

Ep #134: Hedonism



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Brooke Castillo

Welcome to The Life Coach School Podcast, where it's all about real clients, real problems, and real coaching. Now, your host, Master Coach Instructor, Brooke Castillo.

Hello, hello, hello, my friends. How are you guys today? I'm amazing. So amazing today. I can't wait to talk to you guys about this topic. I am so filled with well-being in my life right now. I'm so happy that even when something crazy happens in my life, it can't touch my well-being and that's where I've always wanted to be. That's why I want to keep having all these conversations with you guys because I think that it's a hard sell but it's worth it, all these ideas I have about self control and self discipline and will power and achieving your dreams and why achieving your dreams matters. It's a question I just keep obsessing over. Why does achieving your dreams matter? Does it matter if you achieve your dreams or not? The question is so important because what's the alternative? That's why this entire podcast was going to be on hedonism, which, first of all, I do not recommend that you Google. It might give you a little bit more than you bargained for. I guess there are all-inclusive resorts called Hedonism where you can go and just be naked and hedonistic with people. I did not know this. I know this now.

Here's the thing. The question is: Why bother with achieving our dreams? Why bother with achieving desires for greatness? Why not just have desires for pleasure? I think it's a legit question. Here's why. I think that everything that we want in our life to achieve is because of how we think it will make us feel, because of what we will think and therefore what we will feel. We want to make a lot of money, some of us, because we think that will make us happy. We want to lose a lot of weight because we think that will make us happy. A lot of people would just argue, "Why don't you just be happy? Why are you going out into the world and achieving all of these things and creating all of these things to get these feeling states when you can just have the feeling states ahead of time?" That argument I think is interesting because what I've noticed in my own life is that when I feel the feeling state ahead of time, I achieve it anyway and usually a lot faster. If I'm already happy when I go about making money, then I make money quicker. If I'm already in love with my body and feeling good about my

body, I lose weight easier. If I already am satisfied with the pleasure I have in my life, then I seem to get more pleasure in my life.

That doesn't make any sense, right? Then what drives us towards achievement? I think that there is a huge misconception and I think we're actually taught this, that the reason for us to achieve things is to feel better and the reason for us to achieve things is to compensate for us not being good enough already. I do not think that is the point.

In fact, I think if you are currently overweight, you don't need to lose weight to get better. If you are currently overdrinking, you don't need to stop overdrinking to be a better person. I don't believe that at all. What I do believe is that if you are buffering your life, if you are escaping your life, you are missing out on the ultimate pleasure that is available to us. But is that ultimate pleasure the point of our lives? Do our dreams even matter? Do our deepest desires even matter? I'm asking this as a really genuine question.

When you think about what is the best possible thing that can happen, and this is what I was thinking about when I was thinking of hedonism, this idea of the pursuit of pleasure. I think when you think about this concept, that hedonism is the pleasure is all that matters and pleasure is good, then you have to decide what is pleasure and what is the ultimate pleasure. I think this is where we get very confused. You know, you guys, I've been doing a lot of research on this and there is nothing out there that I think is really clear on this that helps me understand it. I have been trying to make it clear in my own brain so I can understand it.

The way that I've done it, as you've seen in the podcast, is I've distinguished between pleasure that comes from external sources, which is pleasure from an external fix, and I have classified it into false fixes. A false fix is like anything that has been concentrated to give your brain a false sense of pleasure, not a naturally occurring pleasure. For example, flour, sugar, heroin, cocaine, cigarettes, anything that we've taken as it naturally occurs in the world and concentrated it so it has an explosion of chemicals in the brain that the brain is not evolved to manage yet. That's a false pleasure.

The reason why I call it a false pleasure is because it makes your

brain think that something's happening that's much more important and exciting than it really is. The other problem with the false pleasure is it perpetuates the desire for the false pleasure. Once you have it, then you will have negative consequences from having it and then you will want even more of it and you'll never really get out of the loop of wanting more and more and more of it because the way false pleasures work is that your brain down regulates its response from it because it's not used to getting that false pleasure so you'll always be seeking more and getting less and less and less satisfaction from it. That dopamine is the chemical of desire and so all you'll be doing is desiring something that doesn't provide that satisfaction and it gives you that negative consequence on the backend.

Now, there are other pleasures in the world that come from external sources that aren't false, that do not create dependence. For example, you can go and take a walk outside...nature, you get a lot of pleasure from nature. There's rarely a negative consequence from getting pleasure from nature. Our connection from other people provides us with pleasure that doesn't necessarily provide a negative consequence. Getting a massage, getting a pedicure, even though there's a price for some of us, as long as you can afford it, it's not a negative consequence. Going to the spa, going to the beach, going on a walk, you know, all of the things that we do, playing video games appropriately may not have a negative consequence, watching TV, that sort of thing.

How do you know if something is a pleasure that's a sustained pleasure that's not going to have a negative consequence? Only you will know that. You can't define it by the thing that you're actually doing. You have to define it by whether or not you get a negative consequence. Are you doing it in a way that only provides you with the pleasure that it provides? Then I think what is the ultimate pleasure, so there's the false fix pleasures and then there's the external pleasures that aren't false fixes but require the external thing, music, going to a play, those sorts of things, going to the movies, external pleasures without negative consequences. Then, there's well-being, which is the ultimate in ongoing pleasure that we earn by our actions and usually by delaying gratification.

What I think is so interesting about well-being is that in so many

instances, well-being is earned. It's something that we earn by taking care of ourselves, respecting ourselves, not giving into false fixes constantly, being responsible for ourselves, taking responsibility for our emotions. Acting in a way that gives us pleasure is the ultimate in well-being.

The question then becomes: Why not just stay in false fixes all the time? Why not just stay in external pleasures all the time? Why bother with well-being? Because well-being seems to have a price of hard work. It seems to have a price of sacrifice. In fact, for most of us, giving up false pleasures is the price for well-being. I'll give you a specific example. When you're looking at my clients who are wanting to lose weight, they have to give up the false pleasures, most of them, of sugar and flour and eating all the time and snacking all the time and getting pleasure from food all the time in order to get the well-being that comes from being able to process your emotions without food and living in a body that is at its natural weight. For someone who's given up alcohol in order to have the well-being that comes from not being dependent on alcohol is giving up all of those false pleasures on all those times that you would normally drink a glass of wine. It's like sacrificing the false pleasure in order to have that long-term pleasure and delaying our gratification. When you think about false pleasures, it's all about instant gratification. It's all about getting that gratification now and paying the price later, whereas well-being is paying the price now in order to get the pleasure and the well-being later.

Here's where I'm going to like set you up to like explore those two options. This is what I've been thinking a lot about. The ultimate in hedonism, and I'm going to talk more about that in a minute by the way, but the ultimate is I want pleasure and I want it right now and I'm always just going to be seeking more and more and more pleasure in this moment. That is one of my options. Now, if it's a false pleasure, you're going to, always on the other side of that, be dealing with the negative consequence of that false pleasure. For most of us, we just have more false pleasure and then we get the negative consequence and then we have more false pleasure. We go through the withdrawal from sugar. We just eat more sugar. Eventually, all of that immediate gratification will lead up to the long-term consequence. The other option is we do the long-term work ahead of time in order to get the

ultimate well-being "consequence" at the end of that. We either do the pleasure before or the pleasure after. We do the hard work and the pain before or after.

Now, if we decide to delay gratification, the benefit of doing that is tenfold. Here's why. You get to build up your strength, your self confidence, your discipline, and your self control. The more you're able to do that, the more you are able to create more and more well-being. Someone who's a hedonist might say, "But wait a minute. Why bother building up strength and self confidence and all of those things when you can just have pleasure now, when you can just feel that pleasure now?" The reason and the answer that I have come up with is that the more I delay gratification, the more I build up my well-being, the less effort it takes to feel good ongoing. The more effort I put in now, the less effort it takes later versus the least amount of effort I put in now, the way more effort it requires later.

What I've done is if I look over a ten year period and I look at pleasure first, consequence later, if I look over that ten year period, the amount of effort I have put in to trying to feel good is non-accumulating and actually the amount of effort that it would take me to feel good over that ten year period would be tenfold compared to if I'm building up and accumulating well-being as I go. It's kind of like, have you guys seen in those some of those books where they talk about if you invest your money now and the interest compounds, that's how delayed gratification works.

We can look at that, for most of us, in how we treat our education and we all went to college and we worked really hard in order to go to college so we could get a job so we could get paid. The amount of effort we had to put in was all that effort to get that education and get that job and now the benefits of that are accumulating versus if we had put off going to school and skipped high school and tried to go to work in order to try and make that money, the effort we'd have to put in to make the same amount of money, because we didn't delay our gratification and we just constantly gave into it and didn't go to school and didn't work hard and didn't try and move up in our careers. We're constantly having to work harder and harder and harder to make less money. Make sense?

I think that is one of the ultimate benefits of the delayed gratification. It makes you stronger, builds your self confidence, self control, which begets more opportunities to delay more gratification to have more well-being in our life. I think most of us do that pretty well in many areas of our lives. Most of us aren't cheating on our relationships. Most of us aren't cutting school. I shouldn't say most of us. A lot of us aren't cutting school. We aren't not going to work, right? We're continuously putting ourselves there. Where I run into a lot of students and clients that run into trouble are they're settling in in this comfort zone and not pursuing bigger dreams for themselves, not going after those ultimate dreams that would require a significant amount of delayed gratification. They're trying to balance it. We're trying to have just enough pleasure, just enough gratification now to stay comfortable.

What's wrong with that is the question. Is there anything wrong with that? Do our dreams, the biggest dreams, the best thing that could happen to us in our life, the best thing that we could create in our life, does that matter? Do we have any obligation to fulfill our potential? Do we have any obligation to our dreams, to our deepest desires, to our intuitive hits of desire? It's such an amazing question.

I heard Grant Cardone say one time, "You have a responsibility to be successful. It's not optional. You have a responsibility to be successful." I said, "What?" Wow. That's an amazing concept. I think it's presented to us in America that we have the opportunity to be successful. My mom always used to tell me, "You can do whatever you want with your life." It wasn't like, "You have an obligation to be your best self, to raise yourself to the highest standard you can, to be as successful as you are capable of being." Not at our own expense. I think a lot of times in this country we think success has to be at our own expense. I think that's the opposite of success. I think a lot of times we associate success with climbing the corporate ladder and making a lot of money at our own expense. I think that's the opposite of success.

It's important to me that you understand that when I'm talking about success, I'm talking about fulfilling your potential as a human being which means pursuing your ultimate level of well-being as you pursue your goal in life. Your health is taken care of, your stress level and

your emotional life and your psychological life is taken care of and your family's taken care of and the amount of money that you're capable of making and creating and giving is taken care of, you're doing all of those things for yourself and never at your own expense. That's a huge shift in the way that we're thinking about this.

If I say to you, "You have a certain amount of potential in your life." I say this to my kids all the time, "You have your intelligence, you have your background, your ability, your education, you have all of that. The only thing constraining it is your ability to delay gratification. The only thing constraining it is your lack of self control or your potential capacity for self control. Your intelligence is limited by your self control." If you think about someone that's incredibly smart or incredibly talented at something but they don't have the discipline or the self confidence or the self control to practice, to study, to go out there and make it happen, they have the ability to do the thing in the world but they don't have the ability for self control. You guys have seen this all the time. You look at people who have so much potential and they're using drugs. So much potential and they're eating their way into obesity. So much potential, they're drinking, they're procrastinating, they're not showing up. I see this with teenagers, my son's friends, all the time. Their potential, their ability, their intelligence so high.

Why does it matter that we pursue our potential? Who does it matter to? I think those are the questions that have been swimming around in my mind. Do we really have that responsibility? I don't know if we have the responsibility, but I do believe that actualizing ourselves to actually pursuing our potential is most ultimately the most pleasurable thing that we can experience as human beings. That's a huge thing for me to say. The only reason I can say that, for example, achieving a lifelong goal that you put your heart and soul into and that you earned, the only reason I can say the feeling of that accomplishment is better than heroin is because of the negative consequence that comes behind heroin. I'm not including just that I've heard that heroin's the most pleasurable thing or that opiates are the pleasurable things that we can experience. I haven't done either one of those things but I'm imagining pure ecstasy on the ultimate level when you take that drug. That compared to that accomplishment, I don't know which one wins there except that I know that heroin will

have the follow up negative consequence and the accomplishment won't unless you have done it at your own expense, which in this case, we're assuming that you haven't. You've done it for you and not at the expense of yourself in any of your relationships or in your life.

If the ultimate pleasure that's available to me is one that I can earn and is at my highest potential, how can I teach myself to go after that instead of to go after this instant gratification? The best way that I heard this described, I was reading a book on this and they were talking about how our lower brain, that our primitive brain that you hear everyone talking about that its only goal for animals or reptiles is to pursue pleasure and avoid pain. That is how we have evolved.

Now, they didn't reset that brain and redesign it from the ground up for humans. What they did is they just put the prefrontal right on top of that. We still have all of those animalistic pleasure-seeking, pain-avoiding tendencies. We just have the ability to control those things now. We have the ability to plan and look in the future and delay gratification. What I make of that is that pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain is something that anyone can do. Animals can do that. I don't think that I'm a human being so I can just be an animal. I don't think I was given a prefrontal cortex to just forget about it and not paying any attention to it. I think in order to make my contribution to the world, I have to help my prefrontal cortex evolve. I think the only way all of our prefrontal cortexes evolve is by us using them to their highest capacity, pushing it beyond their highest capacity, actually.

What is my prefrontal capable of doing? What is my humanness capable of doing? One of the things I'm able to do that animals aren't able to do is manage my primitive urges, to plan ahead, to think about what I think about, to manage my thinking, to manage my emotions, to create my emotions on purpose, to change where I'm focusing on purpose, to pursue and accomplish my dreams on purpose, to acknowledge that I have a dream and there's a reason why I have it, that I have a desire to do something in the world and there's a reason why I have it. I think so many people think that their dreams are just something that happen to be for them, if they want them or not. What if you thought about your dream as, "Wait a minute. This has been implanted in me on purpose." I love the spiritual idea that your dreams are the map to your destiny. Your desires, once you've

cleaned up all of your urges, what's left?

You know, we talk about that all the time. When you take away all the buffers, when you take away all the escapes and all the false fixes, what's left? Whatever desire is then left is the map to your destiny, is what you're meant to do with your life. The reason why that matters is because that will be the ultimate pleasure once you achieve and that pleasure will be ongoing. That will be what will be ongoing and sustaining so not only will you be feeling pleasure, but you will be proud of the pleasure, you will not be feeling guilty about it. That's the difference, right? You won't be having pleasure anticipating the negative consequence. You'll be having pleasure and you'll be proud of the pleasure that you're experiencing. Whether we have a responsibility to that or not, I don't know, but it sure sounds pretty good.

Let's talk about this idea. I'm going to back up a minute. Let's talk about this idea of hedonism. I was looking it up. I Googled up hedonism and it said the pursuit of pleasure. It said to maximize net pleasure. I said, "What? What's net pleasure?" It's kind of like we hear a lot of people talking about their businesses and how much their businesses make. How much net is coming in off that business? How much of that is profit? You may be making \$20 million a year but who cares? How much of that do you actually get to decide what happens with that money? How much of that money can you actually use? What is your net after expenses? It's really similar to asking someone what their net worth is. Think about all the money and then take away all the debt. That's your net. It's one thing to say, "I have a \$1 million," but if you owe \$1 million, then your net is zero. Your net worth is zero.

The idea of net pleasure is the ultimate pleasure that you get from doing something minus the suffering. It's kind of like the way that I talk about it, the pleasure minus the consequence. Let's talk about a cupcake. There's the pleasure from eating the cupcake and then there's the guilt and the remorse and the sugar high and low that you're going to have after that and maybe the weight gain. I would include all of that in the suffering. This is if you're trying to lose weight and trying not to eat cupcakes. You take the pleasure you got from eating it and you minus the suffering on top of it. That's the net

pleasure. It's kind of a cool way to think about it. What is the net pleasure from drinking alcohol? What is the net pleasure from cheating on your husband or on your wife? There's the pleasure you're going to have from the rendezvous with the other person but then there will be suffering on the backend probably for how you feel about yourself and your relationship and all those things. What is the net pleasure?

If we could think about our lives in terms of net pleasure and then we added up the net instead of just adding up the cost, instead of just adding up the pleasure, we have to take the pleasure minus the cost. Then, think about what is the net pleasure of taking a walk if you enjoy walking. What is the net pleasure of a massage, of a pedicure, of a vacation, of a conversation, of a hug? What is that net pleasure and how much pleasure do you really have in your life if you're measuring your pleasure based on net pleasure? Totally fascinating to me to think about that because I think about all those years I spent thinking about eating food. All I thought about was the pleasure of the Fettuccine Alfredo. I never thought about net pleasure. I never anticipated the consequence on the other side of that.

Ask yourself this question: Are you better, the same, or worse off after you do it? Think about the pleasures in your life. Are you better, the same, or worse off? I think about me walking my dogs. It's one of the best things I do. I love going out, putting on my hat, putting my podcast on, not my podcast. I don't listen to my own podcast but I put on podcasts from other people or an audio book. I put it in my ears and I take my adorable puppies, who I'm obsessed with, and I go on a walk. The experience of the pleasure that I get from being on that walk is amazing and I feel great after and it's good for me and the dogs are happy and relaxed the rest of the day. The net pleasure from that is like two times. If I ask myself, "Am I better, the same, or worse off?" I'm better. I've done something pleasurable and I'm better because of it. That's when you know you're onto something.

I think a lot of people feel this way about running and exercising and doing yoga, meditating, they actually enjoy the experience and they get double net on the back of it. I think pursuing more things that are pleasurable that we're better because of is a good idea. I also think pursuing things that aren't pleasurable in the moment but give us

ultimate well-being in the end are worth doubling down on. I think we should do more of those things and less false pleasure. I think we shouldn't even call false pleasure, pleasure. I don't even think it should count because the net is zero.

The other way that I think is interesting to think about this is there is the pursuit of pleasure, there is the experience of pleasure, and then there's the result of pleasure. I think thinking about those things separately is really important and understanding the net of those three things is really important and asking the question: Do I enjoy the process of pursuing it? Do I enjoy actually getting it? Do I enjoy the result of it? I think most false pleasures, the answer's no. Isn't that crazy? It's crazy when you think about it.

"How does all of this apply to effort?" was a question that I was asking myself because I was thinking a lot about my students who are trying to build businesses. A lot of them get frustrated way too fast and they don't apply enough effort to get any momentum and then they're frustrated that they don't get the result that they want. I was wondering if there's a thing called an effort threshold like where we're only willing to apply a certain amount of effort before we give up. The reason why I've come up with this is I've watched student after student stop at about the same point, about at the same point of effort.

What determines our effort threshold? One of the things that I think brings down that threshold is if we're struggling emotionally because that exhausts us. There's a certain amount of work I have to do to build a coaching business. If I am stuck in self doubt and frustration and hating myself and not believing in myself and not following through on all the things I've committed to doing because I don't believe in myself, not only am I putting effort into taking all the steps to build my business, but I'm putting effort into that struggle against myself and that will be exhausting. I think that our willingness towards discomfort increases our effort threshold. When our effort threshold is increased, we can delay gratification because we have more energy to do that. The more we delay gratification, the more willing we are to be uncomfortable because delayed gratification is really just discomfort. It means I'm willing not to be gratified. I'm willing not to have relief right now. I'm willing to be uncomfortable. Our willingness

to be uncomfortable, our willingness to put the effort in to accomplishing what it is we need to accomplish while we're uncomfortable will determine our effort threshold and our effort threshold will determine everything we accomplish in our life.

Ask yourself this question: How much effort are you willing to put towards your dreams, towards your goals? If your effort threshold is low, my guess is it's an exact direct correlation to the amount of false pleasures you have in your life. The amount of time you are spending on pleasures that have negative consequences because that will be exhausting. It will use up all your desire, all your motivation on things that are not serving you in your life, that are providing you with a negative consequence on the backend so overeating, overdrinking, procrastinating, over working, gossiping, all of the things that prevent us from achieving our dreams, sucks all of our desire and all of our effort away.

I'm coming full circle, the reason why I don't think you should be a hedonist, the reason why I don't think you should pursue pleasure for pleasure's sake, especially false pleasures, especially externally dependent pleasures, pleasures that you have to get from someone else, is because I think that it robs you of your internal pleasure that comes from within and ultimately that is well-being. When you have well-being, you have a constant IV of pleasure, you have a constant IV of peace, of feeling confident, of feeling capable, of feeling happy. On top of all of that, you created it so you don't feel dependent. You don't feel like that pleasure has to come from something outside of yourself and that's where that confidence comes from. You're not constantly having to seek it, you're not constantly having to escape yourself in order to feel pleasure. Your effort threshold goes up. Your level of discipline goes up. Your ability to have willpower goes up. Your prefrontal cortex becomes literally bigger, more developed, it has more neural pathways, more blood going to it, which means you have more self control, which means you can create more of the dreams that you have in your life. Your capacity increases and your capacity for creation and also your capacity for well-being.

If I've sold you on it, you're probably asking, "Okay. I'm in. What do I do?" Step number one, we have to take the buffers away. Once we get rid of the buffers, what remains is the reason you have the

buffers. That's going to be all the discomfort. You have to learn how to stay in that discomfort long enough so you can process it, so you can learn how to manage your mind, so you can learn how to move into emotional adulthood and manage your emotions. Then, once you get to that level, then you can start pursuing your desires, increasing your effort threshold, delaying your gratification and you will just keep getting stronger and stronger and stronger. That strength will beget more strength, which will beget more well-being.

You will be tempted to quit. You will be tempted to give up because your current programming has taught you that you should pursue pleasure, immediate gratification at all expense. That's where your primitive brain is going to come in. If you can, and you can, shift your energy and your mind towards the long-term pursuit of what you ultimately want in your life, you not only get to enjoy the idea of what it is you want, you get to enjoy the desire of having it in your life, and you get to enjoy the anticipation. You hear so often that it's not the destination, it's the journey. That's totally the truth. If you get the prize before you've done the work, then you get the prize and then you have to do the work. You eat the candy or you eat the food and then you have the negative consequence afterwards, which doesn't have any anticipation, desire, or joy in it. If you do it the other way around, your whole pursuit of it will be filled with growth and joy and exhilaration and anticipation. I can't think of a better reason than that.

Ultimately, you will get to own that you did what you wanted to do with your life on purpose instead of just reacting to the pleasures that any animal could have reacted to and pursued. I don't know about you, but that sounds better to me. If you're listening to this podcast, you're probably on board with me on that. Let's do that together. Yes, it's hard. Yes, there's effort. Yes, it requires everything that you have in your brain in all of your humanness, but who cares? That's why you have it. Be willing to do the work and up your effort threshold so you can create exactly what you want in your life.

All right, you guys. Have an amazing week. I'll talk to you next week. Bye bye.

Thank you for listening to The Life Coach School Podcast. It is my honor to show up here every week and connect with people that are

like minded wanting to take their life to a deeper level with more awareness and more consciousness. If you are interested in taking this work to the next level, I highly encourage you to go to thelifecoachschool.com/howtofeelbetteronline. It is there that I have a class that will take all of this to a deeper application where you'll be able to really feel and experience how all of these concepts can start showing up in your life. It's one thing to learn it intellectually. It's another thing to truly apply it to your life. I will see you there. Thanks again for listening.