



EPISODE 161 Having Trouble Making Decisions? Access Your 3 Centers of Intelligence For Greater Clarity!

With Dr. Heather Fork

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HF: “Is it time to leave? But you work so hard to get here. How can you consider throwing it all away? Someone else would kill to be in your position. You're lazy. Why can't you hack it? It's really coming from fear-based thinking. It's not coming from a rational, calm, confident, trusting state.”

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.

Hey there, and welcome back to The Doctor's Crossing Carpe Diem podcast. I'm your host Heather Fork, and you're listening to episode number 161. When you're at the crossroads, there are some big decisions to make as well as a lot of smaller decisions and questions that you're trying to ask yourself and things that you need to be doing. But it

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can be hard to even know what you think or really feel, and it can be challenging to take the steps you need to, to move forward and accomplish your goals.

Sometimes it can even feel as if we're fighting with ourselves, conflicted or confused. One week we are ready to jump ship and leave our job. The next week we may have a lighter schedule, have some good patient encounters, and we think, "Oh, I could do this a bit longer."

Well, today, I have an exercise to share with you that can help you get better clarity for yourself and make decisions that are in alignment with what will work best for you. I call this "My Three Centers of Intelligence" exercise.

We often think of our brain and our head as the primary center of intelligence, and that's where we make our decisions. I would like to offer that we actually have three centers of intelligence: the head, the heart, and the gut. We're often not aware that we are getting information from these different centers as we try to make decisions and they can be in conflict.

We may also not be fully aware that we tend to favor one or two of these centers and that there's one center that often gets neglected. This can make it hard for us to make decisions that are truly in alignment with what is best for us.

In this episode, I'm going to talk about these three centers and what they look like when they're in balance and out of balance, and then I'll give some examples of what it looks like when you are trying to ask a question and you access these three centers of intelligence to help you answer them. And then lastly, I'll share some advice on how you can use this technique in your own decision making for self-understanding and guidance.

Let's begin with the head center. When the head center is balanced, our thinking is rational. It's objective. It's coming from a place of trust in self and really truth about who



we are and what the situation is. Thinking can get out of balance where we're overthinking or under thinking.

When we're overthinking, we might be doing too much research. We might be reading excessively about something and that could be preparing for a surgery case that we have to do or it could be learning about nonclinical options. We might feel we have to keep listening to more podcasts, having more informational interviews, reading more blogs before we can even have any idea of what we should do next.

When we're under thinking or not really thinking, this can be thinking that's fueled by anxiety. An example could be you are not on call, but you are already having pre traumatic stress about being on call. You might be thinking, "What's going to come in? What kind of case is going to come in? Am I going to be able to handle it? What if this rare thing comes in and I won't know what to do?" And so, you're in this loop of "what if" thinking and you go from being anxious to thinking about worst case scenarios, to scaring yourself, to going back to the dread and thinking that you're not going to be able to handle this. And it's just a loop that you get trapped in. So you're not really using thinking to get out of the loop. You're under thinking in the sense of it's not effective thinking. You could also call it circular thinking.

The second center of intelligence, the heart center, is also called the feeling center. When this center is in balance, we're able to access our feelings. We are not numb, but neither are we overly reactive. We can have our emotions which are normal, but we are able to choose how we respond to them. If we are not able to really choose this response, we get reactive. There's feelings that sort of flood our system.

For example, a patient might write a negative review about us, and so we take this too much to heart. We can't shrug it off. It's really bothering us, we're perseverating about it, or we might have had a negative outcome with a patient and it may have been a while ago, but we're still feeling bad and it's hard to get our confidence back. We may also let



patients talk too much and run overtime because we don't want to upset them. We want them to like us, so we don't have the best boundaries here.

On the other hand, if we don't have enough feeling, we become a bit numb, feelings may be uncomfortable for us or they get in the way of what we need or want to do, then we're really not accessing this part of us.

For example, if you made the decision to go to medical school and become a doctor, but somewhere along this path you started getting feelings that maybe this isn't right for me, but these questions are incongruous with this goal you already set of becoming a doctor. So you ignore them, you try not to hear them, and the more you push them away, then the quieter they get. It's just harder to access that part of you. And when we disconnect from feelings to some degree, it can make it harder to feel other feelings.

When I'm speaking with a physician at the crossroads and I ask them, "Well, what do you think you might like to do? How might you like your life to look? When you look back on your life, what would you really want to have done or accomplished or experienced?" They may say, "I really don't have any idea. I don't know. I haven't really thought about what I want."

And so, that can happen when someone has for a while really disconnected with what's in their heart, what their heart is wanting. And then those connections are kind of fuzzy. It can be difficult to get real information from yourself.

The third center of intelligence is the gut center. This is where you might have a gut feeling about something or an inner knowing. This could be where you're using your intuition. When this center is in balance, you're able to hear your own intuition and have a sense of your inner knowing and follow it to good effect.

When it's out of balance, we may get into action too quickly, or on the other hand, we may not even hear this guidance or we may ignore it. For example, I may hear a physician say, "Oh, when I was interviewing for this job, there were some red flags, but I just ignored them. I thought, well, maybe it will be okay, but I saw them and they actually turned out to be true red flags."

Or I remember hearing someone say that on their wedding day, they remember getting ready for the wedding and thinking, "This is not the person I'm supposed to be marrying. I just know it, but it's too late. The wheels are in motion, everybody's coming. The ceremony is planned." And then down the road they were getting a divorce and they remember that day and that feeling.

When you get into action too quickly, it could be, for example, you are hearing some doctors talk about these real estate investments and they're working really well for them. And you have this feeling, "Oh my gosh, yeah, I need to invest in Airbnbs. I got to do this now." And so you get into action, you have a good feeling, but you may not take the time to do the research to make the best investment. So it might be that yes, it was a good intuitive hit that real estate was a good direction for you, but you went in a little too quickly.

Now I want to use some fictional examples to look at a physician who is trying to answer a question. This first physician, I'll call Dr. Casey, and he is trying to answer this question of if he should leave medicine or not. What I would have him do, say for example, if this was a client, I would have them just take a couple deep breaths to center in the body. And I would say, "Now we're going to first focus on your head center." I might even say, "You can put your hand on your head, if you really want to connect with this part of you, and let's ask this question." We had asked the question, "Is it time to leave? Should I be staying in this job? What's right for me?" And then I say, "What does your head tell you?" And then we write down what we hear.

This is what he hears from his head. “You worked so hard to get here. How can you consider throwing it all away? Someone else would kill to be in your position. You're lazy. Why can't you hack it? If you leave, you may be more unhappy and you could fail. Just put your head down and be grateful you have a job.” This is from his head center, and it's really coming from fear-based thinking. It's not coming from a rational, calm, confident, trusting state.

Let's check in with his heart now. What I would say to Dr. Casey is, “Why don't you take a couple more deep breaths and then put your hand on your heart and then see what your heart has to say?” His heart says, “I'm dying a slow death here. This is soul sucking work. I can't remember the last time I felt joy. I feel numb. There is no way I can keep doing this for another 10 to 20 years. I've been telling you for a long time, this isn't working. When are you going to listen to me? Why don't you hear me?”

Here's an example of where he hasn't really been referencing his heart center. It's become numb and he's not getting this information, but when he asks directly to hear how it's feeling, he gets a very clear answer.

And then lastly, we go to his gut center. I would instruct Dr. Casey to put his hand on his belly if he wants, and just breathe into that area to connect with his inner knowing and guidance. I'd say, “What does his gut have to tell him?” His gut says, “I can't say exactly why, but I know this is not right. I know something needs to change. I may not have all the details or know how things will work out, but trust me when I tell you that you'll be okay if you make a change.”

Here is where his gut center is actually coming from a good place. I would call this in balance and he probably wasn't really able to hear this until he directly asked for this information. And if we look at it all together, these three centers, his head is coming from fear-based thinking. His heart is telling him how he really feels, and his gut is letting



him know that he's actually going to be okay and change needs to happen, but he doesn't have to know the details.

This physician before he did this exercise, he was likely stuck in analysis paralysis and fear-based thinking and just trying to talk himself into staying at this job. He should be grateful that he has this job, but knowing that he's not happy, yet trapped and not able to move forward or do anything different. This is a really good example of how doing this exercise can even bring you clarity and a permission slip to trust yourself more and get some guidance. And this is in here. This is more intuitive guidance about what's going to be right for him.

This next example is for Dr. Bob, and he is also questioning whether he should leave his job or not. And so, I'm going to have him first check in with his heart center. I ask him in terms of staying or leaving at his job, how's he feeling? Connects with his heart. And what his heart says is, "I feel like I have a target on my back. Everything I do is being scrutinized. If I don't see enough patients or bill enough, I'm afraid I'm going to be let go. I walk around with a pit in my stomach."

Here he is in a situation in his work where he is feeling fear and anxiety and that fear is physically manifested as this pit in his stomach. Whether he has a sound reason to feel like he has a target on his back or not, we don't really know, but this is how he's feeling.

Next I'm going to check in with his gut and say, "What does your gut tell you about the situation?" His gut says, "We got to get out of here. The writing is on the wall. Ever since our group was taken over, things haven't been the same. I've heard about these doctors getting nonclinical jobs. I'm going to fire off my CV to a bunch of jobs and roll the dice."

Here, this is an example of the gut and this intuition, this inner knowing could be very right and accurate, but it's also having him want to jump into action and do something really quickly. It's overreacting here.



Now let's check in with the head center. What does the head center want to tell him? “Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. Not so fast here, grasshopper. Things are rocky, but let's not jump ship into something else right away. Last time you did that, it was a mistake and we had to leave that job after four months, remember? Why don't we take some time, get some help and make a plan.”

In this case, the head center is in balance and it's coming from a thoughtful place. And it may be true that this is a bad situation and that it's going to be important to get out of it, but how you get out of it is just as important.

I have one more example to share. This is Dr. Lori. Dr. Lori is trying to do some networking to explore different nonclinical options and she's having some trouble putting herself out there. First, we check in with our heart center, the feeling center to see what it wants to say. The heart says, “I don't want to go on LinkedIn. Don't make me, I'm a private person. I don't like social media. It feels uncomfortable to put myself out there and ask other people for help. They're going to think I'm stupid and clueless.”

A lot of emotions are coming up that are getting in her way; they're sabotaging her. It's understandable to have these feelings. I hear this all the time, but the question is, what do we do with these feelings? Are we able to just acknowledge them but still get into action or are they going to derail us?

Let's see next what the head says. When she checks in with her head center, she hears, “Yeah, I have no idea what to even say in my messages. How can anyone help me if I don't know what I want in the first place? I think I should do more research on the internet. Maybe I can find some more books to read or listen to some more podcasts. I'll do some more reading in Facebook groups and then I'll have a better idea of what I want and what to even tell people about myself.”



Here's an example of where the head center wants more information before getting into action. There's overthinking going on. She doesn't really need to do a bunch more research. She could just start where she is. The head and heart are working in tandem to keep her stuck.

Lastly, we check in with the gut center. What does this say to her? “Who cares what other people think? If they want to help, they'll help. If they don't, they won't. It's not personal. Just give it a try and see what happens. If you don't do anything, we're going to stay stuck here. What's the worst that can happen?”

This is very common when you connect with your gut and it's balanced and it's healthy and serving you, is that it can just be very practical and it's not overthinking things. It's not letting feelings get in the way. It's really just based on, “Okay, let's just get into action and do something that makes sense.”

You may be wondering, “Well, how do I really hear myself? How do I hear these different parts of me?” It actually is easier than you think. What I recommend is to take a little time when you won't be disturbed and get some pen and paper or you can use your computer if you want. I kind of like having a notebook and a pen. And what I'll do is I'll just take a couple minutes to do some breathing and quiet my mind and try to connect with my body. Then I write my question down.

I did this recently when I was wanting some help in this online course that I'm trying to create for you all. It's been in the idea stage for a while and I've done some work on it, but I really need to be able to spend more time. I don't have a lot of extra time, and it's very easy for me to book up my schedule with clients and consultations and the podcast takes a lot of time and these are things I enjoy doing, especially my client work. And then I don't really get time, don't leave time or create time to work on this course, which is going to be a pretty big course for physicians at the crossroads. So there's a lot I need to do.

I used this technique a couple days ago to ask myself, my head, my heart and my gut, how I'm feeling about this course and why it's really challenging for me to create the time I need. And what came out of this exercise was that the gut center actually came to my rescue because I'm kind of an emotional person and it's very easy for my emotions and feeling the weight of doing something and the difficulty and the challenge to make me avoid it. And thinking, I can also think about all the things that I have to do and all the work, that can kind of slow me down too.

But what my gut said to me when I did this exercise was you have to put your rocks in the container first. You're putting in the sand and then there's no room for the rocks. And what it was referencing was something I remember when I read Stephen Covey's book, "The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People", where the things that are really important to us are our rocks and we need to put them in our container first and then we add the sand. The sand is all the other things that we need to do, but they don't really move the needle. That might be all the emails we have to respond to and the daily tasks and things that just take up our time, but they don't really create anything new or different.

And so, I always put the sand in my container first because I'm like, "Oh, when I answer these emails and when I do these other things and get these things done, then I'll have the time to work on the course." But as we know, time becomes elastic and all that sand fills in my container at the end of the day and there's no room left for this rock, which is the course that I want to create.

And what the gut was telling me, this inner knowing, this wisdom is "If you don't get the rocks in the container first and prioritize it, you never will." Do I know this? Yes. Was it telling me something I don't know? No. But sometimes when we hear things in an exercise like this, it just solidifies what we need to do and it makes it more concrete.



I hope that you'll try out this exercise and then let me know what comes out of it for you. If you'd like some additional help, perhaps you're at the crossroads and you're trying to answer some of these questions, I would love to help. I offer a one hour consultation. This can be a one-off session or it can lead to additional coaching. You can find out more information and get a link to the schedule by reaching out to us at team@doctorscrossing.com. And I'll put that email in the show notes.

Most commonly physicians reach out when they're trying to decide if they should stay or go. They don't know what their options are. They'd like to have some steps to move forward, and a plan. We can talk about this and anything else that you would like.

This podcast is airing right in the holiday season. So I wanted to wish you and your loved ones a safe and joyous holiday. And 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 and check out the free resources tab. You can also go to 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.

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Podcast details

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