**EPISODE 211: Do You Feel Like You've Lost Your Purpose? Crack the Purpose Code with Dr. Jordan Grumet**

**SEE THE SHOW NOTES AT:** [***www.doctorscrossing.com/episode211***](http://www.doctorscrossing.com/episode211)

[0:0:00]

JG: “Purpose is not about why, it's actually about doing the things that light us up. You might want to impact the world, and you might want to do that, for instance, by being a doctor and working with Doctors Without Borders. That's great, but your purpose is doctoring. Your impact or your ‘why’ might be changing the world. If your goal is to impact the world, but you don't like the doctoring, the way you're getting there, it tends to lead eventually to burnout.”

HF: 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 to the Doctor's Crossing Carpe Diem podcast. I'm your host, Heather Fork, and you're listening to episode number 211. Let's start off with a question. At this point in your life, do you feel like you're truly living your purpose, professionally and personally?

When we first chose the path to become doctors, many of us were driven by a deep sense of purpose, to heal, to help, to serve, and to make a meaningful difference through our knowledge and compassion. That sense of purpose was often the fuel that carried us through the grueling years of training and the long nights on call.

But what happens when the reality of medicine doesn't align with the dream and vision that first inspired us? What do we do when we feel like we've lost our way in our sense of purpose? How do we reconnect with it or recognize when it's time to find fulfillment in a different way or in a different place?

Now, to help explore these vital questions, I am thrilled to welcome back Dr. Jordan Grumet. Dr. Grumet is an internal medicine physician and hospice and palliative care specialist who brings incredible wisdom and heart to the conversation around purpose. He's also the host of the award-winning Earn & Invest podcast, where he dives into financial independence and meaningful living. His first book, “Taking Stock”, showed readers how to align their finances and values to live without regret.

Now, in his new book, which is out this week, “The Purpose Code: How to unlock meaning, maximize happiness, and leave a lasting legacy”, Dr. Grumet offers a powerful framework for understanding and navigating life's crossroads. In today's episode, we'll discuss how to rediscover purpose when you're burned out or questioning your career. We'll also explore the question of pursuing a purpose that is your passion but feels precarious versus doing what is practical and safe.

Lastly, we'll also look at how regret, when faced constructively, can be a surprising catalyst for connecting to your purpose. Without further ado, it is my great honor and pleasure to welcome Dr. Jordan Grumet back to the podcast. Hey, Jordan. Welcome.

JG: Thank you so much for having me. I'm excited for the conversation.

HF: I am too. And you wrote this really great book, “Taking Stock”, and we had a podcast episode about it. And now you have this new book. I'd love to hear what was the catalyst for you for writing this book about purpose.

JG: I originally wrote “Taking Stock” because as a hospice doctor dealing with end-of-life care, I was learning all these important lessons that I could translate over to my personal finance crew. I was doing a personal finance podcast and blog, and at the time, I realized that when we talked about money, a lot of times we didn't understand things like “enough” or the “why” we were doing what we were doing, and yet my dying patients could talk about all the things they regretted and what was important in their lives.

I wrote “Taking Stock” to really bring that premise home that we have to start putting purpose, identity, and connections before we started building our financial framework. And when I went to market this book and went to do public speeches, et cetera, about it, I got a lot of people who would come up to me after my talks and they'd be angry. Now, the first time this happened, I kind of blew it off, but it happened over and over again, and people would look at me and say, “You keep talking about purpose, and I've been searching for my purpose forever, and I can't find it, and it's making me stressed out. Please stop asking me about purpose.”

And so, I did the deep-dive in the literature, and I found two things that seem to contradict each other. One, having a sense of purpose is deeply connected to things like health, happiness, and longevity. On the other, up to 91% of people at some point in their life have what's called purpose anxiety, this idea that purpose actually stresses them out. And so I wrote the “Purpose Code” to kind of work on this paradox and to even give a prescription for a more constructive way to start looking at purpose.

HF: Wow, that was great. So I'm sure it was a little unsettling to have people be angry about something you were talking about, but you didn't just stop there. You went and said, “Okay, let me try to understand this”, and out came this book. To prepare for this podcast, one thing that I did was to go and look at a bunch of intake forms, because when I have a new coaching client, one of the questions is, “What would you describe as your purpose?”

And so, I wanted to share some of those answers, because I think they can help us with this conversation, because they are a fairly wide spectrum. A number of physicians said that “My purpose is to serve and to help others.” Someone said, this was an OBGYN, said “I find purpose in making a positive impact in the community and developing meaningful relationships while exploring and going on adventures with her husband.”

There's sort of some different purposes here. An intern has said, “My purpose is to continue to learn how to trust in God and trust in the gifts I was given to heal and touch more people's lives.” Another physician said, “When I think about my purpose, what comes to me is honestly nothing.

Then there was another physician. This is an emergency medicine physician in his early 60s. And he said, “This may sound selfish, but at this point in my life, my purpose is to enjoy things such as my wife, my kids, my grandkids. And I know that does sound selfish, but this is what I feel I need to do at this point.”

And let me read one more here. This is a surgeon and he said, “I often feel my purpose in life is to give to others without anything in return. Consider I'm saying this positively with regards to family and friends and done out of love. Consider I'm saying this negatively regards to work and society in general when I'm feeling resentful.” We have a whole different variety of answers here. I'd love to hear your thoughts on some of these things.

JG: I think this is the colloquial version of purpose that makes us all pretty upset and unhappy. It's not that these things are wrong, but they're using basically this idea that colloquially purpose is our why. But the problem with looking at our why is then it becomes big and audacious and you either kind of fulfill that sense of why or you don't fulfill that sense of why. It leaves you feeling uncomfortable often, depending on how you feel like you measure up.

What I actually suggest, purpose is not about why it's actually about actions that we do in the present and future. It's simply doing the things that light us up. That's it. No more, no less. I think when you start saying, “Well, my purpose is to serve or my purpose is to improve the world or my purpose is X, Y, Z.” None of those things are bad, but that's not purpose. That's outcome. What you're really talking about is what are my goals, which is a very different version of what is my purpose.

I think purpose is about action and it's about present and future. Yyou might want to impact the world and you might want to do that, for instance, by being a doctor and working with Doctors Without Borders. That's great. But your purpose is doctoring. Your impact or your why might be changing the world.

But hopefully if you're doing this right, what you consider your purpose is something that lights you up. Hopefully the doctoring part lights you up because if your goal is to impact the world, but you don't like the doctoring the way you're getting there, it tends to lead eventually to burnout.

The only other thing I would add on is that I'm not a big fan of this idea that my kids or my wife or other people are my purpose. Only in the sense that while that's incredibly good, too, and I think that's positive, especially if it's your kids, you kind of want to model for them purpose being something that lights you up because when you deeply engage in it, they see you joyful and then you give them permission when they're parents to also be joyful and do these joyful things. If the version of purpose for you is that you live for your children, what happens when your children decide not to have children or can't find a spouse or genetically can't do it, then the only version of purpose they've ever seen is something they can't actually attain.

And so, I think it's wonderful to love your family and your children, but I think it serves you and it serves them also that you have a sense of purpose not related to them so they can see you lit up and you can model that behavior for them.

HF: Well, this is a different paradigm than we're used to thinking about purpose, so it takes a little time to digest here. Perhaps could you give us an example, Jordan, in your own life about how these things may have changed for you when you set out to become a doctor and how these principles that you talk about in the book match up with how things change and how you changed?

JG: Certainly. I think when I was a little boy, seven years old, my father died. He was an oncologist, a doctor. I thought I was going to cosmically fix the world by becoming a doctor like him. And so, this idea that becoming a doctor was very, very purposeful and exciting for me was very real as a child. It became my sense of purpose.

Now, as I got older and actually started practicing medicine, I realized I didn't like the process of doing it. It didn't light me up. It wasn't exciting. The reason I was doing it was actually, I think, to cosmically fix this thing that I had very little control over. And so it no longer felt purposeful for me. It actually caused burnout and made me feel uncomfortable.

However, at that time in my life, I started doing a bunch of other things. One is I got rid of almost all the doctoring stuff I did, except hospice. Now, hospice was something I deeply enjoyed the process of doing and would do it even if no one was paying me for it. I knew that that at least was a version of purpose, what I call little p-purpose, process oriented purpose. That part was good, but then I had to start searching for a bunch of other things that filled me up and excited me because doctoring no longer did. I discovered things like writing, something I had always really liked doing, but never gave myself permission to do, and public speaking and podcasting.

But there are other versions of purpose in my life, too. Some of them seem fairly benign and normal, but they're very purposeful for me. For instance, I love taking long walks every morning. And so for me, that's a very purposeful activity. I love reading, not to gain or grow or learn, but I just love crime novels and things like that. That's also very purposeful activity.

I think we've made so many rules around what purpose should look like that a lot of times we don't realize that some of these little things we do that fill us up and light us up are very reasonable versions of purpose that we can pursue and they can add to more joy in our life.

HF: And how would you describe your purpose now at this time? If you were to just describe it in one sentence, what would you say that is?

JG: My purpose is abundant and full of many, many things. It's podcasting and writing and public speaking and long walks and reading and all these things that I deeply enjoy doing. Some of them last for years, some of them last for weeks. Some of them have a deep, immediate impact on the world. Some of them don't. There's really no rules. The only rule is you kind of have to enjoy the process of doing it regardless of the outcome.

HF: As you said earlier, purpose really is what lights you up, you know, doing what you're connected to that sort of fills you. And so what would you say is your why?

JG: Why to me is a much deeper question. It's what I call a meaning problem. For me, why is about my past and those stories I tell myself about myself. When I was younger, having my father die, going through these things that were difficult, built in a series of important questions for me. I realized I really loved having deep conversations. I really liked dealing with death and end of life because I felt like I had gone through that and that was something that I could help people with.

But the truth of the matter is I don't have like a deep sense of why. A lot of it is I would like to do things that light me up. Now, when I do those things, I tend to impact people and I do tend to make changes in the world. But I don't have a deep sense of this one thing drives me. I have lots of different versions of purpose. And so I love learning. If you want to call that a why, so I go out and pursue new things. I love connecting with people and interacting with people. If you want to call that a why, I go to conferences and podcasts and blog and those kind of things.

But I don't know if even for me concentrating on specifically why per se matters. I think in a lot of people think this is self-serving, but I tell you it's exact opposite is I think I concentrate on things that really light me up. But by doing so, I show up as my best self and probably have a greater impact and use my gifts to help people more.

HF: Well, I think that's a really great point, which connects to some of the purpose statements that I've seen clients have, which is they want to use their gifts to the fullest. And this is something I've seen in my career and in others and connects to what you say about what lights you up and what energizes you is I feel that when we're working at our highest level, which to me is connected to your gifts, it's an energetic volcano that you get to sit on and it makes you expansive in whatever you're doing.

For example, to use my own story, when I was in dermatology, I love learning dermatology. I really love my patients. But after nine years, I just felt like there was some other way I was supposed to use what I've been given. This didn't feel like a perfect match. It felt out of alignment. And so, fast forward, I can see now in hindsight, coaching feels like that alignment. It feels like I get to use my gifts in a way that's at my higher level than as a dermatologist.

JG: I was just going to say, I wanted to interrupt you because I think you made a really important point and I didn't want you to pass by it. And the important point is your why actually is the same for both of those things. It's just your purposeful activity is different. Your why is to kind of help people and improve their lives and your why can be the same, but one activity didn't serve you because it didn't light you up, whereas the other did. And I think that's really interesting because again, it gets to me, it gets to the point of I'm not sure how important the why is, or at least when it comes to purpose, it's more that the things you do light you up.

Now, the why might be a guide. I often talk about purpose anchors. And so the “why” might be kind of where some of those purpose anchors come from, but you're just doing different purposeful activities around what you're considering to be your “why.”

HF: Right, because I think that gives us the most chance of sustainable success when we connect with that energy that's really connected with our soul, our purpose in that sense. And what we're meant to do in this world, it often has success built into it because it's in alignment with us. I'd love to tease this apart a bit by going to a fictitious doctor at the crossroads who went into medicine because they wanted to help people.

They were excited and they get there and maybe they're two years out, three years out, 10 years out, whatever it is. And even though they're “helping” people, it looks that way externally, they don't feel that they're making a difference. And to them, they feel like they lost the meaning and purpose and they're not sure how to find it. And I know you're going to address this word fine, but can you help us out with this kind of scenario, Jordan?

JG: I don't think you find purpose. I think you create it. But it is true you have to connect with some anchors of purpose in your life. These are beckonings, inklings, things you want to build a life of purpose around. In someone who feels lost, we have to go back and figure out what those purpose anchors are in our life to build a life of purpose around them.

And so, in the book, I talk about a bunch of different exercises and means to find those purpose anchors. I talk about the life review that's thinking through what we do in hospice, which is this life review, which is a process in which we ask people these structured series of questions that help them look at what was important in their life. What were their biggest triumphs, what were their biggest losses, defeats, failures? Who are the important people in their life? And more importantly, what were their regrets?

And so, when we do this in the dying, it's very difficult because they don't really have time or energy to go back and fix or change things. But if young people can start doing life reviews, that's a way to start turning things like regret around into what I call a purpose anchor, an activity to start building a purposeful life around, or at least a purposeful activity around.

That's one example of how we find purpose anchors. And there are a bunch of others, things like thinking about your joys of childhood, or what I call the art of subtraction, looking at your job, getting rid of all you don't like, like I did with my house, my job and finding that hospice was the thing I still loved. Then building some purpose around that.

Or if nothing else works, what I call the spaghetti method, which is throwing a bunch of stuff against the wall, trying a bunch of new things, hanging out with new people, maybe making yourself slightly uncomfortable and seeing if you enjoyed what you did that day. Because if you enjoyed the process, if it was a good use of your time for that day, you might want to start building some purpose around it.

HF: Right. And I think this exercise requires a permission slip that sometimes we need someone to give us or to give ourselves, which is that what you want and what you like matters. Because I've talked to a lot of physicians who all say, “Well, what do you want?” Like “I don't know. I haven't asked myself that in so long as what about what I had to do or what's supposed to do.” And so reconnecting with the heart, what matters and not feel selfish or indulgent and not feel embarrassed about saying something such as, I'm bored seeing patients or I really don't like doing this and not feel guilty.

JG: I think what people don't realize is that when you start doing things that light you up, you're much more likely to create communities, to collaborate with people and actually have a bigger, larger impact. I think that's one of those things that really gets in people's way is they concentrate so much on impact, they forget to think about what they'd actually like doing and therefore they pursue these activities they think are going to have the greatest impact. But a lot of times it's not something they enjoy the process of doing, which means they burn out and never actually fulfill that promise they think they're fulfilling when they go to do these activities.

HF: That's an excellent point. I've seen a lot of physicians who come to me thinking they need to leave medicine, but when they really start to look at, like you said, what really lights you up, what parts of your job do you enjoy and do more of what you love and less of what you don't, they often reconnect with the way they can practice, find a different setting. Maybe they narrow their niche of what they do. Maybe they change even just the way they're thinking about their work.

There's so many different ways I've seen this happen, but it really comes down to you have to play the game warmer, colder, and not judge yourself for what you'll find out about what really is meaningful to you and what makes you happy.

JG: I think we are really talking about permission, about giving yourself permission to put away the big audacious goals of changing the world and start doing things that change both you and connect to the people and change the world locally. Because I think we have a global impact through local activity and that's our best way. A lot of people always think about globally, but it's really hard to achieve global impact unless you start locally. But if you do things that light you up, connect to other people, collaborate with them, you're much more likely to change the world.

A perfect example is I was burned out of medicine and I found that I was financially independent, had enough money. I could have just left and walked away. I could have pursued something that I thought would have much bigger impact, maybe even with my podcast, et cetera. But what I actually realized is I still loved hospice medicine selfishly. I loved doing it. I actually knew I would connect with less patients. I wouldn't save as many lives because I was dealing with people who were already dying. And in some senses, I thought globally, this might lead to a less impactful life.

But I found because I enjoyed it so much, I connected to more people. I collaborated with them. It eventually led to a book where I tied in both finance and hospice, which has gone out to thousands and thousands and thousands of people that ultimately by acting locally and doing things I loved and connecting to other people, I probably am having a bigger impact than even when I was a full-time busy practicing physician.

HF: Yeah, I love that. I think it simplifies things. Because sometimes if we try too hard with a big audacious goal, which I think can be fine. I think sometimes that's actually motivating and inspiring. And I wouldn't say don't do that if that works for you. But sometimes when people are trying to figure out what to do next or how to do things differently, they just follow their energy. Like you did, like what energizes me more, it takes away that big question and you naturally start moving forward.

Now, one thing I mentioned in the intro I wanted to talk about is how regret and looking at regret can be a catalyst. And I love this story in your book about Beatrice, is this can bring in this conversation about doing what you're passionate about or what seems practical and safe. Could you share that story briefly and how we connect to regret to help us?

JG: Beatrice is the classic do-over story. What do I mean by that? When she was in, I think it was her late 20s, years and years and years ago, I met her when she was much, much older. She was diagnosed with an abdominal mass. She went to the doctor. Back then there weren't nearly as many sophisticated scans. They told her she had cancer and likely had months to live. And they didn't have anything they thought they could do for her. They sent her home and said, “Come back in a few months”, fully suspecting that she would never return.

Given this horrible diagnosis, Beatrice and her husband pretty much cloistered themselves in their summer home, got prepared for what was coming. And Beatrice had an epiphany. There was this thing that was always important to her that she never pursued. You see, she loves jewelry. And in her dream of dreams, she was going to become a jewelry maker. She had these memories of her grandmother and her elaborate jewelry and playing dress up with her. And these were some of the best times of her childhood.

She felt really connected to this idea. But there was always a reason not to do it. She was too busy. She was busy being married and setting up their house and all these kind of things. And so, she promised herself in what little time she had left, she was going to start making jewelry. She went to the library, checked out every book she could. She voraciously read through them. After a week or two, she had her first piece. After a month, she had sold her first and second piece. After a few months, she had sold out all of her inventory. And after a year or two, she was selling to local department stores.

And here's the kicker. She didn't die. She went back to the doctor. Eventually, they couldn't find any evidence of the mass anymore. It had disappeared. Now, I'm not going to say that her finding her purpose caused it to go away. I think more likely back then at the time in medicine, they probably misdiagnosed her and just didn't have the techniques they now have to deal with that. But she eventually developed a life of purpose around jewelry making, which lasted her for decades and decades and decades after that.

So, here's the thing. She had this amazing insight because she thought she was dying and she really thought about her regrets and gave her a last chance at pursuing it. But this is the great thing. Why can't the rest of us think exactly alike? Why can't we imagine just for a moment, as painful and uncomfortable as it is, that we've been given a terminal diagnosis and think, “Well, what would I really regret? And why not start pursuing those things now like Beatrice does?” Because Beatrice didn't die and hopefully none of us will either. But if we don't start doing these things now, we may never. And so, she was a great example of how we can turn a regret into what I call a purpose anchor, something to build purpose around.

HF: I love that story. I can't tell you how often I'll be speaking with a physician and they're talking about their regular career and maybe they're going to do something nonclinical. But then I say, “Well, is there something in your back pocket that you've been researching and looking into that you might want to do as an entrepreneurial pursuit?” And it often comes out, they come out of the closet and they say, “Oh, I really wanted to have an interior design business or be an image consultant or have a coffee shop or be a consultant for parents with a newborn.”

And they've already done research. They looked into this or even coming up with business names. But they need that permission that it's okay to try something like this. And we don't want them to have to have a fatal diagnosis to go forward. So, what kind of advice would you give someone who's sort of weighing this passion versus what feels practical?

JG: I think the best thing to do is start slowly building that passion into your current job. So let's say you don't like your job, but you have a passion. Could you possibly slowly start integrating that in your job? Because I think to say quit your job and follow your passion is really a large leap for people. I'll give you a perfect example. I know this woman in corporate America who didn't love her job. But you know what she really was interested in? The role of women in the workplace in corporate America. She started blogging and writing about it. And eventually, she started putting on programs at her job for employees just out of the goodness of her heart.

But here's the thing. After she did it for a long time, she became well known in the field. And her boss said, “You know what? We like what you're doing so much. We're going to make you 50% time. So you're going to spend 50% time doing your regular job. And then we're going to free you up for the other 50% time to put on more of these kind of programs.”

And she started by just pursuing something she liked, but eventually was able to integrate it into her job. And that's a good solution for people who just don't feel ready to leave their job. I could have done the same thing. I didn't love my job in internal medicine, but I took on what I call a medical side hustle where I did hospice. I also started writing and eventually got paid for both of those. So I wouldn't have had to work as much if I didn't want to with my 09:00 to 05:00.

HF: I think that's excellent advice. And a lot of us can do that. And some of us take the other approaches. I need all that space and time to do something new. And when I left dermatology, I didn't know what I was going to do. And I took some time off and then I decided to pursue coaching. I did that full-time from the beginning, but people don't have to. And I have a good number of my clients started a coaching business on the side. And that works too.

We're getting close to time here. And I'd love it if you could share how folks can get in touch with you, how they can find your book that's out this week and anything else you want to tell them.

JG: They can go to jordangrumet.com. There they can find links to both of my books, “Taking Stock” and “Purpose Code”, as well as all the other places that create content, including the Purpose Code Substack, as well as the Earn & Invest podcast. That's at jordangrumet.com.

HF: Well, we will make sure to have those links in the podcast. And I just want to thank you so much, Jordan, for coming on again to the podcast and sharing your wisdom and all this deep work that you do to help us have lives that are more meaningful, purposeful, happy, and fulfill that desire to do what makes us come alive.

JG: Thank you so much for having me.

HF: You're very welcome. All right, my dear listeners, I'd love it if you would like to share this podcast. If you can think of someone today, this might be helpful for. Maybe they're questioning how to find purpose and meaning in their life or any other podcast you think would be helpful.

I did want to mention that we have two new freebies that are on the Doctors Crossing website. We added a new freebie about seven tips for your resume to help it open doors. And we also have a new freebie on using Chat GPT. And we have lots of prompts that will help you use Chat in your personal life and professionally, including if you're at the crossroads.

You can find those freebies, as well as a number of other ones related to interviewing and pharma and medical writing and time management and a bunch of other things, as well as the starter kits. You can find all of those at doctorscrossing.com under the freebie tab. We'll also have a link in the show notes.

Thank you so much for listening. And as always, don't forget to carpe that diem and I'll see in the next episode. Bye for now.

You've been listening to the Doctors 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.

[00:31:03]

Podcast details

END OF TRANSCRIPT