



EPISODE 973

4 Powerful Ways to Rewire Your Brain for Confidence, Overcome Self-Doubt, & Fuel Bigger Success

With Guest Dr. Shadé Zahrai

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SHAWN STEVENSON: Every decision that we make is based on who we believe ourselves to be. Our self-image is guiding all of our ideas, our attitudes, our beliefs, and our decisions, and thus the results in our lives. So often we get caught up trying to change the external, trying to force ourselves to make certain changes, when in reality the most powerful leverage in real change in sustainable change is operate at the level of your self-image today, you're gonna discover the four attributes that really create your overall self-image. And I'm telling you right now, if you're struggling with any of these four areas, it can completely create chaos in our lives. If not, just hold us back from the results, from the joy, from the greatness, from the growth that we truly want.

And so to really unpack these four attributes is incredibly illuminating. And not only that, not only are we gonna look at what these four attributes are, but our special guest today is gonna provide us with science backed strategies for us to address if we're experiencing any deficiencies in these four areas. And I'm telling you right now, we all are impacted by these four areas at one time or another in our lives. And little do we know, oftentimes, again, they're leading to these struggles and often self-induced struggles with getting the results that we want. So I'm very, very grateful to be able to share this with you today.

And without further ado, let's get to our special guest and topic of the day. Dr. Shadé Zahrai is a behavioral researcher, award-winning, peak performance educator and leading authority on confidence and self-doubt. A former corporate lawyer with an MBA and background in psychology, she's designed and delivered transformative programs for Fortune 500 Giants, including Google, Microsoft, JP Morgan, and the list goes on and on. She was named one of LinkedIn's top Voices for career development. Shaday has taught over 7 million learners on her LinkedIn learning platform, and her TEDx talks and viral videos have amassed. More than 300 million views. Today, you're gonna discover how to rewire self-doubt, find your confidence, and fuel your success. Let's dive in this conversation with the one and only Shadé Zahrai, thank you so much for coming to hang out with us.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Thanks so much for having me. I am so excited about this conversation.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Me too, me too. Let's start off by talking about the connection between our confidence and how it affects our overall wellbeing, because it's like an aspect of our reality that is kind of controlling our choices, how we see ourselves. So can you talk about that a little bit? Why does understanding confidence matter so much in the context of our wellbeing?

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: So if I were to ask you, Shawn, what is the opposite of self-doubt? Without thinking about it much, what would you say?

SHAWN STEVENSON: I would if I didn't know your work. I would say, it would be self-confidence.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Confidence, yeah. And when we speak to 95% of people who are not familiar with my work, they will say confidence.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Confidence is this state that we've associated as being the opposite of all the things getting in our way. So what we see is a lot of people waiting to feel confident to take the step, to ask the person out, to ask for the raise to change their life. And they say, I will know when I feel ready. And then they're planning and preparing and procrastinating and never actually taking the step. And the reason why is that feeling of confidence is actually associated with a feeling of certainty, and that certainty only comes after you've taken action. When we look at the literature, here's what's happening, you take action, you get a proof point or an evidence point of, Hey, I can do this, which boosts your sense of skill and capability and competence, which increases what is called self-efficacy.

And that is what creates that feeling of confidence. But the problem is when we're waiting for that feeling, then we're never gonna take the step. So when we look at the word confidence, when we break it down, it comes from the Latin con and re, which means with trust. So actually it is not confidence that we need before we do the thing. It's self-trust.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: And it's so incredibly powerful because it gives people permission to not feel ready, to feel a little unprepared, to not have the certainty around how things are gonna work out and to do the thing anyway, knowing that they will learn, they will grow. Even if it doesn't work out, they will find another way. So our work sits at that space. How do we help people develop that kind of trust in themselves? 'cause it sounds kind of fluffy. Trust yourself back yourself, and I have this. I mean, 10 years ago, I would've loved it, but I have this kind of inbuilt resistance to fluff. I'm a researcher, I wanna go and understand the science behind it. So then this brings me to my whole journey of how we got into this space and why it's so important, and then what self-trust actually looks like it means. So, Shawn, shall I dive in?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Absolutely.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Okay. So I'm gonna share with you a little bit of, I mean, look, I will say right now that I have experienced self-doubt my entire life. I still experience it, but I have learned about what I will share with everybody. I've learned how to strengthen the parts of myself that I need to, to take action anyway, knowing that the doubt is there and knowing that I don't have to resolve that doubt or eliminate that doubt, but I can just detach from it.

It's there. I hear it. I don't have to let it be a verdict on what I'm capable of or what I do. Okay. So that's the setting the scene. I have a lot of doubt, but I moved through it. There was a study that I came across when I was doing a five year deep dive. Into self-doubt and what holds people back. I did a PhD and I came across this study in the late seventies, 1970s, researcher by the name of Robert Click from Dartmouth. And what he did is he brought people together and he split them into groups, and then with one group, he drew a scar on their face from their ear to their mouth, a big noticeable scar, and then he let them see themselves in a hand mirror so they can confirm, yes, I have this visible disfigurement on my face.

He then sends everyone out into conversations with strangers. They have these conversations, they come back in, and then they have to report on how they felt the conversation went. Now the group with the scar reported overwhelmingly that they felt the conversation was tense, it was uncomfortable. They felt like they were judged. The other

group thought it was a fine conversation. So that in itself would be a very interesting study on discrimination prejudice. But that wasn't the point of this study. There's a little bit extra, let me take you back. Right before those participants with the scar were sent into these conversations, the researcher said, I'm going to apply some moisturizing cream to set the scar.

Okay. So he did that. But what he did without their knowledge is remove the scar entirely. They now have no scar on their face. They're going into these conversations with strangers believing they have a scar expecting to be treated differently because of the scar, and that is what they experienced.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Hmm.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: And this is called expectation bias. We don't experience the world as it is. We experience it as we expect it to be. And so I personally find this particular study incredibly insightful. In terms of how we are as humans, how we've evolved. We all have internal scars that we are carrying with us and it affects how we show up. It affects how we interact with people. It affects what we expect and then that creates what we notice and then that forms our sense of reality. It's all about perception. So that got me really interesting, as it got me really interesting, that got me really interested in understanding, okay, what are these scars and how do we see ourselves?

'Cause it comes down to what's called self-image. Your self-image is the blueprint of your entire life. So then my next question was, what on earth is self-image? Shawn, if I were to ask you, what do you think your self-image is? And when I ask people on the street, what do you think your self-image is? You would all be reflecting something different, talking about something different. So then I dove into over 50 years worth of research to find out what the most esteemed minds had to say about self-image. And then what I found is that in the eighties and nineties, there were organizational researchers who found that self-image comes down to four personality traits, just four of them.

When these four things combine, I kind of think of it like power rangers. Did you ever watch that as a kid? Like when these four things combine, just like the power rangers, that creates your sense of how you see yourself. They call it your core self-evaluations, and that creates your self image. Now, here's where it gets interesting. If any one of these is weak, that is where self-trust. It's shaky, and that is where self-doubt attacks you. So I found this incredible gem of research and it's now been shown in over 100 studies that these four things, and I haven't told you what they are yet, but I will in a moment. These four things predict your happiness, your success, your job performance, your career satisfaction, even how much money you make, these four personality traits.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: So let me tell you what they are, but I'm not even gonna talk about the trait itself because as soon as I say personality trait, what do you think, Shawn? Is someone's response when you talk about a personality trait?

SHAWN STEVENSON: For themselves personally?

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Yeah. What do you think people think of when you mention trait or personality?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Something that is ingrained.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Yes. Well, I guess that's just who I am.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, I've, I've got blue eyes and it is what it is.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Yeah, it is what it is. Exactly. And so we hear this response. So we work with a lot of leaders and teams around the world, and whenever we talk about personality traits, we get resistance. Oh, well that's just who I am. Can't do anything to change it. And I get it because decades of research shows that personality is stable. How you are as a child is largely how you will be throughout your entire adult life. Unless, and there is an exciting,

unless here in the last few years, there have been other work that's been done that demonstrates that you can change your personality, but you have to intervene.

What does that mean? Target a specific element. And then apply proven strategies, evidence-based strategies to strengthen or make a personality trait more positive. And so during my PhD research, one of the things that we did was explore, can you change someone's personality in six weeks? So we targeted a specific trait or collection of traits, and we found absolutely, yes. In a six week period, you can fundamentally change someone's personality in relation to that thing.

SHAWN STEVENSON: That's so powerful.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: It's so powerful.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Before, before you share those four..

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: ...Attributes though. You know, just to kind of summarize, you know, the context of how our belief about ourselves, thank you first and foremost for diving in and deconstructing self-confidence, because it's not about that, it's about self-trust, right? To give an affirmation and our lack of self trust. Trust is determining the choices that we make in our relationships with our choices, with our health, what we believe we deserve. And so, you know, our perspective mental health, you know, the list goes on and on. And so being able to invest on this, because what I'm picking up already is that our self-image is guiding the life that we're creating for ourselves.

And so if we wanna create a life, that we truly love. And you just said the H word, you said happiness, then it's to work on our self-image. But we're spending so much time trying to work on the outside stuff and hoping that it's gonna fix us. Right? And so having these four components, which I if you could share that now, if we can address these four things, I would imagine then we can start to construct a self-image that is aligned with the life that we want to have.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Because self-image is the blueprint of your entire life. As you said, it shapes your decisions, what you pay attention to, what you're willing to tolerate, and whether you push forward when something gets tough or you say, well, I guess I can't, I guess I'm not made for this. I guess I'm not worthy. So let's explore those four things. Again, I'm not gonna talk about the personality trait because I don't want anyone listening to say, oh, well that's just who I am. I'm gonna talk about the trainable attribute that allows you to strengthen. The personality trait, and that is what I take people through in the book Big Trust, which is where my research really comes up. So the very first attribute actually, well let's do it this way, Shawn, what do you think is the most common self-doubt that people have?

SHAWN STEVENSON: I'm not enough. I'm not good enough.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Exactly. I'm not enough. That sense of not enoughness stems from a lack of self-acceptance and we know that this originates. I mean, they all originate really early on in life, but this one especially is one of the first senses that we develop as babies. If we feel like we received emotional support and nurturing and love when we were tiny from our parents, from our caregivers, we come to develop a sense of, Hey, I'm acceptable as I am. If we then, as we're getting older, feel like we were valued when we asked for attention. They gave us attention. When we showed our drawing, they attended to the drawing, we start to feel like, Hey, I am enough.

But of course we know that the opposite can happen where we've got busy parents or other things were going on. We had other siblings and we start to then internalize a belief of, okay, I must be performing or doing the right thing in order to be noticed and accepted by my parents and validated, I must get the top grade in school. I must win in the swimming carnival. And so we'd internalize that view of, I am only worthy when I am delivering something that they want. And what's super interesting about this one, you can even have the most supportive family upbringing. For example, in my case, I had the most incredible family upbringing, supportive parents, a loving environment, and yet I internalized somewhere along the way that I am of value only if I'm making other people happy.

And it's because when I was very, very young, I came from a Persian family. Every Friday night we would have dinner at my grandpa's house or my grandparents' house. And then after dinner, the family would chant, which means ADE has to dance for us, which is super common in this culture. You get the kids to get up and dance. I was maybe three or four years old and it made everyone so happy. And then it became a bit of a ritual. Now, by the time I was maybe 8, 9, 10, I didn't wanna do it anymore because I'm a bit more self-conscious. I don't feel like I, I really wanna be doing that. But I didn't know how to say no and I didn't wanna disappoint.

So again, I internalized this view of I must perform even if I don't want to, so other people are happy. And I'll be honest, Shawn, I am still trying to shake that, but the principles and tools that I've found from the research and we've studied ourselves and that I've put in big trust have helped me immensely to fundamentally change my life and detach from that need for validation. Yeah. So that's our first one. Now if anyone listening is thinking, Ooh, this might be me. Let me share four of the signs or the patterns that show up if you struggle with self-acceptance. The first one is what we call the pressure to prove. So you feel like you have to prove your worth. What does that look like?

That looks like a desire to perform and achieve and set a big goal. And achieve a big goal because then you're proving that you're worthy. But then also you tell yourself, I will feel like I'm enough when I get there. When I get that bestselling book, when I raise the kids and they get into the best school when I this, when I that. And then you get there and we all know how it feels empty, because you can never chase a sense of enoughness. It has to come from within.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Mm.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: So that's the likability trap. We then have the, sorry, that's the pressure to prove. Then we have the likability trap, which is where I fall into, I have this compulsive need for people to like me in order for me to feel worthy. And if they don't, I feel a compulsive need to try and win it back. But then what does that lead us to do? Become inauthentic to who we are. Say yes. When we really mean no to quieten our opinions, because we don't

wanna ruffle any feathers. And it leads us to become codependent in relationships, to sacrifice ourselves for everyone else.

Not a healthy way to be. The third pattern we see here is the shrinking syndrome. So some of the people we've worked with really highly successful, and then suddenly an opportunity will arise. That's what they wanted, and they're fully qualified for it, but they will step back and say, no, no, now's not the right time. I don't think this is actually what I want. And where it's coming from is a fear of failure. If I do this thing and I fail, everyone will see my reputation will be damaged. My, you know, the perfectly curated version of me that I have created for so long will be shattered, and I can't deal with that.

So they shrink to stay safe. Now, the fourth one is called schadenfreude. German speakers don't come at me. It's a German term and I think I've got it right, but schadenfreude, it's essentially when you get, or some people who struggle with self-acceptance, they feel a sense of satisfaction when they see someone else stumble or fail. And it's not that, oh, that gives me permission to be human too. It's more like, Hey, hey, yes, I'm happy to see you struggle. And it comes from a lack of acceptance in yourself. So it's a form of ego where you are misdirecting your lack of acceptance to try and pull other people down, which is often what a lot of bullies and narcissists will do.

So that's acceptance. So if you're struggling with acceptance, which is extremely common, in fact in our research we find that the most people struggle with this particular attribute. But not a lot of people will acknowledge it 'cause it feels like weakness, especially men. We find women are much more willing to acknowledge, yeah, I don't feel like I'm enough. Men feel like it's a lack of masculinity, a lack of power, and they don't acknowledge it, but they experience it too. So what do we do if we're struggling here? I'm gonna share with you a few things depending on where you might be struggling most. Now, the first one is a really counterintuitive one. It's to get a hobby, especially a creative hobby.

Now you might say, how does getting a hobby help you build a sense of self-acceptance and self-esteem? There was a study that was conducted looking at over 500 scientists, and what

they found is that Nobel Prize winning scientists were three times more likely to have a hobby and 22 times more likely for that to be a creative or performing hobby.

They attributed these hobbies to helping them be more creative, to find connections other people missed, and also it meant that if they had a bad day at work, they could go and enjoy this creative hobby and take their mind off it, and it reminded them that they are more than just their jobs and their performance. Hmm. So super simple. There's also been studies looking at over 60,000 people across dozens of countries, and they found that hobbies consistently have been shown to improve self-esteem. So if you wanna improve your self-acceptance, get a hobby because you're probably putting all of your identity on your job or your role as a parent, or your role as a carer or a coach, whatever it is, it's called the risk of a single identity. Your job and who you are, are fused. So this is one way to help create some separation.

SHAWN STEVENSON: As you know, mental health challenges have skyrocketed in recent decades, and without addressing the root cause of this emerging change in our society, we're going to continue to see poor outcomes we need to address, of course, nutrient deficiencies, our sedentary behavior, our lack of social connection, our poor sleep quality. All of these things are proven to contribute to these epidemics of poor mental health. Of course, medication can be helpful in some context, but most people are not educated about the science backed natural supplement. That has been shown to be as effective as many medications, so making sure that we're being mindful of our lifestyle factors, but also utilizing science-backed supplementation.

An analysis published in the Journal of Effective Disorders found that the renowned spice called Saffron was just as effective as conventional antidepressant drugs like Prozac, Zoloft and Celexa. Additionally, and of the utmost importance, people who are utilizing Saffron had none of the side effects that were seen rampant and those who are utilizing those conventional treatments. So something that is far safer, but equally, if not even better in effectiveness. That's what we get when utilizing something like Saffron. And my favorite resource for Saffron in therapeutic amounts and actually in a tasty version, are the happy drops from

Organifi. Go to [Organifi.com/model](https://organifi.com/model) right now and you're gonna get 20% off their phenomenal happy drops.

Alright? As a matter of fact, you're gonna get 20% off store wide. Now, these happy drops are exceptional. It's not necessarily just for a mood boost, but something that can be utilized as a tonic, something that is good for many other aspects of your health, because Saffron doesn't just have one benefit of supporting mental health. It's also been found to be supportive of metabolic health as well. And here are a couple of real world testimonials when it comes to these happy drops. Nicholas said, happily surprised. I was extremely skeptical about this product, despite all the good reviews. However, using it daily for the past two weeks, I can definitely say that they work.

I definitely have an easier time staying positive and rolling with the punches of daily life with the help of Happy Drops and Hillary said Happy Drops will make you happy that you ordered. I found out about these little drops of bliss from Instagram. I was skeptical as every product makes claims that aren't always backed. Upon trying these happy drops, I've noticed a mood improvement energy that lasts throughout the day, aKA no afternoon slump anymore, and improved sleep at night. I'm thrilled. These are just some of the incredible testimonials. You could check them out over on the website. Again, go to organifi.com/model for 20% off right now. That's O-R-G-A-N-I-F i.com four slash model for 20% off. And now back to the show.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I wanna say something about this in particular because. I feel that a lot of people who are very driven would see that having a hobby is not efficient. It's not a good use of my time. It's not valuable because it's not contributing to, you know, my intention, my purpose, the thing that I wanna create. And so it's like this kind of pocket thing. And so what this does is it gives an affirmation that this can actually help you on your path and your career choice and your passion and your driven nature to, you know, accomplish whatever it is. And also I think it's a very human thing. You know, to have other interests and to have things that you are able to kind of decompress or to shift gears mentally and to have a more expanded self as well.

So this is super valuable and I appreciate this is giving a reason because I could definitely see a time when I backed away from the things like outside of the work that I do because again, I just, I was so driven to create. But something else you said was that it also helped to create connections and to express things in a unique way. And I think that's kind of come across in my work as well, being able to tie ideas together in unique ways that have come from the lived experience outside of that work that I'm doing.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: It's powerful.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: And it's great. You've experienced it and what we find with a lot of highly driven people, they feel guilty when they stop working. It's called productivity guilt. It's well documented in the literature and that's why you struggle to take a vacation. You struggle to switch off on the weekends.

SHAWN STEVENSON: What? What is it called?

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: It called a productivity guilt.

SHAWN STEVENSON: No, it's called vacation.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Oh, va. What is this vacation you speak of? It's always reserved for other people, not for you. You don't deserve it yet. That's a sign of low acceptance, and that's why having a hobby. So the super interesting thing about having this creative hobby, there's two elements. On the one side, it can help you enter a state of flow. If it has a high enough degree of skill and challenge and enjoyment, you can actually enter a state of flow, which then just activates different parts of the brain and is regenerating. So when you go back to your work, you're feeling fully energized. The other super interesting thing though is have you ever found, Shawn, that you have amazing ideas when you're in the shower or doing the dishes or when you're out for a walk?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Of course.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: When you're not actively working on a problem, the brain's default network mode is activated. And that's when it's plugging away and problem solving without conscious awareness. And that's why sometimes we have these amazing ideas when we're not actively involved in something. And so a creative hobby that is not incredibly challenging, you don't wanna pick something that's even more work. You want it to be enjoyable. This can also allow the default mode network to be active, to help you be more creative.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. And it's unique for you.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Exactly.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right. Find something.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: 'Cause like for example a friend of mine was, and my wife as well, really enjoyed this whole painting, getting together and paint. I didn't, I felt so much pressure, like I, this, I was like, this is not relaxing. This is not decompressing. I don't feel like I'm using because I want to really be great at this thing. You know? And so for me it's not necessarily gonna be that, but for other people it is absolutely. That for me, it might be something that's more physical and like you just mentioned, even just going for a walk, you know, or whatever the case might be. But again giving yourself permission to try different things.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Especially today, we've got access to so many cool things that we can try out. You can go get a pickleball lesson, you can go, you know, obviously you can do the paint and sip, which I think they really, I think it was the wine.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: I think so.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And I don't drink, so maybe that's what it was too. And we all had to draw squirrels or paint squirrels and, you know, my squirrel looked like it was like lifting chemicals.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Do you have your squirrel or a photo of it? Because it would be great to show it on, on screen or link to it.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I absolutely have it. I absolutely have it. And so again, thank you for bringing this up because that's what life is all about. Like, and I think we don't, we definitely undervalue giving ourselves permission to try different things. For us to be able to decompress and to also find that flow state where we are doing something that's challenging and giving yourself permission to suck at something.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: A hundred percent.

SHAWN STEVENSON: When you start.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: We call this, so we have a practice that we talk about in the book, which actually relates to the second attribute, which we'll get to, but I call it the daily dabble, which is give yourself 10 minutes a day to do something and suck at it. Actually suck at it, drawing, painting, playing the guitar, whatever it is. Your goal is not to improve, it's just to do something that's ugly. So Ed Kamo, who's, I think he's a Pixar executive, maybe the co-founder, he was saying that when they're developing their movies, Pixar animation movies, they all suck at the beginning and they call them ugly babies.

And the idea is that, you know, a baby is always, it's your baby and you don't want it to be ugly, but you just have to desensitize yourself to ugly babies. Now, apologies to parents out there. There are no ugly babies. We know that. But in this case, it's getting used to getting used to being a beginner and not being good and sucking. If you can learn how to deal with the discomfort of sucking, it gets so much easier. And if you do this 10 minutes a day, again, you're activating default mode networks. You're just giving yourself permission to play because play is incredibly, incredibly powerful to build the second attribute, which you'll get

to, but it also helps you with self-acceptance 'cause you realize that sucking in this area is not a reflection of you, it's just something you're doing.

So lots to think about there. I encourage everyone to find a hobby that works for them. And as you said, Shawn, if it's not working for you and if you're feeling the pressure, try something else. We have someone in our community who had read the book and said, I don't know about the hobbies thing because every time I do one, soon enough, there is pressure to perform for everyone else and to get the validation. And so my response to that is, okay, the moment you feel that coming in, drop the hobby, start something new. That means the self-doubt is creeping in because something has become, again, habitual, or it's just another part of your identity. Drop the hobby, start a new one. And again, it's that permission to start to be a beginner to suck.

So that's our first tip for acceptance. I'm gonna share just a few more. Okay. Because that's kind of a broader one. Another one is if you struggle with acceptance, you struggle with letting people down and saying no. So you will say yes when someone asks you something, even before you've even heard what it is or processed if you really want to do it. So we find people in this space end up overcommitting themselves to everybody else without checking in whether this is actually what they want to be doing. And they overcommit to friends, to family, to coworkers. They're the ones staying late at work because they've taken on extra work to help the team.

No one else is there. So here's what you can do. Intentional delay. What does that mean? We know from research that if you can just delay a decision literally by a few milliseconds, you tend to make a better decision. So instead of compulsively responding with, yes, I'll do that, you would say to the person who's asked you or emailed you or texted you, thanks for thinking of me. So it's a positive first response because us people pleasers will love that. We can give a positive first response. Thanks for thinking of me. Let me check with my calendar or my partner or my schedule and I'll get back to you in 20 minutes. By the end of the day, whatever it is, three steps, right? Thanks for thinking of me. Let me check or confirm and I will get back to you by give them a deadline. And then your next step is to actually, you've just created space. Ask yourself, do I want to be doing this? Is it out of a desire to serve or is it out

of a desire to not let this person down? Because I want them to like me, and I'm willing to sacrifice what I need.

If it's a desire to serve, fantastic, that's a great thing. But if you're saying yes, because you don't wanna let them down, you don't want them to disapprove of you, then perhaps it's not the right thing for you. And then your next step is to decline politely. Again, thanks for thinking of me. I'm not able to fit it in this time, but feel free to ask me again if it comes up. Now, a lot of people here will say, but I don't want to say no. I don't like saying no. It feels selfish. And the reason why it feels selfish is because you're focusing on a no. So what is really helpful to do is to think, okay, I'm not just saying no. I'm actually saying yes to something deeper. For me, it's a deeper yes to you.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Because every time you say yes to someone else, you're saying no to yourself in some way. It's a no to your time, to your peace of mind to you being at home with your family 'cause you're prioritizing someone else. If you have a deeper yes, which could be honoring my values, being at home to tuck my kids into bed, investing in my wellbeing. No, I don't wanna go out tonight because I wanna have an early night because I know how important sleep is have a deeper yes, burning inside so that it's not just a no, it's actually a yes to something that feels more important. And this is incredibly, impactful when it comes to people who struggle with acceptance 'cause the more you do it, you realize I matter too. And what I need matters. And when I honor that, I can show up better for the people that I really care about.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Love it.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: So that's that one. And then the third one, for people who struggle with acceptance, if you ever go on a journey of growth. So, Shawn, let me ask you this. Let's say that you've gone on a journey of growth and transformation, and then you're catching up with your family or your friends. What are they most likely to say when they see all this

growth you've been on? There's one phrase that comes up a lot that doesn't make us feel great when we hear it. Any ideas what that is?

SHAWN STEVENSON: You've changed.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: You've changed.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Mm.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: And when they say you've changed, does it feel like a really positive thing?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Hell no.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Hell no. It doesn't at all. And it's generally because it's not. It's coming from a place of their own insecurity as humans, we like predictability.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: We like familiarity. We like people to be how we've always known them to be. But the thing is, when you're growing changes the point. And so if you are growing, it's going to shine a spotlight on people's insecurities and they will share that with you. Because subconsciously they wanna keep you small because it makes them feel comfortable. And what do we do when we struggle with acceptance? No, I haven't changed. I'm the same. And then we try and prove to them that we're the same, and then we engage in the same old behaviors and the same ways of being. And we like devolve into an earlier version of ourselves, which is not doing us any favors. So the best response to you've changed is three words.

Thanks for noticing. Thanks for noticing. And then you can follow it up with growth has been a priority for me, and see how you've just taken something that would otherwise be a negative, and you have turned it into an incredibly positive thing that you are taking ownership for. But you're also giving them permission.

You're saying, Hey, I've changed because I'm focusing on growth, which allows them to think, oh, so if I focus on growth, I can change too. And it's a beautiful thing. And it's so simple.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Ah, I love this. Thank you so much. Thank you. Again, I know that a lot of people listening, you know, have experienced something similar and their dedication to just being better, to being more of who they really are. And of course, you know, the people in our lives, they don't wanna lose us. And also that certainty piece, we feel very comfortable with people being a certain way. And so you might even be frozen in somebody's mind, in a certain state, a certain way of being. And maybe you see them, you know, they see you 10 years later and you're completely different to their, you know, to their experience.

And so, just keeping that in mind, this isn't something personal, you know, and oftentimes, again, it's out of love and people wanting to stay connected to you. And so, you know, just really quickly, I remember having this experience, you know, and I just moved like adjacent to the hood, like Ferguson, Missouri, and, you know, I was living in Floris. At the time, and, you know, my wife and I were like meditating my amazing mother-in-law, you know, taught us meditation and we were going to these different you know, classes and things like that. And we changed the way that we were eating and we were serving people and doing all these classes. And from being 1000, we were losing money, you know, doing these like food prep classes and, you know, just, I was so excited about helping and because I felt like I was helped so much.

And my little brother, you know, he, it ruffled his feathers, you know, he is like, you know, you changed, you forgot where you came from. This very subtle, you know, phrasing, which we don't want to hear, especially coming from my community. And the thing is, I'm actually from the hood. Like I grew up in the hood when, by the time he was like out and able to like run around the neighborhood, we lived in a good area. You know, like he lived in a good part of St. Louis with my parents. And so he doesn't even know what that's about. Like he was listening to Spice Girls and whatever, you know what I mean? And he's judging me because I'm like meditating and whatever, but I still ha I know where I come from and I carry that with me.

And I want to express and to model what's possible. Like our circumstances do not have to define us, right? And so being aware of those things and also, you know, intentionally finding a way to, as you just mentioned, expressing like, I did this. There's change possible for you too, and I'm here to contribute and to support you in that, if that's what you want.

If you don't want that, then that's fine as well. So thank you so much for sharing that. So self-acceptance is really a part of this. It's one of these attributes, these four attributes, but it's really a superpower if you think about it. I agree. And as you mentioned, it's ironically the number one kryptonite for people as well. So let's move on from self-acceptance to what's next.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: What's next? So after the, I'm not enough, what is another doubt people might have, especially if they're starting something new or trying to step into a new space? It's, I can't do this. I cannot do this. And this relates to the attribute of agency. Okay. So agency relates to, if we go back to the idea of traits, it's self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the belief that I can set a goal and achieve the goal because either I have the skills or the existing competence or capability, or I can learn them or I can find other people to do them for me. So it's that element of resourcefulness.

And when you don't have agency, you look at something and you say, I can't. I can't. What do you do? You shrink or alternatively, so let me share with you the ways that a lack of agency shows up in people that have some degree of achievement behind them. We see this as imposter syndrome, where people feel like they don't deserve their success, that they're faking it. That at any moment someone will find out that they're a fraud and they don't. They shouldn't be where they are. And this does one of two things. Either it holds people back because it's safer to just not take the risk just in case they fail or what we see more commonly is it pushes people to overcompensate.

To take on more, to keep doing bigger and better things to prove to people that, Hey, I actually, I deserve this. I deserve to be here. What's super interesting about imposter syndrome, if anyone has ever felt like that, we often feel very alone in that you need to have

some degree of, like a track record of achievement behind you in order for it to be imposter syndrome.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Hmm.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: If you're starting something new and you feel like you don't deserve to be there, that's not imposter syndrome. That's just you're starting something new and you've never done it before. Give yourself grace to learn. But if you have achieved something and you feel it, some studies have found up to 82% of people have felt like an imposter. So you are in really good company. That's eight out of 10 people. Not only that, whenever we start to feel like we're the only ones who have felt this, it's called pluralistic ignorance because it's usually false. Humans have insecurities. Chances are someone has been in your position experiencing similar things, feeling the same insecurities.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So is it really a syndrome?

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: And that's the next point. When we look at the term imposter syndrome and we look in the literature, it doesn't actually exist. It was discovered in the eighties by two researchers who determined that it was a behavioral phenomenon. It was a behavioral phenomenon. What's the difference between syndrome and phenomenon? A phenomenon is a naturally occurring behavior in a population of people. A syndrome pathologizes it and makes it feel like there's something wrong with us. And so they've referred to it as the phenomenon 'cause it was so common. And then it has been studied as the phenomenon. And then somewhere along the way, someone slapped on the term syndrome because suddenly that sells and that's great marketing.

And now people use that as an excuse and they think that something is wrong with them, that they are broken because they have this syndrome. If you can just see it as something that I feel I have imposter thoughts, it changes the way you see it. And suddenly you realize, okay, maybe I'm not so alone. Maybe there's a way to move through this. Now, if you feel like an imposter at any point in time, what's happening is because imagine that you have a spotlight shining right on you, right? So it's shining from above, right on you. You don't see

anything around you. It's just highlighting all of your perceived gaps and limitations and what you think you don't have.

But if you take that spotlight, and usually when the spotlight's on us, we will say, I don't know how. And everyone will find out. That is the subconscious fear. I don't know how, and everyone will find out if you take that spotlight and flip it around, turn it into a flashlight, moving ahead of you, it changes to I don't know how. And I will find out. I will figure out how to do it. And that perspective shift can be hugely impactful because I always say that attention is a superpower. When you're not aware of what your attention is doing. That is when your thoughts are driven by default. Default thinking patterns, default beliefs, and more often than not, they are rooted in self-doubt and insecurity.

Because of our self-image, because of our lack of self-trust. If you can just consciously shift your attention in these moments, you are reengaging the prefrontal regions in the brain, which reduces activity in the fear centers, the threat detection centers. You are less likely to notice all the things that could go wrong and you're more likely to focus on, well, what can I do? What is my next step? So if you notice that thought of I don't belong to be here, instantly shift it to while I'm here, what an amazing opportunity I have to learn and grow. Who can I learn from? What is the step I can take? What do I need to upskill in? Because we need to be pragmatic. Sometimes there is something you don't know how to do. That's okay. Learn how to do it or find someone else that can do it and get them to help you. There's incredible power when you develop your agency.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Can you give an example? For example, if I just said, can you give an example? For example, what if somebody's saying, I don't have enough experience? How would you reframe that?

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Anyone who has done anything new has not had enough experience. That's the definition of doing something new, and you're never going to get the experience unless you lean into that discomfort. You see, when we experience discomfort, which happens when we experience self-doubt, if we can really stay with it and know that, Hey, this is just my brain doing what it does.

So if we look at the primary function of the brain, a lot of people will say It's to protect you and keep you alive. And that's true to an extent in a purely simplistic form, but there's another level to it, right? The function of the brain is to make sure that our body is doing what it needs to do to stay alive using the least amount of metabolic energy. The brain wants to be lazy. It wants to use as little energy as possible. And so when it comes to discomfort, it's a lot more energy to lean into it and embrace it, and take the step in spite of it than to just shrink and stay safe. So your brain's default is going to be to try to gear you to shrink and stay safe.

Because then it uses less energy and it has succeeded. That is what it's wired to do. If you know this, when you're facing the discomfort, you can then say to yourself, okay, my brain and body are just doing what it does. Great. I know that they're working good, but I don't have to listen to it. And then when you lean into that, what happens is discomfort can also activate neurotropic factors in the brain, specifically brain-derived neurotropic factor, EDNF. That is a protein responsible for learning and growth, and neuroplasticity, neurogenesis. That is how you develop new habits, but you have to push through that discomfort. And so that might mean saying yes when you don't feel ready. That might mean still going and pushing and trying that new thing even if you don't have the experience.

Now let me share with you one quick story that I love. It comes from Nike. So in the 1980s, I think it was 1985, the year my brother was born, Nike was going through a lot of challenge as a company. Stock price had declined mass layoffs. They were struggling to enter the basketball market, so they needed fresh talent, and they held a 24 hour shoe design competition for their internal staff. Tinker Hatfield was his name. He was a young corporate architect working in Nike, and he decided to enter, he drew a design and then he won, and basically the next day he was approached and said, or and told, okay, you're joining the design team. So suddenly this corporate architect who has zero experience in design is now in the design team in a space he has never been in.

It would've been very easy for him in that state to say, I can't do this. I've never done this. I'm not a designer. And then request to go back to his old job, which would've been safe, but

instead he asked himself. Okay. I haven't had design experience that's a given. I'm not gonna pretend that I have. But what do I have?

Well, I have architecture experience. And in architecture school, I remember learning about this building called the centre pompidou in Paris, which is basically an inside out building. So all of the structures, the mechanisms, the lifts, elevators that are usually inside and hidden, they're all on the outside by design. And he thought, what if we did that with a shoe? So he sat down and he started sketching this design. He did the Nike Swish on the sneaker and a big visible air pocket in the heel. And that design was picked up and became the Nike Air Max one. The iconic shoe that Nike is known for, Phil Knight is recorded or reported as having said to him, tinker Hatfield.

He said, you single-handedly saved Nike in the eighties. And then of course there was the Michael Jordan deal and all the other things that came. But that story is a fantastic example of how, yes, you might be doing something you have no experience in, but if you allow the spotlight just to shine on you here and now you forget that you have a huge track record of other things you've done, other experiences, other skills, you've developed, other perspectives, other ways of looking at the world, other instincts and their transferable, you can bring them to what you're doing now. So never feel like you have nothing to offer when you're doing something new. You do. You just have to tap into it. And how you do that is by strengthening your agency.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Wonderful. I love that story. Such a cool story.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Isn't it a cool story? I love that story.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And you know, with that being said, instead of carrying this I don't have the experience, I don't have enough experience to be doing this and just affirm it to yourself. I have capacity, I have agency. I get to make choices. I am, I'm presenting with a great opportunity where I'm going to gain experience as I'm bringing an attitude of progressiveness and curiosity, and they're so fortunate that I'm participating in this because I want to learn, I want to get better. Right.

I can keep going with this, but it's just a subtle reframe for whatever fits for you psychologically to give yourself to. When I think of agency, I think of the ability to choose.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Hmm.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right. And to just realize that I have the capacity to make a choice regardless of the circumstance. And I can find a way to not just survive this, but to thrive and to get better, you know? So it's just, thank you for that. Is there anything else here as far as like a strategy or tip to help us to gain more sense of agency?

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: I'll share two more very quickly. So the first one relates to the next sign that someone struggles with agency, which is comparison. Now comparison can be very healthy when you're using it as a force to motivate you. And to keep moving forward. And when you see someone who has achieved something and you think, wow, if they've done it, I can do it too. But when you lack self-trust, that's not what you hear. You think, wow, look at how far ahead they are. I could never do that. I will never catch up. Look at all the skills they have that I don't have.

And that undermines self-trust related to agency, which then fuels self-doubt. So when it comes to this, there's two things you can do. I know a lot of people who constantly compare themselves to others, and then they constantly compare, which leads into the third attribute, which we'll get to. But if you are constantly comparing, what we encourage you to do is shift from comparison to emulation. What does that mean? Instead of comparing, you know, apples to oranges, they're two different things. You are different to everybody else. So don't compare your journey to theirs, but you can emulate. So look at where they are. Look at how they got there, and ask yourself, how do I emulate their journey? And take that first step.

So you use it as a pathway, as a guide point. Okay, they got there. I can do it. I'm going to, that's one thing, comparison to emulation. And then the second thing we see here a lot is when someone lacks agency, they distract themselves from taking action. Because again, they're waiting to feel like they are ready and they have the skills and the ability.

So they procrastinate by preparing and planning and researching. And we know the more you research, the more you realize how much you don't know. And then you keep researching and then suddenly you never feel ready, but you feel really accomplished because hey, you know a lot of stuff and you've got your whole document here of all the preparation you've done, but you're not taking the step.

So quick little story here about Elizabeth Gilbert. She's the author of Eat, pray, love. I've seen the movie, I haven't read the book, but some people have read the book. That's her memoir. Now, you'd expect, Shawn, that if you're writing a memoir, it's your story, so it should just come to you naturally. But when she was writing this, she said that she had this mantra of this sucks in her head constantly. And so she'd write a sentence and she'd rip out the paper and throw it away. She'd type a paragraph and she'd delete the whole thing. She couldn't get herself to do it. And so she had to say to herself, okay, wait, wait, wait. Hold on. I didn't promise the universe that I would write brilliantly. I just promised the universe that I would write, so I'm going to prioritize the act of writing and not writing brilliantly.

And that's exactly what she did word after word, sentence after sentence, paragraph after paragraph. And she wrote this incredible memoir that became a movie that got her on Oprah and has just been incredible for her in terms of getting her message out there. And she's a phenomenal writer. But what this tells us if you want to build your agency. Lower your standards. And I don't mean that in a loose way. I mean, your standards are probably way too high. We wanna be perfect at the start. Lower them, make it doable. Make it the smallest possible step that you can take. Because when you do that, you get the proof point. Hey, I can do this. This isn't as hard as I thought.

And then you're more likely to take the next step. So instead of find my soulmate, make your goal, ask that person out for a coffee. Instead of build a billion dollar business, I'm going to create a website. Instead of go viral on social media, I'm going to post a video being detached from the outcome. That is one way to build your agency. It's actually just by showing up and doing the work, and that's also a fantastic way to build self-trust.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Mm, lovely.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Now, the very, very third step is coming down to what Tinker Hatfield did. He didn't have the solid skills or the capability or the competence in design. He'd never done it, but he focused on what we call his essence qualities. These are those transferable parts of ourselves that we have developed, that we've taken with us through every stage of life. Every single person has these, and they have been developed not only professionally, but also in our personal lives.

If you are a parent, you have incredible essence qualities around preparation, planning, patience, consideration, empathy around scheduling, around managing competing stakeholders and priorities. You have to recognize these are really valuable. These are essence qualities. You can apply them no matter where you go and what you do and who you're interacting with. If you have set up a business in a different space and now you're transitioning, you have all sorts of qualities that you've developed there that you can bring, and this just reminds you, Hey, okay, yes, I have not done this before, but I have been in situations where I haven't done it before and I was okay, and then you take the step.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I've never heard somebody say that they want to have a less energy. I just got so much energy. I don't know what to do with it. I don't know what to do. For most people today, they want to have more energy. Energy is the fuel of our lives and our experience of energy, if we're looking at it through the lens of biology, boils down deep down to the role of our mitochondria. Also known as our cellular power plants or cellular energy plants. But it's a dynamic exchange going on constantly with all of these trillions of mitochondria that we have within our bodies. Now the question is what is going to help our mitochondria to do what they do and to give us that energy that we're really looking for?

Of course, we want to mind our mitochondria, eat some nutritious food, eat foods that are not creating derangement in all these abnormalities. Blood sugar spikes and gumming up all of our cells and our tissues, making sure that we're getting adequate sleep, checking all those boxes. But if we're boiling things down to a category of nutrients that we really wanna look for, look no further than that category of electrolytes. Electrolytes are minerals that carry an electric charge, and they are critical for the function of your mitochondria. A recent study

published in Free Radical Biology and Medicine. Determine that mitochondrial sodium levels are critical in contributing to changes in mitochondrial energy exchange and redox capacity.

So this is about delivering energy to all of our cells and resisting the harmful impacts of oxidation and stress. Who knew sodium was so essential for life? Well, a lot of people have known this, including researchers at McGill University, who found that not only does sodium help to maintain proper water balance for all of our cells, but also our most essential organ of energy and life, period, which is the amazing human brain. They also found that sodium functions as a quote on off switch in our brains for specific neurotransmitters that support optimal function and protect our brain against numerous diseases. And so we wanna make sure that we're targeting plenty of electrolytes in our diet's gonna come in the form most often of whole organic fruits and vegetables.

But this is also the reason that so many people feel and experience more energy and faster recovery when they're utilizing supplemental electrolytes. Now, if you're going to utilize an electrolyte supplement, the number one science backed electrolyte supplement that supports active hydration, cognitive performance, and a healthy lifestyle overall. Look no further than the incredible folks at LMNT. LMNT has the science-backed ratios of sodium, potassium, and magnesium to help you to feel and perform at your best. The best performers in the world utilize LMNT. I'm talking about team USA, weightlifting, NBA athletes.

NFL teams, Navy Seals, the list goes on, and on, and on. And right now you can try LMNT risk free with their no questions asked refunds. If you don't absolutely love the way that LMNT makes you feel, head over right now to drink LMNT.com/model and you're going to get a free bonus pack of their most popular flavors with every single purchase. Alright, go to drink LMNT.com/model. That's drink LMNT.com/model to take advantage of this right now, head over there, check 'em out, drink LMNT.com/model. And now back to the show.

SHAWN STEVENSON: This is such a great example. Just being able to take our life experience to be honest about, you know, just again, the, the quality of being, you know, a dad in a certain context to translate that over into my work. I just saw it this morning. Every morning I go out and I walk for a little bit, and I saw this father and son and the dad. He's got this just

outrageous, incredible mohawk. All right. And it is green, right? I don't know how he sleeps at night. I don't know. I don't know the story about taking down the Mohawk, but it's always pristine.

And his son was already outside. He was getting in the car and the dad runs out and he drops what he was carrying by the car. And he basically, you know, like kind of tags. I don't know what he's saying, but. They end up going to the bottom of the street and then they take off and, and they race each other. Right. And so I think that this might be a daily routine that they've started up since I've been going this today. I went out at a different time this morning. My wife had to go to an appointment or whatever, but you know, for him to be able to translate that over into the work that he's doing, right.

I'm a dad who gets out here and I have this bar that I'm setting because I know that my son, every day he's getting a little bit faster. He is getting a little bit faster. When I caught the race, the son had actually crossed over in front of him. Wow. And tried to beat him that way by getting in his way, like a, you know, like a race car. And to have those experience and to be honest about it, like that's, that's not a quote, normal dad behavior. Like I'm creative, I'm thinking about my son and the experience that, that I'm giving him. How can I translate that over into my business? Right. Or this project or another relationship. So take inventory of your life and be honest about the experience that you do have because you have so many different valuable skills and talents and capacities that you can use in any endeavor that you aspire to take on. And so I think we sell ourselves short and we don't have enough big trust.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: We don't.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And so you're giving us this inroads for us to, because even for my, I don't think about that. I don't think about translating that thing over into this other thing. It might happen unconsciously, but for us to wake up and realize like, wow, like wait a minute, I have this incredible bank of life experiences. I know everybody listening has been through something very difficult, right? And just imagine that resilience that you have already and you might not, like, I wouldn't wanna go through that again. But you have the capacity for more than you know. And if you didn't go through that thing, you wouldn't even understand

how strong you are. And so thank you for helping us to guide us to more introspection. It's incredibly valuable in of itself. So we've got acceptance, we've got agency. What's the next one?

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: The next one is my favorite because we don't realize that this is a facet of self-doubt. So Shawn and everyone listening and watching, let me ask you this. Do you know someone in your life who complains constantly? They are resentful of other people who seem to have an easier life than they do. They blame other people. They don't take responsibility for things, and they tend to tell the same story of how they've been hurt in the past or someone double crossed them.

Or life has just been so much more difficult than everyone else. And you know the first few times you hear this story, you have incredible compassion for them and empathy for them. The second time, you know, yes, you still have it. By the 30th time you realize, ah. This person is keeping themselves stuck. And that's not to deny that some people have had objectively, extremely difficult lives that are completely unfair. There is an element of unfairness and inequality that exists in the world, but the degree to which someone chooses to allow that to infiltrate their identity shapes the remainder of their life.

And so we refer to this attribute as autonomy. Do people feel like they're in control of their lives? Now, that doesn't mean that you can control every aspect of your life because we cannot, we can't control the weather. We can't control what people think of us. We can't control what other people think or do. But it's the degree to which you choose to focus on what you can control. 'cause here's what's so interesting. These people tend to focus on what is outside of their control because they have low autonomy. They do not feel personally powerful. But what happens when you're only focusing on things outside of your control? How do you feel?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Lost struggle bus. Uncertain. A lot of uncertainty.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: A lot of uncertainty. And we know the brain loves certainty, and we also feel powerless. Why do we feel powerless? Because we literally are powerless. And so you're

creating an environment where you are focusing on things that make you feel like you have no power, so then you don't take action because you do not have power in those areas. And this is what we see, this negative spiral of people who get stuck by their own psychology.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Mm.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: And so it comes down to what's called locus of control. Locus coming from the Latin Loki, which means location, and it's where do you place control in your life? Do you feel like you have some degree of control? Or do you feel like it's all out of your hands? Life is unfair. Other people call the shots. My boss, the economy, the government, granted a lot of things are outside of our control, but the extent to which you focus on them shapes the quality of your life. So what we see here is people who feel like they don't have control, they stay in their comfort zone because it's much easier to stay safe, not take action, because you tell yourself what's the point?

Even if I try, nothing ever changes for me. But that is a fallacy. That's a lie. And it's a lie that you keep creating in your reality because when you tell yourself that you don't take action to change things, so nothing changes. The other thing we see here is people who stay in jobs that are completely wrong for them, but they say, oh, but I've already invested 10 years of my life into the 20 years of my life. I can't move. It would be a waste as a sunk cost fallacy. We see this in relationships of people who are genuinely in the wrong relationship, but they say, no, but I've invested seven years married to this person. I can't throw it all away. And it comes down to this idea of hard, there's this term or this meme that's been going around.

Choose your hard. So the idea is, you know, marriage is hard, divorce is hard. Choose your hard. Being fit is hard. Being unfit is hard. Choose your hard. It all comes down to what you prioritize something is inevitably going to be hard. Whether you deal with the hard thing right now, or you put it off, put it off, put it off, and then have to deal with a life of regret or a life of missed opportunity. So autonomy is recognizing I can only control what's in my control and I'm going to focus here. I'm not going to complain about things because super interestingly, what we know from the literature, especially research on neuroscience, looking at the brain when we complain about something that has happened to us, we are

reactivating the same parts of the brain that were active when we went through that initial experience.

So we are reliving it in vivid detail, which means we are feeling the same negative emotions in vivid detail. And the more we do that, we are creating a default pattern in our brain that reminds us life is so hard for us, people have it out for us, and it makes complaining more default. And then you become a negativity magnet. Because we know what it's like when we're around someone who complains a lot. We suddenly stop wanting to spend time with them unless we also complain.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Mm.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: And then it's, oh, you think that's bad? Let me tell you about my life. And then we see these people attracting other complainers, and then they get a sense of satisfaction by validating how difficult each other's lives are. Does that give them any incentive to change? Nope. And you're undermining your self trust. You're not taking the action that's going to change your life. So what do you do? The reason why we do this often is 'cause we lack the agent or the autonomy, but also because we see discomfort as a sign that things are not working out for us.

See? Too hard. Never for me. Good things never come my way. But if we lean into that discomfort. Recognize that's what the brain is doing. It's releasing those brain derived neurotropic factors that feel uncomfortable. But that's how we learn. That's how we change our lives. So the simplest thing you could do here if you feel like you're stuck in your comfort zone is to practice what we call micro braveries. Micro braveries. So it's like microdosing hard moments. You don't get better at anything unless you do that thing. You don't get stronger at the gym unless you do the reps. You don't get better at the guitar unless you actually practice the guitar. You don't get better at dealing with discomfort unless you practice dealing with discomfort.

So you need to identify something in your life that you're holding back from. Let me use the example of social awkwardness, which surprisingly is really common. People feel very

awkward in social situations, networking events, even barbecues, meeting new people. There were a lot of people who do not enjoy this. I wouldn't say you're one of them, Shawn, you don't strike me as that kind of person. I feel like you love people and meeting new people, but this is something a lot of people resonate with. So they don't do it. They opt out of the networking event, they opt out of the social gathering, they stay safe. So what's really valuable is to go, okay, if I don't like talking to new people, I'm gonna set this smallest possible goal to microdose hard.

What does that mean? Next time I get in an Uber beyond just, hi, how are you? Good, thanks. How are you? I'm going to ask, how was your day? And then just have a little three minute conversation. Yeah. When you do that, you show yourself, okay, that was uncomfortable, but I did it. Brilliant. The more times you do that, you become desensitized to it. This is how phobias are dealt with. So Pete, let's say you have a phobia of spiders. Do you like spiders?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Arachnophobia? I saw the movie John Goodman. Shout it to STL, I don't mess with spiders like that.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: No, don't visit Australia. So let's say you.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, they're like people sized out there.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: People size. No, thankfully not that big, but they're pretty gnarly and scary looking. So let's say you have a fear of spiders, which it seems like maybe you do, if it was a genuine fear that was preventing you from leaving your house. What psychologists would do, who are experts in this space, would go through a process of what's called systematic desensitization. They need to expose your brain to this thing in small doses until your brain starts to acknowledge, okay, I'm safe. I'm alive. This thing is not worth the fear that I'm giving it. So you'd come into a room, they'd show you a photo of a spider on the other side of the room. It's just a photo. You might have that instant fear response, but then after five minutes it dissipates.

Okay? Then you move to round two the next day or the next week, you come in and it's a video of a spider. Fear response, eventually dissipates the next stage. It's a spider in a little plastic cage on the other side of the room. Next one, it's a little bit closer. By the time you've gone done this, enough time, the spider's on your hand and you're desensitized to it. Hmm. De systematic desensitization. We can do the same thing when it comes to anything that we're avoiding. You're making the choice to take the action, focusing on what you can control, starting small. So using that example in the Uber, that's your first step. The next one is, okay, well now I'm gonna say hello to the guy at the, you know, the barista at the cafe, and ask him how he's going.

Ask him about his weekend. Then I'm going to have a conversation with people in the office, in the kitchen. Then I'm going to say something in the meeting. Then I'm going to have a, you just slowly build, and it's incredibly powerful when you do this because you're showing yourself, Hey, I can take ownership. I can take action. This thing that I'm afraid of is not happening, and it builds your autonomy. Now we move to the second part of autonomy. Shawn, you touched on this earlier when we were talking about agency. The fact that everyone has experienced hard things in life. Hardships, challenge, genuine suffering.

Everyone has experienced it, and some people have experienced a lot more than others, but there are also some people who choose to then identify themselves by those sufferings. It's called a contamination story, right? So there was a researcher by the name of Dan McAdams, Dr. Daniel McAdams, and he has spent over 40 years studying what's called narrative identity. What is that? When you speak to anybody, when you are alone with your thoughts, there is a kind of narrative that you are telling about yourself, about who you are, about your role in the world, and that's called your narrative identity. And there are two types of narrative identities. One of them is where you've had a lot of challenges in your life and you identify with those challenges.

They are you. They reflect that you have no power. People always treat you poorly. My life is so much difficult, more difficult than other people. They have contaminated your identity and they don't make you feel powerful. They don't make you feel empowered, and you stay stuck.

The other type is called a redemptive story, where it's like, yeah, okay. I've experienced a lot of hardship and it has made me stronger.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Hmm.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: It has taught me what not to do. It has given me an impetus to go and help other people who were in that same situation. You are redeeming yourself from that story, learning to grow from it. There is, you know, we've heard of PTSD post-Traumatic Stress, which often happens after a highly traumatic experience. But what we don't talk about enough is its opposite Post-traumatic growth. 53% of people who experience trauma in their lives experience post-traumatic growth. They don't suffer from it. They choose to grow from it, and what researchers have found is there is one quality they demonstrate that allows 'em to grow from it. Any idea what that one quality might be, it's, it wasn't what I expected. It's actually curiosity.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Oh yes.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Curiosity. When you choose to be curious about your experience, what happened? Why did it happen? Where did it happen? What did I feel as a result of that happening? What was going on for that person? What was going on for me? How has it changed my life? Suddenly, you're not in the experience, you're almost observing it. It's a form of metacognition where you start becoming aware of your thoughts. And it's incredibly powerful when you do this because one of the things that I talk about, actually, if I take a bigger view of all of this, self-doubt, insecurity, you are not your thoughts and you don't have to believe everything your mind tells you to, but the only way you can do that is to stop living in your thoughts and start observing your thoughts.

And this is one way to do it. So if anyone listening or watching feels like they have a little bit of a contamination story, something bad happened to them unfairly. And they keep reliving that experience and it's coming through in their interactions and they keep sharing that story. There's this powerful process called narrative.

It's based on narrative therapy. It's narrative re-identification. You're retelling the story to yourself. You are editing your story. That doesn't mean you change the facts, you can't change history. What's happened has happened, but you can choose to focus on what you learned, how you grew, and how you're using that to create a better life going forward.

And it's, again, it's so simple, but it comes down to some of the words that we use. A lot of people will say. This always happens to me. I always end up with a toxic partner or I'm always manipulated. That's a sign of a contamination story. You would flip it and you'd say, there have been times in the past where I have been manipulated and treated poorly, but I'm learning to value myself and I know that I teach people how to treat me based on what I'm willing to tolerate. So I'm not willing to tolerate that anymore. And you see how you've taken something which is negative and victimizing yourself and flipped it into something where you are honoring your growth and your capacity to get better. So that's one always and never a classic giveaways the other one that comes through. So, Shawn, how do you feel if I were to say to you, oh, you should do this, you should do that, you should do that.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Chill.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Oh, yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Yeah. Chill. Like, hey, yeah. Hey. Yeah, leave me be.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, I know that we can have some things lost in translation. It's like chill, like ease up off me.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Totally.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Exactly. Because we don't like being told what we should do and we have a negative default reaction, which is called reactance, where we become really defensive and

sometimes we want to rebel against that. And it happens in relationships. It happens when we're telling our kids what they should do. They react no and they have a tantrum, whatever it is. And it happens when we are telling ourselves what we should do as well. People who struggle with autonomy live in, I should have done this, I should do that. And it doesn't make them feel empowered. It strips away possibility. Research has found, there is one word you can flip instead of should say to yourself, could, what could I do?

And so what's helpful, I always encourage people to grab a piece of paper. Divide it into two equal columns on the left. Right? I could at the top, that's your heading and you write your, I could list all the things that you could do in the current moment when you feel powerless, when you feel like things are out of your control. Well, I could do this. I could call that person. I guess I could do that. I could send that email. You're not committing to anything yet. You're just reminding yourself there are options here. Yeah. And then you move to your, I will list what are the one, two, or three things, the smallest possible things that you've listed that you will take action on.

And what's incredible is that term could, opens up divergent thinking, increases possibility and solution finding. And then I will reengages the parts of the brain responsible for action. And you remind yourself, no matter how bad things get, there's always something I can do.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Amazing.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: That's autonomy.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Amazing. Amazing. We're at the fourth of these four attributes.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: We are.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So acceptance, agency, autonomy. What's the fourth?

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: The fourth one is entirely related to emotions because if you were to think about any kind of experience of self-doubt, you've had any kind, and you strip all the emotion out of that, suddenly all you're left with is some thoughts, but they have no

emotional energy behind them. So you can rationally process them. You can ask, is this true? Do I need to believe this? What is evidence to the contrary? So emotion is actually what makes self-doubt damaging and makes it so incredibly powerful and have such a choke hold on us. So if we can get better at navigating and harnessing the emotions that come with life and with self-doubt, everything becomes easier.

We call this attribute adaptability. So it's being able to adapt to your emotions. So I'm going to really quickly just share a few signs that you might be struggling here. One of them is that, it's called low frustration tolerance, where little things that ordinarily shouldn't bother you suddenly start really bothering you. So you are, you're in the middle of a text or you're doing an audio. This happens to me. I'm doing voice to text to my husband, and I finish the voice to text and I read it and all the words are wrong, and I get really irritated. It's not even a big deal, but I have low frustration tolerance, or you're having a conversation with someone on the phone and the phone line keeps cutting out and you get very, very irritated.

You are in traffic, someone cuts you off, they didn't see you, but you get very irritated. So your tolerance for little frustrations is very low. That's a sign you're struggling with adaptability, and that can fuel. All of your self-doubt.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Hmm.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: The other one would be, we call it meta emotions. So it's where you might feel anxious about something and then suddenly you go, hold on, I'm Shawn. Why am I feeling anxious about this? This is ridiculous. And then you start getting angry at your anxiety and then you feel guilty for getting angry at your anxiety. 'cause you've done so much work to develop your emotional self. What's going on? So it's an emotion related to an emotion related to an emotion.

And it doesn't help us. And a lot of highly intelligent people experience this because we try to rationalize everything. So there's a few signs there. What we know though is that your body and your brain are intricately connected and they fuel your thoughts, which fuel your

emotions. When you're feeling insecure, when you're feeling full of doubt, when you're questioning things, what does your body typically do, Shawn?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Hmm.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: I mean, maybe not your body, 'cause you've probably done so much work on this, but what would someone's body typically do?

SHAWN STEVENSON: If they're feeling..

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Insecure?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Insecure.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: They're self-doubt, they're doubting themselves, their ability, their worth.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I think there'd be symptoms of like lethargy, fatigue. It depends on the person, but they might feel a certain part of their body just kind of, pressure or you know, a sense of like, maybe it's in their chest, you know, maybe that's kind of feeling of anxiety or, you know, maybe tension. I can go on and on. I think it expresses different in different people. But yeah, we would feel it physically, for sure.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: And what, in terms of physiology and posture, what often happens to our posture?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Hmm. Yep. We're gonna be kind of slumped over. Yeah. We're going to be, you know, kind of kyphotic and maybe our head is down.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: These are all signals, cues that our body gives us because it's trying to keep us safe.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Mm.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: It's trying to withdraw and be small because then we're protected.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Mm.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: It can also happen when we don't feel like we're enough and so we don't feel like we're worthy to take up space. So we try and take up less space. Now because of the connection between brain and body, this reinforces that yes, there is some kind of threat in our environment that we need to be protected from. So your body does it by default. It reinforces how you feel, which then reinforces what you're doing and we become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

So one of the simplest things you can do if you notice yourself experiencing doubt is ask, what is my posture doing? What is my posture? And sit a little bit more upright. Stand a little bit more upright. Now, I was really fascinated, 'cause we've heard of this before, right? Expansive body posture. There is a behavioral feedback mechanism that happens, but I was really interested to understand what is it about posture that is affecting how we feel and making us feel more confident and more powerful when we stand upright. And I had a look at a lot of meta-analyses and I had a look at some research and there was a study that was published very recently and they identified there was one main mechanism. It's not your shoulders, it's not necessarily all of your spine. It's one part and it's called neck flexion. Shawn, if you and everyone listening, if you put your chin down to your neck sorry, chin to chest, and I want you to just feel that joint at the back of your neck.

So put your chin down, you're going to feel a bone sticking out, and then bring it back up and then do it one more time. This is actually a good stretch anyway. Bring your chin down to chest. Feel that bone, bring it back up. What you just did now that's called neck flexion. And the distance between your chin and chest is the determining factor for how you feel when you withdraw

The first thing to drop is not your shoulders, it's your head. And then everything follows. So you don't even have to think about posture in those moments. You just think, what is the distance between my chin and my chest and how do I elongate? That doesn't mean looking at the ceiling, that's not gonna help. But you want to have an elongated chin to chest ratio, right? That helps you feel more powerful in the moment. Second tip, if I were to grab a pen, which I don't have on me right now, and place it between my teeth like this, no, I'm not gonna thank you for offering your pen, but I'm not gonna put it between my teeth like this.

All right? And if everyone listening, if you've got a pen, make sure it's clean. Do that, stick it between your teeth. What would happen in about 30 or 40 seconds is you would start to feel a little happier. Why is that? It's because the shape you're making with your face is the same that you do when you're smiling. And because of that feedback mechanism, by activating the same parts of your face, you're activating the same parts of your brain. And because we have so many pathways linked to smiling and happiness, you start to feel a little more calm, a little more at ease, a little happier. But what is often the first thing to go when we're insecure, it's our face.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Hmm.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: We frown, we drop, we become tense. So all this to say that thoughts are important, but also what your body is doing is important too. And so if you can remind yourself, okay, what are my thoughts doing? I don't have to believe everything. I think. And then the next step, what is my body doing? How do I just have a little bit more of an expansive posture? No matter where I am, who I'm talking with, what stage I'm speaking on, you are going to feel a lot more composed. And it's again, just a very simple thing we can do to help build our sense of big trust and our trust in ourselves.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Fire. So good. So good. Thank you for that affirmation as well. Just it's another reminder of how our psychology and our biology are intimately connected, right?

And sometimes having that outside in change really can make a difference. And so just being able to have that cue for all of us to just have the introspection when we're not feeling quite right. What's my body doing right now. And chances are you're gonna find like, wait a minute, and be able to adjust.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right. So yeah, so powerful.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Especially, I mean, how do we look on our devices?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Oh man.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: The pose. Firstly, it's terrible for your neck, the amount of weight that you're carrying.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So many turtles out here, just so many.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: And that pose of looking down, you are reinstilling within you a low power pose, which is going to influence how you feel.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Mm.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Even if you weren't feeling insecure to start with. If you sit like this for enough time, you'll probably start to feel a little bit less confident than you did to start.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Amazing. This is just scratching the surface. Yeah. As well of what's in big trust. The book is available now. Everywhere books are sold. Pick up a copy. It's a delightful read. Incredibly insightful. I have half the book highlighted, by the way. Incredible insights. Great. And I love that you're affirming things with these various stories and studies as well. And you're not, as we even experienced today, you're not holding back at all on the tactical stuff too.

So we have these big ideas, but then here's what we can do about them. And so it's like sprinkled throughout the entire book. So definitely pick up a copy. And also there's an assessment that I took in the book as well, but people can get access to that for free.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: How do people get access to that?

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: So that, so these four attributes they combine in each of us to create almost like a Myers-Briggs or a disc style archetype. We have a doubt profile. And once you know your doubt profile, you can determine where am I weak and what do I need to focus on? Because no matter what you do in life, if any one of these is weak, you are always going to struggle. So it's incredibly insightful. We have it in the beginning of the book, but we did make it available.

And you can actually, even if you have the book, go and do it online because you get a PDF report that is personalized to you to help you determine, okay, where are my weaknesses? What does this look like? What does it sound like? So you have your pathway to step forward. In the right direction and know what to focus on. If you go to [doubt profile.com](https://doubtprofile.com), that's [doubt profile.com](https://doubtprofile.com), you can do it there. It's 12 questions. It's based on a psychometrically validated tool, so it's really robust and it will give you your breakdown across the four attributes. Highly recommend that.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Amazing. Totally free.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Totally free.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Awesome. Yeah. Thank you for making that available, and thank you for doing this work, you; know.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Thank you.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Just also, of course, you share more of your story as well, but just the journey that you've been on and to see you're not just talking from aspirational things, like you have firsthand experience of like pivoting and going into these new fields and like figuring stuff out and then sharing these delightful insights. So I appreciate you so much. This has been awesome.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Thank you, Shawn. I appreciate you. Thank you for the opportunity to come on, and I wanna say thank you to everyone listening and watching for investing the time in yourself to be here, because that is a huge testament to the fact that you are on this journey of growth. And next time someone says to you, you've changed, respond with, thanks for noticing. I'm listening to Shawn's podcast.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Boom. Let's go. Shadé, thank you so much.

DR. SHADÉ ZAHRAI: Thank you.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Thank you so much for tuning into this episode today. I hope that you got a lot of value outta this. If you did, you already know what to do. Share the inspiration, share the education with somebody that you care about. Make the good stuff go viral. So share this out on social media. You could take a screenshot and share this with your community on social media. You could send this directly from the podcast app that you're listening on. Share your voice if you're watching on Spotify.

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