



Feeling Pressure to "Catch Up"

After building a stable career in the corporate world, Monica is ready to take risks and chase dreams she put off. But feels she's racing against the clock. Stevon helps us differentiate between safety and success, and gives advice on not discrediting our hard-earned accomplishments in pursuit of new goals.

Stevon Lewis:

What's up everybody? Welcome to How to Talk to Higher Achievers About Anything. I'm Stevon Lewis, a licensed psychotherapist. Today, we welcome Monica. Monica is a marketer and marketing coach. She lost her family at a young age, so she focused on climbing the corporate ladder, looking for safety and stability. Things have changed now for her, and she's finally ready to take big risk in her career. She has all these different creative and business projects she wants to pursue, but in the hustle to finally do what her heart truly desires, she fears she may be too late and won't have enough time to do it all. Let's get into it.

Monica: My name is Monica Rivera. I am a 20-year marketer, and also a business and marketing coach for a company called You Want To Do What? Since I was a child, I always had big ambitions. I actually had this book, and for every new year of school, there was a list of what do you want to be when you grow up? There was an option where you could just write in, but there were also these other choices, and I would circle just so many different things on the list, because I always felt like why can't I do all of these things? I think I can really distill it to, I grew up in this neighborhood in the Bronx, which was full of black and Latino families, but then I went to school in white neighborhoods. So, I had these dualities of where I would oscillate with the red plaid skirt uniform and the navy blue shoes to go to school.

Monica: Then I would come back to my neighborhood, and switch into baggy clothes and hoop earrings and Timberland boots. So, I was very early on, able to see that there were so many different paths that existed, and because of that, I was curious about each of these paths, but I was raised with this mentality, like it was really important to just get the secure job, not rock the boat. My mom was born in Cuba, and at the time of Fidel Castro and having all her family's property be seized, she really just wanted me to have that safety, even though in my mind, I wanted a lot more. Around 16 is where my grandmother had passed away. Six months after that, I lost my mother, and then over the course of the next seven years, my family

members all passed away one by one. By the time I was about 22 or 23, I found myself pretty much alone.

Monica: So, all that priming that my parents had given me about pick the safe route really kicked in at that point. Safety meant to me, making sure I had more than enough for rent, making sure I had a car, because for me a car symbolized freedom. So, I pursued the corporate ladder. About seven years ago now, probably I was about early 30s or so, I was having a conversation with a stranger when I had this realization moment. I said to myself, "I think I'm okay." There wasn't obvious to, until I was finally articulating it to someone else where I said, "Wow, I've finally taken a few steps forward." Ahh, that feeling, it's so hard to explain. It's almost like if you think of meditation, you take this really deep breath in, and imagine holding that breath, but for years of your life, and now finally I was exhaling.

So, since that time I just changed my model in life. My new model became shoot your shot. If you think about some of the most successful people in basketball, like Seth Curry's one of the most successful players right now. He shoots his shot all the time, meaning he's not afraid to miss, and what that looked like for me is starting my podcast, as an example, back in 2017, called You Want To Do What? The closest I had gone to a microphone was karaoke, but I put myself in rooms, so people that were smarter than me, I asked a lot of questions, and then from there it led to a fellowship with NPR, the TEDx speaking engagement, and like all these other opportunities. But I feel like I'm catching up for lost time. I want to try all the things that I wanted to do when I was a little girl, but I want to do them now as an adult.

So, what that looks like is a little bit different. I want to pursue businesses that combine my creativity and my business mind together, even though it means the opposite of a steady paycheck, and it means in some cases the opposite of stability, but those are the things that light me up now, to be able to go for those opportunities that I thought were never going to be available to me. So, right now I have these two businesses that are both very early stages. Within that, I have all these ideas of how I want to grow, and I have a full-time job still, but all those things are happening at the same time. Underneath this urgency, I know that there's a fear, and part of the fear actually stems from the fact that I am older now that my mom was when she passed away. Because of that, I think I spend a lot of time counting my days, hoping I have a lot of years ahead of me.

This rush of always doing things, it really does lead to this constant sort of grind mode or this hustle culture. There's also this anxiety of, am I too late? Has this moment already passed me by? Then there's also another layer to it, especially as you get older, and you do have responsibilities. Am I showing up enough for everyone? I am a partner. I am a [inaudible 00:05:38] to what I consider my niece.

She's four years old. I also don't want to compromise these moments that I want to have with the people that I love. When I think about safety now, safety means that there's enough for my family. It's not about me feeling safe anymore, because I feel okay where I am, but how can I extend that feeling so that the people that I love can feel safe in their own life?

Lewis: Thank you, Monica, for sharing your experience with us. Listening to Monica's story, the theme that kind of jumped out at me was this idea of playing it safe, trying to reach success in the safest, least risky way possible. I think that created in her this bit of fear that if you take a risk, it will put you at jeopardy of not being successful. All of the messages she received about playing it safe, which is another way to say hide, don't be too big, don't be too bold, I think in her, it primed her too, be very cautious and somewhat fearful of going outside of the box. She talked early on about excitement, being a dreamer, so to speak, the possibility of all the choices she could make in terms of what her life path would be. Now she's at a place where she's done well in life, and she's comfortable enough to where she's like the risk, I can buffer it or manage it. She's got to teach herself now, how to trust herself.

This concept of being too bold or too big and trying to protect against that. High achievers, especially Black and Brown achievers, they have this experience where we are taught to kind of not be too showy, because we don't want to draw a unnecessary or negative attention. I think, when I'm talking about in Monica's situation of her being a little bit too bold and her family wanting her to play it safe and choose the more secure path is this idea of not being overexposed. That if you are overexposed, the letdown will be too great for you to endure. I have a problem with it because it's, it suggests then that they are predicting the future, that there will be a letdown. I don't know how they would know that, especially for someone like Monica, who seems to do things well, and is going to find a way to be successful. I think part of why she is able to dream big is because she has some confidence, whether it's stated or not, that she's capable of doing a lot of things.

Unfortunately, she didn't get the message from her family that she should go after all those things, to be all she could be, and I think that there's this still little kind of nagging fear that if I go too far too fast, I will expose myself to detriment. I can understand some of that, because if she's going to have to be responsible for the decision she makes, then she needs to make sure that she can endure whatever the consequences of those decisions are, both good and bad. So, I think that part of what she needs to do is unlearn this idea that safety equals success. The other thing I'm concerned about is her having some compassion about what that means to go big or to go bold or to change dreams.

Lewis:

There may be some learning curve in that, and she may not have the success she's expecting or used to. That's okay, because part of doing something new, I don't agree that profession should ever be the standard, but definitely not right out the gates. It's okay to say, "it may not go exactly the way I envisioned it, and that's not a bad thing." That's not a sign from the universe that I'm not supposed to do it. Look at that as an opportunity to learn, and apply what you've learned to then continue down that path of exploration, to see if it truly is something for you or not.

Something that Monica's done now is that she's had a bit of an awakening. She's fired up. She's invigorated to go chase after things that she's felt she could have done in the past or done sooner, and put off for a variety of good reasons. There's this urgency in people who can do things well to say, "Oh, I need to get that done now. I need to make up for this lost time." Part of what I hear when she says that, is that the stuff she did before almost doesn't matter, because now she has opportunity to do more. The way I think about it is that Monica is running two different races. If she were a marathoner in the first part of her life, doing things slow and steady over time to get distance. That was the safe, secure path. Now that she's choosing to go after dreams, and she's going to explore a lot of different opportunities, she might be training and performing more like a sprinter.

One isn't better than the other. They're just two different races. She doesn't need to discredit or see her past as less than, because she was a marathoner in her previous life. If I know I can get to somewhere better than where I'm at now, isn't okay. Where I was before isn't acceptable. I look at it in a way of, but it's all under the umbrella of achievement. So, then why are we discrediting one achievement over the other? You graduated elementary school. Does it matter now that you've graduated college? I think one had to happen before the other, and so that they were both important at the time that they were. So, when you were 10 and you were graduating elementary school, that was a very significant accomplishment and was good for where you are. When you're 35, maybe we aren't so focused on the elementary school graduation. That doesn't mean it doesn't matter. I think that we put pressure on ourselves, high achievers put pressure on themselves to go on to the bigger and better thing, and we're only as good as our last kind of accomplishment. I'm saying they all matter. They don't get painted over, so to speak, by our new accomplishments.

One of the unique things about Monica is that there's this urgency or rush that she puts on herself to say, "I've got to make up for all the other years, because I'm not promised another 30, 40, 50 years." If she's looking at it as "I've got to accomplish as much as I can in 10 years," that's cool. But what if you lived 20 more years?

Lewis: So, I think instead of planning for time running out, she should look at it, at the positive side of like I am here and I get to do something every day. So, every day that I'm here, I will just continue to do things. I think that will reduce some of the pressure of "I have to accomplish X before Y time hits." I think what is really important for her is just to start doing things, using the time she has in a way that she wants, that is congruent with how she wants to live her life or how she's envisioned her life to be lived.

My last bit of advice for people that see themselves in Monica's story, is that you can probably go further and farther doing things that seem natural and more comfortable for you than trying to not be true to yourself in how you are. If your way of running is that you can hold a steady pace for a really long time, then maybe you don't try to be a sprinter so much. You allow yourself to find a pace that works for you, ratchet it up to as comfortable and as fast as you can go, and hold it, and see where you end up. Don't start to judge yourself based on how other people are running.

Lewis: And, that's a wrap. Thank you so much for listening to How to Talk to Higher Achievers about Anything. We have really big plans for our show, and we want you to be a part of it. We want to hear about your successes and challenges, your sacrifices, the ways you've celebrated. And what's ahead as you grow. Send our producer Virginia an email, and we'll get your story on the show. She's at virginia@lwcstudios.com. How to Talk to Higher Achievers about Anything is an original production of LWC studios. Virginia Lora is the show's producer. Kojin Tashiro is our mixer. Juleyka Lantigua is the creator and executive producer. I'm Stevon Lewis. On Twitter and Instagram, we're @Talktoachievers. Bye, everybody.

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ERASING THE MARGINS

