

EPISODE 24: A skeptic's journey into functional medicine

MERYL: Hey everyone. This is your Rebel Nutritionist. Welcome back to another amazing podcast today. I am so thrilled to be able to be speaking with a long-time client. Rob Isbitts, but Rob is more than just a client. He and I have developed a great working relationship, both in the work that he does, which I'm going to share with you in a moment.

He is going to share his story. And over the years we realized there are a lot more similarities to both of our businesses than we had ever realized. So Rob is a professional investor in many forms. His main work now is through the investment publishing business. He founded, which is Sun Garden, investment publishing.

And his work is through that investment publishing company is a nationally recognized investment journalist and is currently a columnist for both Forbes and US news and world report. His career accomplishments include being named one of the top 100. Wealth advisors in the country on four separate occasions and is a former mutual fund manager as well.

So without further ado, Rob, I am going to let you take it away.

ROB: Well, thank you, a long, long time ago I was in the professional radio business for a short time. So that, that was, that was a nice lead-in. Thank you, Meryl. I'm so thankful to you and

your team for inviting me on to tell my story because my story really blends right in with your story and why more people should know it.

But first, if you don't mind, I'm going to introduce a little bit of music which hopefully come through. Okay. You recognize that song. I won't play the whole thing.

MERYL: I can't hear it. Wait, you gotta make it a little louder.

ROB: I won't get all the way for us, but that that's a song called Rebels from Tom Petty, the late great Tom petty another, a Floridian. And I guess like you another blonde and but you know, to me, I just, I was thinking about what is a rebel and here we are, I mean, we're both in south Florida, a wonderful place to live.

What does it mean to be a rebel in the health industry?

We both have built businesses here. We're both entrepreneurs. And, and that's why I when I sought somebody out with some of the issues that I had over the last. A decade health-wise that weren't resolved by the traditional. Means I wanted to work with a fellow entrepreneur little did I know I was getting somebody that was not just a great entrepreneur, but an incredible diagnostician.

And of course, we both live in Florida now. But we're also we also both hail from the great state of New Jersey. And but it goes way beyond that. And I was thinking to myself, so what is a rebel? Okay. Because it says in you I've listened to a lot of your podcasts and what is a rebel? So of course I did what anybody else would do.

I Googled it. And the description or the definition that, that seems to hit home with me. **One who opposes one in authority or control.** And I translated that thinking about you and your business and how to explain this journey that we've been on together and something that's allowed me to be let's say one of those people that is never shy about giving you an opinion.

Yeah, about how you're growing your business. Okay. And vice versa, because I think we're very similar in that way. So what is a rebel to me, **it's someone who speaks truth to power.** And so I'm sure you've mentioned this casually. I know you have on some of the other podcasts, but **there's a big, powerful medical profession out there and it does amazing things, but it can't handle everything.**

And sometimes you end up with. **A medical condition that falls through the cracks of what's the traditional medical pros are trained to understand.** And then of course you have the health insurance companies that either cannot, or do not want to understand. Some of these conditions as well as they should you know, Bill Maher who we watch a lot, my wife and I he addresses or talks about obesity as a national problem, and we can make significant progress of that.

On that over the next decade. You know, and then there's also the big food industry. I mean, I spent my career in the investment business, as you said, and it's similar to what I've seen there. Then, the greatest thing I think I can say to somebody who's trying to get introduced to a Meryl Brandwein the rebel nutritionist and her team is **it's process over product.**

And that's the opposite of what you often see in your field, as well as mine. You know, the product may look good and may help you. Instantly, but it has a lot of filler in it. And that filler

either attracts you in a, kind of a pseudo addictive way, or it kind of trades all short-term satisfaction for a long-term erosion of things like your digestive track with sugar.

So it's been focused thank you to my late father and other heredity for that. And look, we all want to be healthy when we're 80 or 90 or a hundred years old, and it's what you do preventatively as well as proactively, that makes the difference. And so to me **a rebel is also somebody who has to work persistently to kind of get their unique and honest, valuable message out.**

To a very loud, constant, noisy airwaves that are controlled by a lot of bigger companies with huge budgets. And so you're a rebel because you help the rest of us too. Kind of fight for ourselves and, and I, I thank you. I thank you a million times in person and on review calls including the one we had yesterday.

And so it's nice to be able to, to thank you. In fact For fans of Seinfeld, which a lot of us are You're kind of like the Festivus of healthcare. You're like health. You're like healthcare for the rest of us, you know? And, **you didn't save my life, but you saved my life style.**

And, and I'm happy to talk about that or answer any questions that you have that will help people listening to this on their own journeys.

MERYL: I love that. Thank you so much for that. I love the definition. I love the way you described it and yes, it's definitely **process over product.** So yeah, to that end.

Yes. We've been working together for a long time. And I'll remember, you were in my office the first time we talked about and assess what was going on with your gut health. You walked out with product and like two days later it came back with it.

ROB: Oh crap. I was afraid that was going to come up.

MERYL: You're like, I don't, I don't know if I want to do this. And I think I was pretty gracious and said, okay, no problem. I think you left. And you were like, you know what? I'm not feeling well. And then you turned things around and said, okay, I think I'm ready to listen. I think I'm ready to listen. And then I think it's been no turning back that point on because I think a lot of people are like that.

Right? And you mentioned that the first thing people come in here and say is, well, my doctor didn't tell me that my doctor didn't test me for that. No, why should I trust you? Why do I need to believe you? How come I've never heard of this, right? These are the things that I hear over and over.

And so, and it took me a long time to try and explain to you and educate you because it's not convincing. I don't feel I ever need to convince anybody. They need to do this. **They need to understand why they need to do this for themselves** and, and why it's so important for their health. So maybe you can talk a little bit about the first the initial process, of what was going through your head and, and.

Yeah, go from there.

Rob's story

ROB: Sure. So I'll stop you. If at any point in this conversation you say something that doesn't have an equivalent in the investment business that I'd been in for 35 years. And, and I guess one of my favorite quotes is from Steve jobs.

People don't know what they want until you show it to them. And, I was that guy and you kind of showed it to me the first time. Look by my Experience with you and your team and seeing your growth and my growth in terms of my own GI health, **it started with my gallbladder being removed in kind of an emergency fashion seven or eight years ago.**

And as my incredible wife, Danna will remind. All of us when we were supposed to be going to Europe for the first time. I was on an operating table getting my gallbladder yanked out. And so we delayed the trip a year. But the recovery from the gallbladder removal, well, let's say it wasn't really a recovery and that's what prompted me to look around the doctor and pills, and let's do it by the book.

But unfortunately the book is limited. There's nothing wrong with the book. It's just that the book. Doesn't have all the chapters that it needs, I guess. And, and **a lot of times people come to folks like you, I think as a last resort where I wish they would come to you in parallel.** Okay. That's the lesson that I learned because I knew of you and we knew a lot of people who've gone to you and swore by you, but, but it's like anything else until it happens to you.

Right? So eh I discovered functional medicine through. Through you. And as a result, you helped me to kind of take a step back and say, right, let's not look at this and band-aid it. **Let's go back to the root cause.** And I think that that is, is the lesson. And of course, That was very important. Okay.

The, the, if I may, the post gallbladder removal years. Okay. That was the first phase. And I think as you alluded to before, when you're talking about how we're working together, got through that, but then something else came up and I would simply describe it as an annoying temporary, non-life-threatening medical issue that happened to occur.

Or was finally diagnosed by a traditional physician, right. As COVID was starting. And so I was not only quarantining with the rest of the world. I was also immunocompromised and it went right to my GI system among other things. Okay. So the reason I think that I was able to manage that without freaking out or having a major disruption to my work and then able to get back and enjoy life quite bit on time with everybody else.

When we got past the COVID and then. That little window before the Delta variant attacked Florida and made it so that we kind of had to go in between was actually able to travel this summer with my wife and see our children. And, and we literally became empty-nesters like, like four days ago with kids graduating and one going to college and another one recently married and we know a bit about each other's families, so.

This was when I say annoying, I mean, because it gets in the way of all these things that you want to do. But I was able to get through that sort of second annoying issue past the gallbladder, because of everything that we did in that first phase, you had me in such great shape. From awareness and just functionally from a GI standpoint cellular and cellular integrity or whatever you want to call it.

And that is because of **the process we worked through and worked on together, not just here and there, or when there was an emergency like a lot of people treat it.** It was a process that was built up over time. And I guess I would finish by saying. Yeah, preventative medicine is not taking a multivitamin from CVS.

It's a process and consistency in the treatment. And I guess maybe the other, the way I think of it is, especially because of, your great team and some of the things they did for me, when I was

immunocompromised to kinda make us, I didn't have to run around a lot. You know, there is healthcare, but.

You folks really understand the care in healthcare, Meryl. I'm just giving you taglines here, but it's really meaningful to me. And one of the reasons I'm so grateful and why, when you folks asked me to be on this, I was like, absolutely. I want to tell my story because I hope that there are other people that, helped they're not suffering the way I did, but they should know that there is a road and attract to get back on.

The process of functional medicine

MERYL: and I love that. That's great. I think one of the things that I would like you to maybe touch on also, and a little more detail or go back to **your gut health road to recovery it was definitely a process**. And, and we talk about being a diagnostician and people and me being that diagnostician, let's just say.

Because **we did spend a lot of time going back and forth in different ways**. You know, when suspecting one thing, looking at another thing, I think **people think that there always has to be this overt sort of discomfort**. I mean, you did have the discomfort. There's a lot of people with GI issues that don't always have, let's say overt discomfort, but even in that process, I mean, I guess I'd like you to touch it.

What that was for you because it was a long process.

ROB: Yeah, it was. And it's funny because you know, people say to me, when they when they learn what I do and investment management and following markets and volatility and all this

stuff, I can tell you that I can count on less than one full hand. The number of times that I've been stressed as an investor, **all my stress comes from the things that get in the way of living the kind of life that any of us would want to live** and look, there's also, **there's a mind-gut connection**, which you are quick to remind all of us of, and I know you've talked about it on the podcast. You had some guests. You know, it's, it's true, but you know, I think part of the, the cycle if you will. Okay. When you first hit with something and it's bothering you, the best thing you can do is you can try to break the cycle. And I think there are two ways that people can break the cycle of discomfort, which for me was every time I ate and I mean, every time I ate.

Okay. Within 20 minutes of it took that long. It felt like I had a tennis ball at the top of my gut and it just stayed there for days. And. Obviously, we don't want to get any more graphic than that, but that, I mean, that's a really uncomfortable condition. And if there's one thing, if it happens, it goes away.

If it happens just every time. Well, not as you have a problem, you have no idea what the solution is. And I think that that's where the psychological process comes in. And so I think what we did a lot of was. Trial and error. And you have the ability through the vast array of functional.

Medicine approaches. To try to **piece the puzzle together**. Okay. the reason why you and I, I think, got along so well from the beginning is that I said. This is no BS. This is somebody who is approaching this the way I approach constructing and adjusting and making a portfolio of investments flourish.

It's a jigsaw puzzle and you have to move some pieces around and you have to try some things and you have to measure and take data and then do it. And the level to which you have

that process dialed in. Is what makes the difference. And it's just a matter of when you're going to come through it, whether it's going to take hours, days, weeks, months, or maybe years, but the confidence of knowing that there is a process and you're picking away at it almost like a woodpecker on a tree.

You know, that to me is the difference between. The approach that one can take with sort of unfettered access to folks like you. And the doctor who says what I think I saw something where the statistically, **the average visit with a traditional medical doctor is seven minutes**. So you wait for an hour or two to see him for seven minutes, and then you come back in six weeks.

Well, I had that experience enough times and **it's different when there's teamwork going on**. You know, just like a client and an investment manager. Okay., it's the two sides if you will working together. And without the usual snake oil stuff that you see.

Especially in places like South Florida and probably in the New York area and other parts of the country it's devoid of, of a lot of that. And, and I think that that's the difference, the analysis, and the personalization and you know, I'm example one.

MERYL: Well, thank you for that.

Why rebalancing your body is rarely a quick fix

Yeah. And. You articulate so well in terms of being able to let people know that it is the process. Because I'll oftentimes say, well, don't just trust me. Cause I say, trust me, but trust me, because I know that there is a method to the madness of how we do things and, **it takes**

time for the body to become so imbalanced. It is not a quick fix to rebalance the body. And when there's more than one issue going on, right. If you have digestive issues and subsequent other deficiencies and things that go on **you peel away the layers like we do to get to the root, but then you've got to build back up those layers.**

And that is definitely a process. And I think we're so used to whether it is a medical condition, like what you had with the gallbladder and the GI stuff, or even, the diet culture mentality. Right. We want, we want to fix, we want it now. And we become a little bit disheartened when it doesn't work.

Immediately.

(Insert ad break Here)

Why food is medicine and your diet can have a huge impact on your health

ROB: Oh, may we talk about diet for a moment? Absolutely. Because that's the other part of the story is not just like, know, let's try seventy-five different supplements and hope that by the 75th it works. It's not that at all. You know, I've learned from you, or I should say I've learned it from a lot of people over the years.

But I started to really believe it and see it and experience it from working with you and your team. And that is the idea that **food is medicine** and is probably in most cases, the best medicine. I was never, well, I thought I was a healthy eater but. You know, you start to read labels and you start to like I know you've done the supermarket tours for years.

And I have to say every time I go to Publix right now I have two voices. Okay. I, I know what's on the list through Amazon Alexa and my wife is telling me, no, no, no, no, you this is the one that we want, whatever. And I don't do the shopping that often, but when I'm there and the other voice is know you like, like **don't spend too much time in the middle and most of your time on the outside**, you know?

So and, and I, and I see why, and just the label reading and all that. And I mean, I still remember, look, I have adopted With my wife Danna. And, and I think most of our family we've adopted a very different diet. I mean, frankly, she was way ahead of me and you were kind of the confirmation and she's a great cook.

So it made it easy to say things like, okay, let's. You, you figured out that I had an issue with gluten. Okay. And frankly you probably know the percentage more than I do, but what percentage of the population probably doesn't digest gluten very well. And it's not just the gluten is part of it.

Okay. Originally I think with me, it was like, well, you also figured out that it was not just gluten, it was grain. And I was like, well, okay. I never really liked corn that much, but I do like my rice. In fact, we used to joke about my late father. My mom used to always say, describing how interesting a guy, he was his favorite food, favorite food, white rice.

And this was before sushi because growing up in Jersey in the seventies you didn't have too many sushi bars. Right. So. the gluten-free grain-free, but I think what's in between that is when I see words like corn syrup or, or in, and all the other sort of classics. Okay. I like, I like to get a chill, like do not put that thing near me.

Okay. And it's not just because I know that I'm going to have a bad reaction to it. Okay. I didn't know it in the past, but now it's very easy for someone like you. It's through diagnostic testing. I mean, again, all this is a bit food and science. I think work together. Right? Isn't that what we've kind of that's what you, one of the things you've taught me, it's not just the food, it's the food and it's the science and part of the science is yes.

Helping you understand what foods you are sensitive to that maybe other people aren't. In fact, before you helped me, you help my oldest daughter. Because she had had some issues and I kind of came in right after her. But I guess the other thing is **even when you think you're eating clean, you're not eating as clean as maybe you think you are** okay. When I first asked you about. A lot of the common substitutes, the tapioca and stuff like that. I think what you said is, look, is that it's a different type of junk food. It's still a junk food and it's still a lot better than a lot of the junk that we would normally eat. But you can't just all of a sudden say I'm going on a tapioca syrup, vacation.

And, and I'm just everything I eat is going to be right. And that's where the whole, the gluten free and the sugar-free and the low fat stuff that became. Fad and to this day, I think it's still, there's a residue in most Americans memories that, oh, it's low fat so it must be good and breaking through that and **separating myth from reality**.

Okay. That's what you do in your business. It's what I do in my writing. Okay. The first thing it says in my, I think LinkedIn is I'm a MythBuster, well, **you are totally a MythBuster**. It's just a matter of getting sufficiently heard so that you can get the interactions and thank God , that the stars aligned.

And that led me to, the philosophy you espoused and the fact that now you're taking it beyond you in growing the practice with other people on the team that can. basically disseminate your knowledge you know, including with, with another dietician on the team and, and health coaches and support and all that stuff so that you don't have to wear 17 hats.

You only have to wear three or four.

Why the science IS sexy

MERYL: Yeah. I mean, that's, that's been the beauty of the growth and the number of people that we've helped and you know, how the business has expanded, but I do appreciate all those analogies and even just the explanation because again, people need to hear it from people like you and yeah.

I always say science, isn't sexy and it's really hard to, I think it's sexy. Nobody else does,

ROB: I think portfolio management is sexy. Exactly. Do

MERYL: that. And I don't have to deal with that. Right. It's all about what is your, **what is your area of expertise?** Because God only knows the number thing is definitely above my head, but at least those kinds of.

But, but then, I think you made a key point the fact is, is people could go gluten-free and they take all of this random sort of general knowledge and they, apply it to them and it, may not be what they need. And this is why doing. The testing in the way that we do it. and then we interpret it and be able and are able to then give you your individual plan because at the end of the day we've done your genomics.

And that's the other thing that we have to also into right? The end of the day, it still comes down to **what is your individual blueprint? How do you respond as an individual and your unique set of biochemistry patterns to all of these things?** And, so often we just hear these generalities, right? You can go read a book.

Oh, I need to stay away from lectins. Oh, I need to be on the autoimmune diet. And that's all well and good in theory. But if you don't really come back to the fact of **understanding what is at your root, where are your imbalances?** And that's what the testing does so beautifully. And we still have to be careful that testing now, all these companies are out there doing these direct-to-consumer tests.

Right. I have people coming in with these stool tests and I'm like, this is not giving you the information you need or DNA tests. I'm like, oh, these are so limited. So very much to your point about doing, doing it individually and, and paying attention to that. And under an understanding that, that we are all our own N of one, let's say.

ROB: Well, that, reminds me of a little joke, a song, and an irony all in one. So, first of all, how long is it going to be until somebody takes 23 and me and copies it and says, this is three times better. Get it. So it also reminds me actually of a song and the irony and believe me, I'm not going to sing it, but there's a song like I who calls himself five for fighting. And one of the lines in it I remember is 300 million little USA. Okay. So in other words, in the whole social media era, everybody, what is it that people seem to, if you go on know, look at your phone any day, **people crave being unique.**

Okay. Whether it's younger people and the whole sort of snowflake analogy that people use, or just anybody, our age or older that says I'm, I'm me and there's nobody else like me. Okay.

Unless maybe you have a twin, but we're all unique yet when it comes to everything we've just talked about.

The irony is that people do not seek out the union. They go and they say, oh, well I can't sleep. So give me, I can't remember the name of the drug by Ambien. I should know that Jay Z had it in a song. Right. So city on sleep. See you. So it's it gives you an Ambien or something like that.

Anyway, sorry. I got too much music in my head. But yeah. There is a lot of that. As I said, there's a lot of snake oil and certainly there look, there are cost trade-offs too. Okay. I mean finding this stuff out, going on the discovery path does cost some money, but what I like about what you folks have done is you have kind of packaged it up.

So that you **built it into the service so people can pay as they go, and they can decide for themselves how much value they're getting because the first step is the most important step.** Nothing else happens in less unless that first step happens. And I guess the last kind of thought I have is that because if people listening and they're saying.

Well, I don't know, is this for me or not? Well, I think it's probably for just about anybody, but who is it? It like an automatic no-brainer to lay up for. People who by their nature are analytical. Okay. Because one appreciates the other. And so if, if you just want to throw it at the wall and hope it sticks great.

But if you're at all, when your business and your personal life process-oriented, analytical, as they say, there's some people just want to know what time. And there are other people that say, yeah, I want to know what time it is, but I also want to know the watches made and I, I'm not very mechanical that way, but, just in terms of that metaphor, I mean, I think that those are the

people who get even more out of this process because you are like I said, **you're the best diagnostician that I can think of in any field**. I know a lot of good diagnosticians and, and analysts. Okay. But in your field, it's just, it's off the charts and it wasn't, like you said, at the beginning, it wasn't always that way. **I was Grade A skeptic. Why? Because I'm thinking through it and the whole thing and, well, it sounds a little different** and whatever.

And then you brought me on that journey. And again thank you for doing that. And for welcoming me to tell a little bit of my story. I just hope it helps some folks.

MERYL: Absolutely. And we appreciate you telling it and telling it so well, so yeah, I mean, I think that's a great note to leave off on again.

I appreciate the accolades as always, I'm humbled to be able to. Help those who are looking for it. And, and especially you who were so eager to gain the knowledge. And so it makes it even more fun for me. And I appreciate your time and this will not be the last time we hear from you. I think, we were talking about doing more of a business one together as well because of the congruencies and the work that we do and how you help people as well.

So I will look forward to doing that in the near future, but thank you again. Great. Anything else?

ROB: No, I think, look, we, we could teach the world a lot of things, not just you and me, but a lot of folks through analogy and that's kind of what you're alluding to there, health and wealth kind of thing.

So we'll look forward to talking about that, but no, just thank you for, the time and the opportunity to tell my story and. I look forward to working with you for another zillion years.

MERYL: Amen to that. Amen to that. All right, everybody. This is the Rebel Nutritionist signing off for today. Make it a great one until next time.