



EPISODE 108: Is This 3-Letter Word Causing A Roadblock For You?

With Dr. Heather Fork

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HF: “To be able to answer these big questions, the ‘how’ cannot be known right away. The desire and energy to answer these questions has to be freed up to fuel the process without the ‘how’ killing the vision.”

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 108. Today I'm going solo, so it's just going to be you and me, and I'm doing a short episode to talk about a three-letter word that can quickly become a roadblock if it's uttered too soon when you're trying to make some changes in your career.

This three-letter word is HOW. How? How can a simple innocent word such as “how” become a problem? Well, let me share with you how I see it showing up. When I'm

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working with my coaching clients, we get to a point where we're looking at options. They might be exploring how they can change their clinical practice to enjoy it more. That could be decreasing the number of hours they work, changing their schedule. It could be changing the scope of practice that they're doing or they might be looking into nonclinical options.

And initially, like at the beginning of a parade, there's some excitement, there's energy, there's colorful streamers and excitement about what's to come. But very quickly, what often happens is the part of the brain that's more analytical and skeptical and can be fear-based jumps in with this question of, "Well, how are you going to do that? How are you going to change your clinical practice when you're just a cog in the wheel and you don't have a voice anyway? Or how are you going to transition into a nonclinical job? You don't have any transferable skills. How are you going to support your family doing that?"

Now, don't get me wrong. It's very important to look at the "how", but it's when we do it prematurely that it's like raining our parade. We shut it down before it even really gets the momentum.

In this episode, I want to dive into why this is such a common problem and then I'm going to give you some three letter words that you can use instead of "how" early on so you don't shut down your own parade.

Let's start with looking at why this is a common problem. If we think about our path into medicine, we didn't really have to worry too much about figuring out the "how." It was figured out for us. We just had to say yes. And then we got into medical school, we did residency, and then we got our job as an attending.

And so, as long as we stayed on this path, there was a pretty good guarantee that it was going to work out. There wasn't a lot of uncertainty. We weren't going into this unknown landscape. It was a linear process. There were well-defined steps and we could feel that

it wasn't really up to us to worry too much about the “how.” We just had to stay on that conveyor belt.

However, a contrast when we're at the white coat crossroads and we're thinking we need to make some changes, if we look out on that landscape, it can look fuzzy and murky. It can look like swampland or a jungle because there are so many different paths that we could take. It can be confusing as to how we go about figuring out what path to take and how to navigate this unknown territory.

As physicians, we also tend to be skeptical and we're used to looking at problems. What could go wrong if we do X, Y, Z? If we don't get the right diagnosis, if we use the right medication? So, we tend to wear the hat of the skeptic, and so, it's very natural for us to flex this muscle. And it's so natural for us that often I see this happening to physicians when we're doing the coaching process and they don't even really realize it's happening, they just feel like they're being logical and practical and making sure they don't take unnecessary risk. In a sense, we're trying to keep ourselves safe, but in the process of keeping ourselves safe, we may stay stuck or trapped. But it doesn't have to end like that.

If we look at these bigger questions that have been asked in life, we can take a lesson from the way in which they're held. For example, the question of “How do we put a man on the moon? How can we cure this cancer? Or how could we transplant a heart? Or end this conflict?”

To be able to answer these big questions, the “how” cannot be known right away. So, the desire and energy to answer these questions has to be freed up to feel the process without the “how” killing the vision. And that's what we really want to avoid is this “how” killing the vision of what you might want to do before it gets a chance to be tested out a bit.



When I first started coaching, my coach recommended a book called “The Answer to How Is Yes.” This book, “The Answer to How Is Yes” is by Peter Block. And the truth is, even though it's a good little book, you don't really need to read it because the punchline is in the title. Peter Block implores us to say yes. And so, this is one of these beautiful three letter words. Say yes to an idea, an interest, a desire we have before trying to ask and answer the “how.” He doesn't mean don't ask the “how.” He's saying let this beautiful yes of possibility come first.

I often mention this book to my clients and then we talk about it as really a permission slip, this “yes” to explore what is really calling to them. When I've seen my clients do that, it's really fascinating where it can take them and it has taken them to publishing, not one, not two, but three books or starting a business or finding a way to really be happier in medicine when they thought they had to leave.

It's really a very powerful mindset to have around a desire. You may be wondering, “Heather, does this mean we just say yes to any of all of our ideas and go for it? If we hear about other physicians making a killing in real estate, should we buy that multifamily dwelling in our town and just go for it? If we have a friend who transitioned in pharma, who's telling us they're hiring and we should submit our CV or resume, should we just do it?”

Or perhaps you might be considering doing an MBA thinking, “Oh, this could open up more doors for me.” Should you just spend \$70,000 to get an MBA? Maybe, but maybe not.

To help you have a better idea of what to do after that initial “yes”, let me explore this, we can invoke another three-letter word. But before I get to that I wanted to share some resources with you. Don't go away, I'll be right back.



If you are applying to a nonclinical job, it's a great idea to convert your CV to a resume. A well-crafted resume helps recruiters see why you are the right person for the job. My resume kit is a downloadable PDF that walks you step by step through creating an impressive resume of your own. You'll have everything you need, including templates and a bonus on writing a winning cover letter. To get immediate access to this kit that I use with my coaching clients, go to doctorscrossing.com/resumekit or simply go to the Doctor's Crossing website and hit the products tab at the top of the page. Now back to our podcast.

Hello, we're back here and we're just about to look at another three-letter word that can help you in this process. This word is WHY. Why? This is another beautiful three letter word that when you ask it from a place of curiosity, it helps open up this creative imaginative side of the brain where it's easier to look at possibility. You can create a vision, and when you can really imagine how your life could be differently, you really start to connect with a target that your internal GPS can start bringing you towards.

Because if you can't imagine it, it's hard for it to happen. We have to get into this place of possibility. When we ask "why" it can also help us understand if this is something to pursue. Maybe it's not when we dig a little deeper.

I recently had a client who was interested in writing and I asked her why? And she started thinking about the past and she said "Ever since I was very young, I loved writing down stories and talking to people and listening to them." And then when I asked her, "Well, why did you like to do that?" She said she felt like she learned a lot about people by hearing their stories and they also got to learn about themselves too. And she felt that when you really listen to someone, they tell their story, there's something healing about that.

And then we could ask another "why?" Why is it important to you to help people have some type of healing process? You can go very deep with this question of "why." Don't



stop asking it. Keep going deeper, because as you start with this process, you're going to understand yourself better.

There's more self-awareness, and you usually start discovering themes of what's really important to you. You might be looking at getting a job in utilization management and you might ask yourself, "Well, why do I want this job?" And the answer could be, "I'm burnt out, I'm miserable, and I just want to be able to leave work at work at the end of the day."

Well, that's good information because that job, even if you're not passionate about it, might be what's right for you at this time, but you want to make sure that that is the best fit for where you're at. You might want to address the burnout and those feelings before making a big change.

I think it's helpful when you're asking these questions of yourself to do it as a writing exercise because the thoughts can get kind of jumbly in your head and if you start writing down the answers to why you want to do something or why it interests you, and then you keep going deeper asking, "Well, why is that true? Why is that so?" And really thinking about these things and then you put it away and come back to it, you can get some pretty helpful insights from that type of exercise.

There's one more three letter word that you can use and that's NOW. You could ask yourself, "Why not now to make these changes?" Sometimes I've had clients tell me that their job satisfaction is a 2 out of 10 on a zero to 10 scale. And I might ask them, "When do you want to make a change?" And they might reply "Well, in a couple years." And there may be good reasons why they need to wait, but if we ask "why not now?" we can get some clarity on "Well, could now be a good time? What are the pros and cons of delaying?"



Another aspect of making change is that since we often have to get out of our comfort zone, it's easy to keep delaying it, kicking the can down the road. And before we know it, we've been unhappy for a long, long time. You just might entertain that question of “why not now?” and then see what comes up.

Before I go, there's one more thing I wanted to say about how you can use this beautiful word “why.” You can ask this question, “Why not me?” Because what can happen is when we get an idea about something, we start getting in the comparison game. We might look at other doctors and say, “Oh, they must have a 25-page CV and gone to Ivy League schools and published all this research or whatever it is, and we start discounting who we are and what we bring to the table. So, ask that question, “Why not me?” Absolutely, yes, you have everything you need to explore possibilities and believe in yourself.

All right. I hope you have gotten some value out of this episode and have some encouragement for saying “yes” to exploring your ideas and see where they can take you. That's all for now. Thank you for listening. Don't forget to carpe that diem and I'll see you in the next episode. Bye for now.

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