think one way of [00:32:00] looking at it is, I mean there there's several things that, one is that nothing in the real world can compare with your.

Like, a lot of times people who get involved with somebody who's married to somebody else and they think, oh, you know, if I were only with that person, my life would be perfect. So they construct this fantasy, and then some cases they leave their partner or they whatever, and they, they end up with this other person.

They find out it's not perfect. So nothing can compare to your fantasy. Nothing compare to your imagination. Second is that even if something better is out there, , what is the next thing to do? Is the next thing to spend the rest of your life ruminating and regretting and criticizing and devaluing what you have, or is the next thing to work the best, the most you can to make your life as good as it can be within limitation.

Uh, I had a patient a number of years ago who was probably about five 10, which is relevant to this, to this story. And when we were taking his history, [00:33:00] he, when he was in college, he played for a nationally ranked basketball team. , you know, where the guards are? Like six feet, six at the center is seven 10 or seven foot two.

, and I said, gee, yeah, I, uh, I don't mean to be critical of your height, but you know, you're, you're not six six. How did you He said, I, I, he, he was a partner in a law firm. He said, I attribute my success in law to the same attitude I had in basketball. I figured out how to play really well within my limitations.

And we have a hard time with that in our culture, don't we? We have this kind of thing. We should have no limitation. Everybody can be President , you know, everybody can be a movie star. I think social media is like, you know, somehow I'm famous because I got a lot of likes today. You know, uh, we have a hard time with the idea of limitations, but limitation is reality testing, and you can live a pretty good life knowing that you can't have everything and you don't need everything.

I mean, if you needed everything we'd have [00:34:00] to ask. Why would you be the only person in the world who needs everything? You don't know anybody who has everything. You don't know anybody who has everything they want, who's happy all the time? Who's, as you say, who doesn't have arguments with their partner.

Uh, so we need to normalize some of the difficulties in life. Um, you know, sometimes people come to therapy and they think, oh, you're gonna make my life easy. It's like you hire a personal trainer and you wanna lose 25 pounds, and you say to the personal trainer, gee, uh, I want you to make my life easy so I can lose weight and be in good shape.

And I don't have to do anything. And your personal trainer's gonna say, I'm gonna make your life harder and I'm gonna make your life harder. And what we are gonna learn how to do is to endure discomfort. For example, people who take ballet, uh, if you say, gee, did you have a good workout? Yeah, I had a good workout.

How do you know it was a good workout? Because it hurt good. It hurt [00:35:00] good. It had the right kind of discomfort, and this is what I call constructive discomfort, that we go through life sometimes doing things that are uncomfortable, doing things we don't wanna do, so we can get what we want to get in our lives.

I think it's a much more realistic approach to the way life really is. Then all of these promises of a perfect life in Nirvana and so forth.

Yael Schoonbrun: that It reminds me of, uh, a really great line that one of my past guests, Dr. Corey Yeager had, um, which is, we, we want to try to make the right decisions, but ultimately we have to make the decisions right for us, rather than expecting that it just feels right and works right.

We have to live with what is and make it work, and it does it, it just occurred to me that that line really fits in with what you're saying and that the, the example that you gave of this man who's five 10 who made basketball in a very elite level, work for him.[00:36:00]

Robert Leahy: right? Yeah. He's not gonna charge up the middle against the seven two center. So, um, yeah, and it's, it's, it's an interesting thing. It's kind of like, , the idea that, you're not going to get everything you want, but maybe you can get most of what you need. And one way of dealing with that is to actually prioritize what you need.

So I mentioned earlier, , what are the deathbed, regrets that people have? I didn't spend enough time with my family. I wasn't true to my feelings. I didn't keep up with my friends. I didn't do things that were meaningful to me. I spent too much time at work. Uh, gee, that doesn't sound like the elite life.

it sounds like. Spend time with your, your partner and your kids and your pets or whatever, and, you know, have some leisure time. Get some sleep, eat the right food. Don't over drink. You know, it's like, you know, we don't need this over the top life, you know, driving [00:37:00] \$150,000 car or something in order to be relatively content.

And the opposite of regret is contentment. It's not resignation. So here's an exercise I ask people to think about. Think about a moment in your life where you just sort of sat there and you just felt really at peace and content. This is really a very, very nice moment. So I asked the, uh, a physician, uh, this question.

Um, and he recalled when he was in medical school in the Midwest, he was sitting outside. There was a, a pond, uh, there, and he was out there with a couple of his friends and they were looking at the ducks and he said, I remember that that was such a pleasurable content moment. The ducks. So that become the duck image for his contentment.

That's the thing to aim for. Doesn't cost a lot of money [00:38:00] to look at a duck and to have pleasure. You know, so it's, if you think about content, a lot of people think, oh, contentment, there's a resistance to contentment. I'm gonna lose my edge. , uh, I'm not gonna have the motivation to try. I'm just gonna be resigned.

I'll be a loser. Yeah. I, I, I've never had somebody come into therapy saying, I really need to see you several times in week and need to be on heavy medication because I'm content with almost everything in my life. But I have heard people, you know, complain that they don't have as much money as they thought they should, or the relationships are not perfect or somebody, they're envious and somebody's getting ahead of them.

Yael Schoonbrun: Yeah, and your advice really fits in too with this maximizing versus satisfying framework because one of the things that gets recommended within that is that satisfiers are really good at setting anchor [00:39:00] points. Like what feels really important for them to achieve. And then anything above that is, is icing on the cake.

But they stay focused on what their anchor points are. And, and I think about this a lot for myself because when you say it's sort of like, what's the image of contentment? For me, it's like hanging with my three boys and my husband doing nothing like, like hanging, being together,

Robert Leahy: that's a very classic contentment image, right.

Yael Schoonbrun: Yeah, totally. And at the same time, I'm a really ambitious person, right? I, I do this podcast, I write books, I see patients, I have a, a faculty status, and, and so it's sort of, there's these things that I want to maximize, but having this anchor of contentment with my family is really helpful. In addition, I think it's been helpful for me to say, because I am, I really am familiar with this framework, even in my more ambitious pursuits, what's sort of the satisfying [00:40:00] anchor point for me within those, and it's really easy to sort of, you, you get a book contract and you think, what?

Well, couldn't I have gotten a bigger advance or a bigger publisher, or more sales? It's so easy to fall into that, but having that pre-established, Anchor point in saying, you know what? Those things would be icing on the cake. But the most important thing is for me to come back to that anchor of I really wanted to write a book and get this information out in the best way that I could.

The other stuff is not in my control. More would be better, but I don't need to worry about it because I know that for me, this is enough. This is sort of the, the more fundamental, and it's not a need, it's not a fundamental need, but it's sort of like what I would like to feel like the work that I do is meaningful and rather than get swept away with all the additional maximizing kinds of things I could achieve, I'm able to kind of come back to that anchor point.

Robert Leahy: Well, I think you got it. I think you have exactly the right. Idea. The idea [00:41:00] of being grounded in, uh, adaptive humility, satisfaction, gratitude, appreciation, you know, contentment, allows you to try new things. I mean, it's k it's kind of like if you're grounded, uh, with the, the kind of like universal image that you described with your husband and three kids and just hanging out.

If you're grounded that already have that, everything else that comes along is additional, but I don't really need it. It might be nice if I get it, but is it worth the effort? That's the other part of it. Some people have, this, this kind of overvaluation of ambition. It's interesting. There's actually a history of ambition.

So if you look back 500 years ago in, in, in Christian Western Europe, ambition was viewed as a negative thing. You were reviewed as, in a way, self selfish. Uh, the word narcissistic was not around, but that's exactly [00:42:00] what it was. You were rejecting Jesus Christ and you thought you were better than God. All of this kind of thing.

There's actually a book on the history of ambitions, quite, quite fascinating. But today, if you say to somebody, oh, I'm not ambitious. You think, what a loser. You know, I don't want to be around that person. Maybe it's contagious, , you know,

Yael Schoonbrun: Yeah. Oh, that's so interesting.

Robert Leahy: but so if, if we think about, um, if we think about people who overvalue, ambition, uh, you think about those, those deathbed regrets spent too much time at work.

I didn't see my family, didn't see my friends. People who are ambition to spend like, you know, 70 hours a week working, don't see their friends, don't see their kids, don't see their partner, don't have leisure time, don't get enough sleep, and they think, if I get this, I'll feel ha, feel happy. And so they get whatever it is, they get tenure, they get a book contract, they get citations, whatever it is, and they're not happy.

So they think, well, I need to do more of that. [00:43:00] And while they're doing this, this receding reference point, reaching more and reaching more, reaching more, just a moment of satisfaction, then it's not enough because it doesn't satisfy the human needs that you have that you describe Yale with your husband and your three kids.

That's a universal from an evolutionary point of view. Wouldn't it make sense to build in what you find the most content image? Right. So the idea of reaching out and, you know, getting more grants or whatever it would be, uh, the other things in life fall away, the human things in life, the things that we were evolved to find satisfaction with.

You know, it's an interesting thing that the research overwhelmingly shows that people who have good relationships, Of all kinds good, intimate relationships, friendships, work, relationships, face-to-face contact with people, and feel that they have a meaning for other people and other people have a meaning.

For me, these people live longer and they're less likely to be depressed and [00:44:00] far less likely to commit suicide. Right. None of it has to do with the ambition. And in fact, the people who are likely to commit suicide tend to be white males who are ambitious and who are in high, high level, uh, occupations.

So it's, it's a, it's an interesting thing about contentment because it, it almost goes against the capitalist idea of trying to manufacture false needs in kind of universal dissatisfaction. Like you don't have the new iPhone 15 or whatever it, whatever it is. So I was talking with a, a patient recently whose, uh, 90 year old daughter was being teased by other kids.

because she didn't have a smartphone. She had a dumb phone.

Yael Schoonbrun: That's a tough, tough thing in this world,

Robert Leahy: It's, it's amazing what the people in Ukraine have to go through compared to

Yael Schoonbrun: I know. Yeah. We lose perspective. So [00:45:00] do you think that regret is a more dominant experience in modern times?

Because we have in more well-resourced communities, societies, um, families, because there are more things to have, so there's more things to feel like you could have. In other words, it kind of sets you up to feel disappointed.

Robert Leahy: Yeah. So regret is, uh, is I think definitely more common today for a variety of reasons. and it depends how far back you go. You know, we, we live in a culture where we think, that if people try harder, they're gonna be able to achieve whatever they want to achieve.

Yael Schoonbrun: Right, and you call regret the opportunity emotion. So even having that idea in our mind sets us up to feel like we should be achieving these like high, high outcomes.

Robert Leahy: Yeah. And, and what I think, think the, I think part of that is, um, [00:46:00] you know what's called survivor bias. So who do we see in the news? Celebrities, you know, we see, movie stars, we see, uh, politicians, we see, uh, wealthy people like, Elon Musk and, uh, all these other people.

We see the celebrities and we think, oh, that's our comparison level. What we don't see, we don't see the homeless, we don't see the working class, we don't see the middle class. Um, and so we don't get a sense of the normal distribution.

And so we have now this, , this kind of idealized standard that almost nobody is going to achieve, which is a false standard cuz we don't really know what their real lives are like.

So we idealize, oh, this person's celebrity, even though they've been divorced five times and been in 15 rehabs and tried to commit suicide. They must be happy, right? They must be their fans. They have the ideal life. Uh, so we have this kind of [00:47:00] idealization. The other part of it is social media has had a dramatic effect on depression and anxiety, body image issues because, you know, what people do is they say, oh, look at me at this five star hotel having a wonderful time all the time.

Um, people post images of what your life should be and then we buy into it. So the more. Time that teenage girls, uh, watch TikTok, the more likely they are to be anorexic and have body dysmorphic disorder and into a new attempt suicide. Um, so regret is, it's the opportunity emotion with the idea. Two things.

One, everything is possible because, you know, you're, you're living in America and so you could be anything you want. Uh, and second, you should be, uh, incredibly successful and beautiful and rich and interesting and fun all the time. Uh, and third, you're, you're missing out because look at all these other [00:48:00] people who are having such a great time.

So what we know from the research by Gene Twang and other people, the University of California, is that we've had a dramatic increase of narcissism over the last 30 years, especially among young people. And the more time they spend on social media, the more narcissistic they become.

Yael Schoonbrun: Yeah. So I mean there, there is this sense that of these standards that we should be able to achieve and how that gets absorbed into our psyches is, is something that really sets us up to feel regret. Like there, there's something wrong with me that I don't, if only I had made this choice, then I would, if I only I had connected with this social group, then I would have this kind of status or that amount of money.

Or if only I had, uh, married the right person, then I wouldn't be miserable all the time. Right. Look at all these happy people who found their partners,

Robert Leahy: Yeah, it's, it's like looking at life as status seeking and [00:49:00] acquisition, uh, and so forth. What's interesting is that you never hear people say, um, people who say that, uh uh, if only. Had not been content. If

only I had not been satisfied. If only I didn't have so much gratitude and appreciation and compassion, my life would be better.

Right? It's like , we, we know that toward the end of life. You know, cuz that's what the end of life regrets are about. Uh, but we start, you know, the idea of a career was kind of invented in the 19th century because people in America had many more opportunities. There was a labor shortage and people were needed for almost everything.

And you had an increase of what we call white collar work in the latter part of the 19th century. So people were pursuing a, a, a career, which was a pathway, uh, in advancing, and everybody was racing in that, in that [00:50:00] direction. , but if you think about the idea of contentment and satisfaction and appreciation and gratitude, um, you know, if you think like, like one thing I've, I've been.

I've been interested, I've written about his envy and uh, cuz I think we live in a culture with a great deal of envy. , and, uh, I was talking with somebody once who, you know, wasn't making as much money as he expected he would make. He was making considerable amount of money compared to the average American.

and I said to him, I said, do you think there could be any people who could be envious of you? And, and he, it was like asking him a question, you know, from an outer space. , I said, you have a wonderful relationship with your kids. You're divorced, but you have a wonderful girlfriend who you respect, who respects you, who loves you, you're physically healthy.

, you have a lot of friends, you have enough money to live on. You know? Um, [00:51:00] do you think there could be people who are envious of you? It never occurred to him because he was always comparing himself upwards. He was always thinking, you know, if I had pursued something else, I would be up here as if the people up here are happy all the time. The people up here are comparing themselves to people farther up or they're saying, gee, I have all this money. Why am I not happy? So we have to look at what makes people happy. You know, good relationships, adaptive humility, gratitude, appreciation. I was talking with a, a patient who's orthodox, uh, Jewish guy, and he was talking about the mea, you know, the like on the thresh, the, the doors you walk out.

And he said, you know what that is? It's sort of when I touch that, when I leave the house, the apartment, [00:52:00] it reminds me that God's presence is everywhere. Pervades everything. And I thought I was raised Catholic and I

thought, my God, what an absolutely beautiful sentiment. It's like wherever I am, I meet a stranger or I eat food, or I see the sky, or I reflect on my family.

It's the presence of God, the eternal presence. Um, and I just thought it was a beautiful sentiment of contentment and gratitude and satisfaction and humility. Now, how likely is something that with that kind of sentiment want to kill themselves? Right? That's not a sentiment of ambition or acquisition.

It's a sentiment of no matter what, I'm grounded in this reality that it could be different. So one exercise that I often use with people is what I call the negation exercise. um, imagine everything's been taken away. Your [00:53:00] body, all your senses, your family, your possessions, your career, you are nothing. And, we'll do a role play.

And I'll give you back one thing at a time if you can prove to me that you appreciate it. So I'm gonna play God. And a friend of mine, , said, talk about Ms. Casting . He said Maybe Morgan Freeman should be playing this, but, you know, so anyway,

Yael Schoonbrun: I know you have a very distinguished presence. It could work

Robert Leahy: so, so you, you do this exercise with almost anybody and you know, no matter how macho they are or how ambitious they are, what do they want back first? They want back their children. They want back their partner. They want back their senses, you know? and you have to tell me what you appreciate about them.

In other words, your eyes are open. It's a revelation. And I've never had anybody said, I [00:54:00] want back that million dollars, or I want back that car, or whatever they want back. The very fundamental things that are part of human nature, your senses, your ability to relate to your children and to your partner. And that way, if you think if you practice negation, this is an ancient, stoic exercise from 2000 years ago. If you practice negation and then you imagine that your partner is gone, your kids are gone, but now you have them back because you have them back cuz you appreciate them, well maybe you should be appreciated them on a da uh, daily basis.

Yael Schoonbrun: Yeah. I love that exercise. I love that exercise cuz it's such a, it's such a way to reframe, the things that we can get discontent with, right? Because we're doing these upward comparisons and imagining that we've lost them just helps us to r. Restructure kind of how we're thinking about them. And

I, I am a huge fan [00:55:00] of daily gratitudes and I, I do very short meditations cuz that that's what I feel like I can fit in.

But I do one minute a day reflecting on something that I'm grateful for. And then I also try to do that at night before I go to bed. What was the most meaningful moment of my day? And I think building in practices like that is a way, if you're not religious, as I am not religious, of building in this habit that is more prescriptive in, that has in history been more prescriptive from religion that we've kind of lost sight of in our secular culture.

But I did wanna kind of note, you know, you spend a lot of time in your book talking about that if you do have regret, for example, that you're missing some of those more fundamental elements of what makes for a connect. Meaningful life. For example, you know, connections with people you care about, that you can use it in a productive way to guide behaviors going forward.

In other words, that the upside of regret is that we can [00:56:00] learn from mistakes, learn from what we're missing. We can self-correct, we can apologize, we can boost our own motivation. We can experiment in our, in our mind sort of thinking through using this negation technique or, or other techniques that you offer in the book with thinking about what is it that I am really longing for, or what is it that I regret having it, you know, put into my life that actually doesn't belong there?

And so I wonder if you can talk about what you recommend for people who, who feel like a sense of regret, but don't really know how to take action to make their lives more like what they think would make them feel satisfied.

Robert Leahy: Well, you know, it's, um, I think, I think one way of thinking about this is the concept that I, propose of relative preferences. So, um, very likely you're not gonna be in a position where even if you work at something, you're gonna get [00:57:00] everything you want in your job, your relationship, where you live or your life.

Um, but the maximizing concept that I think drives a big part of our culture, um, is one where we don't have relative preference. We have an absolute preference. I want this, my partner should be this. So, I was talking with somebody, uh, a while back and, um, uh, and he expected that his wife was going to retire.

Uh, was this a second marriage? Both widowed and uh, uh, but she wanted to continue working part-time. Um, um, and he said, you know, he said, you know, that's not what I expected. And I said, well, you're right. That's not what you

expected. Uh, but you know, the thing about expectations, you can change your [00:58:00] expectations and match reality. He said, what are you talking about? It's an expectation. I said, an expectation is the thought. It's like in New York City, uh, you see these, uh, stands where the buses are, where they have the schedule, like the Second Avenue buses coming at nine 12 and 9 24, 9 36. The only people who look at the schedule are tourists. Uh, people who live in New York never

Yael Schoonbrun: They know better.

Robert Leahy: Yeah. Cause you know, yeah. Cuz you're sitting there at nine

Yael Schoonbrun: in Boston

Robert Leahy: where, where's, where's the bus? You know, 9 36 3 buses come at the same bus at the same time. So, um, you indeed change your expectations to match reality. And you need to look at relative preferences.

So let's think about, let's think about your relationship or your career as a basket of goods. Like a buffet. You know, it's a buffet. They have a lot of different things, but they don't have your favorite thing and they never will. Right. [00:59:00] But look at all the other things here. You know, what, if you were to have this flexibility that I'm gonna work hard at, um, at appreciating, and, you know, recognizing how lucky I might be to have some of these other things on this buffet table.

and one way of doing it is to compare somebody who doesn't have a buffet table. So it's, it's kind. You don't, you don't want to be a glutton for ambition. Uh, what you wanna be is somebody who is willing to work hard, but to recognize their limits of working hard. And the limits of working hard is how much time do you spend with your family?

How much time do you spend on other things as, like, Aristotle would say, would be to have the balance in your life.

Yael Schoonbrun: Yeah.

Robert Leahy: And balance is a hard thing. You know, in Europe, in, in the, [01:00:00] in, in America, we say, you know, they, that person works like a dog. Although I think it's very hard to get a dog to work hard for a long period of time.

But

Yael Schoonbrun: That's true. That's a funny saying. I hadn't thought about that.

Robert Leahy: that person works like a dog. Uh, in Europe they say that person works like an American.

Yael Schoonbrun: Oh

Robert Leahy: like an Americans have vacation time. They don't take

Yael Schoonbrun: Right.

Robert Leahy: right.

Yael Schoonbrun: Yeah, I mean, it's interesting cause I think, so one, we're, we're almost out of time, but I, I have so many more questions, one of the things that it brings to mind is this, this idea of risk assessment that you talk about in the book, um, that decisions are a trade off of risks, not the absence of risk. And my recent book was, uh, about working parenthood. And I, I talk about this in that context too, that we're looking for to sort of like optimize both sides. And, and that's an impossibility. In fact, there's always trade-offs. And so really being I entering into decisions with our eye eyes open that we're, every [01:01:00] time we choose something, we're also choosing away from something else.

And that this, and, and in your book you write that risk assessment is really central to managing our regret. So I wonder if you could say a bit about that.

Robert Leahy: Right, it's in interesting because, um, you know, you were saying earlier that people are anxious and depressed or often, uh, risk averse. They're afraid of taking a risk cuz they equate a risk always with a bad outcome. They can't recover from losses and all of that. Uh, but there are people who take too many risks and the way.

It's interesting, how do we assess how risky something is? And there's a lot of research in, um, in the, the field of behavioral economics and cognitive science. For example, you know, during the pandemic and people not wearing masks, not getting the vaccination, uh, the whole thing. Oh, you know, it's too, there's no, there's no risk of, or, or, or the risk of getting covid and [01:02:00] dying is very low.

You know, I know people who didn't wear a mask or didn't, you know, get the vaccination who, you know, did not die from covid. So in that case, some people will underestimate risk. And what they do is there are a number of errors in thinking what they do is they use anecdotes. They don't, they don't use probabilities.

Um, you know, for example, we know now that people who have not been vaccinated, Are 17 times more likely to die from Covid than people who have been vaccinated. And we have a less virulent, uh, version of Covid going around, um, that they, uh, they focus on anecdotes. They ignore probability. They have a concept which I call Russian roulette, which is that, oh, well, having been, you know, wearing a mask, or I haven't been doing these things, or whatever, and nothing bad has happened yet.

That's like saying I have a, a gun that has six chambers. There's one bullet in it, I pull the trigger five [01:03:00] times, nothing's happened. I must be safe. So, uh, there's cumulative risk, cumulative exposure. So we don't, we often don't, um, calculate risk, uh, rationally and people who underestimate risk, uh, Are going to have, are much more likely to have a bad outcome at some point.

People who drive too fast don't wear a seatbelt, unprotected sex, whatever. You know, certain things like hit the hedonic, uh, thing. If it feels good, it can't be risky. So unprotected sex or drugs or alcohol, whatever, they may feel good. And so we underestimate the risk of it. Um, the other part of it is overestimating risk and you know, it's like all the bad news all the time.

That's what cable news is. Um, and it's, it's interesting the more, the more people, more time people spend watching the news, the less [01:04:00] accurate they are about

Yael Schoonbrun: or, or Googling symptoms, right? So it's not right. I think that there's so many ways that we can really get caught up in all the risks that can be really paralyzing for decision making.

Robert Leahy: Yeah. We, we goo, you know, we have this, you know, Google, I, we're constantly searching for the bad news. Uh, and so when we do that, we don't, it's like a selective search. It's like, oh, let me see, is there some reason why I should be anxious? Oh, I know I have this file called my anxiety file of all the possible bad things that could happen.

And I go into that file, oh my God, I feel so anxious now. So it's, it's accessibility that I can get this, the salient images, you know, the, if it doesn't

bleed, it doesn't lead. And so we then begin, uh, over resting meeting, uh, the risk. But life is risk versus risk. The risk of doing something, the risk of not doing something. [01:05:00]

There's no risk free alternative. There's no free lunch, but at least there's a lunch.

Yael Schoonbrun: I like that. It was interesting too, cuz there was just, uh, there's two things that I'm thinking of. There's, um, Emily Oster has this terrific newsletter that I recommend to anybody who's a parent. It's wonderful. And she had this piece that came out yesterday in the newsletter, uh, that there's no option C, right?

You, you could pick A or B. And A or B. Both have pluses and minuses, but there's not some fantasy option C that is risk free. They all have risk and if you find an option C, it too will have risk, but there's no magical option

Robert Leahy: Yeah. Yeah.

Yael Schoonbrun: The other thing I'm thinking of is Time Magazine. Just came out with a serious, uh, interviews with happiness researchers and one of them was written by Marty Sigman and it was all about catastrophizing.

And he writes how he's a catastrophizer, but because he's so invested in this research, he's sort of developed a set of practices. because he's aware that always getting caught up in like all the worst possible outcomes is, is not good for one's, uh, mental [01:06:00] health.

And so, you know, we need to sort of figure out how to unhook from those tendencies and do a more accurate risk assessment while recognizing that risk is, to some extent, unavoidable, but that focusing out on it with all of our attention and energy is not, it has uh, diminishing returns.

Robert Leahy: Right. So, uh, I have a, i I, I agree with Marty about catastrophizing that concept that Beck developed many years ago in, uh, Albert Elvis with Awfulizing, uh, back in probably late, late fifties. Um, I think there's another catastrophe that we overlook. It's the catastrophe of not living your life. Uh, you know, it's like somebody who says, well, you know, I got hurt and relationship broke up, and, um, I don't want to get hurt again, so I'm not gonna fall in. right? So, um, you think about, you know, people will say, I don't wanna get hurt cuz I might fall in love. I say, well, you know, I actually guarantee that if you fall in love you'll get hurt. [01:07:00] Oh my God, I'm pessimistic. Well,

here's what I think that one of you is gonna die. You know, and you'll get hurt if your partner dies or you'll certainly get hurt if you die.

Right? So we all get hurt and one of the things that I think we, we often think is that we want to end suffering, which I agree. We wanna, we wanna minimize suffering. I was talking with a, a, a psychologist a number of years ago, a very prominent person who came up to me after and said, you know, my wife died, uh, six months ago and I'm still not over it.

We have been together 38 years and she had a long cancer. We knew it was the right time, but I'm not over it. and I said, well, I actually hope you don't get over it. I hope that you're able to feel the pain of losing somebody you've loved for 38 years and raising children, having [01:08:00] grandchildren, the love of your life that that you life is not a matter of not suffering.

It's a matter of living a life worth suffering for. And so you should think about building your life that's large enough to contain that suffering. A life that you go on, you have other meaningful relationships. But if you look back at losing your wife, you should be open to that sadness and that loss.

Your heart is broken, but you can repute your heart and you can build a life worth's suffering for, and I think that's a, that's something of of relief for people to think that suffering is part of life. You know, it's part of life because life matters. Things count in life. You're not the stoic who's just standing back and just accepting and everything is what it is.

We have to be accepting of the suffering that we have by virtue of the love that we have.[01:09:00]

Yael Schoonbrun: that's so beautifully put. And, and really at the heart of acceptance and commitment therapy too. And, you know, makes me think of Victor Frankl's work on making meaning from suffering. Suffering can't be avoided. And it's not a bug in the system. It's a feature, it's a part of being human. Um, so I, I just really appreciate your work here and I, I think that your, your tough love here is.

Important, right? To recognize that this isn't something we can avoid, but this is something we can do more skillfully. We can feel that regret and use it to prompt building the things that really matter and worrying less about the things that are just gonna cause us to be in this vicious cycle of wanting, but never feeling fully satisfied.

So I really recommend folks pick up this book if only Finding Freedom From Regret. Where else can people find out more, uh, about you and from you?

Robert Leahy: well they can come and visit me in New York, but

Yael Schoonbrun: [01:10:00] He'll be by the bus stop waiting.

Robert Leahy: I'll be on the second Avenue bus stop. Uh, now you can go to my, uh, our website, uh, www.cognitivetherapynyc.com. And, uh, there's a lot of information, uh, on that. Uh, yeah, so it was great getting a chance to talk to you today, Yale, and, uh, I hope we covered a lot of things that. You and your viewers will, uh, find interesting.

, it's a big topic.

Yael Schoonbrun: sure. It's a big topic and I, I will say that I actually have like another dozen questions that I didn't have a chance to talk to you about because, um, this book is just full of ideas and recommendations and research. So, uh, we give you a taste of it. But it was such an honor to speak with you. You're such a legend, uh, in the field of psychology and, and I was really excited to have the opportunity to speak with you today.

Thank you so much for making the

Robert Leahy: Well, you're very kind. Thank you so much.

Yael Schonbrun: Hey, psychologists, off the clock listeners, I'm gonna guess that if you got to the end of this episode [01:11:00] that you also love to geek out about books in psychology.

Michael Herold: If you don't know where to store all your books and people are already complaining that you talk about this book that you're reading all the time, then why don't you join us once a.

To read a book together.

Yael Schonbrun: If you're interested in joining us, we hope you are. Just send an email to off the clock psych gmail.com and we'll send you more information.

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