



Episode 7 A Cool Technique to Reduce Your Physician-Career Anxiety

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Welcome to The Doctors' Crossing Carpe Diem podcast. If you're questioning your career in medicine, you've come to the right place. I'm Heather Fork, a former dermatologist and founder of The Doctors' Crossing. As a master certified coach, I've helped hundreds of physicians find greater happiness in their career, whether in medicine, a non-clinical job, or something else.

I started this podcast to help you discover the career path that's best for you and give you some resources and encouragement to make it happen. You don't need to get stuck at the white coat crossroads. So, pull up a chair my friend, and let's Carpe that Diem.

Hello, hello, and welcome back to the Doctor's Crossing Carpe Diem Podcast. This is episode number seven. Today, we're doing something a little bit different. And I'm so excited, I could almost burst. I think you're really going to like this because I have a very simple technique to share with you that addresses a common problem so many of us have. Pretty much if you're human, chances are you're going to have this issue some of the time. The issue is not being present in the moment.

*Let me tell you right off the bat, this technique is **not** meditation or taking a deep breath.*

Do you ever find yourself lost in thought, thinking about what could be, what you should be doing, or worrying about what could happen or ruminating about something from the past? This tendency to be lost in our minds can create anxiety and stress. It also can rob us of experiencing the fullness of life.

I've been trying for over 20 years, since I first started meditating, to find a simple technique to help with getting out of the spinning mind and be more present. While I find it easy to be

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present with clients or when I'm otherwise focused on something, too often my mind wins the tug of war and takes me out of the moment in front of me. I thought meditation would be the answer. And when I did a full year of daily meditation, completely committed, I made this commitment that I was going to sit on my meditation bench in the backyard, rain, snow, sleet, freezing temperatures, mosquitoes, whatever, and meditate for 20 minutes. And I did that. But at the end, I thought I would have nailed this problem and have full control of my mind. No way Jose. No. Nada. Didn't happen, and I want my money back!"

Sure, I became better at controlling my thoughts while meditating and give myself a B+ overall. but it didn't really translate to the kind of control I wanted off the meditation cushion. I don't know if any of you do this but sometimes I'll find myself walking from one room to another to get something and when I get to that room, I can't remember what I was supposed to get. Or have you ever taken or not sure if you took a pill and then you can't remember, "did I really just put something in my mouth and swallow some liquid and I can't even remember it?". And it's not like I think I have dementia or early Alzheimer's but that's how lost we can be in our mind in the moment that we can do things and not even be conscious of it. Kind of scary, like, "Can I rob a bank and not know it?" No..... There's a reason they call it the monkey mind. It can be rather willful and defy discipline, which can drive us crazy sometimes.

However, in the past few months, I feel like I found the tool I've been looking for, the holy grail if you will.

To demonstrate this technique I'm sharing with you recordings of two physicians doing this exercise for the first time.

Before we jump to the recordings, though, I want to see if you can relate to some of the common ways that we as physicians get lost in our minds and are not present. It's Sunday night, you're home. You should be relaxing with the family enjoying some downtime, but your mind has already gone to Monday. You're thinking about that packed schedule, or maybe a difficult surgical case you have to do. And even though you're not at work, you're already sort of working and feeling that stress.

Or perhaps you're going to be on call, you're not on call yet. But your mind is already worrying about what kind of cases could come in, could there be a train wreck? How are you going to make it through 24 hours on call? It's pre-traumatic stress, and the anxiety already starts coming into your body. And you might just be home and you can't enjoy the time that you have. Also, we can perseverate on past mistakes, perhaps you had a bad outcome, and it wasn't even your fault, or you missed something. Or maybe there was a bad patient encounter and you keep

going over and over the details in your mind, somehow thinking if you go over it enough, you can change it. But you can't and it really can be hard to let go of these things.

Alright, so let's get on with a technique. Now, this is based on a mindfulness exercise that I learned about a year ago called See, Hear, Feel. The way I was taught this exercise is that you look around, and you name five things that you see. Then five things that you hear, and five things that you can feel. And that could be a tactile sensation, or could also be an emotion or a feeling. Then you name four things that you see, hear, feel 3,2,1, you go through the sequence. I really liked it, it helped me be present in the moment. I was noticing things around me I hadn't seen before. I felt more relaxed. But it was kind of long, and it was a little bit cumbersome to do. So I found myself just not doing it. But recently, I came up with this version that I've adopted that's really short and I call it my doctor version. It's based off of this common saying that we have, "See one, do one, teach one." And we all know that that's easy to remember. So this is,

"See one, hear one, feel one". Cool.

All right. So let's listen to the first physician doing this exercise. All right, here we go.

- HF: I'd love to hear, when do you find that you lose presence and are lost in your thoughts?
- P1: The biggest trigger for me is during periods of uncertainty and the fear that surrounds it uncertainty leaves me totally lost in my thoughts and fears.
- HF: Yes, that's a very common one. Would you like to try an exercise that you can use to help you be more present?
- P1: Yes!
- HF: Okay. So it's a version of *See one, Do one, Teach one*. It's see one, hear one, feel one. Okay? (Okay.) All right. So first, I want you to tell me something that you see around you.
- P1: A mirror.
- HF: Tell me something that you hear.
- P1: The sound of the air conditioner.
- HF: And tell me something that you feel, and that could be a tactile sensation, but it could also be an emotion.
- P1: The feeling of the fabric of the shirt on my body.



HF: Excellent. Let's do that one more time. Look round and tell me something that you see.

P1: A clock.

HF: Tell me something that you hear.

P1: The air conditioner.

HF: Tell me something that you feel.

P1: Relaxation.

HF: Alright, would you like to use this exercise to practice with for the next month or so? And then I can check back and see how it's going for you.

P1: That'd be great. Thank you.

HF: Okay, so happy about that. But I'm curious. What did you notice while you're doing that exercise that's different than when we were talking earlier?

P1: It's just a feeling of relaxation as I became more aware of the reality of what was going on around me.

HF: So you had a greater sense of awareness?

P1: Absolutely. Yes.

HF: That helped you to be a bit more relaxed, or just to notice that you were relaxed?

P1: Absolutely. Yes. Yeah.

HF: How do you think that having this greater awareness is going to be helpful for you, especially maybe related to the anxiety with uncertainty?

P1: It seems that living in the awareness of what is real and what is going on, is so much more powerful and takes me out of the place where I am in my head that creates the anxiety, things I cannot control.

HF: Beautiful. Well, I look forward to hearing how this helps you when you feel lost in your head because of thoughts about things you can't control.

P1: Thank you.

HF: All right, have fun practicing. And I'll check back with you in a bit.

P1: Very good. Thank you again.

HF: You're welcome. Bye. All right, I thought that was great. And I really like the point that he made about when he's present, he has a greater awareness of what's going on around him. Because attention is in the now and it can be a powerful antidote to anxiety from uncertainty, which is such a common thing to have. Now, let's listen to the second physician. This is Jenny, can you tell me, Jenny, when you tend to get lost in your thoughts, and don't feel like you're able to be present?

P2: Sure. I really think that now medicine has been such a huge part of my life for so long that when that was gone by my own choice, I feel like on this search to discover my new career. It's been very, almost anxiety-provoking to think about where I fit in now, how my career will play into my life. And when I think about the career, I can't think about how the rest of my life will fit in with it until I have that career part set. I have to have that anchor. And I don't know what that anchor is going to be. So because I'm a process person that I just keep thinking, Well, what am I going to do?

And I go around in a circle, and eventually, I just come back around to the wall. I don't know what I'm going to do, and I go down the whole road again. It becomes almost a cycle so that I can't pull out of it sometimes and just go enjoy a day. My brain keeps pulling me back into thinking about the career and how am I going to create it. Do I need to network? What if I make the wrong choice? And I can't believe you left that. You went to school for so long, and you take out that big rock that centers who you are, even though it shouldn't. You can't figure out how the rest of your life that's very good fits with what might be.

HF: Yes, there's a lot that could create spinning. The spinning mind does all that because you don't have your anchor to lock it down? (That's right.) Would you like to try a technique to help you be more present?

P2: I would love that.

HF: Okay. I want you to first look around the room and tell me something that you see.

P2: I see my cat is sitting in the window.

HF: Okay. And tell me something that you hear.

P2: I can hear an airplane flying by outside my window. I didn't actually hear it until you just said it.

HF: And tell me something that you feel.

P2: I can... I feel tired.

HF: Yeah. All right. Let's do that one more time. Look around and tell me something else that you see.

P2: I see out the door of my office into my hallway.

HF: Tell me something that you can hear.

P2: I can hear my clothes dryer.

HF: And what is something that you feel?

P2: I don't even know, tired is the only thing that comes to mind. Really tired.

HF: Yeah, and sometimes what you feel could just be something tactile that you feel, or even pressure.

P2: My shirt is a little itchy.

HF: So what did you notice? Did you notice anything different while you were focusing on what was around you versus when we were having the conversation before?

P2: Interestingly enough, I didn't notice the airplane or the dryer when we were talking until you said, "something that you hear". I always have my cat in the background because he's usually walking across my screen. But I also didn't notice that my shirt was itchy until you said, "What's something else that you feel tactile-wise?".

HF: Do you see any way that this exercise might help you with the difficulty you have with the anxiety around not exactly knowing what your career is right now?

P2: I think it might be useful because when I was noticing what I could hear, I was actually thinking, Oh my gosh, I'm so tired. So tired of thinking about this and trying to, like my brain can only focus on one of those things at a time. It's either focusing on what's going on right now, what you can hear, what you can feel, or it's running the usually nonproductive cycle of "Oh my god, what am I gonna do?".

HF: Yeah. And that gets exhausting. (It is exhausting.) Would you like to experiment using this technique as often as you can think about it and do it for the next couple of weeks or so? Then we'll check-in and see how you're doing?

P2: Yeah, I think that would be great.

HF: Okay, all right. Wonderful. Thanks so much, Jenny. Thanks. Okay. (Yeah, I'll talk to you soon.)
Okay, bye.

I think it was really interesting to me how, when I was first talking to Jenny on our call, she was very bubbly and enthusiastic, because she just brings that kind of energy. But as she did this exercise, and she was connecting with herself, you can hear how tired she was, and how not knowing what her career was going to be, it was exhausting for her, I thought she did a really good job of sort of demonstrating how this simple technique can connect you with what you're feeling. So you can just acknowledge it.

I really appreciate that these physicians were willing to do this exercise for you. I thought they both did a fabulous job. I'm going to check back with them in a little bit, and we'll see how it's going for them.

If you'd like to try this yourself, here are a few suggestions to help you keep it in your mind. You could put a sticky note up on your computer and it could be as simple as drawing a little picture of an eye and an ear that would remind you to do the exercise. It could go on your fridge or even in your car. You could also think of this as a mind-training exercise. So every time you do the exercise, this muscle gets stronger. It's like doing a rep. Now, this muscle of coming back out of your mind to the present, may be flabby at first, and you could be frustrated. But don't worry, every time you notice that you're not present, that muscle gets stronger. For the first week, you might just do a few reps a day. And then the next week, it might be five to seven times a day to remember the exercise.

One of the things I really like about this and I think helps you be successful is that it's fun to look at things and there's not a big activation energy you have to get over to just simply remember to look and see. It's fun. Then it's fun to notice what you hear. And it also helps connect us with ourselves to just notice what we feel. So play around with it and see what you can notice in your environment that you've never seen before. Also, watch what changes in you as you become more present.

If you'd like to have a cheat sheet with the instructions for this exercise, plus some simple resources on mindfulness and meditation, you can download it at www.doctorscrossing.com/seeone. That's www.doctorscrossing.com/seeone.

Now before I say goodbye, I want to send you off with a few more words on presence.



In the game of life, you have to be present to win. Winning is just inhabiting life as it is unfolding moment to moment.

You get to experience the depth and the beauty that come from being connected to what's happening right here, right now. If you find yourself lost in thoughts about the past or the future, you always have the chance to choose the life right in front of you. Life is patient and will keep calling you back. All you have to do is look around you, listen, and feel. And there you are in life's embrace. That's all for today guys. Thanks so much for listening. And don't forget to Carpe that Diem.

You've been listening to the Doctor's Crossing Carpe Diem podcast. If you've enjoyed what you've heard, I'd love it if you'd take a moment to rate and review this podcast and hit the subscribe button below so you don't miss an episode. If you'd like some additional resources, head on over to my website at doctorscrossing.com and check out the free resources tab. You can also go to doctorscrossing.com forward slash free resources. And if you want to find more podcast episodes, you can also find them on the website under the podcast tab. And I hope to see you back in the next episode. Bye for now.

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Podcast details

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