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BUFFERING THE STRESS

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Hello, my friends. There is so much going on and so much change in all of our lives. So I just want to ask, how are you? How are you coping with all of that is going on around you? That's really what I want to talk about today, how you're coping. Normally, when I do these podcast episodes, I batch them. I'll record a bunch of them at the same time. And what I tried to do is really focus on that person who's sitting in their office, who's stressed out, who doesn't love their job or isn't performing at their job and doesn't know what to do about it.

That's what I really focus on. That's who I want to help. That's where all my content, all my training programs, and all my coaching programs are focused on. Helping that person take back control of their career, and create the career that they want; even if that career is doing what they're doing right now but being able to be more successful at it and being able to be more mentally focused on getting the results that they want. So that's really what I try to do.

I'm a career coach, but I'm a life coach, at my core, because managing your career and being successful in your career is a combination of the technical skills and the mental management that we all need to be able to show up at our best and be successful. Today, I was thinking about, Okay, what does that person need? They're not in their office sitting at their desks anymore. They're sitting at home.

One of the things that I know keeps coming up a lot. And a lot of coaching conversations that I'm having are about something I call *buffering*. Maybe this term isn't new to you. I didn't invent this term, but it's something that I use as a short form for when people are avoiding feeling a certain way, by trying to find some temporary pleasure in other things. And those things could be things like food, Netflix, drinking, shopping, working, social media, or just surfing around the web.

Basically, we're trying to avoid some kind of negative feeling. Right now, there's a lot of uncertainty. And with uncertainty comes stress and fear. I've also heard people have a sense of inadequacy because they can't do the things they want to do to protect their families. Boredom is a big one as well. These are all things that people want to avoid feeling so they look for opportunities to avoid those feelings by creating some temporary pleasure.

Notice that I said, you're avoiding the feeling, not replacing the feeling, because the feeling is still going to be there. When the temporary pleasure is over, you're still going to have that feeling of boredom and stress and fear and uncertainty or inadequacy, or whatever that feeling was when you started.

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So today, I thought it would be helpful to just shine a light on buffering. A little bit buffering the stress that you're feeling right now, given the circumstances that are around you, and the circumstances are largely circumstances that you cannot control. We're going to talk about the concept of buffering. We're going to talk about how it's showing up right now, and why it's dangerous for you. And what you can do to stop buffering or at least slow down on the buffering with food, Netflix, drinking, shopping, or whatever it is that you're buffering with.

Even though we're talking about it in the context of COVID-19, this buffering happens all the time with regular work when you're facing a project you don't know how to do or you're nervous about, when you're dealing with a boss or a peer or relationship that's getting in your way, or when you're going after a new job. There are lots of things that create emotions in us that we're trying to avoid.

So once you understand the concept of buffering and some basic ways of dealing with it, you can apply it to not only the situation of COVID-19, but how it impacts your life overall, and certainly, how it shows up in your career. Because buffering is something we do, like I said, to avoid pain, and we get this temporary pleasure. But we've done this so many times in our lives over and over again. People buffer all the time.

Even though we've had this experience of buffering over and over again, we tend not to really understand it. Or we just tend to let it go. When I'm stressed out I eat or when I'm stressed out, I don't eat. Or, it has been such a bad day. I just need a drink. We talked about it like it's an acceptable thing to just avoid how we're feeling by using a temporary pleasure by inserting something to temporarily block this, this sense, this feeling that you've got, but the challenge is that feeling is still going to be there.

So when the pleasure is over; when you've finished the plate of cookies, or when you see the bottom of the bottle of wine, you know that that pain is still going to be there. It's like when you walk into a room, you turn the lights on, and you see that the room is a total mess, so you think you know what the easiest thing for you to do right now is just to turn that light right back off. That way, you don't have to see them as if the mess will go away. But we, of course, know the mess doesn't go away. You just can't see the mess. You are just avoiding the mess.

I get buffering. I have been doing it all my life. Okay. It wasn't really until I started studying to become a coach, and got my certification, then I started really immersing myself in coaching, and cognitive thinking that I really got a sense of what this pattern was that I was bringing up in my life over and over again. If I had actually managed this pattern better, what would have been different in my career and in my life? My MO is food. I turn to food for everything. Everything.

The worst experience I had in my life with that was a boss that I really had a hard time with. She wasn't the greatest boss in the whole wide world. She didn't have the best leadership skills. But I made that situation so much worse with my thinking, first of all, and then I amplified how bad it was with my buffering. I want to talk about how amplifying buffering creates bigger problems for us.

Let's take a standard situation. In my situation, I had a boss who was really difficult for me to manage. All I could focus on was all the bad things that were happening. I couldn't focus on anything else. Even though my boss was not the best leader, maybe she started digging the hole for me, I got the freakin bulldozer out. I really made that whole huge with my own thinking, first of all.

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Just like my thoughts about her and what a bad boss she was. That this wasn't fair, I'm so great. Why doesn't she see it? All this stuff that was not useful or productive, and all of these thoughts were creating results that were not useful for me. Throughout this whole situation, I turned to food. Here's what's happening when you're turning to food. Let's say, I come home from work, I would have a big meal and then I would immediately want something sweet or something bad for me.

It could be potato chips with chocolate-covered almonds or maybe I would start with the cookies and then go to something salty. It was like binge eating to make myself feel better. But here's the problem with that. I would feel great for a bit because the food tasted really good. But then I would feel physically ill from eating all this food, too. I would feel guilty as hell. Next. I would beat the crap out of myself for doing this to my body. Then, I would gain weight. Ultimately, I gained 40 pounds, by the way.

As I was gaining weight, I would feel worse about myself. My clothes didn't fit, I didn't know what to wear, I didn't feel comfortable in them, I wasn't happy with the way I looked. Slowly, the situation that I already had with my boss and the painful feelings that I was already having there, I was like, amplifying them. So not only were they still there after I finished a plate of cookies, but I just piled on all these other terrible feelings and thoughts about myself and my situation, because I had eaten all this food.

Here's the thing, when it comes to buffering, it becomes perpetual. The brain gets into the habit of it. It really shows how easy it is to avoid feelings by buffering, to get pleasure by buffering, and to not feel those negative emotions by doing certain things. So for me, it was food. It might be shopping for you. It might be Netflix or Candy Crush, or whatever it is, to give you that sense of temporary pleasure.

Because that lizard brain in our head that is looking for pleasure and wants to avoid pain, that lizard brain that kept us alive when we were cavemen, it is not a long-term thinker. It is about immediate gratification. So at that moment when you're feeling that pain and that caveman brain of ours is all about seeking pleasure, avoiding pain, conserving energy, that's all it cares, though. So when it feels like it's found something to avoid the pain and get the pleasure, it wants more of it. It sees that it works and it wants more of it.

So the more we eat, the more we want to eat. The more we drink, the more we want to drink. The more we Netflix, the more we want to Netflix, and on and on. And marketing doesn't help, I have to say. It is filled with messages that encourage you to indulge in buffering, to make yourself feel better in some way, with some external source.

Many of you know that I worked at McDonald's for years and years. When McDonald's came with the tagline, *You deserve a break today*. *Come and eat some french fries and burgers.* Basically, that in itself was a sense of buffering. You've worked really hard, you're tired. Avoid all of that. Come seek pleasure and food. Coca-Cola does the same thing. They say, *Create happiness*. Which I guess is chemically true. The sugar creates a rush of pleasure in your body. But then what? You have all the impact of all that sugar in your body.

We weren't just in the States for the first three months this year, trying to escape the winter. We had to come back early given all that's going on. But it's funny because we didn't have a DVR. We couldn't record any programs so anytime we watch television, we have to watch live television with the commercials and everything. We

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noticed that all the commercials were about food indulgences like pizza, burger places, ice cream, chocolate, and whatever. Food indulgences are all over the place, or pharmaceuticals.

A lot of fear-based programming feeds these fear emotions that cause the buffering. It was crazy. I felt like all the marketing in the States was about driving people to buffer, either helping you feel stressed out with the news or the programs or whatever; and then giving you these solutions to feel better, like with food or medicine or alcohol or whatever it's going to be. But how do you know that it's buffering? What if it's just like, I just feel like sitting here and watching Netflix all day? Is that such a bad thing?

Or I just want to have a few cookies. Why does it have to be buffering? So here's when you know that is buffering. It's when the net effect is negative, or I call it a net negative effect. If you're eating the cookies to escape something, and the net negative effect is you're gaining weight and you feel guilty and all this stuff that comes with it afterward, then you know you're buffering. Whereas if you're like, No, I'm going to have these cookies because they taste great and you don't feel guilty after.

You don't eat too much and you don't feel bloated. It's just a treat that you want to give yourself and it's fine. If it's a choice that you're making, and not about avoiding an emotion, then it's fine. Say, with Netflix, if you choose to sit there all day, and watch *The Tigers,* which I haven't watched yet on Netflix, and that's a conscious choice you're making and it's not because you're trying to avoid something, but it's just your choice to spend the day doing that, fantastic.

But if there is a net negative effect, like you wasted time when you were supposed to be doing something else that you had to get done, that you aren't getting done, and you feel guilty about it, and you're worse off now than you were before, then that is buffering. You need to make that choice for yourself. Only you will know if what you're doing is buffering or not. Now you know what buffering is, and you see the danger of buffering.

Let's say you decide to stop buffering. What are you left with? You're left with the painful emotion that you were trying to avoid in the first place. It could be anger, stress, uncertainty, feeling less than, fear of failure, or whatever it is that was going to drive the buffering in the first place.

And you're like, *Wait a second, this sounds awesome.* Like you're saying, *Either I'm going to feel like crap, I have to feel like crap, or I buffer to try to find pleasure, and I feel worse than I when I started.* Those are your choices – feeling awful or avoiding my feelings altogether. My answer is *kinda*. But I want to explore the idea of feeling your feelings for a second because it's not as bad as you might think it is.

Let's say, right now, you feel stressed out about what's going on. Let's take a look at that. Is it so bad to feel that feeling of stress or is it so bad to feel that feeling of uncertainty? Because feelings are really just a vibration in your body, it's just a sense in your body. And feelings usually last about 90 seconds in your body. So think about a situation where you recently felt stressed. What was that feeling like in your body?

For me, when I'm stressed out, I have this tingly feeling in my belly, and I get a lot of tension in my upper back. If I'm really stressed, it's almost like the cells in my body are jumping up and down or something. I just feel like I can't sit still. I've got this vibration in my body that's so strong. But here's the thing, that's it. That's what stress

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does. Obviously, if you're feeling stressed all the time, there are a lot of long-term physical ailments that can come from stress. But stress itself in that moment, it can't really hurt you. It's just a vibration in your body.

Or let's say that feeling of uncertainty that you're having right now, think about how it actually feels in your body. It's just a vibration. It's just a feeling and it will pass. You can breathe your way through it, you can become the observer of it and say, *Oh yeah, I see how the sense of uncertainty is like a pit in my stomach.* You can't sit still or whatever uncertainty feels like for you. And you can just watch it. It might be painful, I guess, or a bit uncomfortable, but that's all it is.

Here's a little tip for you. When you're starting to feel an emotion like that, what you can do is just do a body scan. How is it feeling in your body? Take the 90 seconds to feel the emotion literally in your body. It's just a vibration and it can't hurt you. There's nothing wrong with feeling negative emotions. We seem to have this belief that we need to be happy all the time or that life needs to be sunshine and happiness all the time. But that's not real. That's not the experience of life. Life is 50/50.

We only can appreciate the joyous moments in our lives because we know what it feels like not to be joyful. And that's okay. It is totally okay to feel negative emotions, sometimes half the time really. And it makes sense. If someone you know is sick or has died, it makes sense to feel sad, it makes sense to grieve. If you lose your job, it makes sense to feel disappointed. It would be normal for you to feel that way. If you're in a financial jam or a situation where you know you're not sure how to pay your mortgage, or how to pay your rent, it makes sense that you're worried about it.

Having those feelings is not the problem. You can just observe them in your body. Let them pass and breathe through it The challenge really isn't the feelings, it's the actions you take from the place of those feelings. Maybe you're yelling at your kids or yelling at your spouse or less patient with your boss or your reports. Maybe you're less productive than you normally are. You can't focus because all of these thoughts are running through your brain about what's going to happen.

You become a victim to the feeling where you're like, *I'm so freaked out, I can't do anything.* That's you being a victim of your feelings. Maybe you get less patient, less patient with others, or yourself. Maybe you're beating the crap out of yourself and really taking yourself down, really beating up your self-confidence for whatever reason. These are the things that we end up doing from the negative feelings. So it's really important to be aware of the feelings and let the feeling happen without allowing the feeling to create all this chaos.

Buffering is a thing that we do when we feel these feelings. So it's just about, *Okay, I'm going to feel sad today. I'm sad right now and that's okay.* And then you just go about your day doing the things you need to do. You don't have to get mired and all the sad thoughts. You don't have to let it overtake you. You can just be sad and still show up and still do what you need to do. That's okay. You don't have to be afraid of it. You don't have to buffer your way through it. You can just feel it.

I think that an important thing to remember is that everything you're feeling is caused by a thought you're having. The Coronavirus isn't making you scared, the Coronavirus isn't making you uncertain; it's the thoughts that you're having about the Coronavirus that are making you scared. Let me give you some examples. Let's say Coronavirus is a circumstance and a circumstance is something if you haven't heard me talk about this before.

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A circumstance is just a fact. It's something that you can't control. It's a random event. A circumstance can also be the past. A circumstance can also be what other people think feel and do we cannot control that. All those things are circumstances. The Coronavirus is a circumstance. We can't control it. All of the cascading impacts of the Coronavirus, like being told to stay at home, shops closing and your kids can't go to school, on and on and on; are all events that you cannot control so we think about the Coronavirus as a circumstance.

The reason I know it's not causing your feelings is because if I took 100 people, they're all going to think about the Coronavirus and what's happening right now in a slightly different way. Some people might think, *I don't know how long is this going to last.* Another thought is, *What will the world look like after this? Will I have a job whereby investments go on the toilet? Will I have money? Will I have to rethink everything in my life, my whole investment strategy, my whole retirement plan, and my whole career plan? How will I handle it? Will I be good enough at what I do to be able to be flexible and bob and weave and make the changes I need to make to stay relevant in whatever the new normal looks like?*

Some people are thinking when Coronavirus comes up, some are thinking, *This is an opportunity.* I don't think the people at Zoom are hurting right now. Their sales are up 20 times because everybody has all of a sudden discovered Zoom. So if you weren't an online entrepreneur before, I would say Zoom to people like, *What the hell is Zoom?* Now everybody knows what Zoom is. UPS, FedEx, and all those great people who are working their butts off, they need more people.

So a lot of people are looking at Coronavirus almost like an opportunity. How can I grow my business during this time? How can I maximize my opportunity? Maybe even people at home are like, *This is great. I can work out more. I can become a fitter person with a better mindset.* Some people who aren't necessarily dealing with the illness, part of the Coronavirus, who don't have anyone in their life right now who's sick might see it as an opportunity. So I know that the Coronavirus itself isn't causing your feelings.

It's your thoughts causing your feelings because everyone is thinking about this thing differently. So however you're feeling right now, ask yourself, *What is the thought that I'm having that's causing this feeling?* What I'd like you to notice now is that Coronavirus is a circumstance. It's neither good nor bad until you decide how you want to think about it. I'm not saying you have to think super positive thoughts about the Coronavirus, I'm just saying your emotions are being caused by your thoughts. That's it.

You don't have to change anything but taking accountability for that gives you a sense of control. Then you can decide what you want to think about. It doesn't have to be happy steps all the time. It's just knowing that you are the one driving those emotions. And that in and of itself, can make the feelings less scary and can take away the need for buffering when you know that at any time you can say, *Okay, I feel scared right now. What am I thinking to make me feel scared and do I want to have that thought?* This is true even in a non-Coronavirus example.

Let's just take an everyday example that happens to all people all the time. If you have a boss, maybe your boss says something or does something, and then you have a thought that creates a feeling that maybe you want to buffer about. I actually was coaching someone the other day whose boss said to her, *You're not worth the money I'm paying you.* I'm not sure what the boss's intention was there but I'm going to assume that it wasn't to motivate the person because that type of comment rarely creates a motivated employee.

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But the thing the boss said, actually, in and of itself doesn't have any power until you give it power. I know that's hard to swallow. Someone says you're not worth the money they're paying you. That comment actually doesn't have any power until you get power. And I bet you, if you open your mind, play with me a little bit on this. I bet you can think of 10 different thoughts that could come from that comment from the boss.

Some people might think, *I'm going to lose my job, or I'm not very good at my job.* Some people might think, *I'll never be successful.* Or *my boss is an ***hole.* Or *my boss isn't a very good leader.* Or maybe I would think, *A good leader doesn't say things like that.* So it's not making it personal anymore. I'm thinking it about the other person. *A good boss doesn't say things like that. I don't trust what she's saying.* Or maybe, *my boss is threatened by me.* There are so many thoughts that could come.

You could think, let's say, if your boss said something like that to you, *you're not worth what I'm paying you.* Ultimately, it comes back to what you believe about yourself. Because usually, where your mind goes is to something that you already believe about yourself. So if you actually believe that you are worth the money that the company is paying you, you probably won't think things like, *I'm not good at my job, I'll never be successful.* Because you really believe that you are worth the money.

So you might think, *What are they talking about? A good leader doesn't say this. This is unacceptable. I don't have to take this.* Those could be thoughts that you think. But then, there are going to be a lot of people who lack confidence, who are going to think, *I can never do this.* So these circumstance answers things that your boss says. Coronavirus, working from home, none of these things have power until you give them power. Whatever you think about them causes feelings.

And if you're creating a feeling that you want to avoid, you can either change your thought so that you can create a different feeling about it, you can let the feeling happen in your body and not amplify it with BS actions that are going to put you in a deeper hole, or you can do things like buffer the feeling away with food, alcohol, Netflix, and all those things, which of course, are going to make you feel worse after the fact.

Those are the key things that I really want you to take away. If you feel like buffering, know that buffering is only a temporary reprieve from whatever painful feeling that you're trying to avoid. And ultimately, by buffering, you're going to make the situation and your feelings worse. You're going to amplify the number of bad feelings that you're having by buffering. Because not only are you putting off the pain, but you're also doing things that are going to create a net negative effect. So you're creating more pain for yourself, ultimately.

If you're sitting at home right now and you're buffering with whatever it is you're buffering with, I urge you to do a few things. Think about, first of all, allowing yourself to feel the feeling. Nothing wrong with feeling the feeling. It's just a vibration in your body, you don't have to be afraid of it. Just close your eyes, feel the feeling, do a body scan, feel how the feeling feels in your body, and know that it can't hurt you. That's number one.

Two, take a look and figure out what you're thinking. What is it that you're thinking that's creating that feeling? Getting an understanding and awareness of that is going to help you and also is going to dissipate the feeling a little bit when you understand that you're creating it and the thought that's creating it.

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Three, you can decide if you want to keep thinking this thought. How is it serving you? Maybe you do want to keep thinking about it for today. How long? Do you want to keep thinking about it? How was it going to benefit you in the long run?

Number four, when you're ready, you can start thinking something else. You can start to choose different feelings. You don't have to go from everything's crap to everything's awesome. Because everything's awesome may not be a believable feeling to you right now. But you can move from everything's crap to, I can handle this. Some kind of believable movement forward so that you can start to move yourself out of the super painful feelings that a thought like everything's crap is going to generate.

Allow yourself to feel the feeling, figure out what you're thinking that's driving the feeling, and decide if you want to keep thinking this and how it really does serve you. Then when you're ready, start thinking something else. The main message I really want to send to you today is, that there is nothing wrong with feeling any feeling you feel. You don't have to avoid painful feelings because there's nothing wrong with that. Start being the observer and getting aware of what your thinking was driving the emotion and get aware of how that feeling feels in your body. Don't be afraid of it because this kind of awareness is going to help you get out of whatever funk you're in. It's going to help you stop buffering, and it's going to help you move forward.

Okay, my friends. That's what I have for you today. I hope you found that useful. I look forward to talking to you next week. Bye for now.

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