

Ep #13: Being a Beginner Sucks



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With Your Host

Melissa Parsons

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Ep #13: Being a Beginner Sucks

Hey, this is Melissa Parsons, and you are listening to the *Your Favorite You Podcast*. I'm a certified life coach with an advanced certification in deep dive coaching. The purpose of this podcast is to help brilliant women like you with beautiful brains create the life you've been dreaming of with intention.

Oh hi. Welcome back to *Your Favorite You*. Today's episode is lucky number 13, and we are going to talk about the fact that being a beginner sucks. Most of us who've mastered a craft or a career or a hobby, hate being a beginner again because it is so uncomfortable and stressful, and it takes efforting to get good at something.

So, I was inspired to do this episode after I was at a trauma seminar, back about a month ago led by Dr. Kemia Sarraf. And the reason that being a beginner sucks was explained to me very eloquently by Dr. Kemia. She is a badass who's two plus decade career has included becoming both an MD and getting her Masters of Public Health.

She has a medical practice in internal medicine. She has been involved in public health program development, nonprofit leadership, business ownership. She has held multiple board positions. She is doing trauma mitigation work, and she's a farmer. This incredible woman is not afraid to be a beginner. Dr. K founded Lodestar and specializes in trauma-responsive coaching for physicians, and as I stated, I attended her daylong trauma-responsive coaching and leadership workshop in November of this year.

Dr. Sarraf described that most of us think of learning a new skill as a linear process, she prefers to think of learning as a learning U. So, I want you to imagine you see a big U, and it's in a square divided into four quadrants. You're going to draw a U-shaped arrow starting in the upper left quadrant, going down to the lower left quadrant, coming back up the lower right quadrant and finishing in the upper-right quadrant.

The first upper left quadrant where you start in the learning U is called unconscious incompetence. This is where you are oblivious. You do not know what you do not know. There is very little stress here. There's no problem being oblivious. You don't know that there's anything to be

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stressed over. The second quadrant, the lower left of the learning U is called conscious incompetence.

This is the most stress-filled quadrant because you do know that there is a lot that you do not know. So, you see all the things that you don't know and that you still need to learn, and that's stressful. Moving over to the third lower right quadrant of the learning U, we have the effortful area of what she calls conscious competence. You know a lot.

You still have some to learn and you're putting lots of effort into getting it right while learning at the same time by doing. This area is also a bit stressful because you're still efforting to learn and to get things right.

The final quadrant is the upper right quadrant, which is unconscious competence, where what you know and how you do things is completely second nature. You don't have to think about things at all. There's really not a lot of stress here either. There's also not a lot of learning to still be done.

So, to put this into terms that most of us can relate to, think about driving a car. When you're 10 years old, you're oblivious about how to drive a car and you don't care, you don't have to drive a car. You don't stress about it because you're not conscious of your incompetence yet.

When you're 15 and a half, in Ohio, at least, you move down into the more stressful quadrant of conscious incompetence. You know that there's a method to driving a car safely and you know that you are clueless about how to do this without crashing the car.

The first year or two of driving, you move into conscious competence. You know how to drive the car, and you're meeting different situations. You're driving on the highway; you're driving in the snow. If you live where it's snowy, you're driving with multiple passengers in the car you're driving at night to help you become a better driver and be ready for all the different situations that you will meet.

Once you've been driving for as long as I have, which I just did the math and it's fucking 34 years, like what? You are squarely in the unconscious

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competent zone where you can drive in most any situation without any stress. You've been in all the scenarios before and you have successfully navigated them, or you've gotten into a fender bender and you've survived, or you've even gotten into a bigger accident and you've survived that, and you don't really have to think about driving at all.

It's completely second nature, almost to the point that I will drive somewhere and not remember much of the drive at all. I'll be like, "oh, how did I get here?" Probably not the best way to be driving.

Anyway, as I was creating this episode, I reached out to Dr. Sarraf to make sure that I was giving her the appropriate credit for this amazing work that she's done and these ideas that she's come up with.

Because this is one of my values to give credit for where credit is due for things that are not my ideas, and then give you kind of my take on it with a twist.

So, I sent her what I had created so far, and she wrote back because she's a lovely human being, and she said, "lovely," and sent me a red heart.

She said, "and don't forget, when you teach your own child to drive, you need to move back down the learning U at that point, you have to remember what it is not to know. If we stay up in that place of mastery and up in the upper right quadrant, the unconscious competence, we fall victim to the bias of cursed knowledge."

This is why, if you were in medical school with me, or if you've been to medical school, or you've been in class where you had brilliant professors that just could not understand what it was, what not to know, they just couldn't remember what it was not to know. So, they just couldn't teach us in a way, and like kill us in class, right?

So, I have been trying to give you guys so much value with this podcast and from now on when I'm creating and delivering it, I will try to always remember what it is not to know and share from that place with you.

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Now let's explore what happens when you go back down the U. So, think of an arrow going from the upper right quadrant down through the lower right quadrant and back into the lower left quadrant, which is the most stressful one, right?

Once you've mastered something in your life, which if you haven't taken the time to figure out the things that you actually have mastered, it might be a great time to do that and give yourself fucking credit for doing so. It also might be a time to figure out the things that you have mastered unconsciously that you don't want to keep practicing anymore.

So, it's not very comfortable for our brains to be asked to go back down the learning U. The learning U from unconscious competence where we don't have to think about something to know it back to conscious incompetence where we know that there's a lot we don't know, and we want to. When people are in conscious incompetence, that lower left quadrant for me, I like to think of this as like the beginning of residency.

It's very stressful and uncomfortable and we think that the goal and the mecca and the ultimate place that we want to end up in is that upper right-hand corner of the U unconscious competence where everything is second. Now, don't get me wrong, it's nice to be here for a little while and I think some people can stay here forever and be perfectly content, and there's not a problem with that.

For me, this is what I figured out happened after practicing pediatrics for 22 years. I had to think very little at my job and when I was having to think and use my brain a bunch and consult with the other amazing humans who knew way more about certain illnesses than me, it was because I was going to have to deliver a difficult diagnosis to a child and their family or a young adult in their family.

I didn't love that part of my job as a pediatrician, and I'm sad to say that I got damn good at that too, if I do say so. So, as I was making this realization, although I didn't have the learning U framework at this time, the pandemic hit, and I really was not having to use my brain because no one was even coming into the office.

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Illness other than Covid stopped because kids weren't going to school in daycare, and people were advised to not even come in for their wellness visits unless it was time for a vaccine and to shelter at home.

So, this set of circumstances spurred me into action as I decided I would do something I never thought I would do in my lifetime and become a self-employed entrepreneur.

Man, did I dive down that U. It took bravery, ovaries, finding comfort in not knowing, finding comfort and uncertainty. New learning can be stressful and based on the learning U, I would assert that it's supposed to be stressful. Dr. Sarraf taught us that this is not a problem if you believe and practice believing that healthy stress builds courage and resilience.

If you believe that stress is central to normal, healthy learning and development, and intentionally going back down, the learning U to the more stressful phases actually increases your stress tolerance. One of the things that really helped me have the bravery to go back down, the learning U to the more stressful and effortful quadrants was the coaching that I received from my coach, Maggie.

She offered me the idea that I could take all the thoughts and beliefs that I had about myself as a pediatrician and actually slap them onto the identity that I had as an entrepreneur and a life coach.

So, for example, it was easy for me to believe that I was in high demand as a pediatrician. I got so busy with families that wanted me to be their child's doctor, that I had to close my practice to new patients for quite a while.

If it is easy for me to believe I'm in high demand as a pediatrician, I can try on the belief that I'm in high demand as a coach, and that has worked very well for me. Now, I do believe that, and it is true. I am in high demand as a coach.

Another thought I had as a pediatrician was, if I ever get stuck not knowing how to handle a patient or figure out their diagnosis, it's not a problem.

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I will consult with someone who has more knowledge than me and ask for their help. I can't possibly know all the things there are to know in medicine, nobody can.

To make that thought a reality in entrepreneurship, all I had to do was change some of the words. For example, I had the thought, I will read a book called the Podcast Journal when I want to start my podcast, it lays it all out.

When I got stuck in that journal, and I didn't want to spend my time figuring out Audacity or Garage Band, the programs needed to edit a podcast, I messaged an expert, hi Kara, and asked her for help in her zone of genius, and that is how I found my podcast producer and editor, Kara Gott Warner.

I've done this a hundred different ways, and I would encourage you to do the same if you're trying something. Find thoughts about yourself that give you a feeling of confidence or certainty in one area of your life, and then try a similar thought that gives you a similar feeling in another area of your life.

For example, if you excel at being a friend to another person, but you are struggling in your marriage, think of all the thoughts that you think about your friend that you find easy to love, and see if you can transfer those same thoughts or similar thoughts onto your spouse. Let me know if you have questions about this. I would love to hear it. If you do, and I'd love to help you.

To make this even more practical for all of you, think about something that you would like to become a beginner again at doing. Maybe it is yelling at your kids less. Maybe that has become an unconscious competence that you have, like yelling at my kids, no problem. It's second nature, but you want to dive back down that U and figure out what you can do instead of yelling. Maybe it is saying no to something that you don't want to do, when in the past you would've said yes. Maybe it is going into rescue your kids when they get into a pickle instead of letting them fail and figuring it out on their own.

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The reason you do this without thinking about. Until later when you feel the guilt or shame of, or frustration of doing it again, is that it has just become a well-practiced and mastered behavior. You are living in the land of unconscious competence. And by the way, you beating yourself up for doing these things and then later feeling bad about it is just a practiced and mastered experience too. So maybe just start there and agree to give yourself compassion when you figured it out.

In the words of Britney Spears. "Oops, I did it again." And offer yourself compassion instead of judgment. So, to take the less yelling at the kids example right now, when you're not activated, think of a few things you could do instead of yelling.

For me, the simplest, fastest thing to do is just pause and breathe. You can try box breathing, which is breathing in for four seconds, holding for four seconds. Breathing out for four seconds and holding on the out breath for four, and then breathing in again for four until you calm down. Or you can try 4, 7, 8 breathing to activate your parasympathetic nervous system.

When you get activated by anyone, you immediately go to sympathetic, so your only choices in that sympathetic activation are fight, flight, freeze, and appease. So, believe it or not, you can actively call your parasympathetic nervous system up by breathing in for a count of four, holding at the top of your breath for a count of seven, and then breathing out for eight seconds.

You repeat this until you no longer feel the need to yell. If your kiddos are old enough, you can tell them you're trying something new and you want to start yelling less and you can ask them how could mommy, or mama, or mom, or brah, if you have teenagers, get your attention, instead of yelling. Come up with them with a list of two or three alternative things.

You can make it silly. For example, you could burst into song like "Let it Go" from Frozen is a good one if you have little kids. "All I Do is Win by DJ Khaled is fun, "Hot, and Cold" by Katie Perry. "I Choose You by Sarah Burroughs. You get the idea if your kids are old enough to let be left alone. You can put yourself in timeout.

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You can go to your room or go outside until you're calm. You can do the breathing in your room, right?

I have also been known to go into my car and give a nice, long, primal scream while listening to music that I love. Anyway, you get the idea. The next time you start to get activated by them, offer the universe a big thank you for giving you this opportunity to learn.

It's not a problem. You're going to be a beginner again and try to do things differently. Remember, this is supposed to be a bit stressful, but you are choosing this stress in order to learn something new and to increase your stress tolerance. You are actively building courage and resilience by choosing this.

You're going to pause and breathe instead of yelling or whatever it is you and the kids decided might work best. If this doesn't work right away, again, not a problem. You're going to remind yourself that you're a beginner and that it is going to take practice for everyone involved, you and the kids to start to change the behavior and the eventual outcome.

And you're going to continue to practice over and over, coming up with new methods until you reach conscious competence. And with enough practice, it will eventually become second nature not to yell at the kids. Now, of course, you're going to occasionally still yell, but it will feel so foreign to everyone involved and you will thank yourself that it is no longer your modus operandi.

To give you an example of this, several months ago, one day when I was upset about the Uvalde Elementary school shooting and had not yet had a chance to sit with myself and process my grief and anger about this. Owen and I were in the kitchen after I was done working and he said or did something that activated me. I couldn't even tell you what it was. It was something dumb.

So, I started slamming around the kitchen trying to slam our soft-close cabinets, and drawers. It was less than satisfying, way less than satisfying,

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but he was taken aback. He said, mom, what the fuck is wrong with you? Yes, my kids swear as much as I do, and it makes me endlessly proud.

And I had this like realization, "oh my gosh, he does not remember that this used to be my MO." My hair trigger no longer exists, and he has forgotten that I used to slam around all the time when I was upset. At that moment, I told him because I didn't know at that point, I had been working all day.

I didn't know what had me so activated. I said, I don't know what's wrong, but I don't think it has anything to do with you, buddy. And then I took a moment to go sit with myself and ask myself my favorite question when I'm upset, modeled for me by one of my coaches, Brooke Castillo. What's the matter? Love? And in asking myself that question, the sadness over all the people who have died from senseless gun violence in our country, and all the kids and teachers who died that day in Uvalde immediately came up.

I went in to share with O. He was in his room at this point, and I apologized to him. I explained to him that I had figured it out, and we both hugged it out while I cried. He was providing me comfort, which he loves to do now. Anyway, another way to use this tool like totally shifting gears, is if you want to start a new hobby.

I can think of so many new things I've tried over the last four years that I knew nothing about. I'm only going to share two of them with you now, so don't worry. This podcast isn't going to go on forever.

So, I was firmly in the oblivious camp when I started both of these new things. The first was a hip hop dancing class. I went with my dear friend Beth, who is actually a pretty damn good dancer. Hi, Beth.

I tried this for months and I stayed firmly in the lower left corner of the learning U. I was very consciously aware of my incompetence. I was surrounded by mirrors and other amazing dancers in this class, and I'm not kidding when I say I was a danger to others in the class.

I even tried some private lessons with the leaders of the class, and I invited my friends. We had so much fun in the private classes and I still sucked so

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badly. Now, I know I could have put many hours into getting better at this, but Covid actually saved me, and I stopped having the dream of being one of Pink's backup dancers.

I decided that I wanted to invest my time elsewhere, and that's okay. No need to beat myself up or tell myself the story that I gave up. Even if it's true and I did give up, it doesn't serve me to have that thought.

So, I don't, being a backup dancer for Pink or any other amazing artist was never in the cards, and that's okay.

The other example is my yoga journey. I was invited to my first class by my amazing friend and fellow pediatrician, Bonnie. Hi, sweet Bonnie. I had never done yoga before this class. I managed to rip the extensor tendon off my distal phalanx of my left ring finger when I was transitioning from one pose to another on the sticky mat.

When I went to the orthopedic surgeon to fix this, he chided me by asking "what type of yoga was this? Is there a full-contact yoga that I'm not aware of?" And I was like, "Nope. Slow flow baby." I hurt my finger toward the end of class, and it really wasn't painful. I actually didn't even realize that I couldn't extend the last part of my finger until after class, and it didn't hurt.

It just wouldn't extend and was a little bit sore, but, you know, nothing terrible. And I actually really loved the messages that I was getting from the leader of the class, Amber, about self-love and self-acceptance. Hi Amber.

So, I wore the brace on my finger 24/7 for four weeks. As it healed you couldn't take the brace off at all, or else, you know, the tendon would just pop right back off.

So, I got really good at wearing that brace, that's for sure. And then after it healed, I went right back into my practice getting better and better at the types of yoga I love to practice, while also getting better and better at self-love and self-acceptance.

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And I am proud to say that these things have become second nature for me. I hope that these examples are a good demonstration for you and that they have gotten you to thinking about what you have already mastered in your life that you want to keep. Maybe they've got gotten you thinking about what you have unconsciously mastered that you want to change.

And of course, maybe they've gotten you thinking about what you want to try to be a beginner at in the future, intentionally on purpose. I would love to invite you to become a beginner at becoming your favorite you by working with me as your coach. The next step is for you to dive back down that learning U in your relationship with yourself and all the people you care about and that care about you.

I would love to be your guide. I know that I have done tons of work on my relationship with myself. I could have done it all alone, but working with my coaches have has been like rocket fuel and a warm balm for my soul. At the same time, quite an amazing combination for which I'm eternally grateful to all of them, but also to me for knowing that I didn't have to do it alone.

So go right now to www.MelissaParsonsCoaching.com and click on the Work with Me tab to set up a consult today. Let's make 2023 the year you become your favorite you. I hope you all have a Happy New Year

Kemia, Dr. Sarraf is a generous and such an amazing human that she's offering a 10% discount for all my listeners to her already incredibly priced program.

You all are hearing this at the end of December, 2022, and she has a January trauma mitigation masterclass starting on January 10th. If you're wondering if this is for you, most of the attendees are coaches, physicians, attorneys, and leaders in their field with leaders of experience in their own field. So, you don't have to be a coach or a physician or attorney.

You can just identify as a leader in your field. I cannot recommend working with Kemia and her team enough, and you all know I would not be endorsing shit I don't truly believe would help you anyway.

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You can go to the link in the show notes and register for the course. You may use the code COACHMELISSA squished into one word to get 10% off your registration.

You may use this code between now and January 10 for all of her current class offerings. As of right now, there are offerings that run for two months, starting in January, February, March, and May. So, if you are like me and you like to plan ahead, that is available to you as well. So go to the link in the show notes, use the code COACHMELISSA to get 10% off your registration fees and you can thank me later.

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Thank you for listening to this week's episode of Your Favorite You.

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I, so look forward to meeting you.