Episode 576: Todd Kashdan on The Art of Insubordination: How (and Why) to Dissent and Defy Effectively
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Katie: Hello, and welcome to "The Wellness Mama Podcast." I’m Katie from wellnessmama.com, and wellnesse.com. That’s wellnesse, with an E on the end. And this episode could be a fun and slightly controversial one, because I’m with Todd Kashdan, and it's all about "The Art of Insubordination: How and Why to Dissent and Defy Effectively."

And this actually relates to health and mental health in more ways than you would think. This was a really fun conversation, and we go into everything from why he wrote a book on insubordination, and why we all have so many connotations attached to that word, to the reason we’re actually seeing a higher percentage than we’ve ever seen of people being by status quo standards insubordinate. What makes people afraid to challenge the status quo, why we might feel afraid or threatened when people do? But why disagreeing and dissenting can be not just important, but very beneficial to a group, but some caveats on ways we need to do it effectively in our families, in our work groups, in our social groups, how this can actually influence and enhance our friendships. We talk a whole lot about the parenting aspects of this, and how this can help us to raise kids who are courageous, resilient, curious, love learning, and are not willing to question when things need to be questioned. We talk about how to increase resilience and wellbeing, and so much more.

And if you're not familiar with Todd, he is a professor of psychology at George Mason University, as well as considered the leading authority on wellbeing, psychological flexibility, curiosity, courage, and resilience. He has published over 220 peer-reviewed articles, and his work has been cited over 39,000 times. He's extremely, extremely well researched. He received the Distinguished Faculty Member of the Year Award at George Mason University, and has received many other accolades related to his work as well. He's been featured all over the internet. And we get to go really deep into some of his work today. It's a very, very fun conversation. I hope that you learn as much as I did from this one. Like I said, it does touch on a little bit of the controversial,
but I think very, very important, especially timely right now. So without further ado, let's join Professor Kashdan. Todd, welcome. Thanks so much for being here.

Todd: Yes, so glad to be here.

Katie: Well, I think this is going to be a really, really fun topic to jump into today. But before we jump into our actual topic we're going to talk about, I have a note in my show notes that you are a twin, and you have twin daughters, and you have twin nieces. And this seems pretty rare. So I just have to hear a little bit about this.

Todd: And triplet cousins that are not identical but look like clones of their dad. So basically, every single woman in my family is terrified of having kids because they think they're going to be a piñata and just a bunch of living creatures are going to pop out. The beauty of being a twin is I know exactly what it's like to have these conflicts, and everyone's trying to put a flag on who's the intelligent one, who's the creative one, who's the kind one, who's good at making friends. So my twins are going through exactly what I went through.

Katie: Wow. Well, that's incredible, and you at least have probably a perspective that most parents don't when they have twins. That's really, really cool. But the topic that you're here to talk about today that I'm really excited to learn from you about is the topic of insubordination. And you wrote a book called "The Art of Insubordination." I think that word maybe has a lot of connotations for a lot of people. But to start broad, let's talk about why a book on insubordination to begin with.

Todd: Yeah. I think it's pretty obvious to you and everyone else, which is there's never the non-perfect time for more moral and social courage in society. This doesn't matter where you are in the political spectrum, and this also is not about group-related things. It's also your personal life. I mean, this is the greatest percentage of people that are not religious in the history of humanity, the greatest number of people that decided to be single, decided not to have children in the history of humanity, the largest number of people that have residential mobility where they do not have a stable place where they're living. It's not just van life, a bunch of millennials just taking an RV and enjoying themselves in Yosemite and national parks. It's people that decide that "maybe I don't want to put roots after my childhood someplace else."

And then there's another trend, which is a really high increase in polyamory and ethical non-monogamous relationships and people that decide, "I want to have a long-term romantic partner, but I don't want to live with them." And all of these trends are little principles rebels, an action of saying, here are the social scripts of what it's like to be a woman, male, or gender. Here's the social scripture being in a romantic relationship. And my well-being would be different doing something else, and I'm not interfering with the well-being of other people by choosing my own pathway.

Katie: And you said we're seeing the highest number of a lot of these things that we've ever seen in history. Why do you think that is?

Todd: Well, one is we have had such a rigid puritanical society for much of the experiment of America. So part of it is that there's only been a very small window of you talking about, I don't know, 80, 90 years where you had a selective choice as a woman of who your romantic partner is. And you would not enter a romantic relationship for the purposes of financial stability but because you were seeking affection, you were seeking love, and you were seeking growth within a relationship. This is a brand new sociological phenomena.

The other part of it is, and I don't want to spend too much time on social media because I think everyone beats this dead horse but it's worth beating. But let me take a different perspective. It's the speed of intolerance and the speed to which you believe there is a norm in society that you're supposed to abide to is
something that I don't think people are spending enough time with. And you just think about what should be your attitude about spending time with people who have, you know, different races, different genders, different sexes.

And I just surprisingly taught my kids two days ago. I didn't realize they didn't know what intersex was, and so we were just talking about it. And I'm a pretty candid New Yorker, so I was surprised parenting-wise that I missed this one. But just the fact that even as a New Yorker, living in a very open-minded household, that word has never been spoken before in my household.

And so you get an idea automatically from social media of the norm is accept everyone instantaneously. And I know this is slightly controversial. I would say just spend a second defining what that group is and what it's about and why it's not a big deal so you can get buy-in for persuasively influencing people that there's a reason for dignity and respect, not just because I said so. And I think this is a big problem of many problems in current social activism.

Katie: Yeah. And I'd love to talk a little bit about the flip side too because, like I said, I think there's a lot of connotation attached to that word insubordination. You also use the word defy in your book title. I think both of those can evoke a pretty emotional response from a lot of people, and personally, I fall on the side of, kind of, liking that. When I take personality tests, I often get some version of the rebel, and my tagline being, "You can't tell me what to do, and I can't either." And I tend to resist structure.

I also have cultivated a practice in my life of every year, anything I think I believe or have certainty that I believe, I purposely question line by line throughout the year and read things that challenge it with the idea that if I'm right, I've only learned something with greater perspective for people who don't share that view, and if I'm wrong, it's important to understand that.

I also think it's a little bit more nuanced than strictly right and wrong, but it seems like for a lot of people, maybe that's not their mindset going into a lot of this. And for a lot of people, it seems scary to question the status quo or to not conform. So what's happening on the other side of that? So we have all these higher percentage than ever before, people who are questioning, but there seems to be also very much a group of people who don't want to question things.

Todd: Yeah. Katie, so this is why we'll get along and be friends for life is you are a complete outlier in society in all the best ways. I mean, one element of this book has nothing to do with insubordination and rebellions. It's really about, "How do you create a more utopian society?" And one of the ways you do this is exactly what you do for your annual audit each year, which is you ask yourself, "What are the norms that I'm being told to follow?" And being told doesn't have to be as it like an edict from a leader in your organization or the head of your household. It could just be, "Everyone is saying this is what we believe."

And as you said, Katie, like, it's really hard to be the one that says, "You know what, I, kind of, have a different perspective." Because then all heads swivel around and turn to you. You have the spotlight of attention on you, and it's not because you said something funny. It's because they're waiting with arms folded of, "Okay, here's going to be some friction and some drama, and thank God, it's not me. It's going to be Katie or Todd that's going to be doing this thing." People really enjoy showing that they are loyal member of the group or the tribe. And if that's about pointing out who's the witch that we burn at the stake, sometimes this is the strategy that people are relying on.

I don't want to make a hyperbolic statement in saying that, you know, we've got these pyres where we're trying to crush people's souls. What I would say is that we really do have this prime strong need to feel a sense
that we are valued as a person, not just because of what we look like and what we've said in the past, it's the idea that we are not expendable. And if we happen to pass away, that we're not replaceable that easy in our group. We all want to feel that.

And one of the quick short efficient but ineffective routes for well-being is just to show really clearly, you agree with the dominant ideas of the group, and you don't question the orthodoxy. And the challenge is, if you, me, or someone listening believes something that the group you care about doesn't believe in, or at least they're not saying it, you say to yourself two things. One is that I'm not that smart, no matter what college you go to, and I'm not that wise because there's...you know how many books and podcasts that are on your list that you haven't gotten to yet. So you have this self-doubt. It's also a little bit of intellectual humility.

And the second part is, "God, life is hard enough as it is." I have three kids. I think you have more than three kids, and you've got to pay the bills. The tax man is coming down the corner. "Why would I add social persecution potentially to the list of things that I have to do when I got to talk to the cable guy?"

Katie: Yeah. That's a great way of explaining it. And I think you touched on something else really important. I was going to save this to later, but I think this might be a great springboard into the next part of this conversation, which is I've had parenting experts on here before who have said, as humans and especially for kids, understanding the human need for belonging and significance is really helpful as a parent because kids do have those core needs. And I think often those, kind of, get swept into this idea of believing the same things, thinking the same things, kind of, following the status quo.

And I would challenge that, actually, one of the greatest gifts we can give our kids is to teach them to question, of course, respectfully and kindly and with respect for other humans. But to teach them that questioning process while still making sure we are taking into account their need for belonging and significance of connection as parents and making sure we're respecting those parts.

But earlier on, you use the phrase "because I said so." And this is a phrase that I...one of the things I'm most proud of in my life is I've never used with my kids, and this was very, very intentional before they were born. But I think often kids are told "because I said so," and you're a parent as well. So I'm curious how this affects your parenting and how you raise your kids to be able to ask these hard questions and to challenge the status quo when inadvertently, you are the household, and they're probably challenging you quite a bit.

Todd: Oh, yeah. By the way, it's very clear if this is someone first time listening. This is why you're the wellness mama because I definitely have said "because I said so," and I regret it. One of the things that I do in parenting, I mean, this is the most mundane strategy I have to offer, is it's just like playing Wiffle ball in the street, and you hit the ball, and it hits a tree. You say interference, and you do a redo. You don't do this in professional sports, but when you're a kid, you do this.

And I think adults have to have more inters, interferences, where every single day of your life, you can wake up and do a mea culpa of what you said to your friends, your partner, your co-worker, and your kid. And my kids know how much I apologize, and I'm not doing it to win points. I'm doing it because I was wrong. What is the benefit other than my ego not to say, "Listen, here's what I wanted to say. Here's what I said, never the twain shall meet. Let me get a redo and phrase it the way I want to even though I know I really pissed you off. And I'm upset about that that happens there." And then afterwards, this is what some parents miss even if you add this strategy is explain why you're doing the apology and say it as like, "Listen, this is why it's important to me. This is why I ruminated over this over the course of the night." That's the simple strategy.
The more challenging strategy, which I think is important, is if you're going to tell your children that, " Stranger danger, it's your body. Nobody should touch it even with me in the shower when you're three years old." You know, I used to ask my kids for permission, "Hey, is it okay if I soap your torso? I didn't say torso...your body?" It's just setting up the early seedlings of when they're in high school and they're in college and they have a romantic element of their life. I want them to know from the get-go, from the age of three onward, nobody, even your parent, has access to your bodies. And as they get older, you know, we have, you know, the tough conversations about, you know, incest and difficult things that happen in other kids' lives and why we should, you know, donate gifts on Christmas and Hanukkah. You know, these are the reasons people have hard lives, or the Roe v. Wade debate, which we won't necessarily dive into, but it's that this is what it comes down to.

So if you're going to give kids that license. If a teacher espouses a political view that they disagree with in the classroom, just insert a mad lib blank. I'm not going to reveal what that is. And you train your kid to raise their hands, and as you said, compassionately and attentively and with the sense of benevolence say, "You know what, I, kind of, have a different perspective about that. I learned it from my parents or a book that I read. Do you mind if I share it?" If the teacher says, "No," the onus is on them that they've clarified their close-minded. There's no bad situation if your entry point into disagreeing is from a place of learning and from a place of connecting and relating to another person.

I had a situation with my kid when they were in fifth grade, where the band teacher came out. Hopefully, she's listening. And she told all the kids, "Listen, the way that I get paid and I get to continue to next year is how many kids sign up for band. So I want to know how many hands who's gonna do band next year." She got a whole bunch of fifth graders together, no other adults present. My daughter, so pleased to hear about this when I got the call from the principal, she raised her hand and said, "Hey, I'm under the understanding that you're not supposed to pressure us to tell us to do band or not." This teacher was so aghast. So she sent her to the principal, said "You're disrespectful." Now, I don't know how she phrased it. She might have phrased it wrong. I definitely know she didn't use profanity. But she's in fifth grade. She's not supposed to say it perfectly.

The proper response by a teacher is to say, "I love that you're assertive. I love you're expressing your opinion. Let me think about it. I'll get back to you. But you could have expressed it in a better way such that I would have been more likely to listen." Sending it to the principal's office is, Katie, exactly what you said, a parent saying "because I told you so." And when that principal brought, you know, my partner and I in, I told him, "Listen, my daughter might not have described it properly, but here's the thing. In a few years, some guy's gonna be in the basement with my daughter and say, 'Hey, do you mind if I kiss you, touch you?' Or not say anything. Do you want my daughter to have the attitude passively to just agree with a guy doing whatever he wants to do? Or are we raising these girls now to be assertive so that they stand up and say, 'No, I'm not interested. I don't think of you that way? I'm training my daughter now. I want her to disagree with authority figures, I want her to disagree with people in power if she thinks it's for good reason.'"

And the principal said, "You're right." It's not that I want to be right. I want that to be the system of how you train children. They're not adults in the making. They have their own minds, their own thoughts, their own beliefs, and our job is to scaffold, is to assume they're going to be a little bit off kilter, and train them to fight against any normal belief that they think is problematic. It always starts with the younger generation.

Katie: Yeah. And a couple of key things you said. I think the first one is that having the humility as a parent to apologize and admit when you're wrong, which gives them the example and the ability, the freedom to do
that themselves, which I think many of us maybe had to learn some of those lessons as adults or maybe weren't given great foundational tools to do that when we were kids. But it's certainly a thing we can model for our kids, and I share your desire to have kids who are free thinkers and who are willing to question things.

And I think as a parent, it does require a little bit more responsibility and patience when they're young because I've told them, mine since they were little, you know, "Question everything. Ask hard questions." And when my oldest was two, he looked at me in the eye and he said, "Even you?" And I said, "Even and especially me." And he has never let me down on how much he questions things. But I think it's modeling those tools for them.

And even when they're experiencing emotion. I've done, kind of, the Byron Katie model with them, where when they're feeling an emotion or they're, kind of, lashing out at a sibling, asking them, you know, "What are you feeling? And is that true? What else could be true? What would this look like if something else entirely were true?" And, kind of, taking that same method and applying it to any interaction they have and into society. I think this touches on a deeper point as well, which, for a lot of people, having someone disagree or dissent almost seems to, kind of, touch on a primal fear of response. And I know you talked a little bit about this. But why is it so scary as humans when someone disagrees or dissents?

Toddy: Well, we can go back to what's the benefit of conformity. And one of the benefits of conformity is a group makes greater effort, and they're more efficient in terms of time span to accomplish their goals. If you work in a firehouse, and you get the alarm, and you don't know if it's a cat in a tree or a house that's burning down, if you're the person that says, "Okay. Hold on. Pause. Before everyone goes down the fire pole and before everyone brings on all the hoses, let's ask ourselves, 'Should we be asking what this is for ahead of time before we do things?'") It is you are slowing the speed of the firehouse getting to the scene of the problem that happens there. But that descending voice is pretty valuable because do we need to make sure that we have the biggest physically strong people for the firehouse, or do you want the people that are the most nimble that could, you know, climb up the fire escape and get to the roof very quickly? Or do you have people that don't have a fear of heights? They can climb a tree and get the baby or the cat that's stuck in there? So there's something to be said about having an extra 15 seconds added to that situation to make sure we have selected, not just the group that's the quickest to get to the fire truck, but the one that has the greatest talent stack and skill stack to accomplish whatever the actual problem happens to be.

But it's freaking annoying. You can imagine at a firehouse to everybody like, "Come on, just get in the freaking truck, and let's just get there already. Somebody could be dead by now because of this." And when you hear that word that a life or death scenario might be the result of you, you conform. But you don't just conform then. You conform every time in the future, and this is the challenging part about trying to get dissent into the picture. We are trained in most groups. I mean, Katie, you are a, you know, flourishing outlier that the key to having a successful group is you have cohesion, you have consensus, you have minimal problems and conflicts, you accomplish your goals quickly, you're productive, and you're creative.

And what I want to say is, kind of, something that you alluded to before, what makes a good group member. A good group member, which you have to train group members to be, family households or if it's in the workplace or if it's an athletic event, is a good team player is someone that disagrees when the norms, the guidelines, and the leadership, and the direction you're going is unhealthy, dysfunctional, and potentially problematic. Even if you're wrong, a good group member points it out because they care about the group. So we have to change the belief that disagreeing is a sign of discontent as opposed to, if you care about the group, disagreeing is the greatest sign of loyalty.
And you have examples like Elizabeth Cheney right now, who, you know, was a little bit late in disagreeing with Donald Trump. Not that we want to get into politics, but you have this tendency in the political parties in Australia, the UK, and in the U.S right now, as well as Central America, that if you descend, you are disloyal to your party because all you care about is getting elected. And I would say that norm needs to be changed is get those ideas out there so we can have more perspectives. The more ideas...the greatest predictor of a creative solution is you have the most ideas to choose from and select from to find a creative solution.

Katie: And as you mentioned, we're not necessarily as groups wired to enjoy when people disagree or dissent, which I think if you're the person doing that, puts a little bit more of responsibility on you of being persuasive, and like we touched on, having good communication and being kind and making sure you're doing that effectively. And to just touch on the parenting angle, that with my kids, when they're angry, or they're yelling, or they don't want to do something, instead of just shutting them down or saying because I said so, I'll try to reframe and say, "Hmm, it doesn't seem like your method right now is very effective because you're not converting anyone to your viewpoint with this yelling that you're doing. Is there a more effective way that you could communicate this point? Is there a more effective way you could show us?" and I think that, kind of, gives them a tool for reframing.

But you mentioned in the book...there's so much obviously many, many books written about persuasion and influence from so many personal development people from Dale Carnegie onward. And you bring up a point that I think is really important about how the strategies are different if you're in a place of power versus if you're not, and especially for kids, they're not necessarily in a place of power within the home. So, talk about that a little bit more. Explain what you mean.

Todd: Yeah. This whole framework that has 60 years of science that I'm interested in is what's called minority influence. And minority means you lack the status, you lack the power, as you said, this is kids, and you lack the numbers. And so there's a number of organizations where there's one woman in the room. You know, there's one person that's black in the room. Well, to some degree, you lack the numbers in terms of the immediate visual appearance of where the alliance is drawn.

And so one of the strategies for dealing with this is before you have these group situations, even when you're...you know, the families going to the Outer Banks, I got back there from a couple...you know, a couple weeks ago, is you're making decisions about dinner. Do you go to the bay side, or do you go to the beach side? Are you going boogie boarding, or are you going jet skiing? There are all these little decisions that happen there that involve persuasion and influence. In these scenarios, we can teach people to be more effective at not only coming up with a good idea but also as you said is a good way of expressing the idea to bring other people onto your side.

And you're really trying to increase the welfare and well-being of other people. But also as you mentioned, in the short term, people might get really annoyed because their view wasn't put forward. So, one important strategy for us and to teach other people is expanding the time horizon, where instead of thinking about immediately thumbs up or thumbs down to whatever idea that you brought to the table, think about how are you going to feel one week later, how are you going to feel six months later.

And so when people offer us the suggestion of, you know, maybe we don't need to come in for the workplace, I think the mistake of a lot of leaders and organizations is they're thinking about the first few months of the real estate bills that I have to pay, the lack of burstiness, that really fun moment in a meeting where you're like, "Katie, like, I love that you said this. Hey, besides parenting, how would this have an influence in Sri Lanka for people that are working in the farms? I wonder if the same strategies are relevant there and how would it
be different." And all of a sudden, your space lego block set is attached to my farm lego block set, and we're going in all these different directions. That doesn't really happen in the online world, but here's the thing.

When organizations are thinking about that as people are working from home, those moments, when you ask yourself how often does that really happen over the course of a month where you get that burstiness, it's really like one to three times. And if you think about how much time is wasted by talking about last weekend and what you do next weekend in comparison, inefficiencies, ineffective compared to working at home. And so if you expand the time horizon and realize people are going to have concentrated time and exactly the matching of their personality and the structure of their household, and they're going to organize it for four firm hours of flow that is more than what most people get in the workplace.

And so when we think in a larger period, you do a number of different things, instead of being the person that says, "God, I really want to write a book. I really want to learn to play tennis. I really want to live in one of those tiny houses." It seems completely overwhelming. But when you expand the time frame for a year and think about what are the skills, and what are the knowledge bases, and what are the mentors, and sources of wisdom that you can tap into between now and then, you can do almost anything.

Katie: Yeah. And I'd love to talk more about strategies, both as if you're going to be the person who brings up these points of dissent and/or if you're in a group and you're, kind of, an audience member, and you're hearing a point of dissent that maybe challenges you. Because history isn't necessarily the most kind to people who dissent. And there are certainly many, many stories throughout history of people who met, kind of, untimely ends because of their dissent. So, now moving into this, kind of, new time period where we're understanding these things are happening in larger numbers than they ever had before, what are some strategies we can use? You've touched on some but both as the dissenter and as someone listening in, an audience member.

Todd: Yeah. I'm glad you brought up history because I love to bring historical examples that people don't know about as opposed to what happened over the past two weeks. So take one of my favorite women in history, Katharine Graham, whose father owned "The Washington Post" and then it was bequeathed to her. And there's a really cool apocryphal story, which I don't know if this is fully accurate, but doesn't really matter because it's too cool of a story otherwise. So in the early 1900s, she was in the UK, and after dinner...they'd have these nice dinner parties, and then afterwards, they would ask, "Okay, can all the ladies leave? We're gonna smoke some cigars and, kind of, just hang out and drink some bourbons." And those were when the real conversations happened about government, about policy, about you, know, where the business and the company is going to lead. And Katharine Graham was running...she owned the paper, and she didn't get up. And a bunch of men were like, "Hey, Katharine, listen, all the ladies are going down the room." And she's like, "No, I've got better ideas than half of you here, but you haven't heard them yet." And she sat in that chair. And eventually, they were like arms folded of, kind of, like, "All right. Listen, Katharine, you can stay and not have fun yourself." And her ideas in that room supposedly were incredible and took the paper in a number of different directions.

And what I love about the story is the women that did not stay with Katharine. When she came out of that room, it changed their attitude and perspective about what you're allowed to do as a woman when you're socializing in a group of people. And it seems like very bizarre because it's a little bit of a different world right now, but in some ways, it's not. You still have, you know, if you don't play golf, you lose a lot of opportunities in the business world. And she affected those people, those people tell stories of Katharine, and then here I am, you know, decades later telling a story about Katharine.
So it starts with individual people being recalcitrant and stubborn. And you have to think of the perspective of "I'm willing to absorb 80%, 70% social approval in the moment because the mission is important, and I'm not doing this just for me. So you're thinking from a pro-social perspective when you're dissenting. And that gives you a little bit of an extra boost of courage. So for Katharine knows, "I'm doing this for women." Like, women shouldn't be removed from this conversation just because they have ovaries as opposed to testicles. And that was her homely perspective.

And, you know, Serena and Venus Williams with their dad, it was the same perspective of having a black woman on the tennis court, which was why would you play basketball, and why would you play baseball as opposed to playing tennis? Like, why is this sport be racialized as opposed to, you know, just like they're supposed to be playing a different sport that happened there? When you think of this...one of the greatest ways of getting that extra boost is thinking of, "Who's going to benefit from me speaking up for those people that lack power and status?" Even if you lack power and status.

And just as a side effect. This is research that was done by...forgot her name, but she's in the book. And she basically showed is that often the dissenter does not move people to change their behavior on the issue or the topic they care about. So when Venus and Serena Williams enter the tennis world, people despise them. Like, they weren't beloved in the beginning. They were beloved later in their careers where they changed their views for, "Maybe we should think about how do we allow people to enter into tennis tournaments?" And it wasn't about race and it wasn't about them, but it made them think about things. And that's the way to think about dissenting and disagreeing.

You're a tertiary issue is where they'll get to modify their behavior and start to update their beliefs. And you need to be able to accept that that is a really good positive outcome, even if they're not addressing the thing that you care about because people want to protect their egos. And you have to understand that if you want to be doing social activism.

Katie: That's a good point. And in my interview prep, one of the questions I ask is if you had to give a TED talk in a week, what would it be about? And your answer was how to create exciting and lasting friendships. And I think this touches on another point. From the book, you talk about, kind of, the myth of the lone genius or the lone ranger that does this alone. While we love to make movies about those people many years after their death, you talk about that, kind of, being a myth. And you tied this into some advice related to people having better friendships and not having to go this path alone. So can you talk about that a little bit?

Todd: Sure. You know, when we think about, "What are our psychological strengths, and what's in our mental toolkit," we often are very intra-personal. We do an inventory. We take those tests that are available online and say, you know, "I'm high in forgiveness and perspective and creativity and curiosity." Well, what we know from the science is that when you have a very close friend, you have a close intimate relationship, friendship, romantic relationship, family, and they experience physical pain, they're shocked right next to you, and both of you are in FMRI chamber so we could see what's happening in terms of what brain regions are being activated, there is about a 0.80 correlation between the pain regions that are activated and the person who's being electrically shocked and you right next to them.

And the way that I interpret these neuroscience findings is when you enter a close relationship, and you start absorbing their information, their knowledge, their skills, and you also realize, like, Katie, I can call you 11:00 at night and ask of, like, "Hey, how do you start a podcast?" So to some degree, if we're close friends, I have access to your repository of knowledge because I can just call you at any point in time. We mentally treat that as part of who we are as a person. And so when you experience physical pain and I'm there, I experiencing
physical pain as if it's me who's being shocked, and everyone who's listening has had these moments where it involves a bad pregnancy or a cancer diagnosis, or, you know, someone's car ends up breaking down on a bridge at 3:00 in the morning, we feel the sense of terror as if it's our own, and we want to go do something about this.

And so knowing that we expand the sense of self by integrating the social network, the financial resources, and the knowledge resources of people that enter relationships with us, you think to yourself the benefit of forming relationships with people that are similar to you in beliefs, knowledge, and background is really secondary to spending time with people who are different from you because then you get a larger psychological toolkit because you are including all these new things into yourself. So I make it a point. Other people should make it a point.

If you're not a great storyteller, if you're not a great orator, if you're not great at writing really persuasive emails or being assertive if someone ignores you or is ungrateful to you, having people that have these skills is a boom. You can send it to them and say, "Hey, can you edit this for me?" Because I know you spot their strength, you tell them about the strain." And you're like, "No, this is why I'm leveraging. I want to leverage your strength." People love being told that they're awesome, and that's why you want access to them that happens there. So choose a self-expansion motivation for the people that you want to enter into your life, and you're going to have a better alliance than a bunch of similars.

Katie: Another thing I loved about the book is as someone who spends an embarrassing amount of time in PubMed reading studies, it seems, like, you also really enjoy delving into the science of this. And your book is very, very well referenced and well cited, so you obviously went deep on the science of this. And you do research in this world as well. I'm curious some of maybe high points of what you found in your research science-wise and if there were any really interesting facts that didn't make the book that you're seeing in the research.

Todd: Well, I'll tell you a cool one that we just submitted. We did seven studies with my postdoc Laura Wallace, so it's not in the book. And I think it's really important about...the question we asked ourselves was, "How can we change people's minds to be the type of person that would disagree in their group?" And I think this is ripe right now for when you think about echo chambers and you think about we are intentionally choosing sources of news that confirm our existing beliefs as opposed to we're basically anti-Katies where as opposed to at the end of the year, we are purposely selecting books and talking to people and listening to podcasts and people that have different views than us. And as you said, you know, the benefits are either you expand your source, your knowledge, and wisdom, or you come up with better arguments for why you believe what you do. There's really no loss except for a little bit of distress and a little bit of time that you're spending.

What we found was, was that people tend to have very substandard views are what do people actually believe in about ideas. And most people underestimate how open-minded other people are to having their views change as long as it's a high-quality message, and they're in the right place at the right time. And so we collected data on this and we showed...we asked them, "What percentage of people in your political group do you think would be open to listening to a really good, high-quality message from the other political party?" It seems like this would...like, most people believe it's close to zero when you go on...when you listen to the news and you go on social media right now. It ends up at a large percentage of people are open but not to anything. And so once they hear this, they realize, like, "Oh, I wouldn't be the only one that would open to it."

But then there's a second norm that people tend to underestimate, which is, to what degree would you be persecuted if you were to disagree or challenge the group? And you're doing it not to show that you're smart
but because you care about the group. And again people underestimate or overestimate how much they're going to be rejected and ostracized. And I think this is important. So once they recalibrate their beliefs that people are more open-minded than they think and people are less likely to ostracize. But the people that ostracize, they are loud, they're aggressive, and you hear them. The large majority of people are to come to the side, say, "Listen, that was a really good point, but I don't want to say anything publicly because I don't want to be the next in line in the firing squad." As a result of just being...having these updated norms, people are more curious about what the other side believes in, more likely to seek out information on perspectives that are not like their own, and they're more likely to be willing to change their mind and actually sign up for services where they get the news that shows, "Here is both perspectives on the Supreme Court. Here's both people's perspectives on Ukraine and Russia. Here's both political side's perspectives on whatever the topic of the day is." And so you're seeing even behaviorally, people are changing their mind.

The concrete advice about this, do not assume that everyone knows what the norms are of the group. Collect information and share information for how much people are accepting of disagreement, and don't take it as a fact that the number of people that say something out loud is an indicator of how the group feels about having new ideas, creative thoughts, and creative beliefs enter into the ecosystem of the group.

Katie: I love that. That's a really good reframe. And as having been in the online world now for 15 years, I feel like I have some first-hand data in this, and that "Wellness Mama" over the years has challenged a lot of things that at the time, kind of, fell in line with the status quo. And there certainly is that very loud and vocal group that you said who are...will disagree with you usually in the comments, and they can usually say some pretty harsh things. But that is definitely not the consensus of the group. But if you were just going on the comments on YouTube, you would actually think that that's how everyone felt.

And this touches on something else that I think is really, really important. So when my oldest was five, and we were trying to figure out school options, I, kind of, tried to take a first principles approach and ask what actually best prepares him for whatever adult life he would choose. And I realized that none of the options from the traditional school system, even to the homeschool curriculums, actually did that. Because what I realized was that the things that most adequately prepare him are things like having curiosity, critical thinking, asking the hard questions, connecting the dots where people don't even see dots, and keeping that innate love of learning that kids already have. And so I ended up creating a whole education system that was separate based on those ideas.

And in the book, you talk a lot about curiosity and courage. And this is a very selfish question. I would love for you to elaborate on the ways that we can, kind of, nurture those qualities in ourselves and in our children. Because my personal belief is that curiosity is actually the antidote to a lot of the problems we're seeing, but I would love your take on this.

Todd: Yeah. Your curriculum, did you create it for your household, or do you actually have a curriculum that you are sharing with other people or both?

Katie: I created it for my household, and then when COVID hit and I realized a lot of families were going to be open to a more virtual approach to learning, I've been working on turning it into...I call it Unstitute. It'll be a curriculum hopefully open source in the fall.

Todd: Oh, okay. All right. Well, put me on the list...the subscriber list to make sure I get my hands on that. I love this. I love that people are disrupting institutions, and it's really hard because it's... You know, I live in Northern Virginia. It's one of the greatest areas for the public school system in the entire country, and it's
really hard to challenge to do anything else because this is why I pay insane amount of tax dollars, digression. So when it comes to curiosity and courage, there...

Here's one of the strategies for courage is I just had this conversation last night over pickleball, which is really important when you find the list of heroes that match whatever child's interested in. So, you know, most kids learn about Mahatma Gandhi and most people learn about Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, and they learned about Winston Churchill. And listen, I'm pro for all of those characters. There's plenty of other ones as well, Nikola Tesla, not Tesla cars by Elon Musk, and the battles between Edison and Tesla, which are incredible. Find what the areas that interest that particular child, even in the classroom. I feel like there should be more options in a classroom so it can match their interests and values so that they actually want to read the book. Once that happens, I'm a huge proponent of first sharing what their accomplishments are and their triumphs. Then sharing what their adversities were in terms of how they got there. But then sharing what their failings were as a human being. And so this is...

Last night we were talking about Mahatma Gandhi having an estranged son and Martin Luther King having multiple adulterous affairs with his wife. And the people we were talking to, they'd never heard these stories before. And they were so aghast like, "Oh, like, I, sort of, hate that idea." I'm like, "No, it's actually beautiful because then you realize what Martin Luther King accomplished and what Mahatma Gandhi accomplished in terms of, you know, fighting the British Empire for Gandhi and then, you know, the civil rights reckoning for Martin Luther King." And there's so much there about his alliances that he formed where it's not really just about Martin Luther King at all.

Once you find out that they had huge flaws in their behavior, this doesn't disband them. This actually means that every child listens to like, "Oh, like, I mess up a lot too, and I could still be like them." They're not just on a pedestal. They are people who had incredible feats, and as we talked about, they didn't do it alone, so make sure to reveal. I don't even know who Gandhi's, you know, coalition of wisdom was, but I know that this guy did not fight the British Empire by himself. I don't know a single name. I know some of the names of Martin Luther King Jr. That's bad. That's bad teaching. You know, that's bad reading on my part that happens there.

And I think that when you teach children that they have a personality profile that is jagged, which means that Martin Luther King was not high on every single virtue that exists. He was high on charity, he was high in forgiveness, he was not high on temperance, and he was not high on caution when it comes to his jagged profile among other dimensions. And then all of a sudden you realize, oh, they didn't cap out. They weren't a 10 on 10 on every one of these men. And also he was really low on playfulness. He wasn't a playful guy. He was a somber guy.

And I view playfulness as a virtue as long as you're not detract from other people's well-being. Well, this is an important thing to know. You don't see pictures of them tickling people, Martin Luther King laughing hysterically, except for the ever so few shots because they're such rare pictures. And once you deconstruct courageous people, then kids can get a foothold and a handhold. And in the same way, why aren't we teaching the stories about cowardice and having them in the history books? You know, one of the stories that didn't make it into the book, was when Watson and Crick came up with, you know, the shape of the DNA. Basically, you had a number of other characters that were involved that they stole their data and stole their information because they cared about the glory and their egos were highly involved in there.

And it's really important to understand that there are women that were involved when...in terms of understanding the shape of the DNA and the genome that are not in the history banks because they were cantankerous, they were shy and timid. Yes, they were in a very, very, like, masculine patriarchal environment.
Like, I'm not going to underestimate the environment, but it was the wrong personality for having these discoveries and the wrong attitude towards collaboration. At the same time, they had their ideas stolen that happen there. But we should be sharing those stories because they make it of, "Okay, by learning about what he or she or they did wrong, then I could be...now that I know their mistakes, that is the most efficient route to becoming successful at problem-solving as opposed to learning it second hand as opposed to first hand."

Katie: I love so much that you said play is a virtue. That's definitely a kind of a core value in our house as well. In fact, like, I've taken it...I've mentioned on here before but to the extreme degree of we have a gymnastics track down our hallway, and we have climbing hang boards in the kitchen and gymnastics rings that they can swing from. Because I think play is the work of children, and the more we can facilitate that, we help nurture a lot of these things we're talking about, including that curiosity and movement and limbic and vestibular development.

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But I also think something else you touched on is really important. And one thing I've said a lot over the last few years is you're right. I think we've seen this tendency of people getting in echo chambers and even to the extreme degree of getting offended when they even hear viewpoints that contradict their own and feeling even, like, unsafe if they hear something that disagrees with how they feel. And I've argued that what we actually need is more of that and not less but respectful disagreements.

What our children need is examples of adults who can say, "I have a completely different viewpoint on this than you do, and yet I still love and respect you. And let's have a dialogue about this so that we can both learn." And I feel like as a society, we're almost, kind of, losing that ability more and more each year. So I'd love for you to talk about ways that we can better handle disagreements and conflict and increase this dialogue without it seeming to trigger all these, like, safety responses in people.

Todd: Yeah. And really, curiosity is the antidote to being defensive when someone shares a view that you disagree with. I'll give two concrete ones. One is that whoever is the leader or the social attractive person in
the group, they should be speaking last and perhaps not at all. And so I want to add social attractive because I think this gets lost. People have...I think Simon Sinek or someone wrote a book, you know, "Leaders Eat Last." But socially attractive means who is the person that people want to sit next to, because, you know, they're the fonzie, you know, they're the coolest cat in the room that happens there. And then who's the person when they speak that they have such great oratorical skills, everybody puts their smartphones away, and they're getting great eye contact? Well, those characters when they speak, their comments have extra weight over other people in the room. It's the diametrical opposite of the marginalized people in the room, you know, the only woman, you know, the only person, a non-white person in the room who basically their views are actually weighted at the lowest level. So you can't just focus...you always have to focus on multiple things at the same time. You can't just try to increase diversity but not try to what are you gonna do to tweak the socially attractive people in the room so that they amplify other people's messages and don't end up being an unnecessary obstruction to other people's messages. So that's one strategy.

The second strategy that's important when it comes to trying to bring diversity and diverse views in the room and be able to listen to them is you should try to create the least number of heavily tethered identities possible. And I think this is the opposite that society is pushing us towards. If you go back to your grandparents, I mean, at least mine especially...and I know plenty of Midwestern people who are over the age of 70, they would sit, you know, at the local Elk Lodge or sit in rocking chairs in, you know, the general store. And they would talk to the person next to them about what's going on, and they would never care about the political ideology of the person next to them. They would just sit, hang out, watch the sunset, and talk, you know, for hours, and they would just, kind of, you know, take the piss out of each other. They just happen to have ridiculous, playful beliefs that are unlike their own. They would treat it very playfully. Because we lost that playfulness of, you know, just, kind of, making fun of and insulting and, like, hazing other characters that are in our world, we have treated this as more somber than it is. And we have created identities that are too strong with our sex, our nationality, our political ideology, our profession.

It's such a weird thing. When you travel around the world, in other countries, they ask you what makes you happy. In the United States, they ask you, "What do you do for a living?" And it's very interesting culturally to think about why did we make this where our identity is so strongly tied to what we do as opposed to how do we behave in a given week, month, or year. Like, what are your relationships like? There's so many other cool questions that would get it to the core of what a person is. And so reduce the number of things that define who you are that are outside of your friendships, your interests, your values, and your passions. And try not to make it where your hobby horse...you're defining a hobby horse is governance because you should definitely fight for causes, but that's behavioral as opposed to, if you're carrying a backpack, and your political identity goes with you everywhere, then you are going to be triggered and activated anytime that their identity is actually treated as something that could be criticized.

Katie: I think those reframes of language are also very, very important. And you're right. I've noticed that traveling in the U.S. We are very attached to the identity of what we do for a job and often ask, "What do you do?" And we ask kids, "What are you going to be when you grow up?" Meaning what are you going to do for a job, which is not who they're going to be at all. And I love, kind of, just reframing that even in conferences asking questions like, "What are you excited about? Or what are you most curious about right now? Or when have you laughed the hardest in the last three weeks?" I feel like you get a much cooler perspective about people when you don't lead with, "What's your job that you do for a certain number of hours per day?" And, I think, hopefully this conversation is encouraging people to at least reframe and think differently about how they have some of these conversations in their relationships and in their social groups and their work groups. I
can also imagine that when someone does successfully disrupt the status quo, there are probably some after
effects to that as well. So, what do we need to know or worry about if we actually are successful in disrupting
the status quo?

Todd: Yeah. This is the most controversial chapter. If you want to have a good time, check out the difference
of the one-star reviews on Amazon and Goodreads. One place it says that this book should be renamed, the
handbook for "Social Justice Warriors," and goes bananas on me that I'm too woke. So I think that's the
Amazon one star. And then the other review on Goodreads says that I am a white supremacist and, you know,
racist, sexist, homophobic. Same exact book, two different people read it. One says that I'm an extremist on
the right. The other one says I'm an extremist on the left. It just gives you an idea. I love it. I love these one-
star reviews. They give, like, an indication of a nice little touchstone of how society operates.

It speaks to the problem that I really wanted to hit, and this is Radmila Prislin. Nobody knows her. There's so
many great scientists that just have not...they don't market and publicize themselves. And she's done this
great work of what happens when you're in the minority and then you become the majority. And what she
finds is that once you gain power and status...again, controversial topic. So, right now in my sphere in
academia, there's a great deal of power of the LGBTQ community where if they...when there's a subgroup of
psychologists from that community and they say that, "We don't think you're using inclusive language,"
organizations buckle, and they are terrified of being seen as homophobic.

While they might not have status, power is the ability to change people's behavior quickly, and they're able to
do that. Now, I realize they're not the majority in terms of numbers and the majority in terms of status. We
have to separate these terms. Status is when you can change people's beliefs and behaviors because you divvy
out the punishments and rewards. That's different. That's power. And so in this situation, you have to ask
yourself some very important questions. We know from Prislin's research is that you tend to be anti-diversity
about other people that are not in your group once you actually win in terms of gaining access for your diverse
group.

And we have to understand that once our group wins, we end up being very nepotistic where we are more
likely to give positions to people that are similar to us. We're able to dismiss the ideas of people that don't
look like us or think like us. And we're more likely to ostracize or even banish people from the group that don't
look like us or think like this. And you need to be thinking about this as a social activist, not when you win, but
before your win. I mean, the French Revolution is the greatest example of this where the greatest
perpetrators of violence and beheadings in the French Revolution...when you read their biographical books in
terms of what they were like when they were younger, a lot of them were lawyers and judges that were
completely against the monarchy, against like, you know, the power players that were in France, the names
aren't coming through...the terms aren't coming through right now, where they actually have a history of
having a disdain for the death penalty, writing articles like scholarly lawyer articles about why the death
penalty should be disbanded. And once the French Revolution happened, these were the ones that were the
most responsible for the most wide use of the guillotine during the French Revolution. And we do this socially
as people win power.

You know, for me, the notion that any person, their ideas could be dismissed without actually hearing what
their perspective was or not taking into consideration what are their knowledge, skills, and strengths because
of what they look like, whatever it is, that's a very problematic trend, and it's a very problematic precedent.
And Prislin's research will tell you is that not only does the new minority in a group experience less desire to
be part of the group and feel less connected to the group, but then new powerful group that gains power in a
group, they view the group as less desirable, less healthy, and less interested in its longevity. So nobody is
content as the power shifts in a group without intentionally and deliberately trying to figure out, "How do we integrate the old characters in the group that we no longer agree with their beliefs? And how do we find a place where they can coexist with the current system and the new norms and the new approaches that we decide to take?"

Katie: Yeah. And certainly, history is full of examples of that pendulum swing, like you said, of the power shifting and the other groups simply, kind of, filling the exact same role as the group they were just rallying against. I'm curious, on a personal level for you if...maybe anything else that surprised you part one in researching this book and if anything that you personally changed as a result of the research you did for this book.

Todd: Oh, well, the second one's tremendous. There was a study that I didn't put in there which I love, which showed that when a group shows reconciliation with an old adversary, so think about apartheid in Africa and think about what Nelson Mandela did and think about, you know, the idea of a reconciliation between, you know, white nationalists and people that are black in Africa, is one of the things that Mandela was a huge proponent of was publicly showing that not only is there a sense of forgiveness for people that basically mistreated black people in Africa, but we are going to make sure that we listen to them, make sure that they're involved, and make sure their perspective is not...their other perspectives and their other source of wisdom and their other strengths and skills are taken into consideration in the governance of Africa. And if you think about that in terms of America today, it seems like it's a complete bizarre, like impossible to replicate way of handling your prior adversaries.

But here's what the research shows, which is that when the new majority shows reconciliation with people from the past, there's not only a greater respect for prior accomplishments, there's a greater ability to separate those accomplishments from the person themselves. So we still listen to Michael Jackson's music even though we really are not fans of the fact that he was a pedophile. And we're still able to listen to C.K. Lewis, his humor, even though you might not like him as a human being that happens there. And the reconciliation part is recognizing that there were wrongs done and there is going to be, you know, some elements of you need to show the new version of you that is a contributing healthy member of society. But we're not going to throw you to the lions and pretend that you are not a human that deserves some level of dignity. You just have to receive, you know, your just proportional punishments in return. And the research is very clear that societal groups can reinstate this, and they change...they increase the level of virtues and action within the group afterwards. For me personally, like, in terms of how I changes, I'm forced to become much more humble and much more open-minded to different views.

And, you know, I've talked to the university president where I'm a professor, George Mason University, and when Trump was elected, there were a bunch of emails that were offering services to students. And I'm not a fan of Trump in the slightest op-ed. But I did say we should have some, sort of, welcoming message of people that are more conservative in their beliefs of where would we want them to go in the aftermath of him becoming president because, if it's not going to be an educational system, they're going to go find a place where they're going to be more radicalized. And if they find the right classrooms, you know, Katie, as your program you're going to introduce in not too distant future is let's teach them critical thinking. Let's teach them about confirmation bias. Let's teach them about, you know, selectively choosing information that matches what they're believing in and selectively demolishing the ideas and finding flaws in only those news sources and people that have views that are discrepant from their own. And when they learn that in the classroom, maybe they'll change, maybe they won't, but where else do you want them to go?
You know, this book has really reminded me of taking very seriously the idea of assumption of benevolence intention matters, and then the exercise of deep productive conflict is sometimes where the greatest ideas and the greatest accomplishments lie. But it means you have to learn how to tolerate a lot of anxiety and a lot of guilt and a lot of righteous anger and a lot of indignation. And we shouldn't use those emotions as reasons to avoid, suppress, and hide. We should use those emotions as something that we can express very clearly to other people and in a room, but not do it in a way where we are taking away the opportunity for other people to voice themselves.

Katie: Well said. And I love that we got to start some of this conversation with focus on parenting a little bit. I'm curious if there is anything else that stands out to you that can help us, a lot of people listening are moms, in our parenting. I really firmly believe that moms have the power to really drastically change society quickly and I think the future generations even more. So anything else that stands out in ways we can either model, teach, or directly give our kids these foundational tools early on.

Todd: You just gave me the goosebumps because I've never expressed that before, but as someone raised by a single mom, I completely agree with you. I would say this is it's really important to train your child to amplify their voice in as many situations as possible as they're younger. Let me give you two concrete examples. And I've seen this way too often, and I've corrected it many times, so I'm not a hypocrite here it is often there's social gatherings where people will ask the mom right in front of their kid like, "Hey, like, what's your kid interested in?" Like, "Hey, what's your kid do after school?" And their kid's right there. And what I always do, I've done this since they were very little, I'm like, "Hey, Violet, Raven, Chloe, they're right here. Go ask them. Like, they have voices for themselves, and they'll answer your question. And if they turn to me and they want me to flush it out more detail, I'm right here."

And for their entire livelihoods, I have made adults or I should have made. I have redirected adults to interact with my children as if they have...they have voices, they can enter conversations, and they'll work on becoming amazing conversationalists that happens there. And I think it is such a pleasure just to hear what your kid says. So do it just for pleasure, but it is such a gift to kids to say, like, "You matter now. You're not like, you know, clay that is developing into something that matters. And when you get your license and when you get a career, then you'll matter." Because that's not true and you know it's not true. And so start having social interactions where you are making sure that your children know that their voice, not just from you, but from other people matters.

It also teaches them a fundamental skill...two fundamental skills. One, every human being on the planet has to learn how to be a good storyteller, and they have to be able to describe...everybody's interesting but not everyone's able to describe their life that's interesting in interesting ways. And so start training your kid to do that because that's how they're going to, you know, seduce and attract other people and form alliances and move up the ranks and acquire the things that they want to. But the other part is, and I realize some people have a disadvantage here, we all need to overcome our shyness and timidity. And it might be we have individual differences in terms of how hard that is, but we have to give kids opportunities to do that. And so while they might hide between your legs, you can just say, "Listen..." They might not make eye contact with you, but they're still going to answer your question and have them answer the question asked of them while they're hiding behind your legs. And you're slowly scaffolding and you're working your way up, and maybe next time, they're next to you, and maybe the next time, they're beside you having a conversation while you're just, kind of, you know, a couple feet away.

The way the children grow and expand and reach their full potential it's by having the secure base of a mom or a primary caregiver so they can feel as if they're understood, validated, and cared for. But where they become
them is when the caregiver who's the secure base is not there. And I think we forget that. Like, you have to not be there. You take two steps to the side laterally and let the kid have the conversation and then talk to them, "You know what, I'm so proud of you. Listen, it's really hard to be asked a question by someone, and you didn't know what they were going to say, and you did the best you could. It was a great answer. I love...you were so funny when you said that. Or I loved how much detail you gave when you answered that person's question. Or I love that you revealed that you're anxious and you don't know what to say. Like, that's so good that you're like...you were so comfortable sharing that, but this was difficult for you. That makes you endearing to people." There's so many extra moments by giving metacommentary to a kid after you give them that opportunity.

Katie: That's great advice. And as I expected, our time has flown by so quickly, but a couple last questions I love to ask, the first being if other than your own if there's a book or a number of books that have profoundly impacted your life, and if so, what they are and why.

Todd: Oh, soulmate. Well, so "Self-Compassion" by my friend Kristin Neff when she brought that concept into the world, just the idea of self-esteem and having a positive view about yourself is not the action but really having a soft, gentle attitude about yourself, and that your pain is not special. It's a human universal. So her book was really life-altering.

The second one would be "Blank Slate" by Steven Pinker. And what I love about that book it's you can't turn your kid into anything, and we couldn't become anything. And I know it's...you know, we like to say these tropes of, "Listen, you could be anything you want to." I regularly tell in my college classes the first day of class, "None of you are going to be president. None of you are going to be the Supreme Court." Because we know what the colleges are of every single person who's ever been there. No offense. It's never dropped down to as low a tier as George Mason University. But let's just think of the list of what other prestigious careers there are besides president and Supreme Court. And what I like about that start it's just like, "We're gonna be real here."

And there are so many routes to greatness, and there's so many routes to accomplishing amazing feats and making a difference in the world. And it doesn't have to be in the spotlight and the limelight of millions of people. And Steven Pinker's book is we have temperaments and we have...you know, we're not gonna go through it here, but there's about 11 temperaments that you can see at the age of six months of age. And the stability is about 50% to 75% when those kids turn 13. And so we can't ignore that the machine has a lot of parts that were pre-ordained before, you know, your kid reaches their adolescence years.

The third book I would say that is actually lesser known than the other two is called "Shadow Syndromes." And this was, I was working on Wall Street before I went to psychology, a teaser that we're not going to get into. And John Ratey wrote this book. I don't even think it was...sold that many copies. But it's the notion that we all have mental health issues. I'm not even going to say problems. And they might not meet the criteria for a psychiatric disorder, but we have these little psychological obstacles. There's, like, a shadow of ADHD or a shadow of social anxiety or a shadow of histrionic personality disorder where you like drama and you like to...you know, you seek admiration.

And I think there's a real importance of having the self-insight to know about this and then be able to work with it in a non-adversarial relationship with your psychological conditions where it's a source of strength and a source of weakness. And so if you had histrionic personality issues and the shadow syndrome, you did seek admiration, and you do like to look really good, and you love to dress up and, like, kind of, you know, win the attention of the people in the room. It's not necessarily bad especially if you have great ideas, and you're
really good at livening people up, and you can raise people's energy levels. But if you don't know it, then it controls you instead of you controlling it.

Katie: Those are great ones and new recommendations. I'll link to those in the show notes, of course, as well as to your book. For all of you guys listening on the go, that's wellnessmama.fm. We'll have all those links as well as a recap of what we've talked about. And lastly, any parting advice for the listeners today that could be related to something we've been talking about or entirely unrelated.

Todd: Well, we covered a lot of ground, but there's a lot in my brain because I've been doing this for...over 20 years, I've been running the world being laboratory at George Mason University. And I should say that all the science we do it's available for free on my website, toddkashdan.com, is it's one of the strategies that often gets lost in the conversation about resilience and well-being is micro-transitions from one situation to the next. And, you know, I know there's a lot of parents that are listening to this podcast, and we are all...I'm speaking for all of us. We are all freaking overwhelmed in terms of booking and logistics.

I'm gonna say this really quickly because it's...we can spend an hour on this. There's a way to transition successfully from being the carpool parent picking the kid up, you know, from ballet or sports and then going to...walking into the household, seeing a romantic partner or going from your household of your wild kids that are there and then going out for drinks or for food with your friends. It's three parts. First part is reflect. Second, that's where you, kind of, like, really take stock of what happened in the moment before. What happened during the car ride? What you learned about your kids is you required this kind of...just listening to your kids have a good conversation with the other kids in the car. Take all that in, think about how you contributed to making it a positive experience, how you contribute to making it a negative experience, and put a bow on it. You've now understood it a little bit, you've, kind of, grappled with it, you've got language to describe it, and now you can leave it behind and not ruminate.

Second part, rest. What does it take to recharge your batteries? For me, it's music or it's working out. For other people, it might be being out in nature or gardening. It could be a quick couple of deep breaths. And then third, reset is when you...before you enter that other situation, you park your car, you're about to meet your friends for a walk, you're about to, kind of, meet your romantic partner for a date, think about how do you want to show up in terms of what sides of your personality before you walk in there. And the thing is, is how you want to show up is completely independent of how those other people are going to respond. Were you compassionate? Were you attentive? Did you decide that you're going to be extra playful? Did you decide you're going to be extra serious? And even if it all fails and it doesn't deliver, you try to show and bring that part of yourself. And I think part of resilience is about how we can, kind of, move through all these different chapters over the course of the day.

Katie: That's great advice. Todd, thank you so much for your time. I know that you are very busy, and this was a really, really fun conversation for me and probably very helpful for everyone listening. Thank you so much for being here.

Todd: Ah, listen, I love your brain, I love your approach to life, so this is great.

Katie: And thanks as always to all of you for listening and sharing your most valuable resources, your time, your energy, and your attention with us today. We're both so grateful that you did, and I hope that you will join me again on the next episode of the "Wellness Mama Podcast"
If you're enjoying these interviews, would you please take two minutes to leave a rating or review on iTunes for me? Doing this helps more people to find the podcast, which means even more moms and families could benefit from the information. I really appreciate your time, and thanks as always for listening.