

Ep #88: When Not to Listen to The Experts: A Story of Hope and Possibility



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With Your Host

Susi Hately

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Male Announcer: You're listening to *From Pain to Possibility* with Susi Hatley. You will hear Susi's best ideas on how to reduce or even eradicate your pain and learn how to listen to your body when it whispers so you don't have to hear it scream. And now here's your host, Susi Hatley.

With this episode we dig into a concept around healing relationship that I am deeply passionate about. When I talk about healing relationship, I'm referring to the relationship that a client or a patient has with their caregiver. Whether that's a physical therapist, a yoga therapist, massage therapist, physician, osteopath, chiropractor. Really anybody who is working with that client, and that person is in a position of authority.

The healing relationship that occurs in that space is vital for someone's wellbeing. And it's so fascinating when we really tune into that because when we realize that significance, we start to recognize the power that we have, the power to demonstrate what is possible. And, interestingly, the power to take away what is possible.

With this episode, I'm highlighting one of my trainees who shared an aha and insight after the training week that we just completed. I just finished the first module of the final training segment for my certification program last week.

One of my trainees has been recovering from concussion and chronic pain. And she had been told by her physical therapist who she had worked with last year about what could have been possible for her. I'm going to read you the entire piece because it's so incredibly powerful. And it just goes to show the power that our words as health professionals, as people in authority have on and with our clients.

That yes, it's the duty of the individual to interpret our words however they interpret them. I mean, I can't get into someone's brain and change their interpretation. Just like I can't change your interpretation of the words I'm saying right now. However, I do have impact and influence.

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And when we really recognize that impact and influence we have, we recognize just how important that relationship is and our collective roles. So let me get into the story. It's very, very powerful and I think you'll take a lot from it, whether you are someone seeking care, or you are the health professional, or you work as an accountant, or a lawyer, or you're a parent. Anybody who's in an authority figure space, you will get a lot from this. Here we go.

“What a great week. I am proud of myself for making it through eight days online, which I was anticipating to be a real challenge. I am totally tired, but feeling really good. I'm sharing because I had an aha moment last night about the importance of truly helping people see possibility, and why Susi's approach resonates with me.

Last year I worked with a physical therapist to support me with some strategies around my pain management. I told her I really wanted to get back to either full time work or possibly grad school, and I asked based on my symptoms and pain questionnaires what might be reasonable as a timeline. She told me that it likely wouldn't be possible for five to eight years. Yes, I kid you not.

And although I disagreed with her prognosis, her words had lodged into my brain and I made her opinion into my belief. Whenever I've been wanting to expand my capacity, I would find myself holding myself back because someone who I considered an expert and who I trusted, told me it wouldn't be possible sooner at a time when I was deeply vulnerable and scared.

It's taken some work to first recognize the power I was giving her opinion, and also some time to help myself expand my hopes for what could be possible for me. Making it through this week without crashing has been a huge accomplishment. And now I'm just reveling in this feeling of, damn, if I could stay mostly present all week and complete every day without incident, then what else can I do?

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This feels like a huge shift for me. And this is what I love about Susi's approach and this idea of really building on what's working for our person, i.e. our client, and helping them experience those glimpses of possibility. It really can truly be life changing.

So then I followed up with her and I asked her, "Okay, so if I understand this, you no longer believe it will be five to eight years or is there any residual belief?" Her response, "Yes, I no longer believe it. I needed the evidence though, which this week provided me."

So of course, I'm doing the whole, raise your hands up in the air and celebrate. Her response is, "I know, this is why I kept putting off signing up for this module. I didn't think I was capable or had the capacity. It feels really good to have unearthed that belief that was so deeply ingrained in me. I literally thought I'd never be able to handle an eight hour day again."

To which I asked one last question, "So then why did you enroll if you didn't think you could handle an eight hour day? Was there something inside of you that just didn't believe the physical therapist? And can you name it?" She added, "I had already had experiences that proved that I could get better. In 2018, I started off not been able to walk to the end of my block without losing my balance.

At the time the PT told me this five to eight year thing, I was already walking 45 minutes a day. Not always easily, but I was still doing it. I was also able to have my head below my heart again, like in bridge or downward facing dog pose, which I couldn't do for the first two years without a ton of nausea and dizziness. So perhaps I had a bunch of tiny but novel experiences over the years that were showing me that I could change."

So the reason I'm sharing this with you is not to bash the physical therapist at all. Not at all. The story was to highlight how powerful an opinion can be from an expert, and how it was interpreted by the client. Now, granted, this

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is an experience that is being told to me, I was not in the room with that physical therapist and the client. So I don't know, in fact, what was said, but there was an interpretation of what was said. And that is what is actually important right now.

Yes, the physical therapist, if they were viewing this dialogue might say, but that wasn't what my intent was, that could very well be true. And the key piece was the importance of her interpretation. But then here's the next part that was so vital, is how inside of her she didn't believe it. Even though the opinion got lodged in there and created some fear, and concern, and worry, there was something else that had already proven to her that something could change, she already had what I like to call novel experiences.

Because in order to change beliefs, we need to have novel experiences. We can't out action or out exercise our thinking, which is what was stopping her originally. But because she had these little pieces of evidence that were kind of opening the door to possibility, she got a glimpse because her symptoms could reduce that her symptoms could reduce.

And this is something that I highlight a lot when I'm working with my private clients. I highlight it a lot in my intensive training, as well as in the certification program. If somebody in the hour or the week that I'm working with them has a decrease or an eradication of symptoms, even momentarily, that provides me all the evidence to know that their body can have it, because their body has demonstrated it.

Now, what I will also say to them is, okay, this is the early stages of this. This isn't the fix. Because you've got the pain free or the reduction of pain simply means you can have it. Now we've got to build the neuromuscular habit for it.

And this is the part a lot of people actually miss. They believe that, "Oh, look, it's gone, that means it's gone." And then when it comes back they're like, "Oh, that didn't work." But the reality is, is if the symptoms come down,

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the symptoms can come down. Now we've got to build up the stamina to keep those symptoms down. And that work that we get to do there then continues to bolster up the belief that this, in fact, is true.

Now, this corresponds very interestingly with pain science. And what we know about pain science, that when we can build the inner sense of support, we can really change the way symptoms are felt in our body and how we're experiencing them. We know that pain is interpreted in the brain. And what some people then take that to is then say, "Oh, well, if it's interpreted in my brain, then my brain is the problem." Where in fact, it's not necessarily the case.

Yes, there was an injury to the body so we can actually shift up the way we're experiencing that by moving our body. Which is what we were doing inside of the certification training week. Which is what I do inside of my one to ones, which is what we do in the intensive.

So there are three key things that I focus in on that make this healing relationship so powerful in addition to what I just spoke about around letting someone know that when their pain reduces it means that their body can actually have an experience, long term of a reduction of pain. That if their pain eradicates, even for a moment, it lets me know that's the evidence that their body can have it. Now it's a matter of training it.

There are three other factors that are really important in this process. The first is that I 100% focus on the person who is in front of me. It's one of the things about being a yoga teacher, yoga therapist, and a kinesiologist and not operating in what I would call mainstream medicine, is that I have the real pleasure of meeting a person rather than a condition.

And I understand that I can go into the hospital and people can meet me as a person. But really, there tends to be a focus on the condition first, and then the person. Whereas in the work that I do the condition is interesting and it's important. But I have yet to meet two people who have expressed

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the same condition in the same way. So then the way that I work with someone is not based off of their condition, it's based off of how they're expressing it.

So whether someone has MS, or someone is post-concussion, or whether someone has rheumatoid arthritis, or psoriasis, or back pain, how each person expresses those condition is going to dictate what I do to work with them. I'm not pulling out of my files, here is the protocol for fill in the condition. But rather, it's like, "Okay, here's this individual who has it. Here is their life, here's their family, here is what they want to get back to. Okay, now, let's program for that."

So again, while the condition itself is interesting and very relevant, what's even more significant is who is this person? What are their thoughts, their beliefs, and how do they feel about this condition? Where do they want to go? Because those pieces will impact their process of recovery no matter what the condition is, right?

So someone might have an autoimmune condition, they might have a concussive condition, there might be impacts physically, anatomically. Weak links that they're just not processing information the way that they used to, and they might never, but maybe they will. I'm not one to say.

But what I do know is this, is that if I can meet that person, if I can recognize what it is that they want. If I can help them move their body better and bring them into stillness, help them quiet down and grow their awareness, that can change so much of how they experience their condition. So I'm not changing any genetic markers on the condition. But how someone experiences can absolutely change.

Along with that, belief is paramount. Belief fuels everything. We cannot out action or out exercise our belief. And our role as a health professional has a huge impact on what someone believes, especially when someone is seeking an idea or advice from someone that they trust.

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Now, yes, I fully understand that how someone interprets our words is on them, as I mentioned earlier in this episode. And our ability to really tune into our own sense of presence, of what makes a person tick, and what keeps them ticking, if we can tune into that, the delivery of that information can really shift and change.

A lot of times, as professionals, we have our experience of what could be possible based off of the clientele that we see. And there are often people who are outside of those people we typically see. We need to pay attention to that if someone is an anomaly from the common client that we see. Because if we can pay attention to that, then how we might word things might shift.

And again, I'm not trying to berate or blame the health professional or the physical therapist in this case, not at all. I am more so highlighting this really fascinating thing called the healing relationship and the role that we have as a health professional, our impact and our influence. And how belief fuels everything and we cannot out action our belief, we cannot out exercise it.

To go with this, the third piece of the puzzle that makes what I do so effective, I focus on results. For me, evidence lies in the results. I think formal evidence from a research perspective is fascinating. I love to follow it and to see what is coming down the pipe. But in reality, what evidence actually means from that formal perspective is that X percentage of people with ABC symptoms have shown benefit from said protocol.

So what about the client in front of us? How do we know they are in that percentage that benefited or not? When I can focus on the evidence that shows up from the results of their movement, from the results of their breathing, from the results of them becoming quieter, from the results of them growing awareness, that is real time result with the person who's in front of me.

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Formal evidence is fascinating. It can be a guide, but what's actually going on with that person in front of you now, that's a lot of evidence that is super helpful, and important, and highly significant.

And finally, if pain goes down it means that pain can go down. That this trainee was able to move through eight full days of training, and to feel tired at the end, which is totally normal, but not to have any major incident is remarkable, and it's celebrated. And to think that she avoided enrolling because she was so afraid of what could happen.

The bottom line is this, my trainee trusted herself. She also trusted the authority figure which was her health professional. And on some level, she weighed out those two things that were shared with her and she followed the evidence that was presented to her, meaning she already demonstrated she could walk more than a block. She already demonstrated other gains in her ability to move. She knew that it was possible. She followed that as a way to make a decision going forward.

So the bottom line is this, our words matter. What we say to our clients matters. We don't need to be Pollyanna, but recognize the impact and influence that we have as authority figures, that we can be ones that instill possibility, or at least influence possibility. We can also be the ones who take it away. And to recognize that yes, our clients interpret themselves how they interpret it and we don't have that control. But we do have impact.

And for the client, that no matter what you hear from a health professional, if you disagree, then notice the disagreement. Pay attention to what that feels like in your body. What's the message of your body and what is it guiding you to do? That's real, it's not woo-woo. That intelligence is real and it's pushing you in a direction. Just pay attention to it. Consider it, weigh it with the information provided by the health professional.

So then, what's the bottom line here? Well, it's twofold. One is that no matter if we're a health professional or a client, our words and beliefs

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matter. The ability to be present to ourselves and to tune into our own inner awareness, it matters because it will help to reveal the purpose or the direction that we can go.

So to tune in, notice when you're disagreeing, notice when you're agreeing. Notice what that feels like in your body. And then play with whatever your decision making system resonates with you. And let that guide you.

If this episode has resonated with you and you would love to be involved in either our intensive or our certification program, then email us at health@functionalsynergy.com to have a conversation with Kiya about your next steps. We have a program coming up really, really soon. And we'd love to have you as a part of the training.