

0118 7 Major Influencers on Your Stress with Michael Dietrich-Chastain

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They are sponsoring The Abundance Practice Podcast this month, which I very much appreciate. And you guys can get a free month over at Brighter Vision at BrighterVision.com/Allison. Again that's brightervision.com/Allison. Alright let's get to it.

Welcome back to the Abundant Practice Podcast. I'm your host, Allison Puryear, and I am here with my entrepreneurial Asheville friend, Michael Dietrich-Chastain who I've had the pleasure knowing for years. He's got a great business mind. He is a therapist, a coach, and an organizational consultant. And just covers all these things I don't know about. So, I'm really glad to have you here, Michael.

Michael: Yeah, I'm super excited to be here. Thanks Allison.

Allison: Absolutely. So today we're going to talk about some findings that you came across, was it while you were writing your book? Or did they inspire the entire book? Like, you realize these things, then you wrote your book about it.

Michael: yeah, that's a good question. So, a little bit of both. So, when I started my business, I was blogging quite a bit. And through that process eventually kind of zoomed out and said, well what are the themes that are coming up in the blog? And then, over the course of time, always asking the question, what are the commonalities that the clients I've served over the course of my career, what are the commonalities that they share as it relates to change process? So, question, kind of in and of itself has been one I've been super curious about for a long time. So that question combined with kind of seeing what was emerging as I was writing informed the book.

Allison: Awesome. I want to plug the book. Which was just released in early May. It's called Changes: The Busy Professional's Guide to Reducing Stress, Accomplishing Goals and Mastering Adaptability. I am a plus one for all those things. I would like to do all those things. Today we're going to talk about 7 major influencers on your stress. All of which are under control. So, I'm really psyched about that. how do you want to start us off? Where should we begin?

Michael: well, I'll put it back to you, we could, if it's helpful to go back into any background information, I'm happy to do that. otherwise, we could dive right into the 7. What's most helpful?

Allison: I mean, I like the background, because I like to know how things came about. And you've certainly had a really interesting career path that probably informs a bit of that. so let's start with background.

Michael: Okay. That sounds great. So, when I was in undergrad, I was studying psychology like I'm sure a lot of the listeners are. And at the time, I had an interest in industrial organizational psychology. So, for those that don't know what that is, its essentially how to apply psychology to business success. So, looking at systems of people inside a business and how to optimize performance.

So, as I was studying, I was kind of setting the trajectory for that. taking the classes. Doing internships, what not. And when I had graduated, I got a job for a consultant for a firm out of Milwaukee Wisconsin, and worked there doing some leadership roles, some coaching, some career mentoring. A little bit of sales and account management. And it was a great corporate experience. But, through this process, I realized I wanted to take a deeper dive into human development. So, I went back, got a master's in counseling, got a license as a therapist and practiced in the world of mental health in a variety of capacities for a number of years. Private practice, community mental health, managed teams of therapists. And it was great, and I learned a ton. And still had this interest and itch in how teams and leaders and businesses function. So, made a pivot back into the corporate world and was doing a lot of training. I was working for a company and they sent me around the country doing workshops around stress management and the value of getting mental health services. And employee engagement. In a wide variety of other topics around kind of the human dynamics at work. So, that was a ton of fun. I was still doing coaching and doing leadership consultation to a certain extent. So, at that

point, was inspired to start my own business. And so, I started my consulting and coaching business in 2015. And now have an emphasis in specifically coaching and consulting around the topics of leadership, emotional intelligence and communication. So that's the short version.

Allison: Awesome. Yeah. Before we hit record, we were talking about Changes, your book. And how it really came out of recognizing the predictors of success and failure of the folks you worked with. I love that the 7 influencers are an acronym that spells changes. It's perfect.

Michael: Yeah, right. One of the things that I know will happen with this book is, or what's probably happening already, is that people are going to see the title and then realize it's an acronym and think, oh this guy just made up this acronym and to be cory or fun or creative. And, it's kind of the opposite. So, what I did to land on these 7 influencers was looked at all the clients I had over the course of many years. Talking about thousands of folks I've worked with. Both teams, leaders, folks in mental health. Continually as myself this question, like what are the common influencers that I see show up? Whether it's a therapy client or a coaching client or consulting client. And so, I landed on these 7 words. Imagine a big excel spreadsheet, Allison, that has a word on the top with 20 words underneath each of them. So, I had this giant page, and I thought wouldn't it be fun if there was an acronym that I could use for these 7 influencers. So, anyway, that's how the name changes came about.

Allison: Awesome. Yeah. So, can we go through them?

Michael: Sure. Yeah. So, real quick, they are Cognition, Heart, Action, Nourishment, Guts, Environment, and Spirit. And so, I think, well let me ask you. I'm happy to dive into each, how would you like to go about it?

Allison: Yeah, let's go in order.

Michael: Okay, alright.

Allison: You know, I'm systemized.

Michael: Okay, that's good. I like it. I like it. So, and you know, a lot of these are pretty intuitive. I think the challenge is can we not lose focus on how they influence each other and not lose focus on emphasizing one over the other. So, I'll give an example of that. So, cognition, the way we think, right? So, I think that in our modern culture this is a really emphasized skills and learning and all of these personal development tools that are out there. Teaching us new ways to think and all of that is super important. However, I think the missed opportunity is that we get too focused on that one dimension and then leave the others, sometimes to our detriment. And so, I think that's the opportunity in taking this integrated look at ourselves.

So, cognition is the way we think. Heart is our emotional self. So, how does our emotional awareness, our emotional development impact the changes that we're trying to make. Action is our habits and routines and daily practices. And how they serve us or possibly getting in our way. Nourishment is what we put in our body and how we move. So, the things that we eat,

how much we're sleeping, how much we're moving. All of these components of our physical experience and how they influence our ability to create change. And then, guts is about courage. So, I'm guessing, I think we all have times in our lives where we know what to do, our habits are on point, our emotional selves are feeling optimized. But we just don't have the courage to take action. Can you resonate with that?

Allison: Oh yeah. Yeah. And I think probably a lot of people in that the precepts of leaping into private practice are certainly feeling that right now. Because that leap is terrifying. Takes a lot of courage.

Michael: Yes. Yes, exactly. So, I think that's a really great example of how we can have some elements in our life that are really on point and honed in and then there's this one thing that's getting in our way. So, that's guts. And then, environment is the people places and things we surround ourselves with. And how I frame that in the book is talking about not just the 5 people that are most common in our life or we're the average of the 5 people we spend the most time with. I'm sure a lot of folks have heard that. so, I think that's true. But also, in addition to that, not just people, but communities or organizations we're a part of. And things that we read. And even how much time we're spending online and what we're looking at. So, all of these environmental influencers that have an impact on us. And then, finally spirit is about belief systems, both religious and non. And how those belief systems are either serving us or getting in our way.

Allison: So, I'm thinking about in a non-prescriptive way, if we could go through some of these and talk about some of the elements of each that you've seen be effective, or supportive of people. And I'll say, too, we're going to go way deeper with this in a training inside the Abundance Party this month. But, maybe just like next level deep. So, cognition, is there a way that people are thinking that seems to influence the successful side of things versus the failure side of things?

Michael: Yeah. Totally. I mean, I think a really clear example of that is abundant mentality versus scarcity mentality. Which I know you talk a lot about. So, I think that's a really tangible example of how a thinking pattern is either disrupting us or supporting us. Right?

Allison: Yeah, absolutely. And how, even when you know you "should" have an abundant mindset, it's kind of a hard shift if it's not something you were surrounded with, like I'm thinking about the environment. I'm thinking about how this plays with all these other pieces. If your actions are super scarcity based, it keeps you stuck in this cognition.

Michael: I love that you just put that together. That is the absolute hope is that people can see how these dimensions influence each other. Right? Because, like you said, we can say that, I have an abundant attitude, and that's really important to me. But, if our actions don't reflect that, or if we're surrounding ourselves with people that are toxic or that really live in a scarcity world, then, that's going to have really impactful consequences on our life, right?

Allison: Absolutely. Like I think any given day you could go into the Abundance Practice Builder's Facebook group and see an example of the power of environment. Even just abundant thinking. All the naysayers telling folks who are just starting out or wanting to start out, that private practice doesn't work. Because it didn't work for them or because they are jealous, or because they just don't know how it works. That kind of thing.

Michael: Well, I was just going to actually give a plug for you because I've been a part of your large public group for a while. And I think you do a really good job at moderating and managing that group to ensure that people are supportive and abundant oriented. And really engaged and kind of reducing the kind of negativity that could exist in a group like that. So, kudos to you for having that kind of leadership.

Allison: Well, and kudos to my moderators who are like literally the only way I can keep it going. It takes a bit of a village with a group of 15,000 people.

Michael: Right.

Allison: Yeah, and I think about, too, like the action piece. If you are taking every client that calls, even though you know you're not the best fit for them, just because you're terrified you won't fill your practice otherwise, like that's an action that's going to keep you stuck in that scarcity mindset, instead of the abundance mindset. Like, they are going to keep calling, if you're marketing, they are going to keep calling. And you can have the people you do great work with.

Michael: Yeah, I love that. It's those little decisions we make, I think, that really impact things overall, right? Just those tiny choices of, you know, is this the right person for me? Do I take them because I need the money? Or do I refer out because that's more in line with what I want to create. And those, they are hard decisions to make. It's where the courage comes in.

Allison: Oh, ya, ya. Nice to bring in the guts. Absolutely. So, let's talk some about heart.

Michael: Yeah, I think as we all know as therapists, you know, our emotional selves can be huge supporters, and they can be hugely impactful to our detriment. If we haven't actively worked through some of our emotional baggage, which we all have based on our lived experience. You know, that can really get in our way.

Allison: Absolutely. Yeah. and I keep trying everything to practice building for all the obvious reasons. And how sometimes I see people who are doing all the right things, like all their actions are on point as far as marketing and all of that. but there is some block that feels somewhat unexplainable that's typically rooted in some stuff they need to work through. And it's really interesting how that can impact reaching your goals.

Michael: Yeah, absolutely. And as far as practice building goes, connected to heart, one of the things I talk about in that section of the book is about emotional intelligence. So, I think, and there's a lot of data to support this, but emotional intelligence can be a great skillset to

cultivate as it relates to building a business. And as it relates to selling. The other thing that I think is interesting about it is for folks that haven't seen it, I would encourage you to look this up. There's a matrix with emotional intelligence that essentially has four elements to it. So, we can be really developed in our own self-awareness, but not so developed in how aware we are of others. And so, the opportunity there from a practice building sense, obviously, is that we can build awareness and effectiveness around all four of the quadrant elements, we are going to be able to connect with those that are coming to us in a much higher and more effective way.

Allison: Absolutely. So, action is a place that feels obvious. Taking action versus not taking action is most likely to get you toward your goals. Are there types of actions or ways that action interplay with some of these other elements that make a huge difference for folks?

Michael: Yeah, so I think, like you said, you know, rather than being prescriptive, one of the things I really emphasize, and I'm guessing a lot of folks listening do as well, is helping people think through what's getting in their way individually. The reason I say that is in the book, for instance, in the action section, it's really more about an evaluative process of looking at what are my own habits and routines, on a daily, weekly, monthly basis. And how are they serving me, and how are they hurting me. So, it's a hard question to answer in a prescriptive way because that answer is going to be different for all of us. Those habits and routines that we are engaging in are going to be different for all of us. So, I think that's the trick, is being really evaluative and taking a critical eye to what we do and how we spend our time and being really honest with yourself. I think that's where the work comes in.

Allison: Yeah. I can think of scrolling on your phone as a great example of an action that probably all of us do unnecessarily on a daily basis that takes us away from some other actions that could be far more fulfilling.

Michael: Totally. Yeah. have you ever heard of an exercise called a time audit?

Allison: Oh yeah. I've done it before. It's kind of terrifying.

Michael: It is terrifying. Yeah, it's like, it's really daunting. It's an exercise I've done, too. And I've done it with coaching clients over the years. And I'm always excited because if people are interested in doing it, there is typically, in my experience, gold on the other end of that. because it reveals all these pieces of awareness. For folks that don't know what that is, it's essentially looking at your day from the time you wake up to the time you go to bed. And evaluating exactly what you are doing with your time in say 15-minute increments. And creating a log, so at the end of the day, you can kind of add it up and say, oh wow, I spent 3.25 hours on Facebook today. Or I spent an hour and a half on Netflix. Or whatever it is. So, you really get a clear picture of, are the habits I say I'm engaging in congruent with what's actually happening.

Allison: Yeah. I think about this from an ACT values-based perspective, too. Are your actions in line with your values? Because I think that for me, is always a, when I did my time study I was like, oh, damn. Nope, they are not.

Michael: Totally.

Allison: Its tedious, y'all, but it's worth the tedium because of the clarity that you can find. And then, all of a sudden, if you're feeling tired and like you don't ever get things done you want done, you can see what needs to go in order for you to feel like you accomplished what you needed to that day. Whether it was uninterrupted play with your kids, or a work project that you are really wanting to complete.

Michael: Nice. If someone wants a quick hack for this idea, there's an app on the phone that you can get that will actually track how many times you've picked up your phone, and what's the total amount of time you've spent on it over the course of a 24 hour period. And it'll give you little reports. So, I think just something like that brings a ton of awareness around how we're spending time.

Allison: Yeah. I did that, and it would track which apps I was in, when. This was before, I had it before apple would tell you how long you were on your phone. Because sometimes, I like listening to a podcast doesn't count. When apple tries to tell me. Or talking to my mom on the phone doesn't count. These are all good things.

Michael: There you go.

Allison: What's the name of that app?

Michael: I can't quite remember, either.

Allison: Yeah, I'll put it in the show notes. I'll think about it and remember mine later. But, yeah, it's a rude awakening, some ways. picking up the phone, particularly. Which Apple doesn't tell us. But it would tell me, you checked your phone 47 times today. And I'm like for goodness sakes, like I was working most of the day and parenting. How in the world. But it's just that casual, no, nothing new right now, that happens, that is not serving me in any way. That's task switching, essentially. And making me have to reset whatever I was doing.

Michael: yeah, absolutely.

Allison: So, nourishment is the next one. So, I think about this as an eating disorder therapist, and again, from a very non prescriptive place. Because that's how we do in the ED world. Of like listening to your body. Honoring its signals. Moving with joy. Those kinds of things as being really important. Just in general. Of being in your body. Because so many of us, particularly those of us who lean a little too hard on the cognition side, forget to be in our body as often as we actually are in our body.

Michael: Yeah, absolutely. There's so much wisdom to be had if we can really connect with what's going on in our body. You know, how are we feeling? Where are we stressed? Where are we experiencing inflammation or need for rest or need for movement? And I think it requires some practice, too. Because if we are disconnected, it's almost like learning a new skill set. Learning how to listen.

Allison: Right. Yeah. it's interesting. I remember taking some sort of stress test, not like at the doctor, but like an assessment, a stress assessment. And one of the questions was like how often are you holding your pee? And I was like, oh like constantly when I'm at work. Like, if I don't make a habit out of it, out of going, like I am great at nourishing my body as an eating disorder therapist, I'm very practiced at what I preach there. But, when it comes to other body sensations, I'll be like yeah, yeah, yeah, later, I'm busy. And how that's like a whole other level of being that assessment made me realize I needed to fix. And I have. But just interesting things like that.

Michael: Yeah. Always an opportunity for uncovering something new, I guess.

Allison: So, guts is the next one, courage. We've touched on that. but can you tell us a little bit about what you found in your experience in research with courage? Where are people getting hung up? Or what helps them kind of push through over to the other side of doing the thing that they were afraid to do?

Michael: Yeah, I think like with so many things, getting familiar with fear, or getting familiar with whatever the thing is that we want to develop, goes a long way. So, practicing like small wins around pushing back, I shouldn't say pushing back, engaging in discomfort despite the discomfort. So, I think that that muscle can be built, the guts muscle can be built through regular practice. and we can see opportunities for that every day. These small, uncomfortable situations that we're in, instead of retreating, maybe moving toward. Or something that we have some insecurity about, doing it anyway. So, I think those small wins over time really build our capacity to be courageous.

Allison: Absolutely. I think about how there was a time in business where I got so used to being uncomfortable, that I felt almost addicted to discomfort. That courage muscle was very strong for me, in a way it had never been in my life. Which was exhilarating in a lot of ways, because then I was like, well the sky's the limit now.

Michael: yeah that's great.

Allison: I recently started doing research into involuntary hardship. Is that a term you're familiar with?

Michael: I'm not. Tell me about that.

Allison: it's the acknowledgement that for many of us, not for all of us, but for many of us our lives are fairly comfortable, and we get this lifestyle drift that we can kind of lose track of. In the

way that like, as you make more money, you spend more money. That kind of thing. And so, instead of as you make more money you spend more money, you make more money and you put more away towards retirement or very value-based investment. Instead of like, oh yeah, just more Starbucks in the morning or whatever. So, it's things like being outside when it's raining. It's raining. It doesn't hurt. It's uncomfortable, maybe, but it's not hurting anybody.

Michael: Yeah. I love it.

Allison: And, riding your bike to work. That's not really advisable in our city, I would say. There are some parts of the city you could do it, but our city I would say is terrible with bike safety, compared to Seattle. I'm probably comparing it unfairly. But riding your bike to work, even though it's inconvenient and you might smell a little bit, and all that. because it's a little bit uncomfortable, it's good for the body, good for the environment.

Michael: I love that.

Allison: So, it's something I've been dabbling in and then I kind of retreat because I don't know, life is hard enough sometimes. Like, I'm okay with my current involuntary hardships right now.

Michael: Right. I guess it's a tricky balance between pushing ourselves and constantly living in discomfort which is not fun either. But you know it reminds me of, a couple things. One, I love the idea of changing our norms around what's acceptable and not. And it seems like what you are saying could do that over time. Is just change what's normal for us. And it reminds me of this story I heard not too long ago, I think it was on Tim Ferris' podcast. He was talking about Joshua Waitzkin, do you know who that is?

Allison: I don't.

Michael: He's the guy that is the premise for the movie Searching for Bobby Fischer. He's a chess prodigy. Anyway, he was talking about this idea of kind of changing norms. And the way he was explaining it was via the example of taking his son out, who is, I think they said on the podcast, 4 or 5 or something. Taking him out in the rain. When it rains out. and playing. And the idea that for him, he was trying to emphasize that it's not the environment that's impacting us. It's the perspective on that environment. So, turning cloudy and rain into something fun, rather than it being oh, we got to stay inside, or it's a crappy day out, or whatever our perception is, I just thought that was such a beautiful example of how we can choose our interpretation of scenario.

Allison: Absolutely. I mean, I think about, again, our rain example, when I lived in Georgia, when it was raining, I would take my dog, basically just outside to pee, instead of walking. And he's a high energy dog. And then, we moved to Seattle. Well, we are going for long walks, because otherwise, you're going to tear up this apartment.

Michael: Yeah. Right.

Allison: Yeah.

Michael: Yeah, so just change the norm. yeah, that's great.

Allison: So, let's talk about environment. The people, places, and things, you're surrounding yourself with. We talked about the importance of supportive people in your life. What are some other impactful environmental pieces to that?

Michael: Yeah, I think you gave a great example earlier. I think your group is a really positive example of a kind environment. So, how we spend our time online. Are we spending our time online engulfed in the latest news that is oftentimes depressing or negative? Or are we finding ways to kind of fill us up, build us up, support our development. So, I think that's a way to think about the environment. I think the relationships we have, friendships, partnerships, colleagues, that's an environment. Certainly, the kind of work atmosphere that we are in. I know there are a lot of private practice folks that are listening. If they have people that they work with or for folks that are in group practices, who are the folks that they are bringing into those group practices. So, I think all of these things are ways that we can optimize our environment.

Allison: Awesome. And then, what about spirit?

Michael: Yeah, I think, this might be a little bit of a sensitive topic for folks. And I certainly don't mean it to be. However, I do think that there is a real advantage in truly evaluating how our belief systems show up in our life. And again, how they are serving us or getting in our way. And that could be religious or non-religious. And it could be just belief about what is possible. You know, certainly it does include, I think, the belief, the nature of reality, nature of existence. Where do we come from? Where are we going? But, it's not just that. so, I think all kinds of beliefs influence us for better for worse.

Allison: Yeah. I totally agree with that. and I think sometimes we hold onto things that worked for us for a while. And then, life circumstances change, or something happens, and they no longer work. Something like everything happens for a reason. It can be supportive and helpful in one person's life or in one instance. And feel really punitive and demoralizing in another person's situation or life.

Michael: I love that context, right? So, you can take a belief and put it in a context and its helpful or hurtful, too. So, that's a great example. Absolutely.

Allison: I could talk to you, well anytime I talk to you, I feel like I could talk to you for hours.

Michael: It is, it's a lot of fun. Can I mention one other thing?

Allison: Yes, please.

Michael: It's another element of the book I think folks that are listening will find super interesting. So, part one is about these seven dimensions. But, part two is an answer to a question I've gotten many times over my career. And Allison, I'm curious if you've gotten this

question too from folks. Which is something to the effect of what's the difference between coaching and therapy? How do I tell who I need at any given time? And what's the process of making decision should I want to pick one of the other? Have you gotten a version of that question before?

Allison: Oh yeah. a million times.

Michael: Awesome. Awesome. And so, have I and most of the coaches and therapists that I've talked to have also gotten that question, so part 2 of the book is answering exactly that. its differentiating between therapy and coaching. Its talking about how to go through that decision-making process. And its allowing resources. So, it's a bit of a user guide for someone who wants to make that decision.

Allison: Awesome. And I'll go ahead, and spoiler alert a piece of it just based on what I know is one of both of our pet peeves in answering that question is when people say therapists work on the past and coaches work on the present. That's not going to be the answer. Right?

Michael: It's much more complicated than that.

Allison: Yeah. So, if you're in that space, know that is not what you're going to learn there.

Michael: Right.

Allison: Awesome. Michael, thank you so much. I'm even more excited about this training now than I was before we talked. I'll make sure we link to the book in the show notes. How can people get in touch with you? What website should they go to?

Michael: Sure, they can go to www.arcintegrated.com. And on all social media platforms is the same, arc integrated. And yeah, feel free to reach out if you have any questions or want to connect!

Allison: Awesome! Thanks so much, Michael. I'll see you later!

Michael: Thanks Allison!

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