

Enough Episode 98: Be direct. Feel awful. Don't fold. With Jon Prince

Mandy: What if the hardest part of becoming more of a truth teller or standing in your power isn't saying the thing? What if it's surviving how it feels afterwards? Or maybe you're trying to be less accommodating, more direct, clear about what you want and less available for everything and everyone else.

Maybe you don't always wanna be the one who volunteers. Or maybe you wish you didn't. Always feel the need to soften your opinion, blunt off the edges with all those emojis. When you send a text or a request to make it seem less direct. Imagine what it could feel like to say no to something that you had no capacity or desire for, and allow someone to be disappointed without crumbling.

And when you actually do any of those things, it can feel aligned, empowering, and then your body revolts, your chest tightens, your brain starts building a legal case against you. Oh my God, you've ruined the relationship. You're too much, you're too blunt, too selfish. And you replay the conversation in forensic detail probably at 2am and then you consider sending a follow-up email to smooth everything over first thing in the morning.

No one talks about this part. So Instagram is full of slogans. I call it fridge magnet talk. Speak your truth, own your power, but no one actually takes you through the wobbles that can follow this new way of being and how discombobulating it can feel. Before we dive in, welcome to Enough the podcast. This is a show for high achievers whose lives look glossy and competent on the outside, but inside.

The question of, am I enough yet? Still hums in the background here. We don't stay in the polished version. We go into the shadow side of a success, the over accommodating the inner critic that never clocks off, and we look for a more sustainable way to live and lead. So today's conversation is precisely about that wobble.

It's about how you hold your nerve when you decide to be different, and your nervous system starts bleeping red, interpreting it as danger. My guest today is John Prince, former poker player, turned coach, and we're unpacking what the poker table taught him about sitting in tension without making a panicked move. Because in poker, if you play a bad hand just to calm yourself down, you lose. And in life, well the same might be true. If you are in the middle of becoming braver and it feels worse, before it feels better, stay with us. Let's get into it with John Prince.

Sometimes I like pick a question or a quote or something just to spring on somebody to sort of get them lubricated and ready to go. This is yours. Uh, written by the poet Christopher Sexton. He's awesome. He's on Instagram as, uh, Chris, the co-creator, and the one that popped for you today for no particular reason.

Other, other than I thought. I'm recording with John today, and this is the one I've chosen is this quote. I just wanna see what comes up as you let it wash over you. So here we go. Your inner child just wants a crayon. And a little more curiosity. I dare you to color outside the lines of who you pretend to be.

Jon: Oh yeah. That, that hits. I feel that, absolutely feel that. Um, yeah. It's this like feeling of being able to be creative and explore, even though that might feel dangerous to. That part of us, that inner child, and, um, go, yeah, going to the edges of that, um, leaning into it, I feel for me it's this feeling of like being exposed. It's like if I, if I'm a bit more playful or if I'm a little, a little bit more silly or, um, I try something a little bit different, it's, it's like a part of me is being exposed and it's, it's getting comfortable with that, that discomfort of, um, you know, there's a way that I should be, or I should be professional or I should.

Deliver things in a certain way, and then you step out of like the, the rules. It's almost like those lines that he's talking about, they're rules that we've taken on that become an identity and there's, there's a part of us that really wants to step out that maybe wasn't allowed to or was told they couldn't, and it's stayed trapped for years and it's, it's going through that, that discomfort of feeling like you're exposed in order to.

Have the freedom to be able to draw wherever you want, which we've all got, but sometimes it feels like we haven't. Got it.

Mandy: So I was at this self-development conference and I decided to run a little experiment because one of the things I'm working on with my own coach is to step into more directness. To step into less people pleasing, less blunting off the edges, less softening direct requests with emojis or qualifiers, like if that's okay with you, it's stepping out of this nice, this good girl or nice guy persona that so many of us.

Have learned where we color inside the lines and I thought, what if I go to this conference just as an experiment? I can always zip the suit of the good girl back up if I choose to. But what if just this one time. I go in and I don't pressure myself to connect with as many people as possible. So what if I didn't over torque into being exceedingly agreeable and staying in conversations long past their due date?

You know, when you're sort of nodding and smiling and you're thinking, how do I. How do I plan my exit strategy out of this conversation or take the responsibility of making this some kind of a life transforming conversation? Like those kind of weird things can happen at these. Self-development sessions or conferences, like every conversation needs to be deep and transformative and sparkling and incredible.

And you know, you walk away from these conversations thinking, oh wow, that person has stretched me and I felt so seen. And then often if you are the one who's doing the seeing and, and. You know, throwing that fairy dust on people, nobody's asked for that, but then it can kind of feel depleting and a little bit empty and scooped out, and it's almost like desperately eyeing around the room with your glass of warm wine, hoping somebody's gonna do that for you.

It's just kind of like a weird dynamic. So I thought, I'm not gonna have that social perma smile. I'm not going to make sure everybody feels extended or welcomed. It's not my event. So I thought, what if I lay all of those behaviors down? And because it was a situation where there was feedback and you know, getting in small groups and pairs, there is a consequence to making those decisions to show up differently.

So it felt like, oh, I didn't die. Or I, you know, that person was okay. I didn't have to be over responsible. And there feels like this little moment of stretch and growth and this little air punch, like yes. And then getting some of the feedback, uh, there were words like, uh. You seem closed up or there seems to be a barrier up, and I thought if you only knew that all that other social smiling stuff like that was the real mask or you seem fierce, I got that on three or four occasions or like very intimidating or whatever else.

I just thought, huh? I didn't judge. I just got really, really curious about it, and the interesting thing happened was on the way home I had this kind of contraction feeling, this sort of contraction behind my sternum of should I have cleaned that up? Like should I have explained myself, oh, should I made that person who thought I was really fierce and intimidating?

Like, should I have turned up the dial on the warmth and you know, done a little tap dancing for approval again. I really wanna explore with you this dance between the expansion of growth, which can be exciting and uncomfortable simultaneously, but then that immediate clamping up and contraction where we can go into a lot of inner negotiation when we're experimenting with a new way of being.

Jon, welcome to the show. I'm so glad you're here. Are you ready to cannonball in and color outside the lines on this one?

Jon: Yeah, absolutely. Thanks for having me, Mandy.

Mandy: So I'm curious when you've had an experience like that too, of a feeling of making a conscious choice to be different because you know that way of being has outgrown you.

Jon: Amen.

Mandy: And you do the thing and you don't die and it's okay and you feel this little air punch moment. And then afterwards, maybe when you're heading home from a situation or you leave a conversation all of a sudden like there's this, this creeping in of this sensation of a contraction. Take me to a time like that.

Jon: There was a moment where I, before I got into coaching, I was a professional poker player and I played for nine years. I got to a point in my career where it just didn't feel like I wanted to, this wasn't the path for me, and I didn't know what my next move was, but I just decided I'm gonna quit poker and I'm gonna go look for a job.

So I looked for a job and I went and looked at different roles and different opportunities. I didn't know what was right or what the best thing was. I ended up going and applying for several recruitment roles because I thought I, as, as a poker player, I hadn't been around a lot of people and I just craved being around people and being in conversations and supporting people.

So I went and, um, applied for recruitment role and I, I went for one role and I went through several interviews and then I didn't get the job and they said, we don't think you're the right fit. And then I spoke to. A friend that I knew at the time, and he had a recruitment company and I took a, he, he was willing to like, take a chance on me and, and give me a shot.

And so I, I started working at his recruitment company and I worked there for, uh, for a month. And I'd go in at eight in the morning with my cup of coffee and I'd work all day and I'd learn as much as I could, soaking up everything from them. And I really, really gave it a go. As the weeks went on, I just wasn't enjoying it.

And I felt like I was really trying hard to make it work. And then I asked myself the question, if I, if I was gonna be here for five years, is that something that I want? But I wanna be here in five years time. And the answer was no. And then, uh, one lunch, and I, I kind of was in that spot where I was feeling that way.

Like, I don't really, this isn't really right, but do I just keep pushing on or, or do I not? Then one lunchtime, um, I was on my break and I came out the lift and the boss was there and he said, uh, how are you getting on? And I just thought, this is a moment to either just be honest or just pretend like, yeah, it's okay.

Everything's all right. And I was like, I'm just gonna, I said, can I be honest? He said, yeah. I said, not great. And he said like, oh, like not great, as in you don't wanna stay here, or, and I said, yeah, yeah. I don't think it's right. I, I really had to kind of lean into being honest in the moment rather than just continuing to kind of push on. 'cause I could have just carried on and tried to make it work or, and I felt really uncomfortable with that, but I kind of went through it and, and shared it and then felt good. And I was like, right, I'm gonna quit and go back to poker. And, um, it was like after I shared that and said that I went back to, to playing poker and I, I.

Sent my, my friend who was the boss, uh, a picture of me playing poker like a few days later or maybe the next day. And he said like, um, you, you know, you've gone back to, back to your comfort zone or back to your safe zone. And it felt like maybe I was, you know, maybe I was running away. You know, there's this feeling of maybe that was happening, but there was also the fact that I was, it just wasn't right for me in that moment, and I couldn't fully explain it. 'cause there's on one level I'm being truthful. And the other level I felt, I felt like really bad for letting the the company down, let my friend down. Um, not following through as well. And there's just like a conflict in there.

Mandy: So I wanna dig into that feeling bad. So if we go back, we kind of take the movie of that scene that you've just brought us into.

You say the thing to the guy who comes outta the elevator. You say the thing you had plucked up, the courage that felt like the right thing to do. What did you feel when those words had come out of your mouth? 'cause you said it felt good. So give us a little color there with the crayon. Like what were you actually feeling?

Jon: I felt honest, like speaking the truth, speaking my truth of this isn't the right thing for me right now. I'm not enjoying it. And I felt like the, that was what felt free. It's what felt like true. It's like around that, wrapped around that is the guilt that maybe I shouldn't feel like that, or maybe I should give it a try.

All these kind of shoulds of how it should be. Or maybe I'm, you know, I'm letting them down.

Mandy: But I'm assuming that piece came a little bit later, or for you, was that happening simultaneously? 'cause I think it felt really good when I was in that conference. Yeah. It felt quite empowering. Yeah. And then on the train I'm like, wah, wah.

Jon: Yeah.

Mandy: I should have cleaned that up. And I act actually had to go and speak to two friends and as soon as I heard myself saying it out, like, no, no, no. I don't need to clean anything up. But I went through that little post growth wobble. That's what I'm curious about. You spoke a truth.

Jon: Yeah,

Mandy: It felt honest. It felt like the right thing to do. It felt in integrity is what I'm hearing you say. And then you said the, there was that chaser of guilt. Tell us about that. Yeah,

Jon: So I describe it as actually more of a should sandwich as I think about it. Or it's like before there's the fear and there's the conflict.

Mandy: Yeah.

Jon: And then I just get grounded in the truth and I share it. And then after then. There's a little bit more of that guilt around it and everything else, all the, all the stories that were there before. I step in my truth and I feel really powerful. And then afterwards there's like the stories coming back or trying to kind of like pull me out of it.

Mandy: And, um, so what were they saying? I want, like, let's really get in there because I think this is important. I think a lot of people perceive growth as, you know, like Maria von trap spinning in the hills and the sound of music. You just feel this liberation and this dizzy dancing sense of freedom. And I wanna get.

In the mud with you because there's mess before there's that sense of freedom. Or sometimes it's during that sense, or sometimes it's after that sense. This stuff is hard and it is like pulling yourself up on your stomach on a mucky hill, like it's not necessarily fun, and I really want to take people into those sensations with two experienced coaches that if it feels like that for you, you're not doing it wrong.

So what was that should sandwich like? Like were you going home on the train and all of a sudden this stuff starts bubbling up? Or what was that like for you?

Jon: It is, it was the moment of having a walk into the office and be around other people feeling like, feeling like a bit of a traitor, feeling like I'm letting them down just because I don't want to be there.

It's almost this debt to loyalty, you know, like having to feeling like. Because I've signed up and I've said yes, then I should be loyal and stay the whole course. But what is the whole course is, is that a month? Is that a year? Is that three years? You know, this idea that once you are part of a team or part of something, then that has to always be the way.

And that was in me, it was like, well, you should be, you shouldn't let people down and you should be loyal. And those kind of thoughts were then, you know, the, the ones that were conflicting with this feeling, that's true for me on the inside of what. I want or what feels right, and so that's what can spin round.

And then it was like, oh, I'm gonna, then now I have to go into the office and tell people that I'm gonna leave. And, and feeling bad about that, essentially.

Mandy: I'm really curious how your poker career helped you to develop emotional capacity. Because A, there's a lot that's involved in playing poker. It's not just a card game.

How did poker train you for that nervous system capacity or that emotional resilience there?

Jon: There were a couple of things in the moment that I was able to see and understand in that given situation that allowed me to navigate the guilt and the shame that was there. One was really just a, an understanding of the distinction of what guilt and shame are.

That guilt is I did something bad and shame is I am bad, and these are both just. These are both thoughts and beliefs. So they come with an extreme feeling and shame being like a horrible feeling where you feel like there's something wrong with you. But getting used to that feeling that it's a feeling, not a reality.

I really come from the understanding that I don't believe anybody is bad or wrong as a person. I think we make mistakes and we do things that we don't like, but that is just purely a judgment. So I was aware at the time. I had enough awareness that that was judgments that I were labeling myself with and it felt really uncomfortable, and I can't deny that experience yet.

That doesn't have to mean I have to jump back to doing what other people want me to do, or having to go to be driven by those feelings. I can experience them and still make the right decision for myself. And also what I'm become very aware of is with guilt. We think that if we feel guilty that we've done something bad or, or made a mistake.

But for me, it points to a rule. Those shoulds that I had, the rules that I had there, they were things that I've learned about, you should be loyal, you shouldn't let people down. You should do this, that, and the other. Well, who says I should? And because I feel guilt, it doesn't mean that I need to let that drive me.

So what poker really. Drilled into me and, and pushed me to uncover was, you know, there'd be many times when I played poker where I'd make a big mistake and it would cost me thousands of dollars, and then that's what would happen. It's that the shoulds would start, well, you should have played this differently and you should have thought this through and you should have done this.

And it used to just happen. And then in the day, minutes and hours after a session, if I made mistakes, I would just beat myself up and I wouldn't be able to stop it. And the more that I brought awareness to. The thoughts that I was having and how optional they are, the more I could sit with those feelings.

And mindfulness and meditation was an unbelievable tool that I practiced all the time, where I would sit in it and I would notice these thoughts of, well, you should have done this and you should have done that. And rather than being in them, I would just be with them. And that really took the sting out.

And then it meant that, wow, like I'm gonna have these feelings and I'm gonna have thoughts that are telling me to do certain things. And I don't have to follow them. So I can be in the experience and not driven by my thoughts and emotions, which then means you can actually make clearer more objective decisions or decisions aligned with who you want to be.

Like when you walk in the room and, and you are gonna be more bold or more detached or a little bit more direct. There's gonna be thoughts and feelings that are completely contradicting that and being with them while you've. Play the role of the person you wanna be or, or follow your truth at the same time.

That was, that was a skill I had to develop playing poker, because otherwise it was just, you're out of control and then you're driven by your emotions and feelings, which can lead to losing a lot of money or having a very stressful existence.

Mandy: So I wanna go into actually how you learned to hone that skill.

And I know you said meditation and other things, but I want to. I wanna get into that experience like we have the, the ability here to get inside your head, which somebody's not gonna get in this exact way in your book or on your socials or anywhere else of when you were in that place where you hadn't calibrated or you hadn't cultivated this skill yet where you might be hemorrhaging money and.

You kind of know that there's a competing tension going on, or you're shooting on yourself, or you sort of feel like you're on one of those downward spiral things. I have a, when I'm in one of those places, the tell for me is visceral. It's always visceral, be before it. It moves into my brain chattering to me.

It usually comes like a sinking feeling somewhere behind my sternum. And there's like this heaviness that's like this sinking heavy feeling that comes into the pit of my stomach. And then it almost feels like somebody's put one of those dental X-ray aprons on my chest. It's like a low pressure heaviness, like I feel almost pinned down by that weight and also by that weight of that wet sandbag in my stomach.

And then there's a tightness that starts to happen. It usually starts around my throat. It moves up into my jaw, and then my neck starts disappearing. Little by little, it's almost like I'm protecting that vulnerable neck area. And then it's like those things happen on fast forward, and then all of a sudden I start negotiating with myself of how I should pull myself back into being agreeable, being a good girl over torquing, making everybody feel comfortable or whatever it might be in that specific situation.

What was that like for you? Take us into a game where you were not necessarily skilled at that yet. Because I want people to like, with a kind of a mall map, like, you are here. This, this is totally normal, that you might be feeling this before we take them through what might work.

Jon: For me, there would be like a tightness in my chest, so like a restrictions.

I'd feel that, but really the, the sign for me where it ramped up was where I would have the, just the inner critic running in my head. So. It would just be saying like, don't do that. You can't do that. What if this happens? What if that goes wrong? And then beating myself up, continuously questioning myself.

And that would run and run and run and run and run. And initially I didn't have a distinction between that and me, so I would just hear that voice and then, well, maybe I'm not that good, or maybe I'm, because it would question my abilities as a player, you know, if I would. There's one thing you do in poker where you go from one level of stakes to the next level.

So you might play \$2 games and then you go to \$4 games. And when you take that leap up, what happens is you play against better opponents because they're playing at a higher level. You also risk losing more money, which your brain and your body are not used to. So it's a, it is a bigger risk and your bankroll shifts a lot more, so you can, yeah, you lose more money potentially, and.

When you're doing that, you, you are gonna experience more swings and you're gonna lose. And my, the narrative would, if I lost and it didn't go well, it'd say, you know, well, you're not good enough. Or maybe you're not cut out for it, or maybe this isn't the right path for you. And if that narrative, the I was believing it to be true, which I wasn't the beginning because I didn't distinguish myself from this voice in my head, then it would cause me to then.

Be down in the dumps and just be like worrying about it and then have to take time off and then like, try and try and fix my feelings and solve my feelings of like, how can I make myself feel better? And that was like a, a cycle that I was in, but when I just noticed that those thoughts could be there, but they don't have to drive me. Um, and that inner critic isn't who I am. It's just trying to protect me. It's just trying to keep me safe. Then. I just is just not listening to it anymore. That, that's the main thing that really, really changed things for me, um, was that I don't have to, I don't, I don't have to listen to that voice essentially.

Mandy: So we're at choice when we've had a little spurt of growth, whether it's being more direct and bold or whether it's. Changing the stakes to a different kind of a game where there is actually more at stake, there's more to win. But it's interesting that you went immediately to, there's more to lose, right?

Because that part of the brain is, is in that loss aversion place. Like it wants to protect what we already have instead of looking at the upside of what's there. And that's why I wanna talk about this because this, this post post growth contraction. Is really, really normal. It can look like physical contractions.

It can look like a sick feeling in your stomach. It can look like your inner critic being let off the chain. And when we don't think about that, this contraction is part of growth. Quite often, I've never experienced growth where that hasn't happened. At least if it's one of those, you're upping the stakes substantially going from a 2 to a \$4 game or, or changing a way of being or whatever it might be, that that is usually one of those moments where, where there's an ebb, there's a flow, and where there's a flow, there's an ebb.

And I think starting to understand that your inner critic will come and it doesn't mean that the growth is bad or wrong or in the wrong direction.

Jon: Yeah, I, I think. Part of this is really understanding what the inner critic's job is to do, and it's to keep us safe, to keep a sense of control, but also to keep us the same because the identity that we have is safe.

It's familiar. What's familiar is safe. We know it. So the moment you take a step out into the unknown or you do something different. So in poker it was stepping up to the next stake. Even if you win the brain's like, well, this isn't, we don't have this much money. We don't play this so. It wants to retreat.

So win, win or lose, you know, if it goes well, it's like, oh, well that was good for now, but what if it doesn't last? Or it can still create all these narratives to pull us back to where we were. And it's how clear are we on that identity and how committed to the identity that we wanna have. Right? Do I want to be playing higher stakes?

Do I want to be more assertive? Do I want to be more of a leader or to, to take more risks? If we're aware that. That's going to, part of that is, you know, even if you get there, there's gonna be, that critic wants to pull you back to what was familiar and what was safe. So that's why when I got that comment and it was, oh, you've gone back to what's comfortable, back to what's safe, there was, part of me is like, oh, should I have stayed and stuck that out?

Was I. Too quick to, to come back. But in reflection and over time I realized, no, it just, it wasn't the right path for me. But that's the kind of voice that's like, no, look, you want to go back to comfort, you wanna go back to safety? 'cause that's what it wants for us.

Mandy: I think this piece that you just touched on is so alive.

For me, this idea of identity withdrawal, that as we start to grow, no matter if it's the teeniest experiment like the one I talked about, or for you, it was that change of career and then going back and you know, having to figure out, well, if I'm not that, if I'm not a. Recruitment person, headhunter, and I'm not a poker player, like it's this.

It's this place of identity shift, as you said, and I think the inner critic, it just that is fuel for the inner critic and also making a decision that turns out to be the right one in that moment, or when some kind of growth happens, it doesn't mean it goes away. I'm so glad you mentioned that because the identity hasn't necessarily fully formed or.

The clay pot hasn't dried and become solid yet, so to speak. So the inner critic is constantly there. And I love that you drew attention to that because I think when we think, oh, when I make a big decision and I step into boldness, that that voice quiets down. And I'm hearing you say the opposite in your experience.

Jon: Yeah. And it and it, it never goes away. So that's why for, for me, it's a journey of constant expansion. 'cause when we are really connected to our true selves, which is. Always growing and evolving and expanding. You know, the same way the universe is constantly expanding. We are within ourselves wanting to grow and that's growing into new identities.

It's not just being one person and staying the same, but there is a discomfort and a pain towards when we do change identities. And that can be changing roles, changing careers, or even just changing aspects of yourself. There is, yeah. There's a kickback on it because it feels like. You're not being yourself.

And it's like a, it almost stings a little bit as you step out of who you've been and you, you play a new role. And it can be kind of any area of life really, but it doesn't really end because the, as you are gonna keep growing over time or changing, there's gonna be this expansion of identity, of doing certain things in a new way that feel really different.

And I think this is what can stop us from having habits that stick long term. 'cause you go and do it for a period of time and then there's part of you that's like, well, we did that for a bit and let's go back to who we were. Versus getting really clear on, no, this is who we are now. And I think for me, that's really getting clear on who we are as as people.

If we're too attached to an identity, then it becomes just that. So for me, if like playing poker, it's like if that's who I am, then the moment I go to do something else, which was coaching, for example. It feels really un, I feel like an imposter. It feels like that's not who I am. I'm a poker player. Go back to that. It's safe, it's familiar, but you're constantly gonna have to step into new roles in order to to expand and it becomes easier the less we identify with that inner critic. The thoughts that we have in the past.

Mandy: So what I wanna do is I wanna get really, really specific in terms of maybe somebody is at a stage of their life where they're just like, I'm done with that. You know, Instagram is full of like, I'm over that, I'm not available for that anymore. But actually when we start to think about like, what does that actually mean?

As I'm kind of blacksmithing a new identity for myself, what does that actually mean? If I'm no longer available to be over accommodating or I'm no longer a poker player or an investment banker, or I'm no longer tolerating my siblings bad behavior, it's one thing to make a declaration. And put fire emojis onto somebody's Instagram post.

It's something else to actually start to re-identify yourself as the person who walks through the world in this way, and to color outside the lines of what you think your identity was in the past, where somebody may have been more compliant, more tolerant, more over responsible. All of those things that are convenient for other people.

Our lives. So this shifting of identity, I have some little things called growing pains that I wanna throw at you, real life examples. And I just want you with your coach hat on now. And if there's anything relevant from how you used poker to calibrate your nervous system and deal with uncertainty, throw it in.

So the first one is, you know those emails that you get at 13 at night, when you have the quick, it says, quick favor. The subject line, it's 13 PM and it's from that person. You know that person who sends those emails at 13 at night, and if somebody's like, I'm no longer available for that. What could somebody do?

They're at a choice point. Part of their competing commitment is I wanna show how responsive I am. I, I want to be a good employee, I wanna be well thought of. But I want us to go into those little choice points, which I call growing pains. 'cause growth sometimes has a, has a bit of pain. So riff with me on what somebody could do in that scenario.

Jon: I think the first step is we create a commitment around what we want, and that can be. That you don't want to, you're not gonna be contactable after 8 PM So even if you see the email, number one is you have a commitment. You create a commitment that I'm not gonna reply to emails after 8 PM we, along with a commitment, you can have some rules that you create.

These are consciously created rules. They're not like shoulds, like they've been forced upon us, but they're, they're consciously created rules because they work for you and they help you keep your commitment. That wall could be, even if it's, unless it's like someone's arms falling off or something, I'm not gonna reply.

The most important thing I think, mentally to see with this is that. It's your own itch that you want to scratch when it comes to wanting to reply to that email. Now, I've had this with clients because I will set a boundary. It might be around if they're like, 'cause I offer email support and they might email and email and email.

One of my things is I don't reply on the weekends. Weekends I'm off and with the family and there might be come, something come in and it's easy for me to reply, but I have to then pause my own need to reply to it. So it's really knowing that your boundaries, when you're setting them, they're always about what, what's right for you.

And if other people don't understand that, that's really not on you, it's up to them unless you have an agreement. If you've got a work agreement that you're gonna be working 24 7, that would be something that would need to be changed. You need a new agreement and new rules around it, but setting your own rules on it and then practicing holding those rules when they're difficult for you, that's really the the hardest part. You've got the other people and what their reactions might be. But first it's dealing with your own internal kind of, I really want to do this because, and reminding yourself having a really clear reason of why you're setting that boundary in the first place. So, you know, it might be that me replying to this and getting my headspace in this is gonna mean I'm more tired and a and a less energetic employee the next day.

Or it's gonna take me away from time with my partner or my family, or it's gonna take me away from time recharging. So you've got a commitment, some rules to go with it, and a real just a, a reason why you are doing it for yourself. And then the most important thing is like knowing that it's like there's a part of you, it's like the, I call it the itch that you wanna scratch, but it's like, it's gonna feel uncomfortable to leave it.

Mandy: But it's a little bit more, that's where I wanna go. Like in there when you're like, oh, it would just take me 3 seconds and then it would,

Jon: yeah,

Mandy: it would close that loop in my brain and I could move on. But it's the, it's the pausing and the staying in that tension. That's what I'm talking about. Like growing the capacity to be in the discomfort of that.

Jon: Yeah. That tension is one of the most important things for us to, it's so funny that you say this 'cause I have a post-it note literally on my computer right now that says master tension. Okay. And like a way to see tension is, it's a, it's a little bit like a loop gets opened and all our brain wants to do is close the loop, right?

And it feels really uncomfortable to sit in the tension of not closing it. And there are multiple ways that we can practice this. Simple things like if you are used to just finishing your food, 'cause you always clear your plate. That's something I do. Just leaving a little bit of food on the plate and you sit there and you see it and you feel really uncomfortable, like you wanna finish it.

Mandy: Those three peas are staring you down.

Jon: You're just like in such a waist and it's bad for the environment and all this other stuff, but just leaving it. And then you get used to the tension and it's not like you have to do this with everything all the time. That would be like crazy willpower, but where does it matter the most?

And if you're able to hold tension in those spaces where it matters the most to you, that's where you'll have the biggest breakthroughs. Ultimately over time that tension becomes less and less and less and you get more familiar with it and it's like drops off. But in the beginning, yeah, like your brain's just designed to keep you doing what you've always been doing.

And it, I think this is why commitment is helpful around these areas because commitment can be there to keep you in when your brain wants to talk you out of it. And, and part of this is that, and the other part is just nosing the narrative in your head that really is gonna get, gets very creative. With ideas of like, and, and it gets, it gets so creative to the point that it's really real and it, sometimes it's quite nasty, you know, like, oh, if you don't reply, you're a bad person, or like, you are gonna get fired or whatever.

And it's like, can you just hold your ground in that? And the, the, the light at the end of the tunnel with this is, yeah, sometimes you're gonna get kicked back and somebody might be annoyed and you get grounded in it and you hold strong. But the most exciting thing is when you surprise yourself. You really like stay in that and you don't do it.

And then you, you maybe you say the next day and you hold your boundary and say, just to let you know, I won't be replying to emails at 13. The last time's gonna be 8 PM And then somebody says, oh, I really respect that. And you get that positive feedback. And that is, those moments can really spur you forward in, in getting grounded in what you wanna do.

Mandy: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. And I guess poker helped you to build your nerve in that respect. 'cause there must've been times where you were holding literally a poker face. Yeah. And your inner critic and your nervous system was screaming and you had to sit still and hold the tension.

Jon: Yeah, absolutely. And it's, there's the, there's the outward, you know, holding your poker face and not letting people see, but there's the inner.

Your own desire to follow, like what you've always done in the past, and that this can be strategy wise in poker. You know, you followed a particular strategy of this is the right way to play, but then your gut instinct is screaming at you like, something isn't right here. I need to do something different.

And what you've gotta be willing to do is go through that and take, take the action whether it works out or not. And part of that is just trusting your own inner guidance system that. You're not gonna get it right every time. And, and that this is where like building self-trust doesn't come from doing it and it working out. 'cause that is just the myth about self-trust is I do do it. It works out, you know, in poker that's the play works out

and everything's great, but it's self-trust is doing it when it doesn't work out. Not beating yourself up, but actually learning from it, analyzing it, not judging yourself, but learning from the actual data and then making another decision as well.

Mandy: Whilst probably judging yourself and beating yourself up, that's also part of that post expansion contraction is it's normal to go through that until maybe it starts to taper off at some stage.

Jon: Yeah, and I, I really think 'cause it's so backwards because when that judge gets loud and it's really loud and it's rampant, you're usually onto some exciting kind of area.

You're moving in a direction that's really, really exciting. I just remember there's a quote from David Barry where he talks about, you know, when you're feeling out of your comfort zone and your feet are not quite touching the ground you're in, you're in the space to do something exciting. And so it's, it's not meant to feel comfortable.

If it feels comfortable, it's who you've always been. Nothing's changing. But if it is uncomfortable and you've got that, you've got the critic shouting at you, then you are, you are likely moving in the right direction. I got used to this so many times where before I'd do presentations or group work. In the beginning when I was more nervous about it and I'd, I'd be irritable and I'd have this kind of critic go in the days before, but I would just note that and be okay with it.

Even that my wife would be there. I'd say, look, I just wanna make you aware if I'm a bit more irritable now, that's because I've got presentation coming up and I can just sense there's a bit of. Energy going on, but it's not about you. I just wanna make you aware of that and call it out.

Mandy: Nice.

Jon: And just having that awareness rather than having to get rid of it or solve it or fix it, is again, part of the game as well.

It's when we're trying to like, I don't wanna feel like that, or I don't wanna have these judgments. Then what do we do to get rid of them? We go back to the safe, you know, safe zone. Or if I don't wanna have those judgments, then I'm. I'll just email back and then it will all go away. And it does go away

Mandy: For now.

Jon: Yeah. Yeah. Well done. And then comes back.

Mandy You're on a teams call full of stressed senior stakeholders. Your boss pipes up and said, we need someone to lead this. The silence feels like an eternity, and it's probably only been about five, six seconds, but your nervous system is jacked. Your chest is tight, your jaw is tight. The voice in your head is screaming.

Uh, don't be awkward. Be the reliable one. Say yes. Put everyone outta their misery. And if you're honest, you don't actually have any capacity or desire to lead this thing, but the silence feels unbearable. So you volunteer not from clarity, but from a desire for relief In poker, that's called Tilt. It's when you make a move to escape the feeling, not because it's the right play.

And the pros like John have learned this. You don't play the hand just to calm yourself down. You reset, you decide, and then you stay in the game. So it's an awkward teams meeting moment. Here's three poker moves that might be helpful for you. First ground the body. That can be as simple as feeling your feet in your shoes on the floor and then taking a long exhale.

What you're doing is you're putting a crowbar in that machinery of things going really fast in your brain, taking off into inner critic land. Second name the wobble that might look like saying to yourself, I'm feeling tension and I'm okay. And you might repeat that over and over. Tension is okay. I'm feeling uncomfortable.

I'm feeling tense. It's okay. I'm okay. Third, delay the move. Let the silence sit one beat longer than you normally would, and see what happens. If you don't rescue it, then repeat, because here's the reframe, silence is not a threat. Awkwardness is not a threat. It's not abandonment. It's not about incompetence.

It's not about having to prove yourself, silence and awkwardness their data. Silence can be space. Silence can be the place where real players decide their next move. And sometimes the most powerful move is not filling that silence. It's holding it. So let's hear how John learned to sit with awkward silences without giving into the tension.

Jon: I think it, it is, it's the journey of, I was very uncomfortable with the silence. I would try and fill. Fill the blanks and, and say different things. And often, you know, as a coach, many times I will sit with people and just sit there. And sometimes I'll just do it just as a practice for both of us. Let's just see who breaks the silence first.

And sometimes it's so awkward. They're like, call out the awkwardness. But it's that feeling of discomfort and I think it's, it's that we feel like we need to say something to fill it. But getting used to that discomfort, then all of a sudden it's, it is. It's something that you, you're okay with yourself and your own awkwardness.

Mandy I wanted there to be a little silence after you said that, and I would love you to say that again. 'cause mics around the world dropped everywhere. Say that again.

Jon: Being okay with your own awkwardness.

Mandy: What do you mean?

Jon: So one of the things that I, I've like, I've done some speaking in my time and. When if we feel awkward ourselves, other people, then they're gonna pick up on it.

But as you feel, you might feel awkward yourself, but you ground yourself into it. You're just okay with that awkwardness. You kind of sit with it for a moment. You don't make it go away, but you just, you're gonna be with it. It eventually dissipates and then you feel comfortable again. And sometimes that's very quickly.

Sometimes it takes a bit longer, but you just stay with them. It's not this need that I need to do something or solve it or get away from it in order to be okay. And when I've done that, that's what, 'cause what I would do if I was speaking, I'd feel this awkwardness and I'm like, right, I need to say something or do something extra, but I'm paring that on top of the awkwardness.

But if I'm, I'm feeling a little bit awkward now. Let me just stand and be quiet in front of people and feel okay. Sometimes it's just a, a breath. You get into that space and you feel all right, and then you are creating from that space, like the spaciousness from the presence, rather than creating from the awkwardness, which is what we try and do when we say something, because I'm feeling awkward.

So what can I say to get away from that? We were talking earlier about, you know, so something maybe that I hadn't thought about or spoke about before on a podcast, and something for me actually is being a delayed processor, which I didn't even know what that was until. A number of months ago, I was doing a speaking training with amazing lady called Gail Larson.

She's like, absolutely phenomenal. I got, I, I was doing, it was transformational speaking, but we got a lot more, uh uh, it went a lot deeper than that. And one of the things you mentioned is sometimes when someone's a delayed processor, you know, something happens and then you don't really know what to say or what to think in the moment.

It takes time for you to kind of, for the penny to drop. Then, you know, then a minute later, an hour later or a day later, you're like, oh, you've got the exact answer that you needed. Or it comes to you. And I have this all the time on podcast where I get asked a question and then I'm like, and then two days later this the, the idea drops.

And, um, part of that is like, just that can be part of it as well. If you think, oh, well I should know right now and I should have the answers. Sometimes we just don't. And that's okay. Settling into it, just being okay with yourself. When, when that is the case again, you just get okay with that tension and not having to solve or fix it quite, it seems like quite a big theme here actually of, uh, so many of the challenges.

It's like, let me see how I can fix and solve it, and that leads us to go back to old habitual compulsive ways of being rather than conscious. Align choices.

Mandy: We cannot grow without some contraction. We cannot grow with kicking the hornet's nest of our inner critic. I think it's the expecting those things as part of the journey and being really clear that you're not doing anything wrong, uh, and you know that you honed your craft in this. Whilst learning how to hold a poker face on the outside and hold your nerve and hold your nerve and hold your nerve, even though you might have been feeling an entirely different experience on the inside, and eventually the two will reconcile, but it's not gonna be comfortable or elegant necessarily, or whatever the opposite of awkward is.

In the moment. And I think it's just, I think for me, the big takeaway from this conversation is just, I sort of knew that, but it's really come to the surface of this is part of growth, this is part of going into uncertainty, this is part of changing. Identities are lumpy, messy, constantly changing, and I think this sounds like an invitation to Yeah, you're, you're just gonna be riding sidecar with this motley crew of sensations and beliefs and old ways of being as you shed them.

Jon: Yeah, and you know, there's this idea of like, just being completely free of all of it and you, you break through everything and then you're just totally confident and you go and do what you want. And it's like, the way I see this and, and one of a great skill is being non-reactive. Now, it doesn't mean not having reactions, it means experiencing those reactions, sitting and holding them, and then making a conscious choice.

Non-reactive does not mean being detached, having no emotions, having no fears and doubts. It means being with them and then making the, the, the choice. And the best example of this, a real clear example for people to picture and and remember is James Bond. Everyone sees James Bond as this cool character that goes and like people are throwing stuff at him and he is just like walking along, dealing with it and.

One of the most recent films, I can't remember which one it is, it might have been Casino Royal. There's one where he's in a shower and he is crying and he's completely breaking down, and we get a glimpse of inside James Bond's head and inside his emotional world where he's got that going on on the inside all the time.

He's just very good at regulating himself, uh, calming himself and making centered choices, like making committed choices, playing the role of James Bond. It doesn't mean on the inside he's super calm. It means he's just not reacting to the outside world. He's not reacting to other people because they said you should do this.

No, it's, I feel that, but here's the role I'm playing. Here's where I'm choosing to be, and that's what's possible. I think for me it's self-acceptance and, and acceptance doesn't mean agreeing with or liking the thoughts and feelings we have. It just means I'm gonna be okay with it. And it's like when that's there.

We are not, when you're not fighting it or trying to get rid of it, you can actually make the choices and you can show up no matter how you feel, but in a way that works for you, that is aligned with your truth and who you wanna be.

Mandy: Let's be honest. You don't struggle with boundaries. You struggle with the hangover. After you've set one, you say the thing in quite a direct manner. You don't volunteer. You hold the awkward silence and then your body goes, what have you done? We're gonna die. The red lights start flashing, bleep, bleep, bleep.

Your inner critic is off the leash. You're not dying. You're detoxing from approval. That wobble isn't a warning. It's the withdrawal of an old identity. And poker players know this. The worst move to make at the table is the one you make just to calm yourself down. Same in life. Don't rush it. Don't send the softening.

Follow-up text. Avoid the emojis. Don't inflate yourself into a conversational airbag just to avoid that tense feeling. Silence isn't a threat. It's power that hasn't yet been filled up. Hold the tension. You're okay, John. Thank you for this and for the poker face on the outside and the honesty about the storm on the inside, and to you listening if you're experimenting with being braver and it feels slightly al and deeply inconvenient.

Good, that's the edge. I'm Dr. Mandy Leto and this is enough. See you next time.