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DO I REALLY HATE MY JOB OR IS IT A MID-CAREER CRISIS?

Welcome to The Highly Valued Leader podcast where I make it simple for leaders at all levels to amplify their value. My name is Mel Savage and I went from working in the mailroom at a small ad agency to making multiple six figures in senior management at McDonald's, to running my own multiple six-figure executive coaching business. I've had huge successes in my career and epic failures. All of it taught me the world-class leadership, mind and skill sets that I simplify for my clients and share with you on this podcast. I'll help you reset your leadership style, demystify the politics, and help you become the highly valued leader everyone wants on their team. Get ready for the most honest, direct and revolutionary leadership coaching you've ever heard. Let's simplify leadership together.

Hello, my leaderly friends. Welcome back to the podcast. Today I'm talking about mid-career crisis. Yes, that's right, mid-career crisis. We're going to talk about *'Do you really hate your job?'* Do you really think your career is not right for you? Or are you just having a mid-career crisis? And how can you make the right decision for yourself moving forward? The other one I hear a lot is, am I cut out for this? Can I actually do this? Is this right for me? Not because I don't like it, but because I'm actually not skilled enough to do it. That sort of thing. We're going to talk about all that today.

Before I get to it, I just want to say to you out loud that this is for me as well. I am really going to be striving to cut my podcast down from the 40-minute range to the 20-ish-minute range. So I'm trying some stuff out here. I may not do it all at once. I may be migrating there slowly, but what that means for you is that I'm going to be creating more micro situations to talk about, versus these bigger picture situations. I might be giving less detail on all the different things that you can do.

My goal here is to keep it short and snappy so that you guys can have these really tight pieces of information to help you with specific issues. And we'll see how it goes. You have to try things out, and I'm probably going to fail a lot in the beginning as I try to do this, but eventually, I'm going to get it right. Use this as an example of process over perfection. Just really trying to figure things out while still providing value to people. I'm not waiting to get it perfect before I share information with you.

If you are one of these people who are in a mid-career crisis, you're probably having a lot of thoughts about leaving your current job or your chosen career and trying to figure out what it is that you want to do; trying to figure out what it is that you're actually really passionate about and that's confusing to you. You're just like, *'I don't know what it is.'* I think, by the way, that's the first sign. If you're thinking, *'I want to do something else, but I don't know what it is…'* That's a sign that it's not the job. That's a sign that you probably shouldn't quit your job right now or switch your career.

Because really, switching your career is no easy feat, and I'll talk about that, but it's really for the people who have thought, *'I've always wanted to do this. This is what I really want to figure out how to make a living at now.'* And they know what it is and that's where they're running towards something. They're going towards something

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versus people who are just like, *'I don't know what it is, but it's not this shit anymore.'* That's just running away from something probably. Nothing is universal.

I want to just put that out there as a sign that maybe you need to pause for a second. If you are confused or if you don't really know where you want to go with this, it really could just be a sign that you've lost your spark, you're not as motivated as you used to be, you've lost your mojo, you're just going through the emotions, and all that.

What I really want to cover today is if you are in that mode, I want to cover how to ground yourself so that you can really make good, thoughtful career decisions for yourself versus decisions made from confusion, anxiety, pressure, fear, and discomfort. When we make decisions from those places, we usually try to run away from something. So it's better to ground yourself and get yourself into a logical frame of mind, and also get yourself into a place where you are mentally and from an emotionally intelligent, sourced place, making decisions that are very grounded and doing things that are very grounded before you make a decision. That's really what I want to say to you, and I'll explain what that means because I don't think that's very, very clear yet.

What things look like right now for you is probably the fact that you've got a big job. A job bigger than maybe you ever thought you would have, which is kind of sometimes the problem too, where we're thinking, *'Ah, I've got imposter syndrome. This job is way bigger than I ever thought I would get, and we're having trouble getting our brains around right.'* So you've got a job, maybe a bigger job than you ever thought you would have, and you're used to getting success one way. Wherever it was that got you here today, you got success in one specific way that really played to your strengths. You were comfortable with how you were getting success, but whatever that way is isn't working for you anymore.

As an example, a lot of people who were individual contributors before got success created value by solving all the problems for everybody and over-delivering on project work and just working a lot of hours. And you're trying to do that now as a leader, but that's just not working anymore for lots of reasons that I won't go into today. Because the way that you created value before isn't working anymore, you are doubting yourself. You're doubting everything. You're doubting if you're in the right job, the right career if you have the right qualifications, and that doubt is exhausting, first of all, because you're sort of mired in this doubt, and you're working from a defensive place all of a sudden.

You're not as I'm going to call it *"spry"* as you used to be. Like when we were young, we didn't give a shit about anything. We just did it. We figured it out. We took chances. We didn't really feel like there were a lot of threats, or we didn't have a lot as many worries as we have now. At least that was the way it was when I was young. I'm a Gen Xer. Maybe it's different now for all the different generations, but there's probably some form of it for you. Like, when we're younger, we just did stuff. We didn't have as many worries.

But now we're older, we've got mortgages, we've got kiddos, we're not as willing to take as many risks, and so we've got more worries. And so we're doubting ourselves a lot more. We're willing to doubt ourselves a lot more. We're working from more of a defensive place versus an offensive place. And when we're in that defensive place and things aren't working out for us, one of our defensive strategies is looking for an easy way out and looking for an escape of some kind.

You're looking for something to make you feel excited about work again. You're looking for something that's going to make you feel valued again, valuable again, and something that makes you feel like all the hours you're putting in are worth it and you're getting somewhere. It's building towards something, because probably if you're

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in this place, you're stuck. You're maybe in the big job so on one hand, you're actually further along than you thought you'd be, but on the other hand, you're still not moving along as fast as you want to.

It's like this cognitive dissonance where, *'Yeah, I've got more than I thought I would get, but I still want more, and it's not coming fast enough.'* So you got those two thought processes going on in your brain, and the longer you are where you are and you're not getting where you want to go, the more that you think, *'This isn't right for me. I've got to go somewhere. I've got to do something about this.'* And you think, maybe you need a change. You probably haven't thought about it as a mid-career crisis. Maybe you have, but you're sort of in this like, *'I need a change maybe that's bigger than just leaving this job… I need a change that's going to shake things up a little bit…'*

And that's kind of the same thing when I call it a mid-career crisis, I'm not the first person to do that, by the way. I did not coin that phrase. But when you have a mid-career crisis, it's similar to the stereotypical male midlife crisis. By the way, it's a stereotype. I'm not talking about all males being this way. But the one that we all kind of understand is that when a man is going through a midlife crisis, he starts fearing that he hasn't done enough in his life, starts fearing feeling old, starts fearing death, and then starts to act out in ways that make him feel young. That's the stereotype that we all see in movies.

I'm not saying that's the way it is for all men, or that women aren't feeling the same thing. But the stereotype of acting out is how you dress young, have hobbies, change partners, throw away something stable for something exciting, or start throwing wrenches or spanners into your life. And it's kind of the same thing when you think about your career. You don't have the same energy you once had. Your fear is not about death but about failure, or stagnation. And stagnation in a corporate environment could mean failure. It could mean that you're going to be out of a job if you're not like *"the elite"*. Let's call it the elite, in terms of performance. And you're not feeling like it's as easy as it used to be, but you want it to be as easy as it used to be to get ahead. And by the way, of course, it's not as easy as it used to be.

First of all, there are fewer people the higher up you go, and the job is very different as a leader than it was as an individual contributor, or even in that initial transition from individual contributor to leader. The job gets tougher. As a leader, you have to have more and more emotional intelligence, more and more intentionality. The job just becomes more about, not a consensus driver, but a person who manages the organization versus a person who gets things done. How you get things done is about how you manage the organization. That becomes a bigger and bigger piece of what your role is as a leader–creating vision and managing the organization. Of course, it takes time to grow into that, and no one tells you that's your job. I get it.

I get why you're feeling a bit lost, but you start fantasizing. Maybe you start looking for job postings. Maybe you want to hire people to help you figure out what your next step is in your career, like a coach or something. I'm not that kind of coach, by the way, but there are coaches out there that give you quizzes and talk to you and say, *'Oh, you should do this'*, which, by the way, I'm not a big fan of, but that's okay. That doesn't mean it doesn't work for people.

Maybe you think about starting your business on the side. I have a client who would love to start a cooking business one day. I myself left corporate to start a business because I'd always wanted to have my own business. And I was disillusioned. By the way, I have been through what I'm talking about. I've had my mid-career crisis. I did not handle it well so let me tell you the pros and cons of it. I know what I'm talking about firsthand here.

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Maybe you have this dream, like, *'One day, I wish I could figure out how to make money with cooking… I wish I could figure out how to make money by interior design because I have a flair for it…'* or whatever. And because you're in this mid-career crisis, you're thinking about going for it, but you don't know what you're going to do. You just think it's a good idea and you're kind of grasping at straws. I want to stop here and say that scaling your ability to be a leader requires that you grow your capacity for failure. What I mean by that is, if you want to grow into that leader I was just talking about in terms of managing the organization and growing your emotional intelligence, creating a vision, or even being a visionary, you need to scale your ability to feel failure and growing your capacity to fail.

I think that's part of it when we're in this crisis, is we are feeling like a failure, and it's so uncomfortable we don't have the capacity to feel it. We don't have the capacity to feel it, get beyond it, and think clearly. My advice, of course, is to get a coach to help you get your head focused. That's the kind of coach I am. But I'm going to give you a very important free piece of advice through all of this right now. Are you ready? It's not better "there." Wherever you think there is, it's not better there. It's just different there. Because there, wherever there is for you, there is going to be self-doubt, anxiety, fear of failure, and all the things wherever you go. It's just going to be a different mix of ingredients.

If we just take it to a point where, if you're interested in a job now and you want to just change companies, the new job is still going to have people you don't like, politics, the senior management level and executives who think they know everything, people who don't do their job who report to you, and all the peers who try to stab you in the back. There's going to be all of that, but it's just going to be different flavours of it. Some of it's going to be less, some of it's going to be more. The commute might be better, the size of the organization, maybe the pay is better, but you have to deal with some other shit. It's just going to be a different mix.

What I want to just say to you, and I say this to everybody, is life is 50/50. 50% positive, 50% negative. 50% what you want, 50% a challenge. You can define the 50/50 however you like. It's just going to be a different mix. The 50/50 in my life now, in the house I live in with the money I make, is a different 50/50 than when I was 23 in my first advertising job. Life is different. We worry about different things. If you have kids and you're thinking about your teenagers, they have a different 50/50. There is no easy way out.

When I think about my own example, I left corporate because I thought running my own business was better. And if I'm honest with myself, I was running away a little bit from the corporate environment because I was burnt out on all the things that I talked about with you all on the podcast, I was sort of at a low point. I thought, you know what, I've always wanted to run my own business. This is smarter, this is better. And you know what? It is kind of better now. But it was not easier, and it's still not easier than corporate.

I have wanted to quit this business 100 plus times and go back to corporate, but I'm tenacious. I learned my lesson, especially as I became a better and better coach and really a student of my craft and my mindset. I realized that going back to corporate, it's just going to be a different set of problems and a different set of anxieties. I may as well deal with what's in front of me right now and get really, really great at it like the podcast length I'm talking about.

I want to get great at doing a nice, short, snappy podcast. It's going to take me a hot minute to get there. But job one is really to deal with what's in front of you. The problem is in front of you, and solve them in a tenacious fashion. And the problem is not the job, it's you and how you think about the job. You need to do a hard thing, whatever that "hard thing" is in terms of your growth or skill set. Or somehow figure out what to do, or how to improve in your job, you need to do a hard thing, and you don't want to do it. You have to figure out the hard thing,

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make a plan for it, and then execute that plan. That's the kind of coaching that I and lots of other leadership coaches do to help you get through this midlife crisis without selling everything up and buying the hot car.

I think also, many people have this misconception that your job is supposed to make you happy. But being happy is your job. It's your job. A job is just a job. It's just a thing, and you get to decide what you think about that job. And what you think about the job is what's going to determine your happiness. Like I said, your job is 50/50. There are things that are working for you and things that are in your mind are not working for you. So if you think that your job is too hard, your boss is a jerk, the company is toxic, you're not good at what you do, they don't appreciate you, and your reports aren't doing all the right things, blah, blah, blah, and you've focused all the things that are missing for you, then guess what? You're not going to be happy.

When you focus on what's missing or what's not working, you are not happy more often. But just like any relationship, which I'm sure you've had in your life, it's work. If you want the relationship to last, you have to do the work. The "work" is working on your mind to focus on what's working, and working with your mind to focus on whether what's not working can work better, like how can you make it work better for you. And then also letting some shit go, because knowing that nothing's perfect, as if you've been in a relationship.

Next year, I will be 25 years into my second marriage. I've made all the mistakes, as I say. I know what it's like now to make a 25-year relationship last. It's work, and there have been times I've wanted to run screaming from this house, not in a bad way, but from *"Oh, my God, get me the hell out of your way."* But I'm really glad I didn't. I'm really glad I sat down and figured out what was going wrong for me so that I could solve my own problems.

Number one, deal with what's in front of you. Number two, I want the takeaway to be for you is that happiness is on you, not on the job. If you decide to quit everything and start your own business, like I did, it's not going to make you happy, because the job doesn't make you happy. You have to figure out your own happiness. And oh, my God, it was hard at first. It was so hard at first, I would cry all the time thinking, *"What the f have I done to my life?"* And I'm the primary breadwinner in my family. I've always been. Not just my own career, but my family's livelihood was on the line.

Happiness is on you. And if you want to be more passionate about what you're doing, passion, by the way, is an emotion that comes from your thinking, you have to think about the things in your job that make you feel passionate, that you're passionate about. I worked at McDonald's. I was not passionate about selling hamburgers, I got to be honest with you. Selling hamburgers, saturated fat, and two people, was not my jam. But what made me passionate was solving problems. What made me passionate was the people who worked with me, whom I loved working with. What made me passionate was working with these small business owners in all the communities around the country.

I know they're super rich guys. Most are the guys at the time, a lot more women now, but I know that there are a lot of other people I could help. But what made me passionate about my work was helping those people, growing the people on my team, solving all the problems, figuring out all these puzzles and building relationships. I love that part of the job. I found something that made me passionate about doing what I wanted to do, and I was also passionate about all of the exciting opportunities that working at McDonald's afforded me, meaning, opportunities to work in other countries, opportunities to work with people from other countries, to sit on task forces, to make a shit ton of money. I loved that too. I got to tell you, I was passionate about making a shit ton of money. And there's nothing wrong with that. Nothing.

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Number one, deal with what's in front of you. Number two, take ownership of your happiness. Don't put it on the job. If you're not happy in your job, there's something going on in your head, not in the job. That's where you need the coaching. And then number three, always have a good why. Why you would want to stay there? Why you would want to stay in this job? What is working for you? What is working for you towards the goals that you have? Like I said, mine were money and taking care of my family. I was really good at it. I loved growing people, I loved solving problems, I loved working internationally, and the lifestyle that job afforded me. I loved that part of it, the house I got to live in, and all of those things that I really wanted.

When I started this job that I've got right now, my why is *why do I stay working for myself in an online business that's saturated with coaches and all the things?* There is a lot of room for failure here for lots of reasons. I work alone. My team is remote. And I'm very social. I need people so why would I do this to myself? But my why is I want better leaders out there. I think better emotionally intelligent leaders are going to change the corporate world, and possibly more than that. I want to inspire more leaders. I want people to suffer less in their jobs. That's really my biggest thing too, I want people to suffer less in their jobs.

I want to have more headroom to make more money than I ever did in corporate and create a lifestyle where I get to be with my dogs all the time. I have that lifestyle now. I work from home which means, by the way, that I have to go out and create a social life. I don't get to run into people in the hallway anymore. But I work from home, and I get to be with my dogs, and I get to sometimes work on my back deck from my laptop, and there's no ceiling to what I can make. So that's kind of the trade-off for me. And this job, in and of itself, because I'm a coach, affords me the ability to focus on building my capacity for failure, for emotional intelligence, for understanding people, for listening, for happiness. That's what I do every day, is I focus on building my brain, which is kind of fun, I have to say.

The fourth thing is not in my notes, but I'm going to add it. And I know I'm approaching the 30-minute mark here, people. I know I'm working on it. I want to offer you to have a strategy. When you don't have a strategy for your career first, what you want to achieve in your career, and how it relates to what you want in your life, then you just make random decisions based on shiny objects and how you feel that day, and something as important as your career needs to be grounded in a strategy. I'm just adding that for you. That wasn't in my notes, but I think that's really important to say as well.

When you kind of get yourself grounded, deal with what's in front of you. Take ownership of your happiness. Have some good whys for what you're doing in your job, focusing on what's working, having a strategy for your career, all those things. You're going to get your determination back. You're going to start solving problems one at a time. You're going to start seeing all the value that your job currently provides you. You're going to have your why. You're going to find your passion. You're going to start small, and you're going to make a plan to create more value in your job and grow and do it with purpose and intentionality, not through gritted teeth, not because you have to, but because you want to, and you're doing it intentionally.

That is what I have for you today, my friends. So if you are someone who thinks you're in a mid-career crisis, I want you just to stop and say, *'There's no crisis here. I just need to get grounded first. I need to make sure my head is screwed on straight, and that I'm doing everything I can to take accountability and ownership of my situation.'* And I know that if you've gotten this far in your career, you could go further. No doubt, in my mind, I have coached so many people. You can do more. You can do it smarter, better, faster, and calmer, with less work. I know you can. You just need a plan.

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Okay, my friends. That's what I have for you this week. By the way, I'm just hitting the 26-minute mark in my recording. So not bad. Not a bad start. Talk to you soon. Bye for now.

Hey, if you want to simplify leadership while amplifying your value, then you need to get your hands on my free training. Head over to melsavage.com/simple for instant access to the training and get a taste of how I help my clients lead with ease and make more money in the process. I'll see you there.

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