



EPISODE 100 Is A Lack Of Validation Keeping You Stuck?

With Dr. Heather Fork

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HF: “It's so built into I think our genetics that we're wired to want our parents to love us and to seek their approval and do things that gain their approval. But as we know, our parents have mixed feelings often when they think we're wanting to do something different.”

Welcome to The Doctor's 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 Doctor's Crossing. As a master certified coach, I've helped hundreds of physicians find greater happiness in their career, whether in medicine, a nonclinical 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. You're listening to episode number 100.

Oh my gosh, I can't believe that we're here already. It's been quite a whirlwind and I must say starting a podcast has been one of the hardest things I've ever done, but one of the best. And you're the reason for that because when I hear how helpful it is for you and the changes you're making, it just cheers me on and I love seeing how I can help. So thank you for all of your support.

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Now, full disclosure, if I sound a little funny, I feel fine, but I am getting over COVID, but I'm really okay. But the show must go on. So, for this special episode, which also marks our two-year anniversary of the podcast, I wanted to talk about something that I find as one of the most important things we are seeking when we're at the crossroads.

While we may say we want some steps for moving forward and want to know our options and have a game plan and all that's well and good, what we often need before this is some validation. Whether we actually articulate this need or just feel it at a subconscious level, most of us need validation for what we're experiencing and feeling because it typically feels unacceptable to be questioning our path in medicine. And when we're in this place of having doubts and questioning our path, we're at serious risk for staying stuck if we don't get validation because we can feel that there is something seriously wrong with us. We try to ignore these feelings because we fear what they are saying about who we are.

Today I want to dive into this topic and give you a way out of this validation trial. I'd like to start by sharing a recent comment posted on my website that speaks to this need for validation.

This physician commented he had just discovered my podcast and website over the past 48 hours and had listened to about a dozen of the episodes. He described himself as a young physician who has two kids and a fantastic wife. He said he was on his way to taking over a private practice in the near future, but was dreading going to work each and every day.

He went on to say that when he was listening to one of the guest stories on my podcast, "It hit me in such a visceral way that it actually got me choking up and tearing up with the types of parallels I can see in myself, especially when he mentioned not being himself at home due to stress and a short fuse. It made me think of how much my kids have only ever seen the burned out me and don't know me as anything else. Before



finding your website, I did not know there were so many people like me. Your podcast has quickly become both advice as well as a support group. And I wanted to let you know. I don't know if I can ever actually bring myself to get out of my situation despite all this wonderful advice, but just knowing there are others who feel the same as me is massive help. Thank you.”

Now, he never actually used the word validation, but that is really what we get when we find out we're not the only one who feels like we do and we get to hear the stories and see that other people have these emotions and are really suffering as well. I really appreciate that he took the time to share this comment and my heart went out to him and I thought he cannot stay stuck. This is just not going to happen.

Interestingly, when I reached out to see if I could share this on the podcast, he gave his permission and he told me a few things that he was doing and I could tell he was already moving forward. So, I love this example of how empowering getting some validation can be.

I have another example I wanted to share, and this is a client of mine who also gave me permission. She is a young academic sub-specialist who has done very well, who wants to leave academics and forge her own path and practice in her own way and try out some different nonclinical options as well.

So, we're not even talking about leaving medicine, just doing something different than what our peers and colleagues are doing. She told me about how she talked to one of her friends who she said has drunk the academic Kool-Aid, so to speak, and was telling her what she was feeling and what she was wanting to do. And her friend said “You're crazy. Why do you want to do this? This is what you've planned for and built for. Why leave?” And so, she obviously didn't feel very validated after that conversation. And then she found some friends who had similar feelings and talked to them and she said it just



felt so good to be heard and to not be judged. She said “I know now that I'm not crazy or wrong and this was huge for me. I no longer felt like I was nuts or something.”

She also described feeling less burdened and that she wasn't fighting herself so much anymore. At that time, she said she would binge on 10 of my podcasts in a week to just keep reinforcing that message that she wasn't alone.

Now, one of the areas that validation is obviously so important is from our parents. And it's so sort of built into I think our genetics and that we're wired to want our parents to love us and to seek their approval and do things that gain their approval. But as we know, our parents have mixed feelings often when they think we're wanting to do something different and there's a whole range of responses.

Her father happens to be a physician who's in his 70s, and is still working way more than full time. He loves what he's doing and he doesn't plan to stop. And she said when I told him kind of my thoughts about doing something different, she said he doesn't get it. She said, “He'll say, I don't get it, but it's okay. I want you to be happy.” And so, this is partial validation. I think it's definitely better than someone really being against what you want to do.

So, if you're in a situation where your parents or one or both of your parents are against what you want to do, or it's making them anxious or uncomfortable, I think it's important to really ask yourself, “Well, if I still went ahead and did what they didn't want me to do, would they still love me?” Because that's what this is fundamentally about. It's “Am I still going to be loved or am I going to be rejected?” And try to answer that question for yourself. And if somehow you feel like, “No, this is not going to be acceptable”, it still can't be a reason to not do what you need to do.

And I think most parents really fundamentally want you to be happy. It may take them a while to come to terms with something that wasn't in their game plan. This vision of you being the doctor and getting to talk to all other friends about you being the doctor. We

may need to just have some patience around the kind of validation that they're able to give us.

What we've been talking about so far is external validation, but the next level of validation really is internal validation, being able to know that we're okay and feeling what we feel and wanting what we want regardless of what other people think.

So, to dig into this a bit with this young academic that I was speaking with, I asked her a question which was, "What are you saying to yourself when you give yourself permission to try something different and to chart your own course?" And she thought for a minute and she said, "I'm trying to tell myself to trust myself." And then she went on kind of musing about how in medicine and when we see a patient and the labs may look okay or they may say they're okay, but we're trusting our gut to tell us, "Oh, there may be something more here." And we listen to that.

She said, "If I'm trusting myself in medicine, why shouldn't I trust myself in the rest of my life?" And I love that parallel that she made because it really is a form of listening. We can listen to other people, but yet we also need to listen to ourself.

The second form of validation, the internal validation can be challenging because we may again be overriding what we think and feel to present an image that's acceptable. Just like with this physician who commented, he'd been feeling burned out for a long time. He'd been coming home as a burned-out dad as long as his kids knew him. Yet he wasn't acting on those feelings as far as I know, to do anything different about them. Because in some ways, they were incongruous with this path that he was on to take over this practice and continue on with the goal that he had set.

So you may be asking me, "Heather, how do I validate my own feelings when there's conflict? Conflict in who I think I need to be who I want to be? And my feelings may



change. I may have a good week at work and I feel like, 'Oh yeah, I can do this', and then I have a really bad call or a bad patient complication and I'm ready to leave."

Oh, that's such a great question and I hear it all the time. And what I would say is that the first step is really just to start listening and to not judge the feelings and to know that it's pretty normal to have a mixture of feelings and have them be in conflict. That's actually more than a norm. And if you take your time to really listen to them and understand where they're coming from, how often you're having them, and start to talk to other people about them, you can get closer to the truth.

For some people, that can happen in a month. For some people it takes a year. Some people, they have to actually do something different and experience that alternate reality, so to speak, to find out what their truth is. But it all begins with accepting and listening to those feelings and really trying to understand them.

Now, there is a third level of validation that I want to touch upon to conclude this episode. But before I do that, I want to pause to share some resources with you. Don't go away. I'll be right back.

It makes me happy to share free information with you such as this podcast. If you'd like to have additional free content, you can go to the Doctor's Crossing website and check out the freebie tab at the top of the page. Here you can access a downloadable career transition starter kit, as well as guides on topics such as interview prep, resumes, chart review, telemedicine, pharma, and medical writing, with more on the way. If this sparks your interest, you can find these resources under the freebie tab at doctorscrossing.com. Now back to our podcast.

Hey there, welcome back. To conclude this episode, I want to talk a little bit about this third level of validation. We looked at the external approval, that level of validation. We talked about internal validation where we accept our own thoughts and feelings. And



then the third level is the lived experience. Let me give you an example of this, and I'll just use myself.

As most of you know, I practiced dermatology for nine years, and even though it was really good, I kept having this feeling that I was meant to do something different. I wanted to do something different. I was not really looking forward to going in every day and seeing patients and I love my patients. And that was a terrible feeling. That created a lot of conflict. I had this feeling "I need it to leave", so I left.

And then there was validation that that wasn't wrong because I really didn't regret it, but yet I didn't know what I wanted to do. And then I got the idea that I wanted to become a coach. So, that's just a hypothesis. Are those feelings and desires valid? Well, one thing that starts to tell us that they are is that when we think about what we want to do and try it on in our mind, there's a sense of peace and calm and even some energy around it. So, this is really starting to get to that third level of validation. You're not actually doing it, but yet when you think about and almost try to imagine yourself in this space, there is this sense of peace. But yet we don't have confirmation.

When I actually started my own coaching business, this was the lived experience of what I thought I'd wanted to do. And I got a lot of validation for it because every step of the way, even though it was hard and challenging, I knew it was what I was meant to do.

I would not underestimate the peace and calm that you can feel when you accept where you're at and allow it to be and imagine moving forward because you don't have to actually have gotten to a different setting to really start having the sense that you're on the right path. Because I think our intuition is very powerful, and we start getting that message almost on a soul or spirit level, that we are in alignment. What we're doing is right. The confirmation again comes when we get into action.

And when you start moving in this new direction, obviously you may get the naysayers again, you may get the doubters, but it's interesting because that doesn't have to be a bad thing. And we looked at this on the podcast, with Dr. Tom Black, episode 97. He was talking about how he was not doing very well in high school and then getting into the military and doing really well, but then having something bad happen and getting demoted.

He ended up coming up with the idea that he wanted to become a doctor, and he felt really passionate about that, and he felt he could apply himself. And he called up his dad and he told him, "Dad, I'm going to be a doctor." And he said, "The guy laughed at me." He didn't even say, "My dad laughed at me." He said, "The guy laughed at me." And it really hurt him. But he said what it did was it really fueled his passion to follow this path. Now, I talked also about how my dad was very skeptical and sort of disparaging about me becoming a coach. And yeah, that was hard, but it did, again, almost strengthened my commitment to follow my path. I just say that to let you know that everyone doesn't have to sing "Kumbaya" and love what you're doing and believe in you and your idea. If you believe in yourself, that's all you really need. So don't wait for the "Kumbaya." It's nice to have, but you don't need it.

And one last caveat here is that Tom did become a physician, ER physician, and he transitioned into real estate and doing different kinds of investing. Does that invalidate his desire to be a doctor? Was he wrong? No, that was just part of his path.

So, don't think that you have to plan this perfect path and you're going to stay doing what you think you're doing, or that what you try out has to be the "be-all and end-all." The only thing you really need to do is know that each step of the way you're in alignment with yourself as you're moving forward. What that path ends up looking like is your path. It doesn't have to be a slam dunk and it doesn't have to be what you thought it would be when you started. It just has to be your path.



Well, this brings us to the end of our episode. I hope you've enjoyed it. I am sending you 100% validation for who you are and the life that you want to lead. So, rock on. Don't forget to carpe that diem and I'll see you in the next episode. Bye for now.

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Podcast details

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