

Lesya Liu 0:00

Hello everyone and welcome to the new episode of You Can Exhale Now podcast. Today I am excited to host Emma Lunsford, who is a certified health and life coach as well as expert wellness writer. She helps stressed women and business owners all over the world to slow down, take back their house and build even bigger business wins in the process. Emma's mission is to empower women to put themselves first, ask for what they truly need, and go for it unapologetically. So I think you will learn a lot of new tips and tricks to use in your own life and business.

Emma, welcome to the show.

Emma Lunsford 1:34

Thank you very much.

Lesya Liu 1:36

Thank you for coming on. So tell us more about I know that you are a certified health and life coach as well as you know, wellness writer, what made you decide to move into that field? And you know, how did you get started?

Emma Lunsford 1:54

So I have been interested in wellness ever since I was like 13 or 14 because I struggled with severe eczema as a kid. So you know, taking care of myself managing the symptoms of eczema, my skin and my health has always been a huge part of my life just so I can stay well sane, because anybody who's had any eczema or psoriasis or skin issues knows how just debilitating it is to your life to have constant itching, and you know, all the horrible stuff that goes along with that. So it's always been a passion of mine. And I didn't realize it would be such a huge part of my career until I ended up dropping out of college. So I got my health and life coach certification. And then, you know, since I have had like dipped my toes in the business world with freelance writing, I realized that so many business owners and women specifically, really, really struggle with burnout with you know, putting their business above themselves and ends up causing so many health problems and mental health problems. That it just seemed like the obvious next step for me was to help women business owners, specifically because I experienced burnout. So many times, I'm sure every business owner has gone through this, you know, one time or another but ever since I was a kid, I've been very, very ambitious. Like in high school, I burned out so many times then with freelance writing and burned out. So it just seemed again, like an obvious choice for me to help women business owners specifically with their health, and their mental health and their life and managing the boundaries between your business and your, your health.

Lesya Liu 3:31

That's awesome. So you call yourself stress? Coach, can you speak a little bit about that, and, you know, the huge part that stress plays in all of our lives, you know, it could not be an over

exaggeration to say that we are all experiencing stress constantly in all aspects of our lives. But I know that there's a difference between good, good stress and bad stress. So can you speak a little bit to that?

Emma Lunsford 4:01

So after a couple months of calling myself a health and life coach, I know and dealing with women business owners, I realized the main problem that we faced was dealing with our stress response throughout the day. Because for most of us, it's you know, either at a chronic low level or a high level all the time 24 seven all throughout the day, we're just so stressed. And that ends up causing issues like burnout and you know, high blood pressure and sleeping issues and all that other stuff just kind of snowballs. So, stress, because it's such a huge part of everybody's life, especially now with everything going on in the world. I think we're all kind of realizing how much stress has an impact on our life. We all know like, Oh, yeah, stress like oh, yeah, that's a big deal, but what kind of worry about it, but now you know, in quarantine, all these other stressful situations that come out. We're all being forced to deal with our stress because you know, we're alone at home. We want to sit here just stressed all the time. So I kind of realized Okay, maybe I should call myself a stress coach. So people could actually, you know, learn more about how to deal with their stress response when they come to me, because that's very important for business owners especially.

Lesya Liu 5:11

Mm hm. And so what's, I guess a good response to stress? Right? We all think that we are stress resilient, I think that's what all of us put on our resumes that you work well under pressure. Really, you know, what's the what's the best, I guess the right answer to the stress? And, you know, it's probably not possible to get rid of stress in our lives at all right? To be completely stress free, but how can we thrive in different situations?

Emma Lunsford 5:51

Right, I love how you mentioned that to you like it's so it's not possible to be 100% stress free, because there are so many different stressful situations that are just out of our control, like, this past year, for example, like none of this was in our control, but it still caused so much stress. So when it comes to dealing with stress and the proper response, and doing like everybody's quotes in the air right now, it really comes down to you and how you deal with your feelings, because I find that a lot of people business owner, specifically, we don't feel through our feelings, we think through our feelings. So for example, have you ever thought something like, I don't understand why I feel like this, that's a good indication that you're not feeling through your stress, you're thinking there and just trying to figure out and analyze and there's wondering, like, why is this happening kind of thing. And that ends up just exacerbating the stress response. Because you're stressing yourself out from the fact that you're stressing, instead of just allowing yourself to feel through the stress and give yourself some self compassion and grace, and then feel it and then let it go. move on from there. Now that helps.

Lesya Liu 6:54

Yes, and, you know, I think that's such a big part, especially right now is mental health kind of moving a little bit in a somatic direction, and really, you know, feeling through your feelings instead of trying to analyze why you're feeling this way and stuff like that. But a lot of feelings, especially, you know, in stressful situations, can be scary to feel right. We can feel pain, we can feel agitation, we can feel anger, all the kind of feelings that we label as negative. So how can one go through feeling the feelings in a safe way that really helps them to digest what's going on in their lives to help them heal to really help them move past that in a healthy way?

Emma Lunsford 7:51

My first thought with that question is to really build up good coping skills and have a really solid foundation and good community. Having either as a hobby or a person or a place that you can go to that will help you feel safe. Because the problem with those scary feelings if you just don't feel safe enough to work through them. So we can put ourselves you know, around someone or someplace that helps us feel safe like you know, a therapist, for example, your best friend that hobby that you love, like playing the piano cooking, baking, that you feel safe enough to actually feel without, you know, running away scared, like you said

Lesya Liu 8:33

Mm hmm. And the other part you have mentioned compassion. And I think again, his negative emotions and negative feelings often do not spare a lot of self compassion, right? We when we feel angry, or when we feel bad about what we did, or the decision we made. How can we, I guess, nurture self compassion? How can we allow ourselves to you know, almost like self nurture?

Emma Lunsford 9:08

That's a big one. So it really so first up, I guess I need to point out that we value our physical health go up and according to society, we usually value our physical health more than our mental health, which is part of the reason why we get so upset when we feel a certain way because we're like, I this is, this is like weak, almost like it's not normal to feel like this because nobody ever talks about it. So you know, a good example of this is like you have a broken leg. like somebody's like, Oh my god, get to the hospital kind of thing. But when you're depressed, it's like oh, it's all in your head. We approach these different scenarios so differently, although they both can have the same impact on your health. You know, mental health matters just as much as physical health Some even with a more so because of how much impact that mind body connection has. So to walk through self compassion, we first have to realize how we're looking at our mental health, are we looking at our mental health as important, or we're looking at it as just that random thing, we don't know why it's happening to us, we're confused by it. The other thing is to make sure that you are making it a habit, or at least trying to make it a habit to actually integrate self compassion into your life. So for example, this would be you know, utilizing a tool like meditation to help you will guide you through these difficult feelings in a way that won't initiate that stress response so much because like meditation, you're, you're feeling

your way through things in a way that is relaxing and calming. It's not like, you know, a violent outrage type of thing. So I guess to recap, that would be taken into account how you're approaching your mental health, making sure that it's, you know, from a kind, loving place, because that plays a huge part. And also, it was the last thing I said, I totally blanked on the last thing I said, meditation and how Yeah, using a tool and making it a habit, that kind of thing. Because that will also help a lot and making sure that you're doing it consistently, because consistency is really the key here, and making sure that you're lowering that stress response as much as possible.

Lesya Liu 11:22

Absolutely, yeah. And, you know, let's talk a little bit about the tools that can help us unload some of that stress, and help us feel better in the midst of it. So you've mentioned meditation, that's one of them. A lot of people think that they're bad meditators, because their mind wanders off. And there's, you know, it's really difficult to build that habit. What are kind of like some other tools that you often suggest to your clients?

Emma Lunsford 12:00

I really stress deep breathing, because that is like the perfect way to switch your body into a relaxation response. And it's easy, and it's free. So you know, doing deep breathing, in the morning and before bed, even before you eat is perfect. Listening to music that resonates with you, having some sort of creative outlet like drawing, sewing, painting, making sure that you're laughing and playing is super important people, that also is great for just snapping your right into that relaxation response. Another preventer of this would be to watch how much social media you're in taking. So I recommend to a lot of my clients to make sure you're having you know, at least one technology detox day per week, no screens at meals, turn off those push notifications to leave the apps you don't use set a timer for how long you need to be on social media, you know, max 30 minutes type thing. All of these can really help you manage that, those difficult feelings.

Lesya Liu 13:06

Mm hmm. And the next question I wanted to ask you is you've mentioned that we often view our negative emotions or our stress response as not being great. And we often think of, I am not stressed, resilient enough, therefore, there's something wrong with me. Maybe we'll look at our co workers who have three kids and manage to meet every deadline, or maybe we're looking at our neighbors who I don't know, who manage to cut their grass or keep their backyard. First, is there really such a thing as different levels of stress resilience? And if so, can we actually improve our stress resilience?

Emma Lunsford 14:01

Absolutely, there are definitely different levels of stress resilience, and you can absolutely improve it. Stress resilience, in my opinion, really comes down to three major factors and those are having good boundaries, self care, and self compassion. So when you work on all three of

these aspects, you know, daily, weekly, monthly, you are probably building a good stressful dance and no guarantee it's improving. But you know, if your self care is lacking, your boundaries are out of whack. your self compassion is kind of in then you probably have a lower stress resilience, and it probably needs to be improved just a little bit to make sure you can handle you know, daily life daily stresses, the horrible things that happened that we have no control over, I think.

Lesya Liu 14:47

Absolutely. And, you know, you've also mentioned that you suggest your clients to have at least a day off from social media. Can you speak up a little bit about that and why specifically social media has a lot of negative impacts for our stress resilience and our mental health.

Emma Lunsford 15:11

So I found that I have a lot of beef man, phones and technology and mobile devices, they're usually the first thing we check when we wake up in the morning. And you know, so we're automatically setting our day in a poor tone, we're already distracted, we're already comparing ourselves to that friend, we're already you know, feeling down, we're already already sucked out an hour by morning because we were focused on social media. And only that, but when you take into account like the physical aspects of it, like the blue light, like, you know, being on your phone, before bed, and the blue light blocks melatonin receptors, and actually prevents you from falling asleep pretty easily. So it just is a huge source of stress for a lot of people, especially business owners, because we have our messages and our clients wanting something from us and our emails and our to do's just kind of thrown in our face, especially right in the morning when we wake up and it just can immediately send your body into that, Oh, my God, how am I going to do this overwhelmed type of state, which, you know, it's not great. If we end up stressing out and becoming overwhelmed, and then you know, procrastinating on all of our dues because we're just so overwhelmed with everything we have to do. But if we could, you know, give ourselves some space. From that comparison, it is from that technology from all those you know, messages and call to actions and sales being thrown in our face, it gives our brain a chance to breathe just a little bit and to relax, and to remember what it's like to not have so much stimulation, because the stimulation is what is super addicting. I think there's a study where it releases dopamine or something. And so your phone is actually addicted. So the first thing we do is we check it in the morning. So we can I know, you know, where to cut funds completely out of our life, because they are super convenient, but just lessening their effect on you, and utilizing them in a positive way instead of a negative way.

Lesya Liu 17:08

Mm hmm. And I think kind of playing into that phone and you know, always trying to stay productive and you know, answer every call, every message every email. There are a lot of different, I guess, articles on self improvement and productivity. And yet, you know, I think our brains are screaming for some rest. So can you speak a little bit between, to the relationship between productivity, mental health and stress? And how all of those kinds of inner play make

our life either, you know, super productive, but miserable? Or maybe the achievers last but very calm? And does there even need to be? You know, do you even need to have that? Kind of, do you have to choose, I guess, between being productive and being mentally sane.

Emma Lunsford 18:14

So well, I guess to answer the first question, hustle culture can be very dangerous for some people. Because it just really, like I said, just really depends on the person. If you're somebody who is you know, more, I don't wanna say lazy but less motivated most of the time, then hustle culture and you know, motivate yourself and you know, having those productive messages thrown in your face everywhere, it's probably a good thing for you to some extent, because it does help motivate you. But now we're at the point where, especially entrepreneurs, high achievers, we don't need those messages. Like we don't need them, we're already super high achieving and are already up there when it comes to how much we're accomplishing. And you know, when those constant, repetitive, be productive, be productive, be productive messages as their interface, it just becomes overwhelming. And yes, it does play a lot into our stress. Because we feel pressure, we feel so much pressure to always be working to always be on to always be available. When in reality, that's just that's not sustainable. Our brains, our bodies, everything needs a break. If we like we're not robots, we need sleep, your reason we need rest for a reason, because it plays such a huge part in how productive and motivated we are in the end. And the last part of your question, I believe was that was it, it was does there need to be like a payoff to have to choose or can be achieved at all. I tend to go away from the idea that you have to choose and I prefer to stick to the mindset that you base it off of how much energy you have. So if you have enough energy to be super productive, do it, like go for it. If you're feeling a little bit low, maybe take a break that While you're not feeling like I'm either productive or not, it's like, how much can I give in this moment? It's up to you and what your body needs to to decide ultimately, like how much work you get done that day or whatever.

Lesya Liu 20:12

Mm hmm. And can you speak a little bit about burnout? Because that's, that's the extreme case of being constantly stressed. And I think so many people know exactly what we're talking about when we're talking about burnout. So how can you catch yourself before you go over that edge?

Emma Lunsford 20:37

Great million dollar question there. So this is why I stress why Stress, Stress resilience so much, because it can be huge in preventing burnout, because it lays the things you need in place to maintain your health before you end up reaching that breaking point. So you know, those boundaries, self care, self compassion, all of those three things, if you implement them on a daily basis, I'll be really surprised if you end up reaching burnout, especially if you have really, really good strategies in place. But at the end of the day, again, it just depends on what you need. So you know, wake up in the morning, and you're not, you know, most of us, you know, wake up in the morning, we check our phone, and we don't realize how we're feeling until we end up like snapping at somebody because we realize how stressed we are. So we can wake

up and start our day with Okay, what do I need? What can I realistically accomplish? That set the tone completely different? Because we're actually focusing on what is realistic without setting that extra pressure on ourselves to go go go kids that pressure? And that, you know, unrealistic expectation that ends up leading us to that horrible burnout place?

Lesya Liu 21:49

Hmm. And do you have any strategies for people who have actually crossed that line and are feeling burnt out? What are the best strategies to kind of come back from that, as soon as possible as fast?

Emma Lunsford 22:07

The biggest tip, the overarching tip I'm going to give is to, again, tune in to your body every single day, because it's kind of like a roller coaster, when you're in burnout, sometimes your energy, sometimes you can't just you can't do anything, type things. So if it is one of those days where you can't do anything, don't push it, try to delegate to be a little bit more conscious about what self care you're doing. Don't just do like a frickin face mask and call it a day, do self care that will actually fill you up like a hobby, like talking to a friend, anything that actually helps you, then definitely integrate that into your routine. And rest rest as much as you can. And keep the mindset in your head that rest is productive, because that's what usually holds us back from wrestling is that we think it's like being lazy. But in the end, again, rest helps us get where we want to go faster and more efficiently. So rest is productive.

Lesya Liu 23:04

Absolutely. And especially I think there are different types of rest, right, like you've just mentioned, not all rest is just, you know, sitting on the couch watching Netflix for 14 hours straight. Can you speak a little bit about the different, you know, types of restful activities that you recommend to your clients. And that really helps us you know, feel like you're achieving something and feel like you're fulfilled even if you're not, quote unquote, productive and traditional, sort of meaning.

Emma Lunsford 23:42

Yeah, so I always like to think of this as what energizes you or what refuels your tank, so to speak. So to the people who always like to reach for something, like you always have to have a goal in mind to be to feel like you're resting, so to speak, I recommend doing a hobby that has an end destination, like doing a puzzle. I love puzzles, because when I'm done, I feel so satisfied that I completed something type of thing, and could even be a video game that you love, or, you know, making model airplanes as long as it has some sort of destination that makes you feel satisfied that you have accomplished something. But in the end, still refueled you because it was relaxing to some extent, if that makes sense.

Lesya Liu 24:26

Yes. Yep. That sounds great. So what I guess my last question is what kind of strategies do you suggest to people right now because I feel like these are especially stressful times where there's a lot of uncertainty, a lot of fear. A lot of people work from home, and maybe they thought that that's, you know, dreams come true working from home and then they are hit with the harsh reality of doing even more from home? What do you tell those people?

Emma Lunsford 25:08

The biggest one is to come back to that self compassion to let yourself give yourself permission to feel like crap. Because we have so many more crappy situations being thrown in our face, that we don't realize how much it's affecting us. Until one day, we're like, wow, I feel so horrible. It's so, so important to give yourself again, permission to feel horrible. And allow yourself to feel through that, again, like going back to earlier, as long as you feel safe in doing that, so. And going back to the basics. Our nervous systems are super amped up right now that one of the best ways we can call them is by giving it something that's familiar. And this is where routines really come into play. So if you have something that you know you can do every day that you love that you know you're going to do, it's not a surprise, it's not something real news that's like oh my gosh, that now that happened to it's like, I know this is going to happen. I know I'm going to love it, it's going to be a great type of thing. So morning routines, afternoon routines, evening routines, as long as it's something that will give you some sort of stability during really unstable times.

Lesya Liu 26:25

Emma, thank you so much for this conversation. You know, hopefully, a lot of people will find some support and some solace and everything that's going on. And hopefully that prompts them to incorporate a couple of more routines or habits into their daily lives. So I thank you so much for this episode.

Emma Lunsford 26:47

Of course, and thank you for having me. It was great.

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