Hadley Presents

Facing Challenges

Presented by Ricky Enger

Ricky Enger: Welcome to Hadley Presents. I'm your host, Ricky Enger, inviting you to sit back, relax, and enjoy a conversation with the experts. In this episode, we discuss facing challenges and our guests are mindfulness expert, Tiffany Guske, interviewed by Hadley learning expert, Debbie Worman. Welcome to the show.

Debbie Worman: Thanks, Ricky. It's great to be here.

Tiffany Guske: Good morning, Ricky. This is great. Nice to see you and Debbie, at least virtually again.

Ricky Enger: Both of you have been on Hadley Presents before, and actually did one of our most popular episodes, which was on mindfulness. And so for those of you listening, if you haven't checked that out yet, you definitely want to do so because it's very useful. Let's just do a quick intro for those who haven't heard that previous episode and want to know who you both are. We'll start with you, Debbie.

Debbie Worman: Well, I'm a learning expert with Hadley as you said, and I've been with Hadley since 1988, and everybody can do the math on that one. Currently I'm creating workshops, working on podcasts, and I'm also cohost of three of our discussion groups here at Hadley.

Ricky Enger: That definitely keeps you busy. Those discussion groups are really, really cool as well, so check those out. Tiffany, let's get a little info about you.

Tiffany Guske: So I have been practicing mindfulness, pretty religiously for about 20 years. I would say maybe it's a little longer than that. My journey into mindfulness really has been that need and management of self for me personally. Challenges in life, dealing with just my own anxieties or illness or different traumas. Everybody has situations that happen in life that are maybe not exactly what we had hoped for. And in my journey, personal journey to do what I would call, I guess, self-healing, and again, management, I looked to mindfulness. I've had some great teachers along the way. I continue to look to additional experts to really kind of heighten that practice and broaden it and sharpen it. And I'm starting to delve a lot into the idea of resilience, self-compassion and mindfulness is the foundation for that.

Ricky Enger: So in this episode, we aren't going to focus exclusively on mindfulness, but it is something that is probably going to come up at least a couple of times as we talk about this, because it is so important. And for those who aren't familiar with it, Tiffany, can you give just maybe a one sentence, just a really quick description of what mindfulness is.

Tiffany Guske: Really it's about the idea of paying attention on purpose in the moment. It's that conscious choice to say, I am paying attention in this moment on purpose.

Ricky Enger: Even before the latest that's happening in the world, we all had obstacles to overcome. We all had things that life placed in our path that we weren't necessarily expecting. And a lot of times we don't know how to approach these challenges and things seem really overwhelming. And how do we do this and still feel okay about ourselves regardless of the outcome. And so those are some of the things that we're going to dive into in today's episode. And so with that, I'd like to turn it over to Debbie and Tiffany.

Debbie Worman: Tiffany, our last podcast as Ricky said, we talked a lot about mindfulness. We introduced folks to the practice of mindfulness. And I'm wondering if for today's discussion, we can really focus in on how a practice of mindfulness can help us navigate through those challenging times. And when I'm thinking of that, I'm thinking about tapping into one's resilience. So as we began, how might mindfulness help us move forward during those seemingly impossible moments in our life? I'm thinking of those listening who may be coping with sudden vision loss, maybe an unexpected job change, perhaps an illness or whatever big or small challenge could stop us in our tracks.

Tiffany Guske: So the first thing that came to mind, Debbie, when you said, we have these challenges, these unexpected situations, sometimes they even are somewhat expected, but I think, and Ricky you mentioned this as well in the introduction, is the idea of overwhelm. And I think there's an element of first of all, recognizing where you are and being okay with that idea of overwhelm. Sometimes we have the impression that being overwhelmed isn't okay or it's a sign of weakness when really it's about recognizing where you are. We all have a range of emotions and feelings that go through us, any given moment, quite frankly. And that sense of overwhelm, the mindfulness is what helps us become aware of what's happening for us. And then we can actually take action. But it's okay, and actually expected. that you feel overwhelmed. And some psychology would indicate that by not acknowledging that it just gets pressed deeper and deeper and causes additional problems if you don't address what's happening as far as the sense of overwhelm. So I think first of all, being able to recognize that that's what's happening and that's how you're feeling. And mindfulness is a foundation for that. Mindfulness gives us that baseline to come back to, to say, okay, wait a second. What's happening for me? What's happening in my body. What's happening in my brain? What is going on for me that I can recognize and be present with? And once we do that, I think we're able to figure out what's next. And I think it's also important that we don't put a timeline on it. So I may be making it sound like I'm saying, oh, gee, something just occurred. I feel overwhelmed. I'm recognizing that, okay, deep breath. And now I'm moving forward. It may not be that way. And it also might be very up and down that we're feeling overwhelmed. We get a little bit of a plan in action for ourselves, for the hour, for the day, for the week, whatever it is. And then we start to become overwhelmed again. And that's okay. There's a very normal experience of being up and down and up and down. But that idea of having a toolkit to go to, to say where am I at in these ups and downs and what do I need to do for myself? What kind of permission do I need to give myself? How do I take the right action? Which in any given moment may also be inaction. It's about finding that balance and being with ourselves in that moment.

Debbie Worman: I loved what you said about it being a normal experience, because what happens is sometimes we just really beat ourselves up that we can't pull ourselves up by our bootstraps or carry on and we feel less than. So having you just say that some of these feelings are normal, it's a normal experience. And what are those “what next” moments? So steps we need to take. And just by saying that, stopping and recognizing what we're feeling is so important. I call those “now what” moments. Now what am I going to do? And so it's important to recognize that those are normal feelings. Everybody has challenging moments in their lives, big or small, as I said.

Tiffany Guske: Right. And there's no judgment on what is big or small either. I think sometimes we will come across our own issue. Like for example, the idea of vision loss. You might say, well, this isn't as bad as something else or someone else had this kind of a loss in their life. And it's really not about the comparison. It's about turning to yourself and understanding where you are in any given moment in any given day. And it's not about who might be worse or who might be better. It's about taking that time and care for yourself. And really there's this idea of when we have these moments, having self-compassion, and really what that means is speaking to ourselves the same way that we might a very good friend. So if we had a good friend come to us with an issue or something that was happening for them, how would we speak to them? What kind of kindness, what kind of compassion would we have? The judgment likely wouldn't be there, the way that it is for ourselves.

And so one of the first steps that we can do for ourselves there is to say, okay, I'm overwhelmed. I need to take a moment. What can I do? Well, the first thing I need to do is not judge myself. The first thing that I need to do is give myself permission to feel badly, give myself permission to feel as if I don't have control and know that that's okay. And have that positive self-talk with ourselves, instead of saying, why can't you pick yourself up? Why are you upset when there's someone else worse off than you? Everyone has their own personal moments that they need to take care in for themselves. And the more that we can practice that, the easier we can flow through life.

Debbie Worman: It's not about being selfish towards, it's about really recognizing what's going on inside of you. And I love how you put it, think about how you would treat a friend who was going through a hard time. I mean, to me that says it all. How would I treat one of my friends? And then why can't I treat myself like that? What are some things, if we're having trouble with that, doing that, what are some things that we can do that can help us get there? Like what if we're just always thinking about other people, when it comes to ourselves, we just kind of like, can't get there? What are some things we could possibly do to help us?

Tiffany Guske: I think that it can be quite uncomfortable and unfortunately, unnatural. So again, when I say that I attempt to model it and I'm not always successful myself. I can be highly critical, highly judgmental. That's when I have to reel myself back in. So back to this idea of mindfulness. So the idea is that I am choosing in this very moment to be paying attention. So it's not coincidental, it's not someone else. It's me saying I'm going to pay attention in this moment and the easiest way to do that is through the breath, through our sensory system. What's happening with my sensory system right now? Because our mind ... I have a runaway brain is what I have. And so it can make up all kinds of stories. It can go down all kinds of paths. So when I'm feeling that sense of overwhelm or I'm beating myself up, I try and come back, sit and be with my breath, just a couple of deep breaths, getting in touch with my actual physical body. So it kind of puts my brain on hold a little bit if I'm focusing on the breathing in and breathing out.

This allows me to get grounded. Then I can figure out what my decision is from there on what I need to do and how I can do this. So if I find that I'm having this negative self-talk, I may try and reverse that a little bit with some different types of activities. So one that I might do is, again, sitting with myself and what I do, and this is a great technique. You can either stand or you can sit, and you put your hand on your heart. So recognizing that the world is probably not going to give us what we need. We need to find it within ourselves to give ourselves what we need. And one of the ways that we can do this is to have our hand on our heart and say to ourselves, those things that we need.

So perhaps it might be, may I be calm? May I be safe? May I be brave? May I be happy? May I be loved? Hand on heart, sitting with self. And I'm going to be honest. At first I thought, yes, that is a little uncomfortable. I don't know if that really works, but when you do it and you become more comfortable with it, it can make a difference. And what this does is it allows us to have that sense of fulfillment from ourselves rather than seeking it from the outside world. Because when we come into these challenges or difficult situations, we can't always look to other people. Other people may be part of the equation. At some point, we need to stay connected, but we need to know that we are responsible for giving that to ourselves. And in fact, if we can't give it to ourselves, we may find it difficult to receive it from others. Even when it's being given to us.

Debbie Worman: I used that last year when I was going through my chemo. It was just a wonderful thing. I think they call that a loving kindness meditation. It's a loving kindness to ourselves. And so I would be all hooked up and ready to go. And I would just place my hand on my heart and say, may I be brave? May I be brave? May I be strong? Whatever came to mind. I know some people say, oh, Debbie, that's just one of those things that you're always talking about, that doesn't work. But I just really encourage people to try it. It is so powerful, and it really just helps ground you and brings a sense of calmness and love to yourself. It's called a loving kindness meditation.

Tiffany Guske: The other piece that I loved about it is I think there are a lot of words that we can choose, but I would encourage people to think about what do they need and what is important for them? So you're going through the chemo, having that feeling of being brave and courage, and that idea of even the resilience and you being able to move through this with grace and ease. These are all things that we can ask for ourselves when we say, may I be happy? May I be calm? May I be loved? And having just that personalization, I think can make a difference for us. It's what our heart needs to hear. It's what our brain needs to hear if someone else were speaking to us.

Debbie Worman: And it could be as simple as maybe someone new to vision loss or somebody who's just coping with that, getting up every day, meeting the challenge of making breakfast or putting their makeup on. As you said before, we can't define big or small challenge to somebody because how we're coping with it, that's what's important to us. And this simple exercise can just bring a wave of being able to face that moment, that now what moment. And well now I'm going to pause and try this to see if I can secure this for myself.

Tiffany Guske: When you're talking, Debbie, about the chemo, there are probably moments where that is so physically overwhelming you're just looking to get to the next moment, if you're not feeling well. So we're not talking just emotionally, but physically not feeling well, that's a massive challenge that you're just trying to get through moment to moment. There might be something that is a little bit more complex that we're trying to work through in our life. And so the persistence with just giving ourselves those moments in that time, knowing that there's going to be a long journey. It really is about what we can do for ourselves in each moment and each scenario. It doesn't have to look the same.

So when we talk about resilience and being able to kind of bounce back and giving ourselves what we need in order to do that, sometimes what we do is we think back to times where we were resilient. Because when you have those moments that you're feeling literally underwater, and it doesn't feel like you have the stamina, or you have the will to go forward, I find that reminding myself of challenging times that I've gotten through in the past can be really helpful because it reminds me of what I have done and what I was able to do and gives me some of that encouragement to be able to do it again. And it might look similar or it might look different, but it just tells me that I have that strength within me. And so really coming back to that moment and maybe even asking myself, well, what did I do that made that work? What were the things that I was doing for myself so that I could get through this so I had the resiliency and the ability to get to the other side?

And that's very tangible and concrete. Sometimes when we talk in terms that are a little bit more undefined, it can be more difficult. So saying what were the things that I was actually doing? Let me think back to that time. And this is a good question that you might ask your good friend as well. Right? Well, so what did you do last time? What worked last time when you were feeling overwhelmed? Or when you had a real situation? You were dealing with something significant, how did you go about it? You lost your job or you lost someone that you love, or you had a breakup or whatever it might be. What did you do that helps you get through? Because you are on the other side, you made it somehow. So what was working for you at that time?

Debbie Worman: One of the things that helps me is to remind myself that I'm not alone as I think I am. When we're going through challenges, we sometimes feel just incredibly alone and we can buy into that and start self-isolating, but we're never as alone as we think we are. So one of the things I wonder if we could explore a little bit is, how can we invite others into this journey with us? How can we kind of invite them to come along with us?

Tiffany Guske: So specifically some conversations that you and I have had are actually great resources for folks. If we're talking about individuals who are having the vision loss, I think that can be extremely isolating. The shift and the change that's happening and the fear and that sense of isolation. I understand that there are times that I need to be left alone. I need to process, I need to kind of create an action plan for myself, but I really think that that can be enhanced when we reach out to others. And so for you in particular, I know that you guys have some fantastic groups that really help to, back to that idea of normalizing the experience, knowing that others have gone through this journey, they are currently potentially going through the journey and what have they done? What has worked? Sharing our story.

And a conversation you and I had recently actually, and I thought that you put this just really beautifully, was that when we share of ourselves, it's a gift to others. And so, as I was just saying, talking with other folks and hearing their story and knowing helps validate where I am and how I might be feeling, but the same holds true in the opposite. So by me sharing what's happening for me, my thoughts, my feelings, the actions I'm taking, or possibly not taking, help that individual. So this gift of connectedness and this gift of sharing, it can really make a huge difference in your journey to being kind to self, to being able to overcome those challenges and know that you're not doing it on your own.

Debbie Worman: Right. We kind of have to lean in and also be brave enough to actually be specific with family and friends and colleagues and say, I'm having a hard time right now. I wonder if you could help me with the laundry. I guess I bring that up because that's a biggie for me. I was going through my treatment and my sister-in-law kept saying, how can I help you? How can I help you? How can I help you? And I'm an incredibly stubborn person and I want to be independent. And I was going to go up and down those stairs and do that laundry. And finally I said, "Just do my laundry for me."

And she was like, thank you. Thank you for letting me do your laundry. It was so funny. And she really felt it was a gift I was giving her to take my dirty clothes home and do my laundry. So it's just a wonderful thing that we tell others, it's a trust. We're vulnerable. And we say I need this. I need you. And it may not be even something physical. It could be just, can you just listen to me?

Tiffany Guske: I think many of us have this need for independence. We have this need to remain in control. And somehow we feel that if we are leaning on others or asking of others, that there's something wrong with that. That that means that we are not strong enough, that we can't do this. Human beings weren't made to be alone. They're really beings of connectedness and belonging. And it may only be a small tribe that you have, or it may be a large, but we weren't intended really to be in isolation or live alone. And so having that connectivity with others has a mutual impact on both of us. So I can remember when, the years that I was helping take care of my grandmother and as she was losing sight and she was losing mobility, she really wanted to do things. And it was much easier for me when she could just say, "Tiff can you just take care of this for me?"

Now I would say a lot of times my intuition and because of our closeness, I was able to figure some of that out. But I felt like it was actually really empowering for her to say it to me and let me know what she needed. It wasn't just about the activity of getting it done. There was that sense of empowerment. There was that sense, like you said, of trust, of love, of wanting to be there for the other person and allowing those other people to be there for you. It really is just a very good scenario when it all plays out.

Debbie Worman: Right. And it doesn't always have to be this do for me. I mean, I really don't want to paint the picture that we want our family members and friends to be in rescue mode. We have to know the balance, right? We have to know today, I'm going to challenge myself to try to make my own breakfast, to find the things in the kitchen, to be organized. And maybe I just need to, to have somebody come in and check something and to tell them, let me make my mistakes. Let me try this because I'm learning my new skills to deal with vision loss. Let me try this. You don't always have to rescue me. So it really becomes, goes back to what we were talking about in the very beginning, being in touch with your feelings. What are you willing to try on your own? What are you willing to face? And what do you need help with? So really when we're in tune with ourselves, we can figure those kinds of things out.

Tiffany Guske: Focus, I think, that's a great word to put on it. It's when we have that state of overwhelm coming back to ourselves somehow to figure out what we need to be focused on. So when I think about folks and I think about vision loss, there are so many pieces of that puzzle that they may be used to doing on a day to day basis. And they may in fact, be taking a very proactive approach and anticipating what might happen and really using the resources that you guys at Hadley provide so that they can do that planning. But really focusing on what are those goals that I want to accomplish. What's going to help me feel better? What's going to help me feel more capable? More confident? More comfortable in my own skin? And that does take action on my part to be able to do that.

But again, I'm thinking, when you've got the support groups and other people that have done it, really looking to others to potentially be a role model for us. How have they done it in the past? How have they done it when they face the challenge? Knowing that we don't have to figure everything out ourselves, that there's probably someone else who has been through a similar scenario and what tips might I be able to get from them so that I can be better at my tries, at my learning, at my trying to get more comfortable with this new situation?

Debbie Worman: One of the things Tiffany, you and I have often talked about is how gratitude plays into this and how much a gratitude practice can help us reframe our thinking. Can you talk a little bit about what that means?

Tiffany Guske: I think gratitude is a great way to reframe thinking and actually I've been asked what my go to mindfulness exercises and for me, it really is what can I find in that moment to be grateful for in my immediate environment? Because it immediately shifts me away from negative thoughts into something that's my reality right now. And that sense of gratitude. I also think about this idea. So we were just talking about learning and doing new things and trying things that might be outside of our comfort zone. And when we're in places that are unfamiliar spaces, that might be quite uncomfortable, the idea of asking ourselves what's going well? And one of the exercises that I've been doing. At the end of the day, I will ask myself, what are three things that went well today? And I've talked with people and even tried this myself, the idea of the gratitude journal. And it never seems to stick for me. I like this exercise better. And let me tell you why. And if people are using a gratitude journal, it's great. And I think it can be a very good tool. Again, it never seemed to completely stick for me. So what went well for me today does, is it allows me to focus on the things that I likely had some control in and their outcome. So it's a great reminder of how number one, I can focus on these positive things. Number two, I know that I contributed to that, that I made a difference in that. And three, that I will be able to do it again, that I will have more of those moments. And sometimes these are very small. Sometimes they're larger, but it's a very different mind shift from saying what am I grateful for? Because I can say I'm grateful for my family, I'm grateful for my health. I'm grateful for my dog. These are all things that you can certainly be grateful for. But I like the idea of what went well today. Well, what went well today is I had an opportunity to do the podcast with Ricky and Debbie. We had a wonderful conversation that helped me feel good, that helped remind me of all the things that I want to be doing and it allowed me to share it with others. That went well today. I was very grateful to have that experience and that opportunity. So that feels a little different than just saying that I'm grateful for my health today. It's just got more oomph to it.

Ricky Enger: I appreciate this so much, so much incredible material here. And especially the fact that we don't always have to be completely independent. It's so much better for each of us when we do the things that we can, but we also seek out that connectedness and share some of our burden with others and allow them to share what they're going through with us. And in the end, we all benefit from that. Before we sign off here, do you have any final thoughts that you'd like to share with everyone? We'll start with you, Debbie.

Debbie Worman: Oh, I would just really just like to reinforce this whole idea of self-compassion. Just so people, if they're having trouble with that, to maybe listen to this podcast a couple of times over so that it really resonates with them. Each and every one of us needs to have self-compassion.

Tiffany Guske: Yeah. I would definitely agree with that Debbie. I would also just remind ourselves for those of us who are more independent and really want to be able to do things on our own, just to be reminded that one of the ways that we build this resilience, this ability to bounce back, it does start with self-compassion and so that's definitely a tool and a skill that we want to build in order to build our resilience and looking to that idea of mindfulness and getting in touch with ourselves so that we can make these choices around what our actions and feelings are going to be.

Ricky Enger: Thank you so much, Debbie and Tiffany, for joining us. And thank you all for listening. Got something to say? Share your thoughts about this episode of Hadley Presents or make suggestions for future episodes. We'd love to hear from you. Send us an email at podcast@hadley.edu. That's P-O-D-C-A-S-T @hadley.edu. Or leave us a message at (847) 784-2870. Thanks for listening.