

# Episode 50: Is Middle-Age Messing with your Enoughness? with Mandy Lehto

**Mandy:** It is episode 50 of Enough, the podcast. Thank you so much for your tremendous support of the show so far, and if you're enjoying it, could you please go ahead and hit the follow button wherever you listen to your podcast, it helps the show immensely. And if you're new here, welcome. I'm your host, Dr. Mandy Lehto, recovering perfectionist and overachiever. I'm a former investment banker, turned executive coach, and I am on the path right alongside you. In this show, you will find a mix of tools, ideas, and techniques, as well as some inspiring stories of how other people who identify as recovering perfectionists and overachievers are finding ways to slow down and find contentment with who and where they are in life right now. Today's solo episode is about how middle age can stir up a lot of not enoughness, because there are so many things going on at this stage of life, right? Appearance is changing, maybe your work ethic is changing, a lot of things are going on in life. This, if you have kids, this can be the most thankless era, right? When they're in that teenage or preteen know-it-all period and there may be aging parents and ugh, there's a lot going on, as I said. So I looked in the mirror the other day and I thought, what is happening with my eyelids? Like they're here and they used to be there and where has half of my hair gone? Ugh.

So if you have defined your worth in terms of your appearance, or maybe in terms of your professional position, money, prestige, you might also be in this time of inner questioning. Maybe you're asking yourself, I worked so hard for all these years and I still feel like I haven't arrived, is this it? There might be lots of feelings, like maybe you're staring into this abyss thinking, do I keep pushing? You know that mirage of success shimmering on the horizon, like, if I keep pushing myself at this rate, will that be it finally? Or have I actually fallen for that too many times? Decline is happening, this is life life-ing. So whether it's your eyelids drooping or your backside drooping or your work mojo drooping, it might feel terrifying and a bit discombobulating. And you might be wondering, is my already poor sense of enoughness going to plummet even further? Grab a cuppa and stick with me. Let's explore.

How would you answer the following 5 yes or no questions? Okay, question number one. Do you define your self-worth in terms of your job title or professional success? Question two, do you quantify your own success in terms of money, power, or prestige? Question three, do you fail to see clearly or are you kind of uncomfortable with what comes after your final professional success? Question four, is your retirement plan to go on and on without stopping? And question five, do you dream of being remembered for your professional successes? According to Arthur Brooks, who's the author of 'From Strength to Strength, finding Success, Happiness, and Deep Purpose in the Second Half of Life', and that will be in the show notes, if you answered yes to any of these questions, chances are you are a success addict. He adds that success addicts tend to feel like losers or in my language, they feel not enough when they see someone else who is more successful because success is fundamentally positional, meaning it's us vis-a-vis someone else.

But decades of research by social scientists shows that positional goods like money, shiny things, titles, status, Instagram followers, new gadgets, a new watch, new handbags, they don't bring happiness, not in the bigger scheme of things, and we kind of know that in our heart of hearts. So he says that this kind of success, like all addictive things, is ultimately unsatisfying because how much money is enough?

How much power is enough? How many shiny things, 'wins', holidays, renovations, gadgets, cute trainers? And what about perfectionists? Way back in episode 7 of this show, we had a conversation with the imperfection specialist, Sarah Normandin and she shared about how perfectionists can get this temporary feeling of okay-ness within themselves when they positively compare themselves with somebody else.

So if, for example, you may look better than some of the other people your age, or you're doing better than a colleague, so that can kind of give you this temporary fix, but when you compare yourself as less than, if more and better is at the kind of core of your identity, it can feel really heavy and hopeless.

All you need to do is think about how do you feel once you've been scrolling on Instagram, if your feed is full of shiny, happy people, right? And then midlife comes along, and your eyelids aren't what they used to be. Your hair is thinning, your body is drooping, your energy and your vavavoom aren't what they used to be.

And you're seeing, like I said, although shiny people rocking it on social media and other losses start to happen. So maybe you're struggling with sleep, which frays, at the perspective of the best of us, right? You can't seem to drink wine anymore, which used to be such a pleasure and it was a centerpiece of so many fun social activities, so that's gone, and you're seeing this repeating pattern of all the shiny things that used to excite you, like the next promotion. It's not the panacea that you thought it was, and you kind of know that now. Oh, and did I mention the joy of chin hairs? Right? So how in a season of life where we seem to be losing a grip on appearance and being easily toned and having a social life and work success that feels like you can see a pathway through right to the end, these pillars of supposed enough-ness, how do we find happiness and okay-ness within our slackening skin?

There is a good thing about middle age. It can be a time of reassessment around what really matters and maybe thinking about how your current habits and thought patterns and mindset are serving you. So Jennifer Lopez inspired me to create this episode. I was reading her recent piece in *Vogue*, the link is in the show notes.

And this bit I'm gonna read to you really landed for me. She said, "You turn yourself into a pretzel for people and think that that's a noble thing to put yourself second. And it's not. Those patterns become deep patterns that you carry with you, and then at a certain point you go, wait, this doesn't feel good. Why am I never happy?" I really felt that for a long time and finally I was just like, "Ugh, it's time to figure me out". So dear listener, if one of the world's most successful, beautiful, talented, rich, influential women is mulling this stuff over in midlife, that suggests to me that all the status, money, beautiful things, non droopy eyelids, perky bottoms, are not the portal to enough-ness.

So what is?

Dr. Robert Waldinger is a director of the Harvard Study of Adult Development and the author of 'The Good Life: Lessons from the World's Longest Scientific Study of Happiness'. I heard him recently on Dr. Mark Hyman's podcast, which is also linked in the show notes. Dr. Waldinger says that in the ongoing Harvard study, which is now 85 years in research, shows that it's not money or achievement-oriented stuff, fame, accolades, that make a good life. It's connection and relationships.

When the original folks from that Harvard study were 80 years old, they were asked what they were most proud of and what they regretted. So it's important to say that these were young men at the outset of this study, and they were followed for 80 years to find out what actually constitutes a life well lived.

So the consistent theme when they got to 80 years old after being monitored for their whole adult lives, the consistent theme was pride in their relationships. I was a good parent, I was a good friend. I mentored people at work, and that was important to me. No one said "I won that award, or I had that position, or I earned all that money".

No one. As for regrets, the big theme was around regretting that they'd spent so much time at work. Hmm, instead of spending more time with people that they cared about. And a regret that was more common in women respondents was spending so much time worrying about what other people thought. You'll also noticed that no one mentioned their chin hairs or weight gain or the promotion they didn't get, or that time in 1997 when they realized at a party that they were dragging a long stream of toilet paper stuck to the heel of their ankle boot. Nope, nobody said that. Which brings me back to the now, here to middle age before we are in our eighties, if we're lucky to make it that far. Isn't it interesting that in the pursuit of what we think is going to make us enough, the very thing that often gets squeezed out of our lives is relationships and connection.

So if like Jennifer Lopez says, “Ugh, it’s time to figure this out”, I have an invitation for you. The work of relationships and connection starts with you. It’s an inside job. A dear friend recently said to me when we were having a WhatsApp exchange, she said, “I’m so sick of being at war with myself. I’m constantly punishing myself and it’s gotta stop”.

This reminds me of a conversation I had with my then coach about 10 years ago. She asked like, “Do you think we should start doing the work of you forgiving yourself?” And I remember being so gobsmacked, I said, “What? Forgive myself for what? And then she gently invited me to see all the ways in which I had driven myself relentlessly, the ways I had talked to myself with such self-hatred and vitriol words I would’ve never said to anybody else.

And then to use Jennifer Lopez’s words, all the ways in which I turned myself into a pretzel for other people, pushing my own needs down, looking for validation, and pats on the head from others. Ohhhh that! And I said to my coach, like, “Yeah, I should probably do that forgiveness work.” So I can’t promise you that we’re gonna achieve that in one podcast episode, but what if we started that work here?

What if you forgave yourself for all the things like pushing yourself beyond your physical limitations or denying yourself rest or thinking you had to win all the time to be worth taking up space. What if you forgave yourself for all the things that you did before you knew better? Like in all those relationships where you think, “Ugh, God, I can’t believe I did that.”

What if you forgave yourself for all the vicious, hateful things you said to your thighs or your stomach, all that chronic sniping? What if you forgave yourself for that? What if you forgave yourself for any of the state of fear or scarcity that you are in right now, thinking that midlife change is a loss of your inherent worth, like you’re somehow becoming irrelevant and less worthy as these things change.

What if you forgave yourself for anything I didn’t know to mention here because your life is your life? And then what if you could be compassionate towards your eyelids and towards your butt and towards your energy levels and towards whatever you’re thinking about life and work and mostly what if you could be compassionate towards your fears?

And then what if you could be open to the possibility that none of what has felt so urgent and throbbing in your career or to do with your body and how it looks that none of that actually really matters in the long run. Could you be open to that possibility that it’s less important than you think it is?

And finally, would you be (in) open to the possibility of reprioritizing your relationships? As something that doesn’t get squeezed out of the busyness of your day-to-day life, but as the thing that will actually really matter in the long run.

Thank you so much for celebrating my 50th episode with me, I’m so glad you’re here. And this is a reminder that the title of this show Enough, the podcast is a play on words. Part of it is a reminder that you are already enough. You don’t need to arrive somewhere. You don’t need more shiny things or titles or money.

You don’t need anything at all. You’re already here, and I’m here to remind you of that. And the other part of the play on words of the podcast is enough, enough, already! Enough of chastising ourselves, enough of being such dicks to ourselves all the time. That’s what I’m also hoping that you’re gonna get here is a little fire and a little challenge to the way that you’ve been being with yourself.

So who do you know who would love to connect with you by the way, and get this referral of this podcast episode to them that might benefit them? I would love for you to share and keep your Spotify and Apple Podcast reviews coming. They make such a difference to get this message out into the world. So thank you in advance for doing that.

And I would also love to hear what you’re taking away from this episode, so feel free to reach out via Instagram @mandylehto. Thank you for listening, it was fun to celebrate with you. Let’s do this all again in two weeks.