

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky



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Welcome to *Practicing with the Masters* for dentists with your host, Dr. Allison Watts. Allison believes that there are four pillars for a successful, fulfilling dental practice: clear leadership, sound business principles, well-developed communication skills, and clinical excellence. Allison enjoys helping dentists and teams excel in all of these areas. Each episode she brings you an inspiring conversation with another leading expert. If you desire to learn and grow and in the process take your practice to the next level, then this is the show for you. Now, here's your host, Dr. Allison Watts.

Allison Watts: Welcome to Practicing with the Masters Podcast. I'm your host, Allison Watts, and I'm dedicated to bringing you masters in the field of dentistry, leadership and practice management to help you have a more fulfilling and successful practice in life. Welcome, everybody. Thank you so much for being here. I know we're all busy and it's just always fun to be here with everybody and share ideas with like-minded people. I have a person here that I really, really enjoyed tonight. Super excited to have you again here, Barry.

Barry Polansky: Thank you.

Allison Watts: Dr. Polansky, DMD. is a graduate of Queens College class of 1969. Upon graduation, he entered the University of Pennsylvania School of Dental Medicine and completed his DMD degree in 1973. He spent two years in the US Army Dental Corps at Fort Dix, New Jersey. He entered private practice in 1975 and has been practicing in Cherry Hill, New Jersey since then. He also co-owns Niche Dental Studio with his son, Joshua Polansky. The Pankey Experience began in 1990 and he has been on visiting faculty since 2004. Dr. Polansky is the author of the books, *The Art of the Examination*, *The Art of Case Presentation*.

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

I didn't have this in here, Barry, but The Short Guide To a Long ... Tell me that. The Short Guide To a Long Career?

Barry Polansky: A short Guide to a Long Career.

Allison Watts: I got to get a hold of that one. Now, The Complete Dentist. He's written nearly 100 articles for most of the dental journals. He's the founder of his newsletter, Private Practice, which has become a popular blog, TaoDentistry.com. He's lectured to numerous groups throughout the world including The Dawson Alumni Meeting, American Dental Association Annual Meeting, and the Texas Dental Association. Barry recently also received his certification in positive psychology. He is married to Madeline, his wife of 37 years. It's probably more than that. Is it more than that now?

Barry Polansky: That's more than that now.

Allison Watts: They have two sons, Bret and Joshua. His hobbies include health and fitness, reading and writing, and he is an avid practitioner of Bikram Yoga, and many of you may know also that one of his hobbies, and he's had this hobby for 15 years, is raising and showing boxers, the canine variety. Barry, I'm super excited to have you here. I enjoy talking to you every time, and I'm really excited about your new book. I soaked it up and there's so much in here. There's so much good stuff, and so we will probably just barely skim the surface. Do you want to say anything before we start? I want to start really by asking you, why you wrote this book?

Barry Polansky: Well, like you mentioned, this is my fourth book. When you asked me that question the other day and I said ... I thought about it. I realized that leadership, which is what this call is about tonight, and the essence of this call is

[Practicing with the Masters](#) with Allison Watts, DDS

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

about leadership, and why leadership is important, and why I feel it's the answer to a lot of the problems we have in dentistry here. When I look back at my whole career, I realized that leadership is really a journey. It started many years ago for me when I actually burned out in dentistry.

Then it changed when I began at The Pankey Institute, but the four books that I wrote, The Art of the Examination, The Art of Case Presentation, A Short Guide to a Long Career, and now this final ... Well, I'm not going to call it the final book, but the latest book, The Complete Dentist, is really a string along the journey. Each book is separate in its own right, but when you look at it from a different perspective, it chronicles my own journey. We'll start real quick with the first book, The Art of the Examination.

Well, I had been through The Pankey Institute, and I've been studying The Pankey Philosophy and Dr. Dawson. Somewhere along the line because of who I am, I needed to find an order to things. There has to be some kind of organization. I know that there's more to life than just what we see on the surface, and I thought that the examination was a foundational piece of that. I wrote that book as a way to describe to dentists the structure of a general examination and what it meant, but really it's the whole process of all that we do in terms of diagnosis and treatment planning.

Then that book was incomplete in that it didn't complete the process because that was just getting more of the information and organizing the structure. Then I had to take that information and I had to explain it to people basically and explaining it to patients, but really explaining it to staff members and anybody who I worked with. That

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

became The Art of Case Presentation because dentists, we have our own language. Nobody really understands our language except for us. What's even more important than that is not only in explaining dentistry to patients and making it understandable, but more important than that was to make it meaningful.

The Art of Case Presentation was more about interpreting the language of dentistry and making it meaningful for patients. That book was written I think it was 2009-2010. Somewhere about three years ago, I saw dentistry changing, and it's changed. I mean pretty much we're all dentists on this call and some staff. However, with the economy we saw things changing. The idea of burnout has always been around dentistry. I discussed it in my first book, and I discussed it in this book. I mean let's face it, dentistry is a stressful profession. When we go on Facebook, what we see are the happy dentists.

There's also the beautiful cases of a happy dentist, but when dentists get together at the bar and discuss how things really are, it can be a pretty stressful profession. Somewhere around that time I noticed that there was something new going on in dentistry that I had never encountered before and that was dentists actually leaving the profession. The word that I use there they were getting derailed. I thought it was pretty amazing. Around 2015-2016, these young dentists had invested so much time and money into this profession. Back in the '70s when I started, I never have thought of leaving the profession, but they were leaving and they're still leaving.

This is a real problem that I thought it needed to be addressed. I wrote the book A Short Guide to a Long Career in hopes that young dentists can reconcile a lot of

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

these stressful situations and make it work for them as it was working for me, and it didn't always work for me. That's what it was all about because there's nothing inherently wrong with dentistry. I think that's worth repeating. There's nothing inherently wrong with any work. It's just how we approach the work. Dentistry is a very complex field. I talk about complexity from my first book, *Art of the Examination*, right through this new book, *The Complete Dentist*, because complexity is a key factor.

This latest book, *The Complete Dentist*, was me sitting down and thinking, "Okay. How are we all going to reconcile a lot of the issues we have in dentistry?" I call it the paradox of duty and desire. I mentioned that in the book. In other words, the duty of becoming the very best dentist or doctor we can be because we all have aspirations. We all want to be the best we can be. People are good. People are good. We want to be the best we can be. How do we reconcile the paradox between the duty of being the very best dentist we can and the desire of living the best life we want to work? That's a problem. I thought about it.

During the past two years, I went and got certified in positive psychology at University of Pennsylvania and realizing that positive psychology was a key component of leadership because leadership is really about at one level living a great life, living a good life as Aristotle said. This book was basically a book about leadership, but behind it all was a lot of positive psychology, how to make ourselves better people and then apply those to leadership because leadership is about happiness. Leadership is about well-being not only for us, but for the people we serve. I hope that answers that question. I tend

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

to go off on tangent, so if you want to rain me in, go ahead and do that.

Allison Watts: No, that was perfect. That was exactly what I was looking for. I love that you went through all the books and said how you got here. I can relate, and I appreciate the reason for the book. I was burned out myself about 10 years ago. I wish I'd known then what I know now. There's a lot of good stuff I think in this book for that. I do want to remind everybody that you can raise your hand, and Barry and I both would love if you want to interact. All you have to do is press star two at anytime. Right, Barry? You're cool with people just diving in and asking questions?

Barry Polansky: Yeah, anytime.

Allison Watts: I'll keep remembering to say that, but you also may want to write that down just in case I don't remember because Barry and I like to ... Yes, Barry, you do like to go on tangents and I like to go with you. I'll try to keep it back here.

Barry Polansky: What I like to do is I like to keep the thread going so that people who are listening can see an overall structure here. One of the things in case you missed it the first time around was this hero's journey thing. When I look at the writing of the four books, I realized they were just steps along my own personal journey. The reason why I bring that up is because every dentist, whether they choose to or not, is on a journey of some type. Basically it's Joseph Campbell's theory of the hero's journey, and it's a spiritual journey in one way or another.

Allison Watts: I agree with that. I like the structure of the book. I like that you presented the problems first and then the solutions. I

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

mean much like we do diagnosis and treatment planning. You touched a little bit on the problems. Do you want to say anymore about the problems? Do you want to get into that at all?

Barry Polansky: Well, I mean the problems are real in dentistry today and all of healthcare for that matter. I mean the Surgeon General a few years, the last Surgeon General, not the current, Trump fired him. His name Vivek Murthy. Anyway, the point is that he said a couple years ago that the number one health problem in this country was the well-being of our physicians. Probably could have said dentists as well. I mean that's always been a problem in dentistry and medicine, but today if you really look at it, you see the levels of ... In medicine, you see it even more because it's publicized more about physician suicide and depression, and like I said, the derailment issue. What caused all of that?

Well, in the book, I talked about them, the things that caused it, but basically the coming of corporate dentistry and insurance companies. I was around in 1973 when insurance was first beginning. I think I opened the book up, in *The Complete Dentist*, where I was in 1973, and Nixon had just passed the HMO Act. That was the beginning of what has become the loss of autonomy for physicians and dentists and healthcare providers in general. Now why is that important? Because it's a basic human need to have the autonomy. If we feel that our autonomy, our decision making ability is being threatened, it threatens us at a biological level.

It's a higher need that we have. It could be found in Maslow's hierarchy of need, but it's a higher need that we have. The need to make our own decisions. That was

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

beginning to be threatened around 1973 when insurance was becoming popular. As we on years and years with the economy being what it was, it was tough enough making difficult decisions for people with the economy becoming bad. Now corporate dentistry is kind of taking over. All of the factors, all of the forces that I talked about in my first book are really times 10. They're squared now. It's affecting our well-being. When we lose our autonomy or our ability to master our profession, well, that affects our well-being.

Because how do we practice meaningful and purposeful dentistry if we don't have the ability to get better, to do the things we're taught how to do in dental school and then can't even make a decision?

Allison Watts: Yeah, that makes total sense. That is definitely part of the problem. I also know that you talked about that as part of the solution. I remember you speaking about the other facets like of the higher needs. What did you call it? When you were talking about the theory? The Self-Determination Theory? Yeah, and the nutrient.

Barry Polansky: Okay. Okay. Human motivation is what's really important. What drives us everyday? Why do we get up everyday to go to work? I'm not just talking about dentistry right now. I got a lot of that from Deci and Ryan. Deci and Frank Ryan. They did a long-term study, which they called the Self-Determination Theory. What they found was that there were certain nutriment. What's a nutriment? A nutriment is something you eat and makes you stronger. There were three nutriment that Deci and Ryan felt were necessary to provide us with the ability to be motivated to do better. In different language, if you can recall, Allison, Pankey's Ladder of Competency?

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

Allison Watts: Yeah, I think so. Are you talking about the unconsciousness incompetence?

Barry Polansky: No. No. The Ladder of Competency is ...

Allison Watts: Oh, the mastery. You're talking about the ...

Barry Polansky: Yes.

Allison Watts: Yeah.

Barry Polansky: You have the ladder, and the top of the ladder as you climb up you aspire to become a master. If you don't climb up, it goes down. You become very indifference to dentistry. You lose your passion. You lose your passion for dentistry. You could either take it up or you could go down. What Deci and Ryan were saying was that if you're going to go up the ladder toward mastery, then you need certain nutriments to get there.

The three that they spoke about were autonomy or the ability to make decisions, your competence levels, in other words, your ability to become the best you can be and become as competent as you can be, and the third and I think is one of the most significant is relatedness or your connectivity. What Deci and Ryan were also saying was really the higher need included a need for significance and a need for connectedness. If you put all of those things together, you'll climb toward mastery. As you do, that's what will create the passion to continue to go up and up and up. However, if those nutriments aren't present, you become indifference or apathetic to a lot of things.

If the need to be significant or if the need to be connected isn't fulfilled, well, that's what's happening and there's

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

burnout, there's depression, and there's derailment. There's a website that's dedicated to young dentists, this was never around when I was ... Well, in my early years, with social media. There's a website that's dedicated to young dentists who have left dentistry and they come on and they tell their story about how much happier that they are now that they've left dentistry and they're now doing whatever, selling physical fitness supplies. I don't know. Actually what I'm saying, there's nothing inherently wrong with dentistry.

They just didn't approach it properly. You can't just blame dentistry. You can't do that.

Allison Watts: I can relate though also. I mean when you get into that burnout and that feeling of like ... I didn't have the ... Well, I guess I did have some feeling of lack of autonomy. Not related to insurance, but just feeling like there were so many things that needed to be done and perfectionism issues. I think that that climbing to be a master, I wanted to be so competent that all I did ... I didn't take care of myself. I didn't have that balanced life. I just was so driven, and I thought once I get my practice really good, then I'll take care of myself. Well, that didn't work.

Barry Polansky: Let's talk about balance for a second, okay? Balanced life. Where'd you get that term from?

Allison Watts: Well, I know that's a total fallacy, and I'm even sorry that I said it, but what I mean was ... Yes, I've heard it over and over over the years. What I would probably say now is like being in harmony. Actually what I would have done is take better ... I would have managed my well-being, my overall well-being, because I do see the value now taking care of the goose that lays the golden egg.

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

Barry Polansky: Right. The thing about the word balance is that life is isn't balanced.

Allison Watts: Right.

Barry Polansky: Life is about the ups and downs everyday. I mean you can wake up in the morning thinking to yourself that today is going to be the perfect day. The next thing you do is you're going to step in it the minute you walk out your door. The point is I like to use the word other than balanced called equanimity. What it means is that you react to whatever happens in a very similar fashion. You don't get too high. You don't get too low. You respond to life rather than to react to life. Okay?

Allison Watts: Yeah.

Barry Polansky: I think we were talking about it. I call it equanimity because bad and good is going to happen everyday. I've been studying this stuff for a long time, and I say this with all humility is that I don't get angry very much anymore. If you know me from years ago, I was much more emotional than I am me today. About a month ago, I got into a situation where we had sent the patient's work in. It was a single crown and it wasn't approved. It was difficult that I admitted that you couldn't read the x-ray properly because it was a cervical issue and wrapped around pretty much the whole tooth, but it needed a crown. I had to defend the patient.

I spoke with the insurance dentist and he wasn't budging. I really got angry. I really got angry, and I never get angry anymore, but I did. For nothing because I wasn't going to change anything and he stood his ground. Anyway, when I hung up the phone, it took me about a half an hour to really collect myself. I knew a lot better than that because

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

you imagine a dentist going through that two or three times a day for a week and where it becomes a way of life after a while? You see? That's what I mean by equanimity and balance. These days I do pretty well, but you can get blindsided.

We all can get blindsided because, and I think we discussed this before, about it's hard to live in the gap between stimulus and response. You've heard that term. You've heard that expression before? I talked about it in my book.

Allison Watts: I have and I love this conversation. I want to remind everybody, you can push star two just because Barry and I are about to get excited about this. Push star two if you have any questions. Yes, I love this conversation. I said to you I would love and I'm constantly working on and I have gotten a lot better as well at that at slowing things down so that I can be making conscious choices in the moment instead of reacting all day long or being on autopilot all day long. I just think that feels like the key to being able to choose in the moment how you respond to things. Anyway, we did talk about that last time. I would love for you to share that with our guests.

Barry Polansky: Well, that's one of essential components of being a leader, live in the gap between stimulus and response. I first heard that in 1989 when I read the great book and I still think it's a great book is Covey's book The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, which is a book about leadership. If you go back to the beginning of the book, Covey will tell you that he learned if he got caught up in that while he was in Hawaii on vacation and in the stacks of a library when he came across the works of Viktor Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning. They left it at that. Living the gap

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

between stimulus and response, being proactive, habit number one.

That book was written in 1989. For the last 30 years, I've been trying to figure out how do I live in the gap between stimulus and response. There's a problem with that. Okay? There's a problem with that because Covey wrote that book in 1989. Viktor Frankl wrote it in response to the holocaust. The point is that we didn't even know enough in 1989 about the way the mind and the brain works. We just began to learn that in the '90s. A matter of fact, the field of positive psychology was first described in 1997 by Marty Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. That was 1997. Mindfulness meditation, which is all the rage right now, is really one of the ways to do that.

Neuroplasticity, which was described by Norman Doidge, is also a way that we can change the way, we can slow down the mind through meditation and mindfulness. Now in 2017-2018, we have evidence-based ways to live in the gap between stimulus and response. That wasn't there when Covey was describing it in 1990. I mean he was right. The description was great, but how we do it today is much more accessible to us. I can tell you it works. It works. Now let's talk about something else. In positive psychology, there's something called CBT, cognitive behavioral therapy, which was described by a psychiatrist back in the '30s by the name of Albert Ellis.

That's another way to live in the gap between stimulus and response and a lot of people are familiar with CBT or cognitive behavioral therapy. The point is that in reading about that, Ellis in one of his book said that he got all of his thoughts or all of this theories from reading Stoic philosophy. In other words, he read the philosophy

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus and Seneca. You see? That drew me to Aristotle. You see? The rational mind can help you live in the gap between stimulus and response, but you got to know how to get there. Mindfulness was one way. Another way that helped me was to learn about Stoicism and read the works of Marcus Aurelius.

There's a lot of ways to get there today. By the way, to go back to ... Let's assume for a second that you're not the kind of person who want to do the amount of reading that I do. You can take a spiritual approach to this as well because if you start reading about Buddhism or you start reading about Christianity, you're going to find the same thoughts over and over and over again. It's just presented differently. The Art of Case Presentation to that as well.

Allison Watts: Yeah. Cool. Well, I love that you just gave us those, I don't know, handful of things that can help with that because I just really think that's important. You talked a lot about ... Oh, Bill Greg has raised his hand. Let me take your question first, Greg. Hold on just a second, Bill. Okay. You're unmuted, Bill. Hi.

Bill Greg: First up, I got to know how the hell you knew it was me?

Allison Watts: Your name's on the thing this time.

Bill Greg: Well, there you go.

Allison Watts: You have shown up as anonymous, but today you're you.

Bill Greg: Oh gosh. I'd rather be anonymous.

Barry Polansky: Hey, Bill.

Bill Greg: Hey, Barry. Hey, what's up? Hey, listen. I don't know if you know this, but I'm in Santa Monica right now, and I'm

[Practicing with the Masters](#) with Allison Watts, DDS

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

looking at the same sky you're looking at. It's amazing here.

Barry Polansky: Is it not amazing this weather? I mean you just came in at the most gorgeous weather. Welcome.

Bill Greg: It's great. By the way, tell everybody about all the earthquakes and fires you're experiencing so they don't move here. Anyway, I think what really scares me, Barry, is I understand what you're saying.

Barry Polansky: Oh boy.

Bill Greg: I don't have a question so much as a comment, which you've kind of said, but I wanted to emphasize, it's a process. If I were a young dentist hearing what you're saying now, I'd really scratch my head. I've spent 50% of the time that you've spent trying to understand the human psyche and behavior and what makes us who we are and what we are. I would just encourage dentists to look at it as a learning ladder and a process, not an event that you could do now because it's a wonderful place to be to continue the learning process. That's all. I'm finished. Enjoy our gorgeous weather. Thank you so much for all your time and efforts.

I think you're a master and what you're contributing to dentistry to me is a miracle. Thank you for that.

Barry Polansky: Well, thank you, Bill. Thank you.

Allison Watts: Thanks, Bill.

Bill Greg: You too, Allison.

Allison Watts: Thanks, Bill. You too.

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

Bill Greg: You're doing great stuff. I appreciate it.

Allison Watts: Thanks, Bill.

Barry Polansky: I want to speak to a point that Bill mentioned and I hear this a lot. What do you tell a young dentist? That's really what it's about here. Bill and I and so many of the people who I've met along the way are kind of like kindred spirits in terms of our love of learning. A little tip, there's a website called VIA.com. VIA.com. It stands for values in action dot com. It's a free website where you can take a 10 minute test and you can find out what your highest strengths are. I've done that and my five signature strengths are the following: one is love of learning, two, perspective, three, judgment, four, bravery, and five, curiosity. Now those are five.

There are 24 different strengths. There are some that I would like to have, but I don't have. Those are my five. Again when I look back at my entire career and life, without having them even described, that's what I have been doing. I have been searching because I love to learn. I take different perspectives, and you can just tell that in the first half an hour of speaking tonight, the Stoic perspective, the Buddhist perspective. Different, but really, really saying the same thing. Judgment, bravery, curiosity, all of those things are basically who I am.

I would encourage a young dentist to go out and look and see what his or her strengths are and then let that guide them in terms of how they want to approach this. The other thing I would mention is a book called Mindset by Carol Dweck, which is a classic book. Dr. Dweck is from Stanford. In the book, she describes two different mindsets, a fixed mindset and a growth mindset. They are what they sound like. A fixed mindset basically is that I'm

[Practicing with the Masters](#) with Allison Watts, DDS

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

just as good as I am and I'll probably get no better. That my intellect and my abilities are fixed. A growth mindset is something that says, "I want to grow and learn and get better."

I meet people all the time, dentists, doctors, who don't go the extra mile because they think it's fixed. I'm not as good as so and so. I'll never be as good as so and so because he's just better. The mindset factor is very important. It's a starting point. Because if you can get out of that and get into a growth or a learning mindset, well, that changes everything. I was blessed in that being on of my strengths. You see? I agree with Bill. What do you tell a young dentist? Well, you tell them that it's possible, and it's possible because you have certain strengths.

Play to your strengths and also realize that anybody can learn anything. Just don't get caught in a fixed mindset.

Allison Watts: That's so true and that's so funny that you just said that right about Bill Greg talked because I know he loves that book and he loves that conversation. It's cool because it's tying back around to what I wanted to ask you about a minute ago, which I think in the book you say it and I believe it's completely true, and that is leadership is everything or leadership is the most important thing. I think it starts with self-leadership. I believe, and you said it in the book, that it starts with self-awareness. Many of the people on this call, many of the people who are going to be listening to the recording have been to Pankey or heard know yourself somewhere if they haven't heard it at Pankey.

You and I talked about that. It's funny. When I heard that at Pankey, I didn't really know what that meant, and I didn't really know how to do it. I did the DiSC profile and

[Practicing with the Masters](#) with Allison Watts, DDS

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

the Myers-Briggs profile and the Covey profile and the DiSC profile and StrengthsFinder. It was great, and I do think it gave me some insight, but a lot of it was conceptual. I would love to know your thoughts about that. We were just talking about the young dentist. If they really want to be ahead in the game, I think a huge part of that is self-awareness. Don't you?

Barry Polansky: Yeah. Let's go back to The Pankey Philosophy because that was one of the things that started out my journey. Even today, they talk about know yourself, know your patient, know your work and then apply your knowledge, but nobody really talks about what does that mean. I mean you can write an entire encyclopedia about learning how to know yourself. You bring up the one thing, the foundation of leadership is self-awareness. Where does that start? For me, and I've spoken about it before, I mean just tonight was that mindfulness is a key factor to get to know ourselves and understand who we are. Strengths, weaknesses, ego, getting rid of the ego.

The second thing is selflessness. Selflessness. In the book I say that other people matter. How do we destroy this ego that we have that eats us up alive and realize at a moment to moment basis that we are here for others? You see? Other people matter. That's about being selfless. Now I'm not going to sit here and tell you that's how I've always been, but these days I am. These days I am. When I wrote the book The Art of the Examination and giving a patient an hour and a half to get to know who they were means that I have to sit there and listen and be present with every patient and make sacred time so that I could get to know them.

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

Back in those days when I first began, it was a little painful for somebody who was speaking about himself more than thinking about the other. Mindfulness was the first one. Selflessness was the second one. The third one is self-care and compassion. Self-care and compassion about being awareness. I don't know how many people are on this call, but I can tell you that none of us are perfect. You mentioned perfectionism before. That when we make a mistake and when we do something wrong whether it's a technical one or a behavioral one, we have to have compassion for ourself. You see?

Allison Watts: Yeah. It's huge.

Barry Polansky: Yes, it's huge. We have to be kind to ourselves. In positive psychology, what we learn is there are tenets, one is self-care, self-acceptance and self-compassion. Self-care, self-acceptance and self-compassion. Those things are really important in understanding who we are. Because the last thing you want to do when you make a mistake, whether it's a mistake with a case, technical or behavioral, is walk away saying, "You're not good enough." Because once that mental chatter gets into your head, it begins a downward spiral and that's the last thing you want. That derails a lot of dentists.

Allison Watts: I think that's one of the reasons for me in my life having a coach has been so helpful because I think so often we can't even see it in ourselves because we're so used to it. I know when I first started working with a coach I'm still working with she tells me when I'm not being nice to myself. Sometimes I didn't even notice it. It didn't even feel like I was being hard on myself because I'm so used to it. It just feels like normal. I think it helps to have people around us that are helping us become aware also.

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

Barry Polansky: How do we do this? We didn't bring up my favorite topic and that is the ...

Allison Watts: PERMAV?

Barry Polansky: Yes.

Allison Watts: I had a feeling.

Barry Polansky: Let me talk about one of my favorite positive psychologist Marty Seligman whose basically the father of positive psychology. If you ever get to read his book, he's written a whole bunch of books, he started with Authentic Happiness. His most popular is called Flourish. In there, he describes his Well-being Theory, his model of well-being. The acronym is PERMAV. P-E-R-M-A-V. These days what I do is I do a lot of journaling. Journaling is very important by the way. It's another one of those things like mindfulness. It gives you time to sit down and write down pretty much what your day was like or how you like it to be and review. One of the models that I use is I take Seligman's PERMAV model.

I make comments at the end of the day of how I did in these areas. I'll go through them real quick. P stand for positivity. Basically was the majority of my day, did it have a positive effect? How did I feel during the day or is it filled with negative emotions? You begin to chronicle these things. One of the interventions positive psychologists call any kind of exercise that you do that can bring on some of these things is called the three good things exercise. Every morning when I wake up and I begin to journal, I write down three good things that occurred the day before or sometimes I write one good thing. If I had something to do with it, then I'll write that down as well.

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

When you begin to do this for about 30 days, you're going to begin to see some changes. You're going to see the world take on a different outlook. Things are going to look more positive to you. Things will just get better. There is evidence behind this and Seligman's written about it, but for tonight just take my word for it. It works. By the way, there's another very good book, people always ask me for names of books, on positivity. It's by Barbara Fredrickson. She's the one who developed the broaden-and-build theory.

In the broaden-and-build theory, she says, "If we have more positive feelings and thoughts, our perspective gets better." We think in a broader way. We're not locked in in that fixed mindset kind of way. We think a lot differently. Our perspective changes. Then I went through in my journal the E, engagement. Pretty much I say here, was I engaged with the work I was doing? Did I enjoy it? Did I have any moments of flow where time stopped during the day? Did I meet somebody and have a conversation that was so engaging that you couldn't break it up? Also, flow. I look at flow and engagement in two ways not only in the work I do, but the people I work with.

Low and behold, in most days ... Now not everybody who comes into your practice is going to give you a flowing conversation. Things happen. The third one is R, which is relationships, positive relationships. You try to build positive relationships. Now there is two ways to do that. You can look for what you enjoy in people, and then you can look for what you don't enjoy in people. You got to go back to The Art of the Examination about this and realize that you can't be everybody's dentist. If there's somebody who comes into your practice who you just don't enjoy

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

being around, maybe they're not for your practice. That will do more harm to you than it will do for your practice.

You see? Positive relationships. M, which is the big one for me and the one that Viktor Frankl spoke about, which is meaning and purpose. In my burnout years, I didn't feel like I was doing anything meaningful, filling a tooth or scaling a tooth. It didn't have a lot of meaning. When *The Art of the Examination* was written and I put everything together, all of the dentistry ... Not all of the dentistry because there is no all, but most of the dentistry I was doing was very purposeful. A is for achievements or accomplishments. Through the years I've accomplished a lot. I won't bore you with what I've done.

I think that in order to flourish in life and build good well-being, that there has to be some kind of sense that you're achieving your goals. Goals are important. Not only your daily goals, I'm talking about long-term goals. If anybody is so inclined, writing a book would be a long-term goal you might get wrapped in. Goal setting and goal achieving is very important for your well-being. The last one which Seligman didn't talk about in his book *Flourishing*, was V which is vitality. Vitality means all of these things.

In order to have a great life, to have a good day, to have a great career is that you need energy. Energy is important. These days I spent between 12 and 15 hours a week on physical fitness, whether it's hot yoga like you know or lifting weights or running. I still do those things. I think energy is one of the most important things. Again self-care. Self-care. What's comes under that? Sleeping well, eating well, exercising, meditation, all of these things that are very important.

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

I will say that all the things I'm talking about tonight, the self-care aspect of it becomes one of the more important things I've been telling young dentists. You see? Let me just say one thing, it's really important. Remember I told you this thing with the hero's journey. I go back to The Art of the Examination again because that's where I put the structure in place. What's the role of the leader? The role of the leader is not to come to work everyday without a plan, but it's to create the culture, to create the environment, to create the circumstances that you can accomplish these things in. You cannot leave this to a matter of chance.

You have to build it in. There's a new book that just came out. I didn't read it yet, but I know the premise of it. It's called Willpower Doesn't Work. I love it. What his premise in that book is that your willpower is limited. That's true. Roy Baumeister from University of Florida showed that you can have what they call ego depletion. If you make too many decisions during the day, if your prefrontal cortex is overused, it's going to tire out. The way to get around that is to build in habits that you don't even have to think about. Build the circumstances in because you're going to run out of willpower.

Nobody has enough willpower to do the things we're talking about, so you build it in. You build it in. Like Bill Greg was saying, he was talking about the processes, the systems. This way nobody's got to think about this. You see?

Allison Watts: Can you give us an example? I understand the one about the new patient exam for sure. Are you talking about ... Obviously in your life, like I see how you would set up

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

your schedule so that you got exercise built in or like that, but how do you ... Can you give us some examples?

Barry Polansky: Okay. Don't laugh. Don't laugh. I'm going to give you the classic one that everybody uses because it's a good example. Barack Obama, when he was president, he only had one suit. Well, it really wasn't one suit. He had about 30 of the same suit. The reason he did that is because everyday he woke up, he didn't have to think about what suit he was going to wear today. You see? That would save his ability to make decisions throughout the day. You see? He actually talked about that. For me, this is going to sound really weird to everybody, okay, name a time and day right now.

Allison Watts: 10:00 AM.

Barry Polansky: What day?

Allison Watts: Tuesday.

Barry Polansky: Tuesday 10:00 AM I'm at work. Give me a different one. Friday at noon, yoga. Saturday 9:00, gym. Okay? Ask me what I ate for lunch last Tuesday.

Allison Watts: What'd you eat for lunch last Tuesday?

Barry Polansky: Last Tuesday I had yogurt blueberries. Okay? What did I eat for breakfast yesterday morning? Oatmeal, blueberries and strawberries. The point I'm trying to make is all of these decisions that I could be making, if it's Tuesday at 8:00, this is where I am. In other words, all of those decisions are premade. Now that sounds boring. It maybe, but my life is so regimented at this point that I'm on autopilot most of the time. You see?

Allison Watts: Yeah, I do.

[Practicing with the Masters](#) with Allison Watts, DDS

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

Barry Polansky: I'll give you another example. I'm on vacation now. When I get up every morning, every single morning the first thing I do is I do 50 pushups every single morning. I can't remember the last day I missed. When I come on vacation, I say to my wife, "I'm not doing pushups until I come back from vacation." The point is I do it as a regimen. I do it all the time. I never alter my examination. Never alter my examination process. You see? These systems are in place. It just makes my whole life a lot easier. By the way, in case there's money issues and savings issues for people, there are ways to apply this to that also. You see?

Allison Watts: There's a book called The Automatic Millionaire, right?

Barry Polansky: Yeah, but again it's the same philosophy. I've been doing that, and I teach those things to my kids as well, and they do it. Everything is a process.

Allison Watts: That's interesting because I wonder how much of that ... I don't remember what your strengths were, but I'm sitting here thinking, "Oh my gosh. My personality seems quite different than that."

Barry Polansky: Let me mention part of the book.

Allison Watts: Okay.

Barry Polansky: Now this is a very difficult book to read. I will tell you that. This guy is very popular right now in political circles more than anything else. His name is Jordan Peterson. He's a Canadian clinical psychologist and a neuroscientist. The name of his book is called The 12 Rules for Life. Now in the book he talks about some really strange things that are political in nature. We're not going to get into that. The essence of his book is how to go from chaos to order.

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

How to go from chaos to order. The main premise of the book is that for the last 50 years, we've been talking about one word, but we never get to do it, and that word is responsibility.

Responsibility. When we become responsible ... Let's talk about the TAO of dentistry, T-A-O, trust, appreciation and ownership. Ownership would be the responsibility factor. Now that I look back over the last 30 or 40 years, I realized that when I was in burnout, my life was in chaos. When I took the responsibility to do these things, there was order, and that started with The Art of the Examination. Okay? Now I know there are some people on this call who are about to pull the core components of Jordan Peterson, but the essence of what he's talking about is what's important, responsibility. You see?

Allison Watts: Yup. Actually I appreciated and I'm seeing it applied to many things right now as we're speaking, but I appreciated ... I remember you saying after self-awareness is ... I mean I do believe that if we decide and choose that we are responsible for our results and we are ... Like if we take ownership of our life and our choices, that is a huge part of leadership. That's the only way, well, I don't know if it's the only way, but it feels to me like the way to true success and true empowerment and really taking life on. You know?

Barry Polansky: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Allison Watts: I mean being aware and then being the person who makes the choices, taking responsibility for that.

Barry Polansky: Otherwise, I love the metaphor that he used going from chaos and disorder to order. You can see it in your own life. You can see it in the lives of your patients. You can

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

see it in the lives of just walking down the street and looking at somebody. It's just chaotic. Their lives are chaotic versus somebody who's lives are in order.

Allison Watts: For you, you're saying that the answer to that really are the systems. Taking responsibility and then the system. Creating processes and systems to set yourself up for ... Yeah. Cool.

Barry Polansky: Exactly. Taking the responsibility to do that. That not only includes the personal stuff, but the systems and the processes for your entire organization. In dentistry, that means your practice.

Allison Watts: Totally. Awesome. Well, we're like almost at the end. Is there anything you want to say to close, Barry? I feel like we got to most of what we said we wanted to talk about.

Barry Polansky: Okay. Hopefully I am going to get write another book. Yeah, okay. The concept that I've been thinking about lately is a concept that I'm calling Slow Dentistry. I didn't make this up. I got this from a book called Slow Medicine by Victoria Sweet. It's a really good book. The correlation between medicine and dentistry is very good, especially for the dentists who are on this call right now who've been to The Pankey Institute. After reading this book, you might think maybe we should change the name Pankey Philosophy to Slow Dentistry because there's a lot of things in dentistry ...

Dentistry is becoming very fast with CAT scan and digital dentistry and moving through things, but really we need to slow things down. The first thing we learned in dental school was how to do an examination, how to really take in all of this information, and that's Slow Dentistry. Tooth therapy is Slow Dentistry. Granted we can use a lot of the

Ep #66: Beating Burnout with Dr. Barry Polansky

tools of fast dentistry, but we really have to take time to get to know our patients, get to know ourselves. I thought a good term for that would be Slow Dentistry. That might be my next project.

Allison Watts: It feels very coherent with what you're talking ... Even with talking about the mindfulness and everything that you've talked about, it feels like a natural next book.

Barry Polansky: It feels that way for me.

Allison Watts: Yeah, it feels totally like it's the next step on your path. That's cool. It's exciting. I like that. I like that idea.

Thanks for listening to *Practicing with the Masters* for dentists, with your host, Dr. Allison Watts. For more about how Allison Watts and Transformational Practices can help you create a successful and fulfilling practice and life, visit transformationalpractices.com.