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# DRAMA DEPENDENCY

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Hey there, everybody. How's it going, my friends? It's so good to have you here. I'm really excited about this week's topic. It's like a continuation of last week's topic.

Last week, I talked about The Perfectionist Myth. If you haven't heard that one, you definitely need to go and listen to it. You can listen to this one separately but the perfectionist myth, I think, is a really great insight into how perfectionism shows up in our lives. And it's not always the way you think it is. I think a lot of people who don't think they're perfectionists will find out that they have some perfectionist tendencies they didn't know were there. It's definitely worth the time. This is like a continuation of that topic.

Today, we're talking about *Drama Dependency*. This is another term that I made up. I love making up the terms here. But it is terminologies, certainly, that are based on real-world cognitive behavioral psychology principles. But I thought drama dependency was kind of really meta because it sounds so dramatic. Drama dependency, I love saying it. It is kind of exactly as it sounds. We get dependent on our own drama and we don't even know that we are. We get unconsciously dependent, usually on something in our lives, that remains an ongoing problem.

You know this is a real thing because I bet you, you know somebody like this. Absolutely, we all have someone in our lives who is like this; where everything is an issue, nothing can be solved, or there's this one issue that's been plaguing them all their lives They have been complaining about the same thing for years and years, yet they don't do anything about it. So there are these people that are just chronically all things dramatic. And then there are some people who have these one or two things that are totally dramatic in their lives.

You probably even have someone like this on your team or someone that you work with. We totally notice it when it's present in other people. But as always, we completely miss it when it's present in ourselves, and when we're doing it. We're going to explore in this podcast if you are creating and depending on your own drama. We're going to talk about why we get drama-dependent, how to recognize the signs, and of course, how to start practicing being drama-free. There's going to be lots of goodness in this podcast.

Let's explore drama dependency. The very first question, which is so obvious is, why in the world would anyone want to be dependent on drama? I don't even know if that's an obvious question because drama is fun. We think it's fun. But how does it make sense that anyone would want to create drama in their own lives? Like add anxiety


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and bullshit into their own lives? It doesn't make sense. It doesn't make sense that there's no reason. Mostly, it's just basically a big waste of time. But our brains don't always make sense.

It probably might be better to start by diving into how drama dependency shows up. Then we can talk about why you have it and what you can do to break the cycle. So drama dependency is generally when you are used to having a specific problem in your life. It could be your career is a problem, your boss has a problem, or your weight is a problem, maybe your dating life is a problem, your spouse is a problem or any kind of relationship that you have in your life. A friend, a work colleague, or whatever could be a problem.

One of the things that people love having as their specific drama is how busy they are. People love that one. I'm so busy, like so busy, they create so much drama around the fact that they're busy. In fact, ironically, we waste so much time getting sucked into this fact that we're busy. We waste so much time on the drama of busyness. But it's important to remember that none of those things – your job, your boss, your way, your dating life, people in general time; none of those things are actually problems. It's how you think about those things that cause your problems that create your drama.

For instance, you have a lot to do in a day. Having those things on your to-do list is not a problem at all. It's how you think about it that creates your problems. So you could think, *It's not a big deal that I have all these things. I don't mind. I'm probably going to delegate some of this stuff, whatever. I'm going to get as much done as I can.* Thinking about your to-do list that way creates drama-free thoughts, a drama-free work life for yourself, and a drama-free experience.

Another option is you could think, *I'm so busy. I don't have time for anything. There's too much on my list. I have no fun, no personal development, no joy in my life. This is too much to do. I don't have a choice to do all these things. I have to do all this work.* In that way, you create a lot more dramatic thoughts, and you waste a lot of energy getting sucked in and sucked down.

A lot of the time, people also think that having a lot on their to-do list and being so busy somehow means they're more important, or they're more valuable in the world. That's where they're finding their value. That's where they're getting their importance from. When really, they could just decide that they're valuable people without all the things on their to-do list. But it's evidence that they're looking for evidence that they're valuable. They're looking for a reason to believe that they're valuable.

But all that is drama. It's all drama. All that energy is getting sucked in is drama. Do you see the difference between them? Some of those thoughts around your to-do list drive neutral to positive emotions. Those are drama-free. And some of those thoughts drive really negative heavy emotions that suck up your energy. Those are drama-filled thoughts. Again, neither one is good or bad. You can be dramatic, you can be drama-free, no big deal. Whatever you decide to think is up to you. All the thoughts that you have are optional.

Remember that everything that you think creates a different result for you in the end. The person who thinks, *I don't mind doing all this stuff, and I'm gonna get to as much as I can. Maybe I'm gonna get some stuff done. Maybe I'll ask for help* is different than the person who thinks, *I have to do all this work or my life is going to explode.* That's a whole different experience. You're creating the experience, and the emotional toll on the second


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person who thinks their life's going to explode if they don't get all the work done is going to be higher because of the drama that they are creating.

Another example is, let's say, your boss says something to you. This week, I was coaching someone who told me her boss told her something. I'm going to paraphrase it. It was something along the lines of, *You really blew this. You're causing me a lot of problems. Nobody trusts you.* Something along those lines. I'm not endorsing what the boss said, in terms of a management style, or anything. Everyone needs to be responsible for how they show up. But despite what the boss said, whatever they said has no power over you. And it certainly had no power on my client until you give it meaning.

In this case, my client was struggling with the idea that, *Oh, I'm not as valuable as I thought I was. I'm not as good as I thought I was.* So she ended up giving the boss's points power by believing them. Or maybe you would think, *I did make a mistake, but I'm going to fix it, and it's going to be fine.* Or you can think of any of those things in that situation. It's your choice. Three people could hear the same feedback from their boss, and three people might react differently. Your thinking drives your drama.

And your thinking directly impacts your results, the results that you create for yourself, the experience that you're creating for yourself. So if you think your boss was right, you're going to be hurt. You're going to feel less valuable if you think your boss has a point. But it's not that not a big deal and you can fix it. Or if you think your boss is blowing it out of proportion, or whatever, that's going to be reflected in how you feel and how you act. So the trick really is, to practice getting aware of your thinking and then decide if you actually want to keep thinking that.

It's totally fine to think, *Oh, I made a mistake. There's nothing wrong with that.* But if you don't like the results that you get by consistently thinking, *Oh, I'm so bad. I made a mistake. I'll never get over it.* If you don't like the results you're getting from that kind of thinking or that train of thought, then you need to start practicing thinking something else. That's the way you get out of that situation. What's the very first thing to realize? Remember, drama comes from your thinking.

This is the work that I do with clients and I do with myself, frankly. I journal every day, and I hated journaling. I thought I didn't have time for it. That it was a waste of time, I couldn't figure it out in my head. I thought all the things that were on the other end of the spectrum in terms of journaling, I did not want to do it. I was one of those people who would keep buying these awesome, expensive journals. And I had this perfectionist fantasy, which you can hear about from last week's podcast, that I would be this big journaler but I never was. I didn't really start journaling until about two years ago. It started small. Now, I do it every day.

In fact, that's even a lie. I do skip days all the time, but not a lot. Because journaling is really almost like working out for me. It just works out my brain. So I journal a lot of the days, almost all the days, and I self-coach a lot of the days and I have my own coach. Because even though I do all that work, I can't always see my brain like other people can see my brain at work. It's really important to understand where your thinking is coming from.

But one of the really fascinating things that happen with my clients and me, too is that we get used to the drama that we create. We become drama-dependent at some place in our lives. Maybe not in all the places but with some things. The drama we create about whatever this thing is in our lives becomes part of our identity. The


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drama creates this safety net around us, that keeps us from doing the hard work on ourselves, to change how we think, how we show up, and how we deal with the drama.

When I say deal with the drama, I'm not saying like, you deal with the bad boss, or you deal with the job, or you deal with the spouse because those things aren't actually creating the trauma. You might decide that you want to change some of those things in the long run. But I'm talking first about dealing with your thoughts that are creating the trauma. That's really hard work. That's the hard work that most people don't want to do, or don't realize they need to do.

It's really much easier just to quit a job because you say, *Oh, the boss was shit. My boss was a jerk so I'm going to quit this job. I wasn't happy there so I'm going to find this other job that's way easier.* Even though it's hard, it's way easier than actually facing the thoughts that are swimming around in your head. Your brain actually thinks it's easier to stay swimming around in the drama that you know versus going out and trying to figure out new things trying to face the drama in your head so it prefers to stay in there. It becomes drama-dependent and it continues to look for ways to fuel the drama.

Your brain does that by continuing to look for evidence of what you already believe about the situation. Because the more evidence you find that your job sucks, or your boss sucks, or you don't know what you want from your career; the more evidence you find on that, the more you feel justified for continuing to generate that drama in your head. The alternative would be having to face that you're actually creating all this drama and then doing something about it. You're creating something called a cognitive bias. Cognitive relates to your thoughts and perceptions, so basically, it's thought bias. You think something, whether you consciously know you're thinking it or not; you think something and then you tend to see everything through that filter.

Let's take an example. Let's say, the problem is that you don't like your job. That's your drama, you don't like your job. Every day you go to work and you are dreading it. Drama. So you're already going in the door with cognitive bias. You don't like the job and you're looking for reasons not to like it. More drama. You see your boss and you think, *I can't stand that guy.* More drama, more evidence. Then you get to your desk and you're like, *Oh, look at my to-do list. It's so full*. More drama, more things that you don't like to do. More drama, more evidence.

Someone from the outside might look at it and say, *Look, you have a great job, especially during COVID. You have a great job that pays well.* While you think your boss doesn't care about you or like you, or whatever; it could be that your boss actually just trusts you to do your job. While you don't think that you're appreciated in your job, your team actually really values your leadership. But you don't see those things. Or you do that *what-about-ism* that we're seeing so much about or the *yeah-but* thing.

If someone says, *You know, your team really appreciates you.* But you're like, *Yeah, but my boss doesn't.* Your boss said, *good job* after that last presentation. *Yeah, but what about the 10 other times he doesn't say anything?* Your boss really trusts you to get the job done. *Yeah, but you know what, I need more than that.* You get paid huge amounts of money. *Yeah, but my job is really stressful.*

All right, you get stuck in the drama. You keep yourself in the drama. It's like your brain discounts all the other perspectives because it wants to stay in the drama. Even though you keep talking about wanting to change the situation, your brain wants you to stay in it. That's why you stay stuck in this push and pull. You're convinced that


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you want to solve your problem but you're actually the one creating it. It's so weird how our brains work. It's not fun.

Not only do you want to change it, but you tell yourself that when you do solve it, and when you do find your dream job, or your dream boss or whatever; then your life is going to be so much better, then you're going to be happy. But that's not the truth. Because feelings come from your thinking. First of all, if you can't figure out how to be happy right now, why do you think you can manage your mind in a new job if you can't manage your mind now? What's going to be different in the new job? Because the truth is, you can be happy right now.

Jobs don't make you happy. Jobs have no power to make you happy. How you think about your job makes you happy or sad, or creates your emotion, whatever it is. I spend a lot of time with my clients establishing career goals with them that align with who they are. We build plans to make those goals happen.

But the biggest part of the job as a coach is helping them stay committed to making that plan a reality to actually going forward on that plan, helping them deal with the thoughts that are getting in their way of actually taking action, getting behind the excuses in their brain, noticing the excuses that their brain is serving up to them when they're afraid or failing, or when they feel doubt or all the things, and letting go of the drama. Then moving forward in a drama-free way. That's the work of a coach. That's what you pay a coach for.

It's to really get in your brain and help you move forward. The role of a coach is to help you see your brain and all the thoughts that are swimming around in there. Because even the smartest, most capable, and most emotionally intelligent of us can't see how the thoughts in our brains are sometimes working against us, and getting in our way. But sometimes, even when my client knows the thought that's driving the drama, they still want to continue to have the drama. They hold on.

On one level, on a conscious level, people want to stop the drama. That's with your human strategic brain, I call it. But with our primitive brain or cerebellum, or what I call your survival brain; it keeps wanting the current pattern. It understands the current pattern and changes the pattern. It takes so much energy, but your brain doesn't really want to work that hard. It's wired to conserve energy so it does not want to take on the work of breaking the pattern of your current drama so that it can face uncertain drama. It's used to your current drama so your survival brain is actually driving your drama dependency. It's really screwed up in there.

The other thing that happens is people often don't want to accept that it's their own thoughts driving the drama. Because then, I have to admit that they're the ones keeping themselves small. They're the ones actually limiting their ability to be happy, not their boss, or their job, or their spouse, or whatever. That's a tough pill for some people to swallow. I mean, I'm a coach, and when it comes to my business, and a lot of things in my life, I've worked really hard to get aware of my thinking and how it gets in my way.

One of the things that I still am working through is my own weight loss journey. It's up, it's down. I lose weight, I gain weight. I get motivated, don't get motivated right away. I have a coach now on this because I need a coach specifically dedicated to this. One of the things that I know is, a lot of my eating comes from avoiding my emotions, largely at night. Sometimes stress, sometimes anxiety, but most of the time I'm bored. It's COVID time, I watch a lot of TV now and I'm not going out as much. I'm bored and even before, I would generally eat at night out of boredom.


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I think it's why young people are so thin because they're always out and about. They don't watch TV. When we get older when we sit around and watch TV or something, I don't know. But I tell myself that when I lose weight, I'm going to wear all the outfits and I'm going to go all the places and I'm going to do all the things I've always wanted to do. I'm going to say yes to everything. I'm never going to let my way hold me back. I'm going to live my best life. That's actually the perfectionist myth at work.

So if you haven't heard that podcast, go listen to episode 47. But I keep telling myself that when I accomplish a goal when I lose weight, I'm going to do all the things. But how many people think that I will actually do that even if I lose the 30 pounds that I have left to lose? What if I, all of a sudden not be watching Netflix anymore? Would I be out there living my best life? I lost 30 pounds, time to start the best life. No. I'm afraid of living my best life. That's what I'm learning.

I'm afraid of living my best life because I'm afraid that if I go out and live my best life, a shoe will drop somewhere and blow everything up. Like it'll be taken away from me. I know, I am worrying about something that hasn't happened. And I don't even know what it is. It's just some sort of shoe that's gonna drop. It's ridiculous. I'm borrowing trouble from the future. I'm failing before I even start because I'm afraid of something that will happen to stop it. And I was thinking that losing weight would actually help me live my best life.

When you think that, it creates a desperation around the idea of losing weight, like, *Oh, my God, I want my best life so badly. I can't wait to wear all these fun clothes and do all these fun things. I need to lose the weight.* There's this desperation around losing weight, which causes an even bigger emotional freakout versus if I just thought, *I can live my best life now regardless of my weight.* What would that change in my life? Because then I have to do the work to actually live my best life. And that's work. It's totally work.

I have started it. Less TV, I'm doing some renovations around the house, I started gardening this fall, and I'm slowly trying to change my life and my girlfriends' lives. And I have planned all these fun things to do in our bubbles. Me and my bubble friends have figured out all these fun things we can do this winter. Now that I know that I can live my best life now, which apparently was a big surprise to me; I'm figuring it out. But it takes work. My survival brain is avoiding that work because it wants to conserve energy and it's unknown. What if something blows up all the things? I created this drama dependence on my story that I needed to lose weight to live my best life. The drama comes from me, not anyone else. I'm figuring out how to do it now.

One last example. Let's do that example of people saying, *If I could just find the right job, I'd be happy.* Most people don't even know what the right job looks like. I talk to people all the time who aren't happy in their jobs. But they don't really know what's going to make them happy. They know one or two things that are making them unhappy. And they know why, which is usually blaming someone or something else. But they don't really know what's going to make them happy.

They say to themselves that finding the 'right job' is going to make them happy. But really, the biggest obstacle they need to overcome is learning how to be happy in the job they have right now. That doesn't mean they have to stay there. They need to know what they want their career to look like and then move towards it. That's really the hard work, really envisioning or envisaging what they want their career to look like and who they are when they reach that goal. They need to take the time to think about that. That's hard work. Then moving towards it is even harder.


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When I work with people, I don't tell them what they should do with their careers, but I do help them figure it out. I guide them, I have exercises that they work through, etc. But I can tell right away with some people when I'm meeting with them before they become clients, they don't want to find a solution. They like spinning in the confusion. They have 10 reasons why every solution that they've come up with up until now hasn't worked;  or isn't the right solution, or isn't the right job, or isn't good enough.

They'll say, *I thought about being a project manager but that won't work because of these 10 reasons.* Or *I was thinking about starting my own business but that can't happen right now because of these 10 reasons*. So on some level, people are scared of spinning. They're less scared of spinning in this constant drama cycle and struggle of being unhappy than they are of actually going out there and figuring it out and doing the hard work. You stay drama-dependent because your brain is telling you it's the lesser of two evils.

But then, let's be honest, sometimes people do go out, and they find a job they like better than the one they have right now. That perfect job that's going to make them happy. And there are definitely elements to that job that are better than the job that they had. But guess what, life is still 50/50. You still are going to have 50% of negative emotions in your life. The circumstances have just shifted.

It may not be the job per se anymore. But all of a sudden, it might be the boss, the colleague, the commute, or maybe your personal life is in chaos now that your career life is sorted. That's us being human. Life is always going to be 50/50. 50% positive emotions, 50% negative emotions. That's how we are wired. That's how our brains are wired. But we think there is this big panacea, where we can be happy all the time. I'm sorry, that's just not real. I'm not trying to be a downer or anything, but life's gonna be 50% positive and 50% negative, for sure.

But it doesn't follow that you need to suffer just because you have negative emotions. The only real thing you can do is learn to get better and more courageous about allowing those negative emotions in your life, facing them, and then changing your thinking. But you'll never get rid of them. That's not a thing. You can't always be happy.

If you're interested in learning about how to manage your negative emotions, and you want to build a career plan and do all the hard work to make it happen and you're really invested in that, then I want to invite you to book a strategy session with me. It's free. We talk about where you are now, where you want to go, and what you think is getting in your way. Then I'll give you my observations and insights based on what you said, and we can see if we're a good fit for each other. You can learn more about booking a session with me at melsavage.com/chat.

Everyone should have a coach. Do your homework. Find a good one that helps you with your thinking, not just one that gives you a list of actions. I call that causal coaching. When you're helping people with their thinking, that's causal coaching. We want to find and treat the cause of the trauma, not the symptom of the drama, which is what some coaches do. I'll just tell you a list of things to do, which is more symptomatic coaching versus causal coaching. So go out and find yourself a really good coach.

Every successful person or athlete has a coach. Think about the purpose of that. Coaches aren't just for people who are struggling, and not doing their jobs well, which is historically when people have had coaches, they can be proactive as well. So if you want to talk about it, melsavage.com/chat.

Let's talk about what we learned today. Drama dependency is being unconsciously dependent on something in your life being a problem. You like it being a problem. Your thoughts are creating that drama, not your job, not


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your boss, or anything else that's going on in your life. Drama-filled thoughts are the ones that drive the negative emotions. Your brain wants you to stay drama-dependent because it keeps you small and safe. Because dealing with your thoughts and dealing with your emotions isn't easy.

Your brain thinks the drama that you're in is less scary than working your way out of the drama. It's the lesser of two evils. But you get rid of the drama by addressing your thinking and choosing thoughts that create neutral to positive feelings. I know it sounds so dramatic. I love it.

Thank you for joining me today. The thought I want to leave you with today is that even though learning to deal with your thoughts takes work, it's such a relief in the end. If you do the work, there is relief from the drama at the end of it. When you're drama-dependent, there's never relief. You just spin in drama forever. So you can decide which one is a better return for you in your life. if you want to chat about it, check out melsavage.com/chat.

I'll talk to you next week, my friends. Bye for now.

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