

Jimmy Turner:

All right. Three, two, one. Well, without further ado, I want to introduce Junaid to the show and let him kind of take the reins. So Junaid, thank you so much for being on the Physician Philosopher Podcast. I couldn't be more excited for you to be here.

Junaid:

Thanks for inviting me, Jimmy. I'm super stoked to be here and glad that we're having this conversation.

Jimmy Turner:

Yeah, it's going to be great. And for the listeners who maybe don't know, this is Junaid's first podcast ever, and I feel like I need to get that out there because this is awesome. So if, and when... When he becomes famous, we'll all know that it started his first podcast here.

Junaid:

I'll have to give you your dues and your credit.

Jimmy Turner:

I don't need any credit. I just am very excited about it. All right, man. So why don't you start off by just telling us a little bit about yourself. Your background, your family situation, education, that sort of stuff.

Junaid:

Yeah. So my name's Junaid Niazi, I'm a father, husband, physician, life coach, and budding entrepreneur. I'm dual boarded in internal medicine and pediatrics, and practice as a primary care physician in the twin cities in Minnesota. I met my wife here during residency and she does pediatric primary care. We have a spirited two and a half year old son and a sweet five month old daughter. And yes, she's a bonafide pandemic baby. I grew up kind of all over, but I usually tell folks I grew up in Hutchinson, Kansas, because that's where I did high school. I went to Rice University in Houston, Texas for undergrad, where I studied history and did pre-med. I stayed in Houston for med school at Baylor College of Medicine, as well as public health school at the University of Texas. And then after almost a decade in Texas, I decided to try something completely different and ventured to the cold, frigid north in Minnesota for my med peds residency.

After my four-year training, I started working at my current job where I see patients of all ages for all of their primary care needs. A small chunk of my FTE is carved out in a role called an ambulatory information services medical director, and basically I'm part of a team tasked with helping optimize the EMR for physician use and patient care.

Jimmy Turner:

That sounds very fancy.

Junaid:

It's a super fancy title. And I don't even think people within the organization know what it is.

Jimmy Turner:

Nice.

Junaid:

Yeah. But it's a nice kind of a role within the organization to really try to help physicians, too.

Jimmy Turner:

Cool, that's great. So, tell me, do you think, is it mandatory for someone to have a humanities degree in order to become a coach? Because I was a philosophy major. You're a history major. What's up with that?

Junaid:

I think it's just a different way of thinking about the world. I knew I was going to be dedicating my life to science. So when I went to college, I really wanted to try something completely different and really stretch my brain in a different way. And the type of thinking you have to do, or the type of writing you have to do, the long papers and everything, I think it really helped shape me as a person and make me a better physician. And I still did fine on all my science stuff, obviously. So yeah, maybe it is a requirement to become a coach. I don't know.

Jimmy Turner:

Yeah. I always tell people that ask me about that, I was a chemistry major because I had to be, and I was a philosophy major because I wanted to be a better human. And so I completely agree. It makes you think in an entirely different way, but it's been so helpful on the journey. So what made you decide to go into medicine?

Junaid:

Yeah. Well as a kid, it was really between medicine and paleontology and I really don't want to scratch at rock all day. That didn't sound too appealing, but really it was several things. It was a love of science, exposure to medicine. Both my parents are physicians, the universality of medicine, being able to help people anywhere and everywhere. My family moved around a lot when I was a kid and my parents could always serve others wherever we moved. And that was super appealing. I decided at a pretty young age that I wanted to be a doctor and that I was going to be a doctor. And it kind of became part of my

identity even before I was a doctor. And when I reflect back on it, I think that was actually my first sort of thought work. I repeated something to myself so often that it had to actualize and become reality.

Jimmy Turner:

Yeah. So that's actually a really interesting question because I feel like a lot of doctors actually struggle, because medicine becomes so much of their identity, that they have a hard time setting boundaries and letting it go and realizing that there are other things that identify them outside of medicine. So because you identified so early on as a physician, as someone who's going to be a doctor, how do you feel like that shaped your life now?

Junaid:

Well, interestingly, I think you make a fantastic point and I think I was really that way through college. And then through the process of training, when you start to realize you're striving for this ideal to become a doctor and the way you want to practice medicine, and training to a degree, unfortunately beats some of that out of you. And I think I was able to extract myself a little bit and realize there's so many other facets to myself that I wanted to explore and interest that I wanted to do. And even through med school, right? Me and three of my med school buddies, we were the band, we played at every event in med school, after every set of exams. So between studying for exams and rehearsing a set, we were incredibly busy around the end of our blocks, but we always had these sort of other identities that we kind of nurtured.

And I think that's done me wonders. I see docs in my practice that are retiring and they're really struggling. They're in their sixties and seventies and have a real hard time pulling away. And not to say that I won't have a hard time with patients that I've been with for that long, depending on how long I work. But I don't know if you noticed, I think I mentioned physicians the third or fourth thing when I introduced myself, and I really look at it that way. I think our generation is really focusing on our own humanity and putting that first and foremost. And I think that's incredibly important for ourselves and for our ability to care for our patients moving forward.

Jimmy Turner:

Yeah, I think that's really, really well said. And as you made this journey after you finished, you ended up looking for coaching yourself. So you're a med peds doc. You're looking for coaching and it actually struck me pretty strongly when you told me your story about how you were looking for a coach yourself, and we're going to talk about how you became a coach later on, but if you would share with everybody your kind of journey, trying to find a coach as a guy in medicine.

Junaid:

Yeah. So briefly my introduction to coaching was really through podcasts, the main one being the Life Coach School Podcast with Brooke Castillo. And I started listening to her podcast and really trying to absorb what she was teaching. I was working on self coaching, working on my thoughts myself. And it

wasn't really until the leverage and growth summit that Peter Kim and Pranay Parikh of Passive Income MD put on this past May that the light bulb dinged, that there were physician coaches. I was introduced there to Dr. Sunny Smith. She runs a very popular and successful group coaching program for women physicians that I was like, "Oh, this is something physicians do too." Several other speakers at the summit referenced coaching as well. So I was seeing some transformation myself, doing the work myself, but listening to all these other physicians, I was like, "Man, I could really make progress if I had my own coach."

But I really wanted a physician coach just because I can just say, "Hey, I want to talk about call. I want to talk about clinic. Others, I want to talk about OR, I want to talk about..." The physician coach will understand that without you having to waste the first 20 minutes of the call explaining what that is. So I searched online and I was looking for physician coaches and all the ones I found were women. And coaching in general is very female dominated, but none of them coached men physicians. I reached out to a few and I always got the same answer. "Sorry, maybe try this person?" And I just kept kind of going down that chain and kept hitting roadblocks. I did come across a few male physician coaches, but they weren't really mindset coaches. They were more business sort of consultant type coaches, coaching on the A-line as we like to say.

And that was kind of disheartening. But then there was a fortunate stroke of serendipity. Sunny Smith did a demo coaching call in the Leveraging Growth Accelerators Facebook group, which was born out of that summit I mentioned before, and she said she would open up her coaching program to anyone in that group, including men. So after getting over a little bit of a limiting belief of investing in myself, I'd never spent a four figure sum on personal development, which is funny, because I laid down multiple six figure sums for my professional development as a position. But I ended up being one of two men enrolled in her women's physician coaching group. The other one I think was a little bit forced by his wife. So I was the only man that signed up voluntarily for her group. And it was wonderful. It was amazing. I mean, I've made some great friends through there, led me down this whole path I am now. You can attest to some of these online communities we're both a part of.

Jimmy Turner:

Yeah, yeah. I mean, you can't give a big enough shout out to Sunny Smith. So she has a program called Empowering Women Physicians, and Sonny is my coach. So she's my one-on-one individual coach and she is an incredible, amazing, warm-hearted, just compassionate human being that you can't help, but love. And so I think she's changed so many lives through that program, and the Leverage and Growth Summit, in a large way, Peter Kim's work there, him and Pranay, it really just kind of spring-boarded so much of this because that was the big moment where it became just accessible and aware to so many people who weren't in that space before. And so I think a lot of us had a very similar experience.

But yeah, it is so true that there are, I think Sonny often quotes numbers, and I want to say she, last time I talked to her, said there was 140 physician coaches and 137 of them or something like that are women. Which is great. That's a wonderful thing. And each coach has to define what works for their business. But if you're a dude, a guy, a man, that happens to be a doctor looking for a coach, it can be

kind of challenging. And so yeah, I always thought that was such a really interesting story. And I thought it was also great that Sonny was willing to take you into her program which is called Empowering Women Physicians and here comes Junaid, and Junaid got a ton of benefit from it. Yep. And so, yeah, he's got the yellow pamphlet there in front of him. And so I think that's important to realize because people were probably wondering why this emphasis on male coaching physicians? Just because there previously has been none.

So now you've coached clients already in the beta version of the alpha group coaching experience that's coming out. I've heard great things about that from people that have had coaching from you, but I really want to know your backstory. So you ended up having the Leverage of Growth Summit. You decided to jump into coaching as a client with the Empower Women Physicians program, and then something inside of you said, "You know what? This is great. And I'm growing and I'm doing really well, but I want to become a coach and help other doctors." So what happened there? Tell us the story.

Junaid:

Yeah. Well, first off, I just want to thank you for the coaching that you're doing through your program, your alpha program. It is very much needed. There's so much space there for physician coaching and you're definitely filling a need. And then double thank you for inviting me to join you on this incredible journey.

Jimmy Turner:

Oh, thank you for being there. They're all benefiting from you.

Junaid:

I'm going to answer your question a little bit of a roundabout way and start by saying most people, including physicians themselves, often forget that physicians are people. The very nature of our work takes its toll on our psyche. The things we have to absorb handle empathize with as well as the things we have to see and do. Most people don't have to deal with bodily fluids or purposely cutting somebody open and things like that. And that's part of our day to day. Now you add in some of the most rigorous training of any profession, both mentally and physically, and oftentimes in a toxic culture, which does not prioritize your humanity or how you feel coming out of the training or making sure that you're nurtured through that training. It's focused on giving you a skillset, sort of no matter the cost. And we expect compassionate caretakers to naturally come out of this. It's like forcing care bears through the Marine Corps and expecting them to come out on the other side as care bears.

Jimmy Turner:

That's a great analogy.

Junaid:

My clover leaf or rainbow belly tattoo is going to be a little bit deformed coming out of that. And then we're suddenly out in the real world, we're saddled by staggering sums of student loans. We're trying to start our adult lives a decade after our peers. And I could spend the rest of your day dissecting how the rest of the healthcare system impacts physicians, but I won't do that. Suffice it to say, we're burning out, we're unsatisfied, and frankly, we're stuck. We need and deserve a way out. We deserve a way to practice our craft that we spent a decade honing in a way that doesn't take for granted our humanity. And we deserve to be happy. And coaching can give that to every physician.

And the beauty of it is the one simple truth about coaching is the power to make all those changes resides within us. The locus of control is within us. So we don't have to wait for the system to change, to make our lives better. And we're better off not waiting for the system to change because who knows when that'll happen, and who knows if that change will be positive? And just knowing that we control our destiny is so incredibly empowering, even if it sounds simplistic. I think we forget that. And I decided to become a life coach for physicians because I saw that this sort of the ace up our sleeves to help other physicians get unstuck. I had barely dipped my toes into being coached, but just that brief exposure was all it took to start transforming me. And after seeing the impact it had on my life in such short order, I knew I had to bring it to my colleagues.

Jimmy Turner:

Yeah. First of all, the fields there, I think so many of us can relate to that story. That's certainly my story too. And I want to make one big distinction here because in the blogging world, I can tell you that I've stepped on toes when I talk about this subject and get some hate mail for it. So there are two very distinct issues going on, right? So you have the system, the broken medical system that has issues that may be solvable, maybe not. You talk about the secondary PTSD and seeing things happen to patients that humans aren't meant to see, and the impact that has down the line, and the care bear Marine Corps analogy, right? That system is broken. And so when we talk about doctors on the other hand, having the ability to get coaching and defined ways to reduce their burnouts, improve their life satisfaction, and their overall quality of living, we are not saying that it is the doctor's fault that they're burned out.

And so I just want to make that clear because sometimes when people hear this, "Wait, so you're saying that coaching is a way to improve your happiness, are you saying [crosstalk 00:16:16]?" Yeah, that they need to be fixed, that it's their fault. And I will tell you that anybody, doctor, lawyer, teacher, janitor, no matter what you do, can benefit from coaching, and that in and of itself, while it's a tool to help this, does not fix the broken medical system. That still needs to happen. That environment, that culture change, still needs to happen. So I don't want to take the blame and place it on the victim, which is how some people feel when we have this conversation. But I think that what you said is just perfect.

Junaid:

And thank you for calling that out. I should have mentioned that too, but in no way should we feel like it is our fault that we're burned out. This is not hypo resiliency that can be fixed with a medication or a shot. This is natural human response to a stimulus that is very noxious, unfortunately. And that's the way the system is. And like you said, the system needs to be remedied on itself, but there are also things that we can do to thrive as best we can within that system.

Jimmy Turner:

100%. So you got into coaching, what's your niche? I don't ever know how to say that word, by the way?

Junaid:

Yeah. I don't know if it's different depending on what side of the pond you're on or what, but I go back and forth too. Yeah. So I provide wellness, financial, and career coaching for physicians. That may not sound like much of a niche or niche, but I think these three areas are so intimately tied together and truly in their overlap, physicians can find their freedom to live their lives on their own terms. And part of that is oftentimes with coaching work, what I've learned is people will come to you for a different reason, for a want, rather than what they truly need. There's no way to demonstrate what they need until they're going through the process. So you have to get people in, sort of luring them in with what they want, but then you really need to provide them with what they need. And so part of that is having a niche that will sort of attract that. And I think physicians understand that their wellness is tied to their financial well-being, given the special stressors that we face on that front, as well as our careers. So that is why I've selected that.

Jimmy Turner:

Yeah, no, and I mean, you're speaking my language there. So I built a blog that the tagline was Wealth and Wellness from the beginning of November, 2017. So I think that those things are related, and life, career, money coaching, that all three of those topics, it's almost like its own niche. I 100% agree. And so I do have a question for you. And someone asked me this when I started my business and I was pouring in all these hours into this thing that made no money to start for two years and they'd asked me, "So, what are you going to do when this thing catches fire and becomes a raging success? Are you going to keep practicing medicine?" And so I'll pose that to you. When you're coaching business, not if, because we're coaches, right? When your coaching business takes off, do you still plan on practicing medicine? What's that going to look like someday five years from now?

Junaid:

Yes. I still love the core of what medicine is, and for me, that's me and a patient trying to solve problems together. And while I have struggled with my own journey with burnout and its various forms, whether I understood it at the time or not, a lot of that's sort of coming to light as I dive deep in a lot of these issues, I still love the ideal and idea of medicine. And in fact, coaching has helped me rediscover more joy in medicine. I've been less stressed despite the pandemic and all the stressors coming from that I've

been way more okay even with running behind in clinic and not really blaming patients for keeping me from getting home, which is something I really struggled with.

And I didn't realize that that was actually burnout. When you start blaming the people you're supposed to be serving, that's actually kind of a red flag and a warning. And I haven't even necessarily coached on that specific topic with people, but just all the other mindset work I've done, the benefits. I mean, they're tremendous. And there's all this scattered... Scattered is not the right word. There's a lot of subsequent benefits to coaching on anything. When you're working on your mindset, there's all these ancillary improvements you see in other aspects of your life.

Jimmy Turner:

Yeah. I think it's a really powerful thing. And for burned out doctors, I think the turning point when they realize coaching has so much power is the first time that they realized that up until now, they have let other things in their life control how they feel and how they act. And the second that they realize that by doing that, they're placing themselves in a position of being a victim that has no power, and instead, decide to get coaching and work on the thought work and change that mentality so that they can then reclaim the autonomy and power over their own life. For me, I can tell you right now, that was one of the fundamental pivot points where I was like, "This stuff is real."

And you can apply that to a bunch of stuff. Burnout, you can apply that to people who, their entire story is their past and their past dictates their future right now, because, "This is how I got here. I went through X, Y, and Z when I was a kid. And that's why I am the way that I am." And then when they realized that they can let that go and let the past be the past and move forward, whether that's a burnout story, a family story, or wherever you come from. I mean, I completely agree. That was the most pivotal moment where I was like, "I get it. I see how this stuff works." So, well, is there anything else that you'd like us to know about you and your business?

Junaid:

Yeah. I want to use this opportunity to kind of just tell your listeners and your audience. It might seem like coaches have everything figured out. And I really want to say, that is not true and not by a long shot. I had the privilege of being on video calls with 50 plus people this summer as part of the group coaching program, including coaches. And we do not have everything figured out. We're bogged down by the same issues that everybody faces. And I don't want that to be a barrier to people. I need to have figured out so much stuff to be in a place to be coached, or I need to be so lost and downtrodden, that's the only time when I need coaching. None of that's true. Any issue is really coachable.

And the difference is we have a framework for channeling those issues through and constantly working on them, reframing them, molding them, working on our thoughts to serve us better. And I had to learn this. I am still learning this. Just like I learned physiology and anatomy as an MS1, I'm learning the coaching tools and strategies and constantly applying them and constantly finding new ways to apply them. And other physicians can learn this too. And I truly believe they owe it to their patients,

their families, and most importantly, themselves, to learn it, because this is how they're going to find their own freedom and live the lives they were meant to live.

Jimmy Turner:

I could have said it better, Junaid. And I love that quote that you just said. "Anything is coachable." When you write a book, that should be the name of it, by the way.

Junaid:

Oh, yeah, I'm going to write that down.

Jimmy Turner:

Okay. So if people are listening and they're like, "Man, this guy sounds great. I want to get coaching from Junaid." Where can they find out more information about you or about those opportunities?

Junaid:

The easiest place to find me is that my coaching website over at prosperouslifemd.com, that's all one word. So P-R-O-S-P-E-R-O-U-S-L-I-F-E-M-D.com. There, people can learn more about me and my story, learn more about coaching and the model to which we subscribe. They can explore my blog and they can also book a free consult call with me. They can also contact me about anything else. I'm happy to answer any questions or point people towards resources or other coaches at any time.

Jimmy Turner:

Awesome, Junaid. Well, thank you so much for being on the physician philosopher podcast. I think that everyone's going to really enjoy listening to your story and learning from you. So thanks for being here.

Junaid:

Thank you for having me. It's been a pleasure, Jimmy.

Jimmy Turner:

Awesome.