



## **EPISODE 152 5 Ways To Get Unstuck At The Crossroads** **With Dr. Heather Fork**

---

**SEE THE SHOW NOTES AT: [www.doctorscrossing.com/episode152](http://www.doctorscrossing.com/episode152)**

---

[0:0:00]

HF: “It helps you tap into your subconscious and you might find answers that you weren't even aware of are inside of you.”

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 and welcome back to the Doctor's Crossing Carpe Diem podcast. I'm your host Heather Fork, and you're listening to episode number 152. I'm so happy to have you here today. I am going to be talking about five steps you can take to get unstuck when you're at the white coat crossroads.

You can also use this if you're maybe not stuck at the white coat crossroads, but you're having trouble making a decision about something. Maybe there's an idea that you have for starting a business or maybe you have a bunch of different ideas and you're not sure which one to choose from.

[www.doctorscrossing.com/episode152](http://www.doctorscrossing.com/episode152)



If you've been thinking about something and feeling like you're getting stuck in analysis paralysis, going back and forth and starting to get frustrated with yourself for not really moving forward, this podcast is for you.

Starting with tip number one, we have quantify how you feel. To give you a little context for this, I do a lot of these one-on-one consults with physicians, and when we have these conversations, invariably there is something that's not working for them. They're dissatisfied and wanting change.

I could speak with a physician in the first hour of my day who says they're unhappy in medicine and want to explore options. Then I could speak with the next one and they could say the exact same thing.

Well, how unhappy is the first one compared to the second one? How urgent is it for the first one to make changes compared to the second one? When I ask them the question on a scale of zero to 10 with 10 being "I'm really happy and satisfied with what I'm doing" and zero being "I'm miserable, Calgon, take me away", that answer, it's very telling.

Let's say this first physician I speak with for the day says, "Well, Heather, some days it's a four. Other days it could be eight or nine when I have some really good patient encounters. But overall I'd say it's a seven out of ten."

Okay, so there's some highs and lows, but seven out of a ten is my cutoff. I don't really want you to be lower than that if you're doing anything for any significant length of time. Ideally, we're looking for an eight, nine, or ten, but seven is something we can work with. That person doesn't need to get out of their job right away.

Whereas on the other hand, if I speak with the second doctor of the day and she says to me, on a scale of zero to 10 with 10 being really happy, zero being not at all, that she's a



two out of a 10, okay, this is serious. And I might not really have a good sense of who is feeling which way until I ask further questions. And the number really helps me have a better understanding.

If someone is a two out of a 10, whether it's your job, it's your marriage, it's how you feel about yourself in terms of confidence or self-esteem, this is serious. This is not something that you want to just have drag on and continue in this fashion. This is more of an acute crisis situation.

If you just think to yourself about whatever it is that you're wanting more clarity on in your life, like how are you feeling about it zero to 10, you can also use this tool when you're exploring options.

For example, if you're interested in a bunch of nonclinical careers and you've been listening to podcasts and maybe talking to people, but it's all getting jumbled in your head and you're like, "Ah, there are these different things that I could do. I don't even know which would be right for me, where to put my energy", give each one a number from zero to 10.

I mentioned this to my clients when they go to listen to podcasts or do an informational interview, read a blog, read a book. I will say after you listen to this podcast on X, Y, Z, potential career direction, write down zero to 10 how you feel. Write down zero to 10 what is your interest level? If it's a seven or higher, it's worth looking into further. If it's below that and you don't think additional information is going to improve that number, it's really not worth your time and you can cross it off the list.

Once you've done step number one to quantify how you feel, you can also quantify your interest level in different areas, step number two is to understand your "why." And I use this in a bunch of different areas, but specifically I'm going to talk about why you might be interested in something different and to drill down deeper into the reasons, because



as you better understand your “why”, you have more of a connection to what are your core values, what's meaningful to you, and these deeper themes help you when you're looking at a number of different choices and options and scenarios to instead of throw darts or throw spaghetti and just see what sticks, you have a way of testing is this truly in alignment with what I'm wanting and what's important to me?

Let me give you an example of this. Let's say I'm speaking with a physician and they say, “Well, Heather, I'm interested in lifestyle medicine. I heard a podcast and I would say my interest level is an eight out of 10.” Okay, that's high. And if we just stop there, and I said, “Okay, well, why don't you go out and do some research and talk to more people and come up with some type of business plan.”

Okay, we could do that. But instead, if we start asking the question why, and don't just ask it once, but ask it multiple times, we're going to get a much deeper understanding of this person's motivation.

Let's just say I ask, let's call her Dr. Sue. Dr. Sue, well, why are you interested in lifestyle medicine? She might say, “Well, I really don't like just prescribing a pill for my patients. I know there's so much more I can do for them. I can help them with exercise, nutrition, weight. They can better understand making healthy choices for themselves and they can feel more empowered in their health.”

Okay, that all sounds good and reasonable, but if we ask why again, “Well, Dr. Sue, why is it important for you in particular to help these patients? Someone else could help them or there's other things you can do or specialize in?” She might say, “Well, actually, I had a health scare last year and I was afraid that I had cancer. And it turned out it wasn't really true, but it made me really wake up and look at how I was not exercising and I wasn't really cooking healthy meals and I needed to lose some weight. And so, I made these changes and it just transformed my life.”



Okay, this is big here because we're connecting her why she wants to do something for other people with an experience that she had that's been transformative for her. This is a very deep "why." It's connecting with who she is as a person and her own lived experience.

We don't need to stop there even. I could say "All right, Dr. Sue, you mentioned that this is interesting to you and you even told me that you might want to have your own business. Why is it important for you to have your own business versus work for somebody else who maybe has a lifestyle practice?" Dr. Sue says, "Well, I always have felt like there's something I want to create. I want something that's mine and maybe it won't work and maybe I won't be great at it or even want to do it, but I really want the chance to see what I can do on my own."

All right. This is really helpful information because it's also going to potentially lead her in a certain direction of starting her own business versus working for somebody else. So, you can use this in your situation, and if you're able to have someone else, your spouse, a partner, a good friend, a colleague who can ask you these questions, it helps you tap into your subconscious and you might find answers that you weren't even aware of or inside of you.

It can also work by even just writing down your own questions and answers, but the better understanding that you have why you want to do something, the more likely you are to match what you do with what's really going to work for you.

Step number three, get your fears out on paper. What often happens when we start thinking about what we might like to do and making changes, boom, fears rain on us like a heavy parade. This is normal, it's expected and it's often unavoidable for most of us, but it doesn't need to become a deal breaker.



This is I'd say one of the biggest reasons why people get stuck in an analysis paralysis and stuck at the white coat crossroads. It's because whenever they have an idea or want something different, think about something, think about change, the fears jump in, shut down the parade, and you're back at square one. It becomes very circular thinking.

Here's what you can do. Take out a blank piece of paper or open up a document on your computer or your phone and divide the paper in half with the vertical line. You have a column on the left side and then a column on the right side. On the left side, I want you to write down the fears that come up when you think about making changes.

We have talked about these many times on the podcast, but common ones at the crossroads are "I'm afraid I'm going to make a mistake. If I try something different when I get out there, the grass may not be greener, and then I feel like I won't be able to go back to what I was doing."

There is often a fear that you don't have transferable skills. "I'm not going to have the ability to do this job. I'm going to be a failure and I'm going to get fired or it's just not going to work out."

There's often the fear of a change in income to the detriment. "I'm not going to be able to support my family and the lifestyle they've been accustomed to. I'm not going to be able to pay off my loans. If I start my own business I don't know if it will be successful. I don't really have time to not make much money." There can also be fears about the loss of identity. This is who I am. Fears about disappointing others, et cetera, et cetera.

I would say give yourself \$10 for every fear that you come up with. Try to get to at least \$100 and then do something fun with that money so you're getting something positive from your fear.



Once you've made that list, I want you to leave it. You don't need to do anything with it right away because we need to go on to step number four before we really address the fears.

Step number four is to choose empowerment over being a victim. What does this really mean? I use the term victim rather loosely. I could say choose empowerment over weakness, but there's something about shifting out of being a victim that I think really is tangible.

I could have said choose empowerment over weakness. That works too. But I also like victim because it creates an image in the mind of someone who really doesn't have a lot of power, and it's a tangible shift to go from feeling like a victim in your life to being empowered in a way, being the CEO or the leader of yourself and of your own life.

We can feel like a victim in this current healthcare system. We can feel that we've lost power and autonomy, that someone else is making decisions for us, that we're just a cog in the wheel and RVU generator. And it's a very disempowered image.

And while there is a lot of truth to the fact that we have lost a lot of control, and it's not the way it used to be, no matter what, we don't want to see ourselves as a victim or we don't want to feel victimized. That tends to take us into negative energy to finding things or people that we want to blame. And it's energy that tends to take us away from being able to move forward and keep us stuck too.

I know some physicians will tell me when they're making changes and really looking at themselves. I realize that I'm just having a lot of negative conversations with my colleagues. We complain about our shifts, we complain about the administration, we complain about the EMR and the patients, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And I didn't realize how much negativity I'm surrounding myself with.



And when they make this shift to go from being a victim to being empowered, they decide that they don't want to have those conversations. That's not how they want to spend their time and energy and they start doing things differently.

There are other ways that we can disempower ourselves, and this can come from looking at our situation and saying "Somehow I'm not enough. I'm not good enough. I'm less than doing comparison with other people." We might say, for example, want to apply to a nonclinical job, and we say, "Oh gosh. I saw my friend CV who's applying and they have all these publications. They've done this research and they just have more experience than me and they have the right specialty. Who's going to hire me?"

We might say to ourselves, "Well, I don't have board certification, or I had to take a gap. I had a disability or an illness." Maybe you took time off to be with your family and now you're coming back trying to enter the workforce. You can look at all these things and say how you're lessened and disadvantaged.

But if you think about it, let's say you went into a job interview with that kind of energy. Kind of like Eeyore. Think about Eeyore from Winnie the Pooh with his tail between his legs and his ear dripping. "Well, I don't really see why you'd want to hire me. I'm kind of less than I have. There are other people who have fancier resumes than me, have done more and they have better qualifications. So maybe we shouldn't even have this interview." No, of course not. You're not going to bring that self-concept. You're not going to bring that energy. That energy is not going to attract good things to you.

Whatever your circumstances are, you need to reframe how you see yourself. If it's Eeyore kind of energy or just less than or not good enough. One thing I find helpful to do this is to start writing down your story. How'd you get into med school? How'd you do in medical school? What are things that people compliment you on, acknowledge you about? What have you done to learn all the things that you already know? How have you helped people? Just write down all these things about you and you'll start to see "All



right, I can learn to do a lot of really hard things. I have a really strong work ethic. I care about people. I have a lot of integrity. I'm willing to do hard things again. I have a call to serve. I just want to find a new way."

And so, you have to build yourself up and say, "If I am the CEO of my life." I know Dr. Una says that a lot. She was on a podcast with me, episode number 94, I'll link with it. We're talking about empowerment, and she really describes you are the CEO of your own business, which is your life, even if you're working for other people. And if you are the CEO, you want to bring that energy of leadership, of leading your own self, and that's not going to be dragging yourself down with critical thinking.

Take some time to really reframe how you see yourself and who you want to be as you're interacting with other people and looking for opportunities. Once you've been able to make that shift, and I'm not saying it happens overnight, it's something you can even improve on in a day. You can just decide, "I'm not going to tear myself down. I'm going to build myself up, and that's who I am and I deserve this."

From that empowered place, you want to go back to step number three and look at those fears that you wrote down. And on the right side of the column that's blank, after each fear, I want you to counter it and put in an objective reframe about each one.

You can think about it this way. If a friend came to you and mentioned these fears about themselves and their situation, how would you respond to them? I bet dollars to donuts, you would find ways to help them look at these fears objectively and figure out how they don't have to be deal breakers or keep you stuck at the crossroads.

All right, this brings us to step number five, which is to get moving to get guidance. What do I mean by this? Well, we know how when we're in our head and we're just thinking about things, "Well, should I stay? Should I leave? Should I do pharma? Should I do medical writing? I need to get a remote job. I don't know, but maybe I should try to



make things better where I'm. Yeah, maybe I could do that. Well, I don't know. Should I ask to go down in time? Well, someone else just did that and they said no.”

When you're just lost in thought, it can go on forever and you're not getting any closer to clarity. However, when you take a step and get into action, things actually happen where no matter what, whether it was a step in the right direction or a step in the wrong direction or just a step that wasn't meant to be where you're going, you get some information.

Let me give you an example. I have this friend and she's a physician and she's retired from her regular career, but she still wants to do something else. And we've been talking about whether she might like to do some coaching or not. She actually does a lot of coaching for people for free. She's a helper type and people come to her for help with their finances or maybe their parent died and they need help cleaning out a whole house of stuff of a lifetime, or they're having trouble with their teenager.

She just helps them problem solve and she'll go and do a lot of things for them. And she's trying to decide, “Well, would I want to be a coach?” We've been going back and forth about this for a couple years and I said, “Why don't you take one of these introductory coaching classes and just see how you feel?” She did sign up for one and she went to the first two days. It was virtual and she really didn't like it. She didn't like how it was presented. And she's thinking, “I don't know if I want to have a whole business and have to get something like this going.”

But even though that experience wasn't a positive one, she said, “Well, there is something else that I was talking to someone about and I think I might like to explore that.” She's going to see if that's a course that she's interested in. And it is really true that if you think about what is a logical next step I could take to get some more information and put myself in a situation where I can get guidance, it can help you check something off the list. It can help you say I want to explore this more.

And doing one of those things doesn't have to be like taking a whole new job. It could be having a conversation, it could be shadowing somebody. It could be even taking a course because we'll get more information that can help direct us. And I like this metaphor of how when we're driving, if we're using Siri, if we start to go off track from where we put in for a destination, Siri will say, "Recalculating", and then we adjust.

Well, if you're sitting in the parking lot and you're not moving, Siri can't say anything to you. She doesn't know where you're going, so she can't help you. We're sitting in the virtual parking lot of indecision, then the universe or our own guidance, if you will, can't really help direct us.

But when we start moving just in a direction towards something to get more of a lived experience of whatever it is, we're going to get some guidance. And that's in the form of "Okay. I went and I shadowed somebody who had this kind of practice. Maybe they had an obesity practice I was thinking of if I wanted to do this or not. And when I spent the day there, I didn't want to go home. Time went by so quickly and I wanted to come back the next day."

All right, so you got some guidance that you're even more interested in this. It's like that game we played when we were kids. Warmer, colder. You're getting warmer, warmer, colder.

All right, it's getting time to wrap up. Let me just review these five steps. The first one is to quantify how you feel. Put some numbers to your interest or to your unhappiness or whatever it is to get a more objective handle on it.

Number two is to understand your "why." Keep asking yourself why something interests you or why you don't like something or why you want this type of change. And ask it this question "why" five different times to get a deeper understanding.



Step number three is to get your fears out on paper. Write them down on the left side of a piece of paper, get at least 10 if you can put them out there.

Number four is to choose empowerment over being a victim. And number five is to get moving to get guidance.

If you feel you would like some help with your own situations, I do one-on-one consultations, they're an hour long if I have availability. You can find out more information by emailing my assistant Kati at [team@doctorscrossing.com](mailto:team@doctorscrossing.com). That's [team@drscrossing.com](mailto:team@drscrossing.com) and I'll put the email address in the show notes. You can also go to the [doctorscrossing.com](http://doctorscrossing.com) website and on the schedule page, there's a link you can click on to get more information.

Thank you so much for listening. I'm really happy to have you here. Please share this podcast with anyone you think might be feeling stuck at the crossroads, could use a little clarity and an approach to move forward. As always, don't forget to carpe that diem and I'll see you in the next episode. Bye for now.

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](http://doctorscrossing.com) and check out the free resources tab. You can also go to [doctorscrossing.com/free-resources](http://doctorscrossing.com/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.

[00:25:42]

Podcast details

[www.doctorscrossing.com/episode152](http://www.doctorscrossing.com/episode152)



END OF TRANSCRIPT