

MERYL: Hey everyone. Welcome back to the Rebel Nutritionist podcast today. I am so excited to have the famous Nancy Levin on today.

Nancy is a master life coach podcast, host and best-selling author of several books. Formerly the event director at hay house for over a decade. Nancy is the founder. For Levin life coach academy, offering in-depth coaching, training, and certification programs designed to support students and clients to make themselves a priority by setting boundaries that stick.

So welcome, Nancy. So thrilled to have you.

NANCY: Thank you. I'm happy to be here with you.

MERYL: I just before we got on, we were chatting a little and I was saying how much I love your work, love your book. That I have gifted it to so many people and that I have recommended it over and over and over. The information. And what you share with everybody is, is really groundbreaking. I think in many, many ways, because I never knew about boundaries. I didn't know. We could really have them until you, until I read your book. And I was like, oh, wait, it's okay to do that. You know? And , so happy to be able to be here with you.

How to set and hold boundaries with people

So we've come up with a couple of discussion points and I really want to get your take on this and input because I think our audience so desperately needs to hear what you have to share. So I think the first thing I want to talk about is boundaries because I think that in this space, especially when we talk about diet culture, and we talk about nutrition and so many people come in and they're like, **afraid to set the boundaries with the people that are close in their lives**, they're the significant others, their friends, like everybody has a commentary about someone doing a program. So can you speak to that a little bit?

NANCY: So first I want to share how I define boundaries. So **I define boundaries as the limits that we set for ourselves around what we will or will not do, accept or tolerate.**

So my boundaries are very personal to me. And one of the sort of myths that I often bust around boundaries is that it is our responsibility to set and hold our own boundaries. So something I hear over and over again is I set a boundary, but so-and-so crossed it. And here's the deal. **If our boundary is being crossed, we are the one crossing it.**

So this is a very different way to look at things. And what this does is move us out of blame and victim and into **responsibility and empowerment**. So if I know that any boundary I have is first and foremost, between me and me, even if it involves you. It's first between me and me, it's up to me to set and it's up to me to hold.

So it's not up to anyone else to honor, respect, hold my boundaries. So that's the first piece that I want to make really clear.

MERYL: And that's great. Cause I think people do need to understand what that is. Right. Let's say, for example, I have a client who's come in and they are starting a weight loss program.

And they go back to their friends and whoever, Lisa, whatever. Right. And they say, oh you know, I've started this program. With Meryl and all of a sudden Lisa offers all kinds of advice. Oh, you should do this. Or if someone is not sticking to their program and Lisa then offers her own advice.

Why we need to balance our needs against those of others

Oh, I see. You're not doing this. Oh, I see. Right. The judgment there. How do we use that as an example? Because I will tell you our clients have a really hard time. Setting the boundary, feeling comfortable, setting the boundary. And like you said, sticking to it. So what practical ways that we can just teach people now, how does that, and **not to feel guilty**.

I hear that word all the time. Guilt, I feel guilty.

NANCY: Right. So I have a lot to say about this. So first of all, this is a **self-worth issue at the core**. Because I need to be willing to give myself permission to consider my own needs. At

least as much as I'm considering the needs of others in my life. **I need to then be able to give myself permission to consider my needs even more than I'm considering the needs of others.**

And then the real boundary ninja move is to **give myself permission to consider my needs first.** So if we start there. And we move and we sort of go, we, we retro we go retroactively back. First of all, as I said before, my boundary is between me and me. I don't actually need to verbalize my boundary.

I don't need to tell the world what I'm doing with my life. So that's one thing. One thing is to be aware and discerning of who you decide to share information. The second thing is when we share something, it is absolutely appropriate to say to a friend, to a partner, to anyone I'm sharing this because I want to let you know what's going on for me.

And I also want to let you know that **I'm not available for any unsolicited feedback about this.** We can also say. I'm letting you know what's going on with me. And when I'm, when I finish sharing this with you, my request is that you stay silent or just tell me you love me. So this is the thing. **Most of us don't know how to share about ourselves in a way that we can make a request about how we are received.**

And how we are responded to now, you brought up guilt and it's one of my favorite things to talk about in this context, because **if we feel guilty in this context, which is really the context of taking care of our own needs, Guilt is an indicator. We are on the right track.** Guilt is an indicator that we are moving in the direction of our desires and we're taking care of and honoring ourselves.

It's 180 degrees away from the caretaking and the people pleasing and the peacekeeping and the conflict avoiding and the not rocking the boat. So. We really have to look at how willing am I to stand my own ground, regardless of what's happening around me. You also mentioned something about judgment and it's important to remember that if we're fearing external judgment or if we're bracing ourselves for external judges, **The root of that judgment is within us.**

So **I'm already judging myself for what I'm fearing being judged for**. So until I'm clean and clear and in right relationship with myself, I will still fear the external judgment and the external judgment will have Velcro to stick to when I'm clean and clear. There's no Velcro

Is it being selfish or is it self-care?

MERYL: that is phenomenal. I Play this back for every single client. Because like what you just mentioned, forget about even the judgment, but the self care and the so many people come in, we take care of everybody else, but ourselves, right.

And then we don't feel like we are worth taking care of, which is why so many people at the end of the day, when I go back and tell them, Doing this work that you're doing with us is about self care. It's not being selfish. And I think, and I think, look again, I'm going to generalize, but I can tell you, I can speak for myself as a woman, as a mother, as very much that caretaker role for my family.

It was very hard to discern between selfish and self care. I always was judged, oh my God, am I not doing this? Like, my friends are doing this. I wasn't a great mom or am I a great, like, we sit there and judge ourselves all day long on that.

NANCY: I want it, I want to give you a little bit of a reframe on this because.

when we are disowning selfish, and praising self less, we disappear. selfless, no self. So I actually am looking at how do we reclaim selfish and embrace it? **I look at selfish self-care and self-love as three sisters whose job it is to support us in honoring ourselves.** And to really be able to embrace.

I am everything. I am selfish and I am selfless. It's not either, or it's both and.

The impact of self-sabotage on making changes to your health

MERYL: That's amazing. So, so to segue into that, because I feel like everything does have a segue. Let's talk a little bit then about self-sabotage because we see that a lot. I see that all the time, we know, that at a certain point, right.

People can follow a plan, follow a plan, and they're all in and they're feeling good and they're feeling good. and they're having success whether it's weight loss, whether it's meal planning, whether it's health, they're feeling better. **And then all of a sudden something happens in their life.** Right. And I always say, life happens.

Life is going to happen. We don't do this plan in a bubble because life is not a bubble. Right. We have to be flowing with what happened. But what often happens is that that self-sabotage, or that behavior starts to come in week 4, 5, 6, right? All of a sudden it's like, how do we. How do we get around that?

I don't know with the boundaries, with whatever, speak to that a little bit

NANCY: Sure. So a couple of things I want to share. So I have what I call my **transformation equation, which is change equals vision plus choice plus action.** So if the change in this case is around health or weight or wellness that's the change.

The vision is where do I want to be? You know, a goal where I want to be? Have the clarity of vision. **Every single choice we make an action we take does one of two things. It serves the vision, or it sabotages the vision.** That's it. One or the other. So we are far more empowered than we give ourselves credit.

And if we look at our choice so I really look at where we are right now is the culmination of our choices, our decisions, our actions. **So if we're not willing to make a different choice and take a different action, our future is going to end up looking very much like our past or present.** So every micro choice and micro action predicts our future.

Our present moment choices are the crystal ball that we're looking for. So that's one piece of really getting that there is a cause and effect. The other piece here. And I imagine you dive into this as well looking at the sabotaging slash avoidant strategies, right? So I'm going to go eat or I'm going to drink, or I'm going to do drugs, or I'm going to work, or I'm going to mindlessly scroll or online shop **so that I don't have to feel or deal.**

So. A lot of this too, is coming, is **thawing out of the numbness and coming back into feeling.** So the other thing that I feel is really important, especially in this context is it's really not about willpower or discipline. It's not about willpower or discipline. **It's about commitment** and. Here's how this works.

We think we are most committed to what we say we want. However, the truth is most people have no idea what their truest commitment is. And the strongest commitments we have were instilled in childhood. Promises we made to ourselves and this commitment drives the bus until we can uncover it. So commitments, like it's not safe to be seen.

It's not safe to be heard in order to be loved. I have to agree with everyone else. It's not safe to be more beautiful than my mother. It's not safe to make more money than my father, whatever it might be. **So we start getting committed to struggle and to comfort, to invisibility, whatever it might be.**

And our outer world reflects our innermost commitment. So I can say, I want to lose weight. But what I'm really experiencing is sitting on the couch, eating all the cookies and not going for a walk. And if we look at the discrepancy between what I say I want and what I'm actually experiencing, you can be certain that there's an underlying commitment in the mix.

I'm committed to comfort. I'm committed to not being seen. I'm committed to being invisible. I'm committed to being small in terms of my presence or I'm committed to not being too much or too big in terms of my, in terms of my presence. And I know it goes both ways you know, it goes both ways in terms of health.

It's not always about losing weight, it can be about gaining weight or being stronger or being healthier or whatever it looks like. So. It's really essential that we get underneath this because, so we don't beat ourselves up over willpower or discipline because neither of those things really are what impact the outcome.

MERYL: And that is, oh my gosh. So, so, so important because again, I hear that all day long, right? I want to be healthier. I want to lose weight. And the thing that we always go back to is what is your why? So it was exactly what you said. That is, and I think people have a really hard time understanding that because we don't go that deep typically.

Right. when I say to them, weight loss is not your why or what is the story? Whenever someone comes in I'm like, what is your story? And they'll start with the present day. I'm like, no, no, no, no, no. Your story started way, way, way back. Right? And they're like, well, what, why does. Diet patterns. When I was eight years old, when my mother told me I was too fat and I needed to go on a diet, why does that impact me now?

I'm like, well, that has everything, everything. to do with where you are now. So I think what people really need to hear from that is **we have to dig into the story first**. If We are going to have the ultimate success with whatever their goal was when they came in, you know, that it does it speak so deeply To the emotion or sometimes the lack thereof and people always say to me, oh, you're so disciplined.

I know you are so committed. They don't say I'm committed. They say, oh, you have such discipline and you have such willpower. I'm like, no, it's about consistency and commitment. Because for me, there's, there's many things. I'm why I do this. Right. My whys go pretty deep. But I do think people need to understand that, right?

It's not just to come in and say, I'm going to go on a meal plan. I always say the food part of what we do is easy. It's the, it's the emotion. It is the stuff in our brains,

The messages we hear about our worth

NANCY: right. That's right. That's right. Yeah. You know, part of this is really looking at how these earlier beliefs were imprinted in us and here getting the message of you know, your too fat or you need to lose weight or we don't eat this in our family or getting whatever messages we're getting really start informing the way that we move forward in the world and what we believe about ourselves. So **we draw conclusions about ourselves.**

I must not be good enough because I'm too fat or I weigh more than my mother wants me to weigh. And therefore I'm never going to be able to succeed however we equate this.

MERYL: So, so if, if someone is listening and they're saying, oh yeah, this resonates with me.

Let's say, is there a first step? Like how do we help people get out of that? Because I find it is, I mean, obviously the coaching, right. But if we're saying, yeah, what are some of the things like, can you offer a couple of tips? Like how do we even recognize that? How do we get through that? You know, like what are some things that you can, you, you can suggest.

NANCY: To me, it really comes back to **being able to be self connected and self referenced.** So I don't necessarily mean about tuning out the world, but instead of comparing, and instead of checking myself against other people to really come back to. **What do I feel? What do I think, what do I need?** What do I want instead of what did they think?

What did they feel? What do they need? What do they want, but to really be able to come here, because what we need to do is **align what we want with the commitment we're willing to make.** So I want to replace my old commitment to stay uncomfortable or being comfortable. And I want to replace that commitment with eating three healthy meals a day.

When, for example, this is my commitment I'm making to myself. It's no one else's business, right? **This is between me and me.**

MERYL: It resonates so much with me because this is, first of all, personally it resonates because I've done this work. And so for me, I can totally see myself on the other side and, and I still continue to set those boundaries and be true to the boundaries and, and try.

And for me, **it was about finding my voice and finding my intuition**. Right. That right. As one of my coaches said you gotta swipe right on yourself. Right. And so did that, or gave myself permission. You know, part of that is exactly what you've said. And then to go back to that, I think is also understanding, speaking to the fact that this. This is consistent work that people, I think, often come in and they think I'm going to go on a meal plan or a four month plan, or I know for me, it took me over a year to really get it right. And so I think that is the other piece of this is that **we are all a work in progress** and not to expect this change.

NANCY: So we're all a work in progress. And I, to me, it's. It's more about lifestyle it's more about being willing to stay in alignment with, with what's true for you. So even when I talk about boundaries, I, I boundaries is a lifelong process and there will come a time when you no longer actually feel like you're constantly setting boundaries because in the moment you're responding to what's true.

Boundaries and nutrition don't have to be restrictive

And so if you are responding to what's true in each moment, you don't have to sort of set all these boundaries. Right. But the other thing I want to say is, and I think the same thing is true about what you're sharing about an eight week plan or a 12 week plan or whatever is that there is this way that **most people relate to boundaries as constricting**.

And restrictive and depriving, **which is also a way people think about food planning**. Right. And I would love to flip it because I think that instead. **I look at boundaries as being expansive**. I look at boundaries as the way **I am carefully choosing and consciously curating the content of my life**. And that goes along with, what am I putting in my body?

I'm going to consciously choose what I'm willing to put in my body. I'm going to consciously choose the way I want to move my body

And so again, this brings us back to this place of, instead of looking at this as restrictive in any way, look at it as the freedom it actually provides.

MERYL: Absolutely. And that's so true because I think I put down your book and I did all the worksheets there.

I did that. I also, I think when I put down that book. I was like, oh my God, I feel so relieved.

No, I felt like, wow, I don't have to answer to anybody. And, and you know, like, wow, I'm allowed to do this. Like, why do I need permission? Like all of a sudden, now I yell at people. I'm like, you don't need permission.

Why we don't need permission to make our own choices

NANCY: That's the thing. **We really need to learn how to give ourselves permission.** And we need to remember.

We don't need anyone's buy-in on our boundaries or our truth. And it really is up to us to be clear about every, no we say is also a yes. So any, no, I say to you is to freeze my yes for me. No. Cause I think that this ties in as well, you know, it ties in as well, the whole conversation of yes and no.

And, and the fear of saying no, and even around food it's like, okay, I might be on this plan, but now we're out to dinner and we're here. So I'm going to eat this. And there's all this messaging around cheating on my diet, or all this messaging, every, everything. That ultimately has us continue to beat ourselves up instead of staying in the place of conscious choice.

So in other words I'm going to eat this piece of cake and **I'm conscious that I'm choosing it and I know that I'm giving myself permission to eat this instead of mindlessly standing in**

front of the fridge, picking up the cake. And then I, half an hour later, you don't realize you ate half the cake.

Right, right. Totally different experiences. Yes. And so part of this is also realizing, can I, can I give myself permission and, and can I allow myself joy and pleasure because. Absolutely think that this is linked to deprivation and restriction. And joy and pleasure.

MERYL: Oh, there's no question. No question.

Right. I mean, people get in and that's the first thing I say is this plan is not about deprivation and starvation. Right. But yet people can't wrap their heads around it because their whole lives, that's the only way. Quotes successful. They have deprived themselves. How can I be successful on this? If I'm not, I'm like, this is why we got to go deeper.

Right? Why we got to go deeper? And this is why this work is so valuable because ultimately I say to them, if you do the work in the right way, you won't ever have to face this again. Right, right.

Why accountability is so important

on the same lines or along the same lines, I think part of what we both do right.

As coaches, different in different ways is hold our clients accountable. And I think that's an important point because I know that's where our successes with our. **Being able to hold them accountable without judging** because that's tremendously important.

Being able to hold them accountable without having them feel guilty that they've done something wrong.

But holding people accountable in the most supportive of ways. And so can you speak to that a little bit?

NANCY: Of course. So I always say to my clients this begins with your commitment to your own evolution. And **my role here is to guide you and hold you accountable to the commitment you are making to yourself.**

And so the accountability piece, I'm also really wanting to. Guide my clients to hold themselves accountable in the long run. So something I'm really aware of is, especially for those of us who have been chasing all the gold stars and looking for all the external validation and all the accolades.

And **we're constantly wanting that approval and stamp of approval and affirmation from the outside** and the validation. One of the first things I think that really needs to happen is to recognize that we so often don't take good care of ourselves because if no one sees it, why does it matter?

If no, one's there to give us a gold star for taking a bath or going for a walk or making ourselves. Making ourselves a healthy lunch, if no, one's there to say, well, good for you. Then we kind of, we don't validate ourselves enough and that's that's for me. **One of the most important things is to really learn how to give yourself your own validation,** give yourself your own approval and have that be enough.

MERYL: Wow. Wow. Because that hits home. I will tell you personally, that totally hits home. So how, how do you do that? How do you give yourself validation and have that be enough? Is it just that constant? Because I find myself doing that too. Right? You go, listen, it's hard. You go on social media. And even as much as everybody knows, I have this love, hate relationship with social media.

Right. But Because I think it's so much of that outside validation that so many of us that have had self-esteem issues and these issues growing up with were not enough. Right. Yeah. And so we're looking for that external validation of how we look for me, I know it's work day in, day out, day in, day out.

Is it that, is it just the work? Is there some, is there something magical

NANCY: you can say about, I wouldn't say it's magical, but I really, I really think it's about **allowing ourselves to fulfill our own needs** and allowing ourselves to actually celebrate the moments that we are willing to give ourselves. So again, whether it's a bath, whether it's a walk, whether it's just closing the laptop and sitting for five minutes and it I'll always say it needs to start somewhere. **It needs to start small.** And listen, I'm a recovering workaholic, I'm a recovering people pleaser.

I'm a recovering perfectionist and all the things and work is my drug work is heroin. So if I have to close the laptop it's like I have to be in the withdrawal. And believe me, it's been a process. I mean, I'm now at a place where thankfully I'm on the other side of that, but for many, many, many years that was the drug for me.

And I would actually rush through seemingly pleasurable experiences so I could get back to my laptop and feel safe. Hmm. And so the shift is how can I actually be in the moment of the experience I'm in and allow myself to feel the fullness, to feel the joy, to feel the pleasure, to feel the fun.

Like these are very foreign concepts to me when I was young. And how can I actually. Really drink in whatever's here, as opposed to thinking that I should be doing something else or convinced myself that it's not okay for me to take this time for myself.

MERYL Yeah. That's amazing. I love that. Like I said, I think you and I could talk about for hours on end, because, you know, it is so relatable to all of the people that I work with and, and look, and it's not just women, it's men too.

Plenty of men coming in. Once we let a little bit of that ego go,

And, and they do And I think **sometimes for men it's even harder** because. for them it's less acceptable. Let's say **culturally less accepted to be that vulnerable and to show that.** And so I think this applies, I know this applies to all genders. And you know, to everyone, and I think this is just incredibly valuable and it certainly won't be the last time that we talk.

I know people's attention spans are, are, are small. So I think we should probably wrap it up, but anything any last thing you want to leave us with,

NANCY: Really, it comes back to what I said before about choice. **Just recognize that every choice you're making is serving or sabotaging your desire.**

remember there's a cause and effect, stay conscious, stay present to doing what matters most to you.

MERYL: Thank you. I always tell people, yes, stay, stay mindful, not mindless. So I love that. Love that. Well, Nancy, thank you so much for this. Amazing. And like I said, it won't be the last time we talk. All right, everyone.

This is your Rebel Nutritionist signing off. Make it a great day.