

Hello there. And thank you so much for tuning in. Welcome to this episode, I have to tell you, I am very, very excited to be here today and share with you one of the most important lessons I have ever learned. And I mean that with all sincerity.

It is one of the simplest, yet most expansive and useful lessons that I've ever learned and that I'm still learning. There are many layers to this, and you can go very deep, and it is extremely helpful in terms of self-leadership.

And before we dive in, I want to take a moment to say a huge, huge heartfelt thank you to all of you for your support. For those of you who have sent in emails and voice memos and notes and have shared this podcast. I knew that this is going to be a lot of fun, but I did not realize how cool it would be to connect with all of you and to get to know you. So, it's been a lot of fun for me and extremely rewarding. So, thank you very, very much. And I will tell you that the easiest way for you to connect with me is to go to my website, which is www.thewellness.coach, right, so it's thewellness.coach, not thewellness.com. And in the very bottom, there's a red tab, it's on every single page, and it literally says Connect, and you can shoot me a question or an email very quickly right there.

So, we are now moving into the fall. Right? It is almost Halloween, it's right around the corner. And if you've been in any major store, like Target, or a grocery store, and you have seen all of the Halloween decorations, right next to it, you might also have seen some holiday decorations as in Christmas, Thanksgiving, Hanukkah. So, what I want you to do before we dive in, is to take a second and figure out what you think about that. What do you think about those holiday decorations being right next to the Halloween candy?

Now there are several ways that you could think about it. And the first one is you could think this is ridiculous. You can have a negative thought, right? I typed in Christmas decorations up at Halloween into my internet browser. And I found so many interesting opinions about this. And many of them were negative like this is ridiculous. Like I saw somebody wrote, "Why do people find it acceptable to put up Christmas decorations before Halloween? That is absurd". And then of course there were questions like, "what date do Christmas decorations get to go up?" And "when do they have to come down? Is it too early to decorate for Christmas? When do I take my Halloween decorations out?" There's a big discussion about what is appropriate. And many people think it's extremely negative to have Christmas decorations, or even holiday songs playing in department stores when it's not even Halloween yet. So, what do you think about it?

Tell you what I think about it is I think it's great. I think it's a positive thing. Because it gives us an opportunity to think about what we think about Halloween decorations and next to Christmas decorations. And you know, I'm all about thinking about our thoughts. And I also like to kind of group these last three months together October, November, and December. I like to think of it as a time of celebration. Starting with that crazy holiday of Halloween.

I don't have kids who dress up anymore, but boy is it fun. And it is also an opportunity to watch candy and our cravings around it. And how we begin to think about Thanksgiving, and the holidays and how we are going to celebrate or stress out over our family and Christmas. And it's also an opportunity to get a head start in the new year. To start thinking in a fresh and new way right now about the holiday decorations right next to the Halloween candy about how you are going to approach the holidays, and what you are going to bring into the new year.

So, I like to make the Halloween candy so that means something positive. And then you might be in this third camp or you're like you know what, I don't have an opinion one way or the other, I haven't really thought about it, it's not that big of a deal really hasn't even crossed my mind. And I don't care about it one way or the other. So, you could say that maybe you feel neutral about it. So just identify three ways that you could feel about this idea of having holiday decorations right next to the Halloween candy and one is positive, one is negative, and one is neutral.

And the truth is that no matter what you think about the candy, the neutral candy sitting next to the neutral menorah, or the neutral Christmas decorations, the truth is that they are neutral. That those are just things that are sitting there on shelf. And that is what we're talking about today. We're talking about the power of neutrality.

Now, I know that the idea of Halloween and Christmas decorations being next to each other, it's probably not that big of a deal, right? It's not that big of a concept. But it's a great way to start to think about how you think about events, specifically circumstances that are all inherently neutral. And that's it right there. That is the one simple sentence that I'm inviting you to think about that all circumstances are neutral, until you have a thought about them.

And that includes everything. Everything that happens in our lives is neutral, until we have a thought about it. And the only reason that we think that something has ever gone wrong, is because we have a thought that something's gone wrong. And the only reason that we think that something has gone right, is because we have a thought that something has gone right. The event themselves are neutral.

And so today, we are going to talk about why circumstances are neutral, and how it is so beneficial to understand this on a deeper level. And why it is so hard to wrap our brains around this concept, even though it is fairly simple. And then finally, we're going to talk about how you can use this concept really to have more agency over your life and spend more time creating the life that you want, and less time ruminating over neutral circumstances.

So, let's start by defining circumstances. One of the things that we do in Healthy Leader Inner Circle and in our programs is to talk about the difference between the internal environment and the external environment. And we really do focus mostly on the internal environment. And that is you. That is your thoughts, your emotions, the health of your body, what you actually are doing. That is, you and then everything else is the external environment. That includes your family, and the weather and your current job opportunities and whether or not your dog is barking and all of those external events. Those events are facts are the facts of the story.

So, when you start to tell a story about what is going on in your life, and we say, "Just give me the circumstances", it's kind of like that TV show, Dragnet. And Joe Friday is like just the facts, man, I just want the facts. So, circumstances are just the facts. And they are things like the temperature is 90 degrees out. There is a car that just banged into another car. They are out of toilet paper at the store. My neighbor's dog is barking. There is a certain number in my bank account right now. There's a certain number on the scale.

So, all of those are facts, they're not generally that intriguing, or really even all that interesting, but they're just the facts. What I want you to notice is that those facts are outside of us, those are the external circumstances. And here's the drumroll moment, we have no control over them as they currently exist. And this is a hard one for many people to swallow, I know that it was for me, because we are constantly trying to control those external circumstances. And it may even be part of your job, you're trying to change the sales number, you're trying to change your culture, you're trying to get your kids to behave without arguing with you. And what we are always doing in general is trying to manipulate that environment. And really, we cannot we have no control over what already is.

And I want to be clear that I am not suggesting that you do not try to institute change. Of course, that is what we are all doing. But right now, are focusing in on here is understanding that when something exists, when it already is. And we make that external circumstance mean something that that is what is creating our experience of life, not the thing itself.

And understanding that facts are neutral. And what we think about them is what creates our experiences is extremely powerful.

So, if we were to take those examples, the temperature is, I don't know, 90 degrees out, and then you add a thought and I'm going to be sweating like a pig. And while I'm golfing, and it's going to look really disgusting to my clients, and then I'm trying to impress, that's going to you're making the temperature mean something. There's a car accident right in front of you, and the car accident is your car and you're thinking holy schmoly now it's going to cost X amount of dollars, I'm going to be late for my meeting, this is going to be a big pain, now you're making that fact mean something. If they happen to be out of toilet paper at the store, you can think the thought, "oh my gosh, now I don't have to go to another store, I'm going to have to listen to my mother-in-law moaning" or whatever thought you're going to have about it, you now are making that external event mean something. Your neighbor's dog is barking, and then it's going to wake up your child, and then you're not going to be able to get anything done, and they're going to be grumpy.

So, you can see how we have these external circumstances that are neutral. And they do not mean anything. And so, we have a thought about them. And we add drama, to those neutral circumstances, by our thoughts. And I want to be clear that it is natural for us to do that, right? We instinctively are making judgments about things so that we can set up our world so that we can be safe, that we can be comfortable, so that we can avoid pain and be as efficient as we possibly can. Our brains are designed to do that. And the great news is that your brain was also designed to be able to differentiate from facts and your thoughts. You are able to distinguish to witness your own thoughts to discern between the external circumstance and your thoughts. Thing is that most of us have never been taught how to do that.

And so that is what we're going to talk about today. And I know that this seems like an extremely simple concept. But it can be really challenging to grasp, especially when we're talking about things that are going on in our lives. Stories that we are really attached to. Our lower brain, our ego likes to reject this idea and say, "No, no, no, this fact this circumstance, this ain't neutral. your circumstances are neutral, but this one is not". And sometimes our brain just forgets that circumstances are neutral. And there are, I would say, many challenges to implementing this concept. And I'm going to highlight three of them.

And the first is that we all have brains that have these practiced thought loops, right? In other words, the way that I think about something, a thing in my life, happens instantaneously, my brain has thought that thought many times and is really good at firing that neural pathway.

And these are practiced thought loops. They are literally habits have a way of thinking and in order to change those habits, requires consistent redirection to create new neural pathways that are even stronger. That takes time and it takes practice, and it takes energy.

So, here's an example. I'm working with someone who is practicing keeping calm while parenting and they are parenting a teenager. And believe me, I get it. I've had three of them. And teenagers and in children in general, like having your hearts walk around outside your body. And so, it is one of those events, parenting is one of those events that makes it difficult to understand that circumstances are neutral. So, this individual has a teenager who isn't following through on their chores. And we were talking about this specific chore of taking the trash out. And she was saying that when she sees that the garbage is full in the kitchen, and she knows full well that her child is using the garbage and can see that the garbage is full, and then it needs to be taken out that it really starts to get her blood boiling. And it starts with the simple thought of, "he hasn't taken the trash out again". And the thought loop is, "this is the third time in a row. And he's not listening. And he disrespects me". And it goes on and on and on. And this is her thought patterns. This is her habitual way of thinking. And by the time he comes down from getting ready for school and starts to pour a bowl of cereal, she is already jumping in. She's like ready to get on it about why he hasn't taken the trash out before he has had a chance to yawn.

And so, this is a great example of how we blame the outside world, the external world for our emotions. It was easy for her to say, "Listen, if you just take the trash out, then I wouldn't be on him. Right?" So those practice thought habits make it really hard to remember that you get to choose how you are thinking about the neutral event of the trash can being full.

The second reason it is so challenging for us is because we are surrounded by people who will generally agree with us. In her instance, it was her husband agrees with her, "yeah, that he has not been doing what he said he was supposed to do". And his siblings complain about how he doesn't do other things that he said that he was going to do. And then your neighbor has a child who is a very shiny and squeaky-clean student who does all of his chores and gets good grades. And the neighbors are like, "yeah, you need to get that under control, you need to make sure that he is following through on his chores, because if he doesn't, you know it's going to happen". So, you have everyone around you who is agreeing that if he doesn't get the chores out that that means something. So that's the second reason it's challenging for our brains.

And the third one is that we are constantly looking for evidence to prove that our circumstances are not neutral, but that they are either negative or they are positive. And our brains are really good at that. We are looking for a lot of reasons to prove why our circumstance is not neutral. And again, in this instance, it's not only does he not take the trash out, he doesn't do his other chores, and that this has been happening for a long time. And he's disrespectful in other ways. He plays his music too loudly; he spends too much time on his phone. He doesn't look up when I'm talking to him. And he doesn't care about this, what else does he care about? And we literally have this like filing cabinet of reasons why the fact that he does not take the trash out is not a neutral event at all. What it really means is and then you fill in. And so, our brains are challenged by these thought loops, and by people around us agreeing. And also, we already have a lot of evidence, we're looking for evidence and so understanding that the fact that the trash hasn't been emptied is a neutral event can seem really challenging.

So, I want to talk about how you can use this concept to gain more agency over your life and to actually spend time creating the type of relationships that you want with your child, with other people. Engaging your energy in ways that are fruitful and spending less time ruminating. And I want to say as we go through this, want to underline, and double underline that the goal isn't to stop having thoughts, or even to stop making certain circumstances mean something negative, or something positive. It is to understand that you have a choice about it.

I want to share with you that there are, for sure, things in the world that I want to feel sad about, or quote-unquote negative about, or to perhaps even ruminate on a little bit, and I'll share with you that my father passed away a little over a year ago, and I sure want to be sad about that. I miss him dearly, I cry, and I want to feel that way, I want to miss him. And I'll have to tell you that even as I miss him, the way that I am missing him is changing as time passes. And as difficult as it may seem to say this or to hear this, my father's death is a neutral event. And I am the one who gets to decide how I want to feel about his passing.

And as I was just starting to say that the way that I miss him is evolving. And so now, after a year and six months, a little bit more than that, there are less tears than there were when he first passed. And my grieving for him, and my sadness has changed, because my thoughts have changed. He enters into my prayer and my meditation and the energy about him and missing him is more about seeing him in my mind's eye and thinking about what he might do in a certain circumstance, or how he might tell me what he thinks about something.

And so, the neutral fact that he has passed, still exists, it exists as much as it existed the day that he died. But the way that I think about it is different. And I love that I know that I get to choose to change how I think about it, and to choose if I want to be super sad again one day, or if I want to really rejoice in his life, and to be joyful about him.

And so, this is really the crux of the power of understanding the neutrality of circumstances. And that is that when you are truly able to understand that circumstances are neutral. It is such a powerful and freeing place to be. It means that you are no longer a victim to anything to anything that is going on in your life. It means you have full agency and responsibility over the way that you are going to respond. And as a leader, this is a really big deal. Because you might be dealing with millions or billions of dollars of revenue. Or your board might be making decisions about who's going to stay and who is going to go. Or you might be dealing with family pressures, your marriage or relationship issues while simultaneously trying to figure out how to keep a big client from leaving. And all of those, again, I'm going to double red underline, all of those circumstances are neutral. And this can be really hard to understand, but it is true.

So how do you use this knowledge that circumstances are neutral to your advantage. And there are three key ways that I want to point out and the first one is to literally just become aware of the difference between the external circumstances and your thoughts about circumstances. And it's a little more lighthearted and fun to start with things that we all kind of agree on, we culturally agree on that there are some things that are positive, and there's some things that are negative, and our brains are all in on these group things.

So, one of them is the idea of money. So, let's imagine that you just got a huge sum of money. And most of us would agree that that's pretty great that that is a positive thing. And money is just paper, or metal, or a number on the computer or on a spreadsheet. And that is all it is. Money itself is neutral. It isn't good. It isn't bad. Until we have a thought about it. So, getting a huge sum of money could be really exciting for you, and you could be extremely grateful, I would be, and again, it's neutral. So, you can have the thoughts, "This is fantastic. This is what I'm going to do with this money. I'm going to have so much more time on my hand, I'm going to take vacations, I'm going to buy certain things for certain people". And you could also be thinking, "Oh shoot, this sum of money is going to push me over into the next tax bracket. And I'm going to lose money. And you know what that's going to mean? It's going to mean that I have to layoff certain people and then have to figure out these other things, etc., etc., etc.". So, you can see how getting money could be a good thing, or it could be a bad thing. And the truth is, getting a certain amount of money is neutral.

Another fun example is a new baby. Right? How could a new baby be anything but crazy positive and exciting? And I'll bring this to my own personal life, I just got two new babies as in two new puppies. And that is so exciting. How could a new baby or a new puppy be anything but extremely positive, right? And so, we think about all of the possibilities, and all the fun and all of the cuddling and all of the joy and all of the potential. And again, the truth is that a baby, just as it is a human being, and it exists, a puppy is a dog, and it exists, and they are also neutral. And we can make either one of those a baby or a puppy or anything else that is occurring in your life neutral. And we can also make it negative, I can definitely talk to you about how difficult it has been to have two sibling puppies and all the messes that they make. And I could tell a big story about how it's been frustrating or overwhelming. And so again, the baby and the puppy, they're neutral. People are neutral. Things that people do, things that people say, babies, puppies, all of it are neutral.

And this concept gets a little harder to grasp when we start to talk about those bigger issues. When we talk about life and death. We talk about political issues, and we talk about democrat versus republican and healthcare and education, and immigration and the economy. And we can just turn on the TV or take a look at our phones. And we can see how people take neutral events and are applying their story to them all of the time. And there are people who disagree about neutral circumstances all the time.

Now, I'm not going to get into politics or any of that. But what I invite for you to do is to think about your story and your belief system. And just realize what they are, are your stories, your interpretations, your thoughts that you are putting on top of external, neutral circumstances. So, I want to be clear that I'm not asking you to give up your story or your beliefs, all I'm asking you to do is to realize that they are stories. That they are sentences in your head that make up a story. And those sentences are your thoughts. And so, you want to be able to first and foremost discern between the neutral events, the facts, and your story and what you are making it mean.

And then that leads us into the second step, which is to look at the impact that your story is having on you and your life and the way that you are showing up in the world and who you are being. So, as you step back and look at the story and the impact that it has, if it is propelling you to your next right action, if it is helping you to feel really good about where you are in life, and it is helping you to be the best version of yourself and your relationships, then by all means, you keep that story. You keep the story that you're telling about those neutral circumstances, it's serving you, it's the right story for you. And if the story that you are telling is not serving you, if it is not helping you to lead your best life, if it is creating energy and emotions that are pulling you down. Then take a look at that impact.

So, I want to share with you a story of somebody whom I'm working with right now to illustrate this point. And he is right now looking for another job at a very high level. And he just made it through a process pretty far through the process and he ultimately was not chosen. And as we were talking about this, we came across the concept that not being chosen is a neutral event. And when we first started working together, he was like, "What are you talking about this sucks. Now I'm going to start all over, this is not a good thing". And we were reflecting how he can see now that it is a neutral event that they just didn't choose him. That it wasn't good that it wasn't bad. And that it didn't mean anything until he gave it meaning. And he was reflecting on how at the beginning of the process if you didn't make it through and if you didn't get to the place that he wanted to or didn't get the offer that he wanted, that he would make it mean that either they were not good enough, that it wasn't a good company, or that he was not good enough. That he didn't work hard enough. That he didn't do enough research. That he was not supposed to even be in this industry. That it was never going to work out and that he needed to give up and set his sights lower. And so, he was reflecting that he started to understand that the impact of that thinking was not great, because what it would do is have him be in this lull for a couple of days or even a week and just be low energy and not want to get back on the computer and not want to return phone calls and go for that next opportunity.

So being aware of the impact of your thinking is super powerful. It has an amazing impact on your life. And so, what you want to do in the second step is evaluate what is the impact that my thinking is having on situation. Begin to question your own thinking and the way that he did. Decide if it's serving you to think that you're not good enough or that you're not working hard enough. If it's going to make you feel motivated, or if it's going to be a positive way to drive your actions.

And if it's not, then you get to do the third step. And that is to decide on purpose, what you're going to think about. And then this is where you get the opportunity to actively decide how you are going to think about that neutral circumstance. This is really about truly accepting what is and not fighting against the situation, but really accepting it, and then purposely deciding how you want to look at that situation. And what you want to make it mean. Now the key here is this is not about positive affirmations, or seeing the glass half full, or making stuff up, frankly, right? It's not about rainbows and daisies, so that you just feel better about what is. This is about deliberately choosing your response so that you can get to what you want. And in this gentleman's circumstances, it was about really shifting and understanding and accepting that he was not chosen.

And what he decided to make that mean it was that this was not the right job for him. This was not the right opportunity. That this was an opportunity for him to learn more about the industry, to level up on his interviewing, to get a little more specific about things and less specific about other things. And to use this opportunity, to really use it, not to pretend but to really use it to create the exact job that was right for him that was still out there. And you have the ability to do that as well.

I was just also speaking with somebody about Victor Frankel's book *Man's Search for Meaning*. And if you're not familiar with the book, Viktor Frankl was in a concentration camp in World War II for three years. And there's a quote from this book, and I want to share it with you. And he says, "We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few a number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from man. But one thing, the last of human freedoms, to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way".

And I have to tell you, I just got them I got chills, I get chills when I read this, I highly recommend reading that book. Because it is a phenomenal example of one of the worst situations that any human being can ever be put in. And the best of possible ways of looking at a circumstance and choosing on purpose, how you're going to respond.

And so, my hope for you is you go forth into this holiday season, as you see those Christmas and Hanukkah and holiday and maybe even New Year decorations right next to that Halloween candy, that you take a moment to discern between the external circumstance, the neutrality of what is and what your story is around it and to notice the impact of your story. And then actively decide if you're going to keep it. You get to accept that neutral circumstance, and then decide to create your new story. Decide what you are going to make that story mean and how you are going to show up in life.

Those circumstances can be powerful. But here's the truth, you are more powerful. And you have the immense ability to use that power on purpose. To use the power of your brain and your heart to decide what you're going to make those neutral circumstances mean. That is your power. And it is my wish for you that you go forth and use that power to create the most amazing life that you possibly can. Thanks a lot for listening you guys. I'll see you next time.

Hey there, if you are ready to take your Wellbeingness® to the next level, come visit www.thewellness.coach where I've got lots of free resources and make sure that you type in thewellness.coach, not .com and I will see you there.