



Pushing for More Despite a Chronic Mental Illness

Dr. Pipkins is dealing with her severe depression while running a business, which poses significant limitations. Stevon offers strategies for adjusting our expectations and adopting a strength-based approach to how we define our skills and successes.

Stevon Lewis:

What's up everybody? Welcome to How to Talk to [High Achievers] About Anything. I'm Stevon Lewis, a licensed psychotherapist. Today, we welcome Dr. Ly Franshaua Pipkins. Dr. Pipkins is a professional coach who works with black therapists. She's really strategic about how she runs and grows her coaching business while also managing her chronic depression. Trying to create a balance between taking care of herself and pushing herself professionally is a constant struggle. Let's get into it.

Ly Franshaua Pipkins:

My name is Dr. Ly Franshaua Pipkins and I am the founder of The Wealthy Black Girl Method. I started my coaching business because of my health, and I wanted to create opportunities where I can concentrate for as long or as much as I need to, and then I can also rest for as long or as much as I need to.

My doctorate degree is in clinical psychology, and I decided to launch my business pretty much immediately after graduating with my doctorate degree because I had just spent a year interning as a psych assistant. And it was just very clear to me that the level of work of hustle and grind that was going to continue as long as I worked for other folks, that was not going to be good for my health. So there's a new word that I've learned, a label I guess, that's called chronically capable. That actually, I thought, kind of fit, or at least it fits for now because being a high achiever and having these challenges with managing chronic illness, I know that I'm not going to stop. I know that I'm going to continue trying to reach whatever goals that I would like to reach.

So, depression, the diagnosis. It affects your concentration. For me, in particular, it's my ability to concentrate on reading and writing. Running a coaching business

requires that I create content, and that content a lot of times is writing. And even with video content or any of that kind of stuff, I find that I can only concentrate for 10 minutes at a time. Can you imagine? I know, at least for me as a high achiever, "What? You mean I can only work 10 minutes at a time?" It doesn't feel good, but it feels like what I need to do in order to make things happen. So I will time myself for 10 minutes at a time. And then I also set another timer to make sure that I take my full 10 minute break, because I have learned that... I guess what you call your perception of how long you've been resting and how long you've actually been resting are very different for me.

Pipkins:

So, when did I get my diagnosis? Depression comes from years and years and years of holding racism and biases and vicarious gun violence. I managed all of that by probably just working really hard. Then there was a year when I couldn't manage it anymore by working really hard. So a doctor says, "You have to stop working in this certain way." And then came in the timers and the boundaries. For me, the most important thing was to recognize that, no, it doesn't mean that you become an outcast of society. It means that I am now managing really a lot of the same things with different tools.

So in my office, I have a meditation space and I use it for meditation and yoga. The reason that I'm laughing is because, as a first generation college graduate coming from a family background, low socioeconomic status, sometimes it's laughable to me the amount of space that I have to just take up and take care of myself because that was not something that I grew up watching my mothers. And I say mothers because there were many mothers in my family. I didn't watch them doing a lot of resting or taking up space or that kind of thing. So yeah, so those are what my breaks look like. Sometimes the breaks are longer or shorter. And then the other thing is just turning everything off by 3:00 PM and stop working, which is really hard to do actually, for me. But just always making sure that I recognize that, "Oh, there's a point in the day where I've actually done enough substantial amount of work to do what I need to do. And now I need to actually close my computer, leave my office."

I think, for me also, what is healing is speaking up about my experience, being in connection with other folks who know what is going on with you. And I actually do consider my community to be my treatment and specifically my community of black women. Just making sure that I have that kind of support around me on a regular basis. I'm always going to have that push pull of how to balance my energy around growing my business and then doing other things. And I think there'll be a sadness in that, or a little bit of grief in that, that I can't just go fully chasing it

without any concerns. And also at the same time I am, as I said, chronically capable.

Lewis: Mm. Thank you, Dr. Pipkins, for sharing what you're going through with us.

When I was listening to Dr. Pipkins talk about her situation and her experience, what stood out to me was the insight she brings to understanding who she is. There is a conflict that's internal with her of where she has this chronic illness that she talks about of having to struggle with depression, and she also has this desire to do a lot coming from a family where the mothers are really driven and do a whole lot. And she has this desire to do more and do more quickly, and depression doesn't let her do that. And so part of what we know about depression is that it often makes it difficult for us to do the things we would do normally. And I think it's important that she's able to understand that and she's taking some, I guess, precautions or made some adjustments to her life to be able to attend to that, the impact that depression has on her life, but it's still very frustrating.

High achievers really are the manifestation of their ability to focus on and make improvements around things that they aren't satisfied with. For someone with depression and who is highly capable, like Dr. Pipkins, it's doubly tough to be limited when you know you can do more. This is something I have seen with other high achievers that I've worked with. And I like the label that Dr. Pipkins gave it, chronically capable, where I have the ability to do a ton of different things with which most high achievers do, and I am forced to pick and choose which things I am going to engage in or where I'm going to put my time and my efforts. I've seen that. And what it leads to is this feeling of not having done enough. "I've just missed what I could be doing."

There's this analogy or a study that was done about Olympic athletes, and the ones who receive silver are more distressed than either the bronze or the gold medal winner. The gold medal winner has gotten the best prize you can get. They're the best, fastest out of all the people that came to the Olympics. The bronze medal winner is super excited to have made it onto the podium. So they're like, "I almost didn't medal," and they're happy as they could be. The silver medalist only looks at the gold medalist, the person in front of them, and says, "I almost made first. I was almost the best." And so they feel a little bit more distressed. And I feel like that's what's going on with Dr. Pipkins often where she's able to recognize that she could do more and there's more in her, and that she can't really bring that to fruition all the time.

For someone like Dr. Pipkin who recognizes that there are going to be limitations, I would recommend... And I'll speak from my own experience of having asthma and where there are things that I have to be mindful of as it relates to exercise

because it will trigger kind of my asthmatic symptoms. For her, she's found some workarounds, but I think the reality is that we've got to change our expectations of what we can do. The tendency is for people to diminish the quality of that because I know I could do more if this thing weren't there. If I didn't have depression, if I didn't have asthma, if I had parents that went to college, if I had more money growing up. That's good, but that's wishful thinking because those things aren't true. Syllogistic reasoning, the if-then process that, if I didn't have depression, if I didn't have asthma, then maybe I'd be a world class athlete.

Lewis: And so what we've got to deal with or operate from is a place of what we do have and what we do know. And I think for those individuals that are yearning for more, take some of that expectation away. Not in a sense of diminishing the quality of what you're going to accomplish, but more of a way of making it real or realistic about what you have the ability to do. Because the reality is that you are dealing with these things, you can't remove them, so then it's not really helpful to you to think about what you could do if. Let's talk about what you can do because.

I use an analogy to describe that. I talk about a Ferrari, an amazing car. It goes really fast. It's a status symbol. It looks cool. Comes in not so many colors, but red, and it's well known. And it says a lot about you before you get to a place. Also, it's high in maintenance. It gets poor gas mileage. It's very expensive. For you to want a Ferrari to be a Prius, that's not going to happen. You bought a Ferrari because it is a Ferrari, and so you've got to accept all the things that come along with it. And we should do that with ourselves too, the good and the bad. Part of our experience has shaped who we are.

And so for Dr. Pipkins, having depression makes her interact with the world in the way that she does. And so she's had to find some work arounds and she's had to shift maybe her dreams a bit. And she'll be successful in her own way. And that's what it's about. It's about being successful in your own way with what you have, not with what you wish you had.

Part of what Dr. Pipkins identified is that she's going through a process of grieving. Grieving the loss of this imagined identity of where she could be if. It's not a bad thing. It's not negative that you are sad about having to adjust or change or alter what it is you had planned on becoming or doing. It's okay. The idea is to not live there though, to not define yourself by what you could not do, what you could not obtain, what wasn't afforded to you. It's more about what you will do now with what you have.

And I think that that's where she's getting to, that place of, "I'm slowly accepting that I have some limitations. And then how do I work within these limitations?" It's saying, "These are the rules of the game for me. How do I play my best and be as

successful as I can within these rules?" When we take ourselves out of it in how upset and unhappy we are with the fact that we didn't get to create the rules, then we can kind of allow ourselves to say, "Well, this doesn't mean that I won't be happy or won't be fulfilled. It's just saying that it's not going to look like how I thought it would, and that's okay."

Lewis: Part of the homework I often assign to folks is to have them write down what is it that you are able to accomplish, what are the things you have done, and then adopt more of that as a way of defining your true talents and capabilities. So you've had depression. You've been dealing with it for a while. You're still a doctor. You still created a business. You're still out adjusting and making small, minor changes to the way that you work. You are still chronically capable.

Focus on those things as opposed to the fact that you can only work 10 minutes, or again, that syllogistic reasoning, "I could've done more if I would've been able to work 60 minutes." Well, you couldn't, and you could work 10. So what did you accomplish in those 10? Let's be proud of that. It's really hard to do, and I think that's the important part is recognizing that it's not easy but necessary to temper your expectations a bit so that you can still thrive and go be great.

Lewis: And, that's a wrap. Thank you so much for listening to How to Talk to [High 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