

Ep #2: Wholeness & Creativity



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With Your Host

Leah Badertscher

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This past year, I had a pretty major breakthrough in my career as an entrepreneur. I had my first \$50,000 month, and it wasn't like I had been creeping along in that direction for a while, steadily working my way up. This was easily over double what my best month had been before.

Now, you might be thinking, "Wait, I thought this episode was about wholeness? Did she mix up the recordings? What does a financial milestone, a 50K month as an entrepreneur have to do with wholeness?" and my answer is it's not so much what a breakthrough like that has to do with wholeness. It's what wholeness has to do with a breakthrough like that and so much more.

You are listening to *The Art School Podcast*, a show for artists and creatives who want to become the next greatest version of themselves. Learn how to cultivate an extraordinary way of being and take the mystery out of making money, and the struggle out of making art. Here is your host, master certified life coach, artist, and former lawyer, Leah Badertscher.

Hello and welcome back. It is a beautiful day here in Southwest Michigan. My children were ecstatic when they woke up. We had our first snow of the season and although I didn't think I was quite ready for winter, I have to agree with them. I went for an early morning workout before they went to school and the trees were heavy with snow and ice crystals, there was a blanket of newly fallen snow, and it was pretty magical.

So again, while I had been thinking, oh, I am not ready for these cold temperatures yet, you know what, I am going to follow my kids' lead and just let myself be delighted by the magic of it. So whether it's snowy and 20 degrees where you are or you're sitting by the pool and it's like 85, let's dive into today's topic. What we are talking about today is wholeness and what I want you to take away from today, what I really want you to leave with is more than wholeness as just an idea.

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I want you to know that wholeness is a power. It's available to all of us, it's intrinsic in all of us, and oftentimes, it's just a thought away. But because I talk to a lot of people about wholeness and being complete, whole, and human, I sense that there is a lot of fatigue around this topic, and I get that because I used to feel that way too. I think that fatigue can come because we hear the concept over and over, we're told it's true, we're told it's a good idea and that we're whole, but we're rarely shown how to move it beyond this nice idea in the abstract and then actually integrate it so that we can know our wholeness, really feel it, and allow that knowing to serve and support our lives and make a difference.

A lot of times, even when people are teaching about wholeness, I think it can come off or maybe they're even doing it in a perfunctory way. Like, yes, we must talk about this wholeness thing because that's step one in any self-growth industry, your spiritual practice, but really, let's just get on and let's just move to the good stuff about how to do and get the stuff that's really going to make you feel whole.

And this should come as no surprise, but that just doesn't work. Lip service just doesn't work. So there is real excavating and inner work to be done around wholeness and you don't want to skip that step. Do yourself a favor and don't try to skip that step. You'll find that you can never really compensate for that and you'll try with endless amounts of action but it will just lead to struggle and frustration. More on that later.

So one of the reasons I started off with a story of the 50K breakthrough and shared that to begin with was precisely because I anticipated the fatigue around this topic and people just thinking, "Oh, it's not really going to make a difference in my life." But I want to inspire you today to at least take another look. Not only because I want you to have your own major breakthroughs, whatever that looks like for you, but I want it for you especially because I don't want you to miss out on this full experience of yourself and your life.

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I want you to love being you, whole, complete, messy, magnificent human that you are, and I want you to have all your awesome, fun breakthroughs too. So if you can open yourself again to the possibility of wholeness, this belief in your wholeness really will elevate every aspect of your life. Your creativity will improve, your connection to your creativity will feel stronger and deeper whether you define yourself as an artist or whether you are in a different profession but you really value creativity.

You'll feel more confident and sure of your ability to create what you want. Your relationships improve, and your finances can improve too, if that's an area you're working on. Really, all areas of your life are supported by a belief in your wholeness. But those that I mentioned tend to be some of the hot button issues for my clients and a lot of the people I talk to, and so maybe they are for you as well.

But in general, those things do improve because essentially, what altering your beliefs about wholeness does is revolutionize your relationship to yourself. And you do that via exploring wholeness and where your ideas of not enough have impaired your connection to wholeness. A lot of the people that come to coaching and bring their challenges are really manifesting and presenting with symptoms of what I call a deficit mindset.

So in other words, deficit mindset can be chronic feelings or experiences of not enough that are showing up maybe all over in your life or maybe it's predominantly in one area. For instance, maybe it's I never have enough money, or I just managed to scrape by and come up with the minimums for my bills and credit card every month, or the rent, or maybe it's that I can never get ahead. It can also be, I'm always exhausted, I'm just exhausted taking care of my daily obligations and my family or doing my day job and I don't have enough left over for my art, for myself, much less my dreams.

It can also come up in relationships. It can be, I don't feel good enough in this relationship, I'm always afraid they aren't attracted to me or don't really

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love me and might leave, or it could be, this relationship is not enough. So whenever these kinds of symptoms come up, I always take it back to its root and ultimately, all things are a reflection of our relationship to ourselves.

And some people don't want to hear this because they think one, my relationship to myself can't really matter that much, that's just pop psychology babble, or two, they think it's important but they think knowing about it and understanding it intellectually is the same thing and just as good as really having integrated it and being it and embodying it and living from that place. And that's just not the case.

I like to tell people that it's like the difference between reading about Italy and actually having traveled there and experienced it. So there are three things I want to offer you today. First, I want to talk to you about how believing in your wholeness and how allowing yourself to have more experience of that so you have an actual experiential knowledge to stand on of wholeness will elevate every area of your life. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the author of *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* talks to this when he writes, "To overcome the anxieties and depressions of contemporary life, individuals must become independent of the social environment to the degree that they no longer respond exclusively in terms of its rewards and punishments. To achieve such autonomy, a person has to learn to provide rewards to herself. She has to develop the ability to find enjoyment and purpose, regardless of external circumstances."

And I think one of the ways that we do that - this is my speaking now, out of quotes - provide rewards to ourselves and develop the ability to find enjoyment and purpose regardless of circumstances is through experiencing our wholeness, and that we can develop our ability to access that.

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The second thing that I want to offer today, it's really two tools and practices that I use all the time myself and that I offer to clients. Both of these tools are a derivative of one of the most powerful, creative tools we have available to us. And you're going to hear me say this a lot in these podcasts, and that tool is our thoughts. Our thoughts are creative, powerfully creative, but the thing is thoughts can be like a double-edge sword. Again, a double-edged sword is a powerful tool and we all know that when we hear that term, double-edge sword, it's a phrase that in part has a negative or at least cautionary connotation. And we know that a double-edge sword cuts both ways, right?

So if we're carrying it around and we don't know we have it, we don't know how creative our thoughts are, in other words, or we do know how creative our thoughts are but we don't know what we're thinking that can cause us some problems because then we're creating certain things in our life that maybe we really don't want to create. And let's assume that even if you do know your thoughts are creative, you do have an awareness of them, but you are not trained or skilled in using that particular double-edge sword, then again, you have a suboptimal scenario.

A mentor of mine likens this, I guess, non-use, suboptimal use of our untrained, undisciplined minds to being like allowing a toddler to run around unsupervised with a butcher knife. So both of the tools I want to offer you today are under this umbrella of understanding that our thoughts are powerful, creative tools. The first of those tools is something I learned long ago from an acting class I took while I was in law school, and that was about the practice of being heavy.

Being heavy, not in terms of a depressing spiritual energy or negativity, but heavy as in having gravitas or heavy as in the ability of being able to effectively convey something that you desire to communicate to an audience. When I took that class, what I will never forget, the line that will stay with me and has helped me so much is, it's not about me, it's about

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them. That one line has helped me tremendously, especially being an introvert who has a career doing what she does.

But I also used to teach yoga and Pilates and I found that that tool even then empowered me to tap into my own greatest abilities as a teacher and also help me to remain responsive to my students and what they needed, and access my empathy and make the class about them and responding to them rather than just imposing on them the class that I had intended to teach.

It's not about me, it's about them, also translates incredibly well to coaching. It is not an effective place to be as a coach if you are constantly worried about what your clients think of you. If you do so, you've effectively shifted the relationship and made the session about you, the coach, when it should be about the client. So worrying about how am I doing, what are they thinking of me, do they think I'm any good and are they getting their money's worth? All of those things is not the place you want to be. Thinking about this is not the same as a more useful, non-self-absorbent and objective process that you can use to evaluate client satisfaction and your coaching effectiveness.

So personally, I'm always aiming and working to immerse myself in the energy of it's not about me, it's about them, because this allows me to show up with true presence, to be present for their presence, and to bring the best quality of attention I have to this person I'm with, bring my best listening abilities, my best intuitive abilities. It allows me to be clear and access what I have while also being there to hear them and listen to them and be present for what they're needing in that moment.

And you don't have to be a coach or a teacher or an actress or actor for being heavy, it's not about me, it's about them, to be a powerful tool for you as well. This is for anyone trying to create anything. Creating can feel very vulnerable, and it can be easy to become self-obsessed about what we're

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offering and if it's good enough, so while it seems ironic, it can actually be a place of power to return our focus to the other, to it's not about me, it's about them, and then to release the need to manage anyone's judgments or ideas about us and what we're offering.

The second tool or practice I want to offer within this realm of our thoughts are creative is a very specific piece of coaching that I just did this last week with my art school clients around this very topic of wholeness. And I think it's going to be really powerful to walk you through this process of thought inquiry, finding the thought that is the root of the problem, and then seeing how that thought creates an experience of lack, of feeling not enough, and then how, as is so often the case, moving to a place that we want to move to, in this case wholeness, isn't always about thinking a new thought or trying to come up with a new belief system or otherwise exerting a lot of effort to believe something.

But sometimes, it can be about just challenging or removing a thought that's blocking us from everything that is already available to us. So right now, I want to come full circle and bring us back to what I'm proposing wholeness can do for you, and that is again, that it will elevate all areas of your life, including areas I'm assuming are very important to those listening to this podcast, your creativity and your finances.

So let's talk about what the number one objection to wholeness usually is and the conversations I have with people about it anyway. And that is that people are worried that if they feel whole and complete, if they feel like nothing is wrong with them and nothing is broken, they will then feel unmotivated and they will then actually become worthless. Now, it sounds crazy when you say it out loud, right? Like, if you're worried that if you feel whole and complete you'll actually become worthless? Or maybe it doesn't sound so crazy and maybe you're deep down still really scared that accepting yourself and accepting your wholeness will cause you to lose all motivation and drive.

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Maybe your success strategy is still one that relies on needing to reject this moment, these set of circumstances so that you have enough dissatisfaction to use as fuel to get what you believe will be a better moment in the future. And I know that that success strategy, using that can work to a point, and I know it because I used it myself for years until it became clear that for my really big goals and dreams, which hey, also happened to end up including me being sane, healthy, and loving myself and having healthy relationships, that a fundamental rejection of myself and dissatisfaction with myself was not going to get me as far.

It was going to get me to burnout, or I might get there, but I'd be miserable in the process and I would have had a lot of practice becoming habitually miserable. So this is where a lot of my clients find themselves. They've been incredibly successful and you know, even happily so. But for this next dream and this next iteration of their life, the next version of themselves, they're either really scared or just a little trepidatious, based on what the process has been like in the past.

They either want to know that the process to the goal can be done differently now, or they're afraid that they just won't have it in them or it won't be worth what it costs them. And I can't overemphasize that fixating on why and how you aren't there yet only will continually prove to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. So while striving to get there as a success strategy might get us so far in life, at some point, you're going to top out and you're not going to be able to access a deeper or more profoundly creative potential that is also available to you.

Again, another quote from Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's book, Flow, "It is when we act freely for the sake of action itself rather than for ulterior motives that we learn to become more than what we were." So here's what's going on, what happens to us biologically when we are focused on not enough. We are actually shifted into survival mode. So our primal brain can't differentiate the stress and fear that comes from worrying about paying our

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bills, whether that's your rent or a mortgage on a luxury home and the stress that would have been put on our systems, if we were being chased by some predator. Like, our ancestors having been chased by a lion or something else that wanted them for lunch.

So that kind of stress was necessary and a good thing. It produces all the chemicals our ancestors needed to rev up their systems, kick them into high gear so they could hightail it out of there, and it now puts us in survival mode, so the fact that it's still there is actually a really good thing because clearly, it allowed that ancestor to escape and live long enough to procreate because here we are.

But now we still are wired as if for those ancient times and we still respond to stress as if we're being hunted, and it's not serving us in the same way that it served our ancestors. Because when we're in survival mode, whether that's now being induced by credit card debt, stress in our relationship, anxieties around our career, our brain and our body don't know the difference between that and they don't know that there isn't a lion. It just translates that these things are meaning that we are in imminent moral danger, that we're threatened in some way, and this shifts us into survival mode.

And when we are in survival mode, all our brain's energy is diverted away from functions of higher thinking, from imagination, from creativity, from planning, and is hyper-focused on three things - our body, our environment, and time. So think about your own life and the problems most pressing for you right now and see if you can see how they somehow fit into these three categories.

So these three show up particularly in my clients with a vision to create something they haven't created before, but feel blocked from doing so. Usually at the root of that block, there are some obstacles in one or all three of those categories. And it makes sense that they're blocked because survival mode is the opposite of creative mode. So our creature self cannot create when we are constantly obsessed with those big three - our

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immediate environment, our body, which is like, our physical self, or maybe our social self, and time.

When you think about us as creatures, we know that animals don't procreate when they are stressed and in survival mode, and this is why there's such a huge effort in conservation medicine around helping animals that are endangered to procreate when they are in captivity. But humans are actually the same way and it's not just about procreation. It's about whatever it is that we want to create. If our attention is given to how there isn't enough money or a relationship that's in jeopardy, or that our body isn't enough or well, we're not able to be in a creative state. We are instead in that reactive, survival state. Survival mode is a reactive state.

Creative state is when we have access to our prefrontal cortex, to our imagination. When we are in creative mode, we have the ability to think greater than our circumstances. Greater and beyond our immediate environment, body, and time. We have the ability to think beyond how we are currently feeling, which is not something we ordinarily do well when stressed because our brain is telling us we are in danger and it's really hard to be creative when we feel threatened.

So someone who writes brilliantly on this and has a lot of wonderful talks on YouTube is Dr. Joe Dispenza. I just love his work and I love what he says about what he has to say about how wholeness is the optimal creative state. I couldn't agree more. It seems to align very much with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's work in Flow. So this is all also one of the reasons that I'm so passionate about working with my creative clients around money and specifically, how they can make money because time and time and time again, I've seen how the rest of their lives, their creativity, their art, their health, relationships, all of it really opens up and can skyrocket once we have that money piece in place, once we have a solid money foundation in place.

So how do you move from survival mode to creative mode? Wholeness. Being whole and knowing your wholeness truly from the inside out and not

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just as a nice concept is the perfect state of creativity. It's the most powerful place from which to create. A powerful creative that we are all well aware of once said, "You don't get what you want. You get what you believe you are." That was Oprah. And the point being, if you're whole, then you have nothing to prove, and then you are also not going to subconsciously even against your will, be proving some subconscious belief that you're not good enough true because remember, our thoughts are creative, subconscious or conscious.

When you are whole, you know that whatever you do has nothing to do with your intrinsic worth as a human being. So anything you do do gets to be creative play, and creativity is so often a play instinct. It is an inner necessity and play is a human need. But play is not something we're able to access or do when we are in survival mode. Animals reflect this as well.

Julia Cameron of *The Artist's Way* and many other brilliant books has a lot to offer in terms of wisdom about how to shift from survival into creative from lack and to wholeness as well. And one of the things that she writes that I just love is that, "The goal is to connect to a world outside of us, to lose the obsessive self-focus of self-exploration and simply explore. One quickly notes that when the mind is on the other, the self often comes into far more accurate focus."

So when I read what she writes about losing the obsessive self-focus of self-exploration, I don't see that as her admonishing us not to examine ourselves, but rather to move beyond the obsessing over those big three of the survival mode and that actually, what can facilitate a shift into the creative mode into wholeness is the focus on the other. Which brings me back to the first tool I shared with you today and it's not about me, it's about them.

It is such an awesome mystery and a beautiful irony that focusing on another can actually help us tap our most powerful and creative gifts. And just to keep in mind that when we're focusing on them, it's not with a

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concern for how they're perceiving us, but rather so that we're thinking, how can I be fully present, and what's the fullest I have to offer now?

And if you think about other great artists, they could also be focused on the other in terms of their subject, whether that was a human or nature, or an inanimate object. It was the way Georgia O'Keeffe could paint the same door or a flower 100 times and not be tired of it or exhausted of it. The way that van Gogh was present to the isness of a chair, the way that any amazing poet who's been able to convey a truth that then stagger us, it's because they've been giving a lot of powerful attention to some other subject and then come back from that experience with something to say that resonates with us all.

So the last tool I want to share with you today is a tool embedded in a coaching example that I alluded to before. So the way it came up was in a conversation I was having with the participants in The Art School, when someone said, "You know, it's difficult to believe I'm whole when there is just so much evidence outside of me that seems to point to the fact that I'm just not there yet."

So we explored what happens when you think wholeness is reached by something outside of you. And what happens is that you feel empty, despairing, and maybe even desperate when you believe this thought, when you believe the thought that wholeness can only be achieved by obtaining or reaching something outside of you. And when you feel this, you try to feel better. When you believe you aren't whole, that you're somehow broken or empty, you naturally look for ways to fix that and fill the void. But the thing is that's a futile process. You can't fill the emptiness because there never was a void.

But if you don't know and you don't believe there never was a void, if you don't know your wholeness, then you keep on frantically trying to fill a void that's not even there. It's never been there and it never will be there. So the end result you're left with is that you're so fixated on satisfactory, unsuccessful effort to fill a void that's impossible to fill because it doesn't

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even exist, that you never end up noticing the allusive truth, allusive seeming truth because it's actually the one right underneath your nose, and that is that there never was a void because you are always whole and there is nothing you could do that would jeopardize the integrity of your wholeness.

So if you miss this, if you're chronically feeling I'm not enough, but I will be once I get that next one thing that will make me feel whole or successful or good enough, substitute whatever word you use in your mind for wholeness, that will then allow me to feel successful and at peace and then I can relax. But you just can't get to that place from a place of not enough. You can't get to wholeness from feeling that you're not whole.

So that was my experience myself this past year that kind of culminated with that 50K month. I spent a year really deep-diving and accepting places that I had not been willing to accept before, places where I was too afraid that I'd be deeply disappointed and that would result in failure, that I was afraid to come to terms with, and then came to a place - this is the very abridged version - where I was willing to know I was whole and that wholeness was unconditional, and there was nothing I could do to diminish it, there was nothing I could do to add to it.

It was a very scary place to go at first, but once I did, I felt a solidness and then also a playfulness and a freedom and a love, even affection for myself like I had not felt since I was a young child. And I don't believe it was a coincidence that within the same year, I had that financial breakthrough. I had that 50K month. Although, I will be honest, I didn't even put two and two together until a colleague said to me, "No one makes 50K a month on accident. I just want you to think about that." And at first, I thought, well of course, I know that's true, but then when she said it, it caused me to reflect further and it became clear to me that I wanted to go back and really understand what was at the root of that milestone.

So I traced it back to a number of things. It's - I don't want to oversimplify it, but one of the primary things for sure was this work I did around wholeness

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and what I want to make clear is that wholeness is not only its own reward. It really is the reward. And at the same time, don't get me wrong and misunderstand that I don't think the other things are awesome. They are. It's just that chasing any of those other things in order to achieve wholeness is like running west to catch the sunrise.

One important revelation I had in my quest for wholeness came to me one time when I was feeling quite lost and very low, and I got quiet and prayed and meditated and then heard everything you want is on the other side of a blink, everything you want is on the other side of a thought. One of the things I have understood this to mean was that the only thing keeping me from wholeness was the thought that I am not whole.

The only thing keeping me from wholeness, the only thing keeping my clients from wholeness, the only thing keeping you from wholeness is a thought that you're not. So release that thought and there is everything you ever were and everything you will ever be. Whole, complete, human.

Now, this brings me to the part of the podcast where I want you to do more than just listen. I want you to really lean in with. Coach with me. One of my favorite assignments to offer clients is an amazing question, and so that's what I want to offer you as well. Here's that amazing question I want to offer you today. What would it look like if you were to live your goal now?

Stated another way, what would a life of living your goal be like? Look like? I think once you start to muse on this and contemplate it, I like to tell my clients to chew on it, take it for a walk, journal about it. You'll begin to see why it's relevant to wholeness. I think you'll begin to see that relationship between impossible dreams and wholeness because I truly believe that if we get inside those impossible dreams of ours and look around and think about just what is it about that that's so wonderful, it's that it takes our mind to a place of, once I'm there, I can relax, I can really be me, I can afford to be me, I can enjoy being me and I can enjoy my life. I even like being me. I even love my life.

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And for a lot of us, that is like opening the door to our first taste of wholeness. Sometimes that's all we need and then that wholeness can begin to do the rest of the work. So when we open the door to the possibility of wholeness and what that would look like and feel like in our lives from the inside out, from there, we realize that we get to ask ourselves the very creative questions. Not questions of why am I not there yet, when will I ever be there, why am I not good enough yet. Instead, we'll ask ourselves, what do I want to create? What do I get to create? What do I want to explore in this world? What do I want to pay attention to in this world? What do I want to offer this world?

Thank you again for joining me for *The Art School Podcast*. If you enjoyed today's show, I would love it if you would take a moment to write a quick review on iTunes. You can do this by heading over to my website, www.leahcb.com/itunes.

While you're there, you can also register to win a free Creative Life Audit Session with me. If you're an artist, musician, writer, or other creative, and you feel blocked in your creative work financially, or in any area of your life, a Creative Audit Session will help you identify the root cause of your most frustrating block and provide you with a customized strategy to get you back into your prime creative and abundant flow. One winner will be chosen every week. Thank you again for joining me everyone. Have a beautiful week and I'll see you next time.