

Episode 5 Transcript – Procrastination and Perfectionism

AARTI DHANDA: Does it sound good now?

PABLO GONZALEZ: It still sounds good.

AARTI DHANDA: Still?

PABLO GONZALEZ: Yeah.

AARTI DHANDA: Okay.

[music]

>> Join counsellors, Pablo and Aarti, as they discuss two sides of one coin, procrastination and perfectionism.

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PABLO GONZALEZ: We're here today. We're going to be talking about the concept of perfectionism on this podcast. And I thought, who better to talk to than my colleague, Aarti, who's a counsellor at GBC as well as me and who identifies as a recovering perfectionist? So Aarti, hello.

AARTI DHANDA: Hi, everyone. I'm so excited to talk about this today. It's one of my favourite topics.

PABLO GONZALEZ: It's a super interesting topic, and it comes up a lot with students. And I think that seems like a natural thing. You know, students are trying to do things really well. And that's what I want to talk about. What is doing well? And what is reaching for perfectionism? And is that even something that's desirable to be perfect? So Aarti, what is perfectionism?

AARTI DHANDA: Well, I think as I reflect on my own life about it, I realize that as a student and both as a professional, it's something that I've really hard to understand when it's helpful and when it's getting in the way and what's kind of underneath it. So I'm so excited to talk about all those different parts. And I think one thing that's really important with perfectionism that I've kind of noticed, and a lot of people in the field that talk a lot about perfection, and one of them is Brené Brown, if people are interested. She has a book called the Gifts of Imperfection, which tells you a lot about it and would do a really good job in defining it. But what I've learned is how we have in our society kind of talked about this as such a positive thing, right? And I think it just really stands out to me when I remember when I would go for interviews, and you would get prepped to think about well, what's your -- when you're asked, like, what is your weak point? Well, it was true, like, my weak point was that I was a perfectionist. But this was an answer that was usually seen positively. And I think that's such a big part of, like, the fact that it's something that we're encouraged to strive for, even within school environment. How do we find that balance between doing well, succeeding, learning everything, versus feeling that everything has to be perfect?

PABLO GONZALEZ: Can I ask you where do we exhibit -- or where does perfectionism come up? Like, what aspects of life does perfectionism appear in?

AARTI DHANDA: Yeah, so that was something I learned as well in, like, some of my older jobs where I worked. I learned that perfectionism, you know, we often think it's an accomplishment oriented. So we see it in our work when we're trying to work on an assignment. Maybe we have 10 assignments, we want every assignment to be perfect, right? And then we can't keep up. So that's like one place we might notice that. But then there's all these other places it could show up too. And it doesn't show up for everyone in every place. So there's a lot of people who might actually be perfectionists, but they don't really know that because they're like, "I'm not a perfectionist." I'm a procrastinator. I never get anything done. Right? And I'm -- we'll definitely talk about that. But it can show up in every part of your life. So some people might have more of this type of higher expectation, which is a really big part of perfectionism, this idea that there is a perfect or that there is some standard that's almost perfect that you want to continue to strive towards. And that can happen with, like, body image. That can happen in relationships, like how you show up in a relationship, what you expect from the partner in the relationship. This can happen with, like, you know, your routine, your diet. It can show up in all parts of your life. It's just going to look a little bit different. And again, some level of, like, striving and ambition is healthy. But then how do we know when it's at a point where it's actually not helping us?

PABLO GONZALEZ: It sounds like it can be an unhealthy pressure on your life.

AARTI DHANDA: Yeah. It's definitely a pressure. And I think the thing is it just feels so good to accomplish things. Like, there is a reward piece to it, too. Like, if I have an A plus average, that feels amazing. And, you know, for me personally, growing up, I was always a strong student in school. It was a place where I got a lot of positive reinforcement. So my teachers had told me, "Aarti, you're not going to have a problem when you go to university. You're not going to struggle." That was not true at all. So I had such a hard time at the beginning figuring out, okay, how do I not take this struggle personally as though it's somehow, like, a reflection of my ability or even my identity or my work?

PABLO GONZALEZ: So it's tied to the concept of self and your value?

AARTI DHANDA: Definitely. Yeah. And I think one of the interesting things that I learned that was also really hard to learn was that underneath perfectionism, often, it's about, like, I -- these accomplishments make me feel, like, good. But without them, how do I feel? Do I feel enough? Do I feel worthy? Do I feel like my self-esteem is so good? Or is my self-esteem kind of going up and down based on, like, the accomplishment that I'm measuring myself up against? And for some people, it's grades. For some people, it's their weight. For some people, it's other things like how -- the feedback they're getting from others about how great of a friend they are or how caring they are or whatever it might be, right?

PABLO GONZALEZ: So I know from my own experience that being a student is difficult. And being an adult student, for sure, right, in postsecondary education is really difficult. And there are things going on in anybody's life that can hinder their performance in terms of grades. If you happen to be one of these people that puts a lot of weight on grades and maybe some of your self-esteem is connected to grades, that seems like a recipe for disaster, because you're not going to always be able to get an A.

AARTI DHANDA: Yeah. And I think the thing is that, you know, one thing that's really important to recognize is that usually the things we're striving for are justified. Right? I want to do well in school so that I can get a good job, I can get good recommendations from my professors, so I could get the coveted internship. You know, I live in a world that's more competitive. My field is competitive -- whatever it may be. And if we're looking at it in different parts of our life, it could be the same. It could be the same as well, I need to be healthy. And in order to be healthy, I

need to do these things. Right? Or, you know, we see a lot of value in ourselves being someone who is very caring and giving. So we're always trying to be emotionally available all the time. And we can make that a perfectionistic thing. If I didn't procrastinate and I, like, put in the effort I just did this thing, whatever it is, by the deadline.

PABLO GONZALEZ: Oh, yes. I think I can relate to that more than the grades. Like, I could relate to wanting to be a good person, whatever that means for me. And when I don't meet that, my -- whatever criteria I have for that, it's painful.

AARTI DHANDA: It's painful. Exactly. And I think, like, that's the why I jokingly say I'm still a recovering perfectionist because as much as I've learned about it, as much as I keep reminding myself, you know, to work on the different strategies I'll share later, it's a work in progress. It takes time to really recognize where it's coming from for you. And how do I learn to still, you know, pursue my passion or my ambition but not let it define how I'm going to feel? So not on this emotional roller coaster where if I get really good -- I'm just going to use the example of grades because it's more concrete -- that if I get really good grades, I feel really great about myself that week. And if I don't, then they feel not so great. Right? And I think one thing that really helped me -- actually, I'll share a couple things that really helped me shift my mindset and narrative to even realize that this was a problem for me was two things. One, someone had explained to me an analogy of a coin and how there's two sides of a coin, heads and tails. And that one side is perfectionism. And one side is procrastination. And when that clicked in my mind, I realized there is a cycle between procrastination and perfectionism where -- sometimes when I was a student, I didn't do my homework. Does that make sense? Or that I didn't go to class. And it was because maybe I was overwhelmed and the relief I felt from, like, doing selfcare, or, you know, what I told myself, I was taking care of myself. I needed a break. But that was because my expectation was that things had to be all -- like, they had to look a certain way. Almost all or nothing. Right? And sometimes, this -- people who tend to kind of be on the more procrastination side -- sometimes we have to think about as a student or as an individual, think about, okay, what would happen? Like, what's my worst fear? Right? And then people start to notice. Are we expecting it to look a certain way? And then if we don't put in the effort and then we get a bad mark, for example, then although that feels bad, it doesn't feel as bad as if we had put in all the effort and got a bad mark. You see what I mean?

PABLO GONZALEZ: I can totally relate to this. Yes.

AARTI DHANDA: Tell me, what do you feel like? Share.

PABLO GONZALEZ: Well, I'm thinking about my own hesitancy to enter a postsecondary program because I was afraid of failure and to the point where I didn't want to even try because I thought, well, what if I put in all of my effort and it turns out that I'm not good enough?

AARTI DHANDA: Yes. Exactly. Yeah. That definitely was a big realization for me as well. It's something I still have to overcome. If I have a goal that feels intimidating or that I feel like it's more of a dream, well, how do I turn this dream into a reality? Well, now I have to make practical steps towards it, which means I have to believe that, like, I can do it. And if I fail, it doesn't mean that there's, like -- that somehow defines me. Does that make sense?

PABLO GONZALEZ: Completely. That's what I was afraid of. I was afraid of failing. And then that would -- I would be defined, or I would define myself by that failure.

AARTI DHANDA: And so it's -- I think that's where it's so important to understand that link between perfectionism and procrastination. And I think the second realization I had that I was going to share was this took a while, but -- for me to realize that. So when I would accomplish

things, my bar for perfectionism would get higher. And then when I would reach that or get close to that, my bar for perfectionism would be higher. So it was like this -- there was no, like, real end goal that I could actually meet. It was always this gap between how much I can accomplish and somehow where I want to get to and somehow that defining some level of not enough. Does that make sense?

PABLO GONZALEZ: You know, Aarti, if you keep putting that bar up, that seems like a recipe for guaranteed failure, because eventually, you're going to put the bar so high that you can't possibly reach it.

AARTI DHANDA: Exactly. And that's how you know perfectionism -- one of the telltales of why perfectionism becomes a problem, right? So going back to all the areas in which you can be a perfectionist. Not everyone is a perfectionist in every part of their life. Some people -- this is why we use the term, oh, so and so is a workaholic. So if I'm trying to be perfect at work, what happens to all the other parts of my life that I don't, like, intentionally think about also in this perfectionistic way?

PABLO GONZALEZ: Right. So something is going to have to fall to the wayside if the only way to be -- yeah, if being a workaholic is the only way to achieve perfection at work, and that's what you value, other things are going to have to suffer for that.

AARTI DHANDA: Yeah. And I think the challenge is that when those things suffer, as a perfectionist, what do we do? We blame ourselves and say, well, you should have seen this coming. The expectation is somehow that we can predict the future, that we can kind of know what's going to happen. And if we don't, then that's not because we're human. It's because we need to be better than that.

PABLO GONZALEZ: One thing that I'm hearing is that we need to decouple our value or our sense of self from accomplishment.

AARTI DHANDA: Yeah. It's tough to do, though.

PABLO GONZALEZ: Yeah. How do we go about doing that? What does that process look like?

AARTI DHANDA: Oh, wow. That's such a big question. How do we do that? How do we find value in ourselves without looking to accomplishments, whether it's in school or relationships or other things? So Brene -- I'll go back to Brené Brown. Her *Gifts of Imperfection* Book, the very first chapter talks about authenticity. So I know that word has been popular in mainstream media. And she really defines what it means to be authentic. I would say I just spent the most time there before I moved on to the other chapters, because it's the most important thing, but it's also the toughest thing. And she talks about it as hustling for your worthiness. And I realized that when I keep moving that bar up, up, up, I'm just hustling and hustling. And, you know, my life, however it is, might be someone else's perfect. Right? So, again, it's so subjective. And it's not something you could ever really achieve. So then, you know, the brain tricks itself and says, okay, so I can't achieve perfection. But I could achieve, like, close to perfection or 90% or whatever grade you like, loved, in school. Do you know what I mean?

PABLO GONZALEZ: Yeah.

AARTI DHANDA: And again, that's why it's so important to think about it as am I hustling for my worthiness? Am I chasing something so that I can feel good? And if that's what's happening, then you're not engaging in that thing in an authentic way. Does that make sense?

PABLO GONZALEZ: Yeah.

AARTI DHANDA: So it's more about, like, self-esteem, goes up and down. And that's based on accomplishment, where self-worth is this just innate feeling that you're deserving of love and kindness, that you're a good person and it -- and, you know, I would think about it this way. It's like if I didn't have anything and I lived under a bridge, would I still like myself? And whatever that feeling is, like, that's self-worth. So part of that process, a difficult process, is to actually increase your self-worth instead of chasing self-esteem.

PABLO GONZALEZ: As an example, say that, you know, I want to develop a better sense of self, and I want to help myself a little more. What's, like, something that I could practice to get that started?

AARTI DHANDA: Yeah. So I think the first step is, like, to recognize what drives your perfectionism or procrastination, right? So understanding your cycle and understanding, like, what your fears are. And it could be a fear of failure. It could be a fear of success. And I think the fear of success, we don't talk so much about. It's like if I accomplish everything I want to accomplish -- and I remember describing it to a friend this way, saying that, you know, I'm standing. I feel like I'm standing on the edge. And I all I see is darkness. And it's because I had just finished my schooling. And that was my goal. And now I'm like, well, what's my next goal? So it's like always having something to achieve. There's a comfort in that. Right? And so I think part of it is recognizing that you have this fear. There's some fear that's driving it, whether it's a fear of failure, fear of success. But more importantly, what would that mean about you? Right? Because it's so -- everyone is afraid of failing. But are we -- does that -- are we taking that to another level where we say then it means I'm blank?

PABLO GONZALEZ: Do you find this to be a very common thing amongst students, this sense of accomplishment tied to self-worth?

AARTI DHANDA: Definitely. Definitely. I do think it's a big thing. And I think that it makes sense because it is coming -- it does start out from a good place, right? We want to have motivation. We want to pursue our passions. It's when those are -- like when we're kids, and we have this passion, we love to draw, let's say. We love to paint. And then maybe you're in a program like -- I don't know, I'll just use an example -- interior design or something, that this thing that you had so much passion for, it becomes now a goal that you have to accomplish. And if you don't, it means something. Right? So I think the first -- once you recognize your cycle, you recognize the fears and what that -- how you in your mind define that fear in terms of your identity. And the next piece is to think about, okay, if I'm going to show up more authentically, then how do I connect back to that initial passion that I had and why I love this thing?

PABLO GONZALEZ: This discussion about your original passion, and you invoked the word 'children', I think. And I'm thinking about how children begin to develop their sense of self and their values and then begin to adopt some of their own. So can some of this be tied to parental pressure from childhood?

AARTI DHANDA: I don't know as much about that. But I would assume it's just, like, trickle down from society. Right? So I think it's the side effect of, you know, we're an accomplishment-oriented society. And that's -- I'm not saying that's a bad thing. But I think it's about recognizing, what are we reinforcing? And we often reinforce external motivation instead of internal. And becoming authentic is we connecting with your internal motivation. So I'll explain what I mean by that. So for example, I didn't care about spelling. But I do remember when I was young, I loved stickers. And I would always get stickers if all of my -- and I was in Grade 2 or Grade 3. If all of my, like, spelling words were spelt correctly, I'll get a sticker. So I became more motivated to do

that even though I didn't actually care that much about it. Right? And to this day, I still use stickers to reinforce things I've done, I'm not going to lie.

PABLO GONZALEZ: You give yourself stickers?

AARTI DHANDA: Yes, I do. I give myself stickers. I do. But that's an external motivation. And it's not like external motivation is all bad. It's just when that's the overwhelming motivation instead of internal motivation, right? Whereas, like, an internal motivation might be different. Like, if, let's say, there is a kid who loves spelling and wants to enter a spelling bee. There's some internal motivation there because there's something that this person loves about this particular -- it's the same kind of activity. But they genuinely internally feel good about it. So it's about are we reinforcing how well they did in the spelling bee? Or are we reinforcing their love for it?

PABLO GONZALEZ: Oh, that's -- yeah. That's such a good question. It's so important to recognize when we're maybe pushing people too hard and in the wrong direction by rewarding them for maybe even self-destructive behaviour.

AARTI DHANDA: Yeah. Like, what do you think of when you mention that?

PABLO GONZALEZ: I'm thinking about like workaholics or so-called workaholics. And we -- they get rewarded, right? Their bosses like them or are pleased with their performance. People find them to be attentive to things, even though it's causing harm in their -- maybe in their personal lives. Or maybe they're stressed out. Or maybe they get sick.

AARTI DHANDA: Yeah, that reminds me of when I entered the workforce -- and I will be very happy to share this little antidote. So when I finished my schooling and I entered the workforce, I would always be, like -- and this was not an expectation of the workplace I worked at. So it was almost funny because it didn't necessarily -- like, it wasn't the work culture there. But I just had this feeling that I need to show up all dressed up. Right? Like, I would do my hair, my makeup. I'd wear my nice heels. And this wasn't really the expectation of the workplace. It was just more like a comment that was shared, like, that you want to look professional. And this was my interpretation of what professional meant. And, like, I'm not naturally a type of person who was always like that. So this was an effort. And it did make me feel good. And I'm not going to say that, you know, that can't be authentic for someone else. But for me, it wasn't very authentic. I was literally painting on, you know, this image that I was projecting. And although we got a lot of, like, positive reinforcement, you know, it was -- it took some time for me to realize that this was the persona that I had when I went into work of the person I thought I had to be or how I had to look or how I had to dress. And it didn't even click to me that my colleagues were not doing that. Does that make sense? So almost in a way that I was gaining attention, not intentionally what I was looking for. But it was coming more from my own sense of feeling of inadequacy that, like, this -- in order to be professional, I need to make this type of effort. And that's something I learned from the culture of our society, what being professional means. And I think -- now that I think back to it, I think it's kind of funny because I realized that in some ways, it was selfcare. And in other ways, it was encouraging me to show up in a way that I wasn't being authentic.

PABLO GONZALEZ: So Aarti, we've been working together now for a couple of years, I think. And I think that you're a snappy dresser. But you're not coming to work dressed to the Nines. How did you -- you look great. But how did you change that? How did you have -- first of all, did you recognize it? And then what did you do about it?

AARTI DHANDA: Well, because I became friends with my colleagues, and when they were like, you know, -- like jokingly, we would talk. And I realized, oh, my God, I never even really noticed

that, like, when I come into a meeting, like, I gain so much attention just because my outfit looks so nice. Do you know what I mean? And I was just -- I was actually just trying to fit in. But it was not occurring to me that I was making -- I was making such an effort to fit in that I was standing out. So that's why I find it a little ironic. But I think the other piece was just as I got more comfortable with myself as I did this work on perfectionism, I never set out to make a change to how I showed up to work. It was just a natural change in side effects of me choosing to live every aspect of my life more authentically. And that meant that I went back to, you know, embracing those things, except in a way that felt more me, if that even makes sense.

PABLO GONZALEZ: More -- that spoke more to your values of who you are, who you want to be.

AARTI DHANDA: Yeah. I still, like, you know, feel professional. I just now feel like myself when I'm at work instead of this image of, you know, whatever my role is. Does that make sense?

PABLO GONZALEZ: Yes.

AARTI DHANDA: Yeah. So I think, like, I just wanted to share that in terms of the piece around, how do you be authentic? Well, I think it's in all the little, little ways, recognizing in all the little, little ways, how are you not being authentic? How are you hustling? How are you projecting more of an image of yourself? Right? Because -- Brené Brown also talks about why we do that. Because being vulnerable is risky. And if I show up as my true self, then I could be rejected. Does that make sense? And, like, we're not really necessarily thinking about it that way. But that's actually what's underneath the surface. Right? And so I think it is a difficult ask. When Brené asks us to show up authentically, she's actually asking us to be vulnerable. And she talks about that. And the reason we don't want to be vulnerable is because we're afraid of being rejected, being shamed, not being accepted or liked, right?

PABLO GONZALEZ: Yes. I'm also now thinking, based on what you just said, about if I want my more authentic self, maybe I can actually get my real needs met, because I can actually address what they are, because I don't have to pretend to be perfect. I don't have to pretend to be super confident or competent. I can have gaps in knowledge and ask for help or ask for support.

AARTI DHANDA: That's so tough. And I think, you know -- I know that this is a very difficult thing to do. But it can be so beautiful, too, when you show up -- and I'm just going to use the example of workplace. But think about it in your relationships, too, right? Like, two people who are in a relationship. Do we have our wall up? Do we really let the other person see our flaws? And when we do and they accept us, think about how beautiful that love is, that security, that connection, how deeper the love feels. Right? But maybe we've had a couple of breakups. And now we've decided that you know what, I'm going to be in this relationship, but I don't want to lose myself. So I'm going to be uber independent. And I'm not going to let the other person in.

PABLO GONZALEZ: That sounds painful. Like, there's always going to be that distance.

AARTI DHANDA: Yeah. And so how do you close that gap? Right? Because -- so the thing with perfectionism is it creates disconnection. In order to have real connection, you have to let people see you. I know. Those are not my words. I'm not that wise.

PABLO GONZALEZ: You're very wise. But it also -- it just feels like -- even in my body when you said that, it feels like -- it feels so risky. And yet, I know what the reward can be when you do put up a little risk.

AARTI DHANDA: That's why I said that the first chapter is the hardest. There are other things that she talks about, what you can do. And you can -- like, if anyone wants to get that book, that's just the book that helped me a lot. You know, there's lots of other resources too. But I really like Brené Brown's work. That's my bias. But, you know, people can start with other chapters that are easier. But I think it would still require doing this work.

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PABLO GONZALEZ: Aarti, what tools have you used? And what has support looked like for you in your journey with perfectionism?

AARTI DHANDA: Yeah, no, that's a great question. So there are some different tools that I learned from Brené Brown's book. One of them is called AEIOU and Y. So that one actually pretty much summarizes most of the different things that she talks about. So I'll go ahead and talk about it. I don't use this one necessarily every day. But I think for someone who's starting out, it would be a good idea to do that. So A stands for abstaining. Meaning, what is this habit that I have when I procrastinate? What's the thing that I do when I procrastinate that I need to stay away from? So I was listening to another podcast about perfectionism by a life coach. And we can put it in the resources. I don't remember the person's name right now. But they talked about procrasticleaning, procrastiresearching. And I just -- like, that word really stuck with me because, of course, ironically, as I was listening to the podcast, I was procrasticleaning. And it's like, you know, sometimes we choose really productive things to do. But we're actually procrastinating. And for some people, it could be, you know, reading avidly. It could be scrolling social media. And you'll know what the thing is that you do to avoid the anxiety or the shame. And shame is one of those feelings that comes up a lot. It's like the embarrassed feeling.

PABLO GONZALEZ: So glad you're bringing up the word shame. I think it's something that there's not a lot of support in the world to talk about shame.

AARTI DHANDA: Yeah. And Brene talked about that in one of her books where, you know, many years back, even therapists who wanted to study the topic of shame were discouraged from doing that. So it's really interesting to see, like, you know, if we have to embrace talking about shame and understanding our own shame if we're going to help others with theirs, right? And so that's the A. And then the E is exercise. So we may have heard this like a million times. And it's still a weak area for me. But exercise, it's -- again, how do I do that without being perfectionist about it? So it's like even if you can only commit to 30 seconds, a minute, two minutes, what's a small, small, small thing you can do to exercise, even if it's just neck stretches, because you've been on the computer all day, even if it's getting up, walking to -- walking downstairs to the living room to pour yourself a glass of water? Right? And I think it's about keeping the expectation small enough that even on a day when you're stressed, it feels doable. Right?

PABLO GONZALEZ: You're going to accomplish it no matter what conditions are happening.

AARTI DHANDA: Yeah. Because if I'm like, yeah, I'm going to exercise for half an hour three times a week, and I have 10 assignments do, it's not happening that week. And then I'm going to feel bad about it. And then that defeats the purpose of the tool.

PABLO GONZALEZ: Right. Oh, that's so good, right? Because if you hold yourself up to that perfectionist standard, and you say I'm going to get it all done and exercise, and you don't get it all done and exercise, then it creates pain.

AARTI DHANDA: Yeah. And then you're setting yourself up to fail. And this tool, remember, is not meant to be used as, like, another to-do list item on your to-do list. And so then there's the AEI. So I is for me. What can I do for myself today? So again, making this really small enough that it feels manageable and doable. So if you ask yourself this question daily, if you go through the AEIOU and Y daily, then each day will be different. Maybe one day, you're like, you know, I can take that bubble bath today. And maybe the next day is the only thing I really feel the capacity to do for myself today is make sure I drink enough water. Right?

PABLO GONZALEZ: That seems like an exercise in showing yourself some love and respect.

AARTI DHANDA: Yeah. And then the next one is O. What can I do for others? Now again, if you're the type of person who's a perfectionist in relationships, then you're going to have to balance this one out and kind of think about what's a small thing I can do for others versus trying to do everything?

PABLO GONZALEZ: What's an example of, like, an accomplishable small thing to do for others?

AARTI DHANDA: Like maybe acknowledging something that someone did or a strength that they have that you genuinely appreciate and highlighting. Or, you know, if you live with a roommate, and it feels like they're usually the one who puts away the dishes and unloads the dishwasher, and you feel you have the capacity and the energy to do that.

PABLO GONZALEZ: So manageable -- small, manageable things, gestures.

AARTI DHANDA: Yeah. And it's not necessarily like -- and this is the difference. You don't need to tell the roommate, "Hey, I unloaded the dishwasher," so they can say thank you for doing that. That's self-esteem. It's more you just doing it and then feeling good about it yourself. And I'm not --

PABLO GONZALEZ: I was going to ask you how am I going to get my praise if I don't let them know?

AARTI DHANDA: Yeah, like, I'm sure -- like, I'm not saying never ask for praise or acknowledgement. Of course. I'm not a Zen Buddha. But I'm just saying, like, you know, do you need that every single time?

PABLO GONZALEZ: Right.

AARTI DHANDA: Then you're hustling for your worthiness. Right?

PABLO GONZALEZ: Okay. So the motivation matters, why I'm doing something.

AARTI DHANDA: Yeah, of course. In a relationship, you know, it's important to acknowledge each other and what you're doing for each other. I'm just going to use the example of a relationship. But at the same time, are you going to be like, "Hey, I unloaded the dishwasher. I did the dishes. And I took out the garbage today. Where's my thank you?"? Guilty feeling. That is usually under the surface with perfectionism. Like, we're not -- we don't want to do that. Right?

PABLO GONZALEZ: I don't know. It reminds me of things that I've thought and said.

AARTI DHANDA: Yes. So that's what I'm saying. So then if that's the kind of -- like, if we're keeping score, then we're not really genuinely doing something for the other person. We're doing it for the acknowledgement. So that's the AEIO. U is what is unexpressed? So this is

about any unexpressed feelings that are happening for you that day. And it's important to recognize that. And it's not necessarily that you have to sit there and journal and process it. Maybe you do, maybe you don't. It depends on the person and the day. But it's more that you think about just acknowledging the feeling. I feel sad. The pandemic really sucks or bothers me a lot today. Or, you know, I'm feeling lonely, or I'm feeling anxious. I'm having a lot more fear of failure today because I have an exam. Right? It's just recognizing what's unexpressed.

PABLO GONZALEZ: You know, before we started recording today, you checked in with me, and you asked me how I was feeling. And I shared with you that feeling kind of depleted and tired. And you asked me what I could do about that. You helped -- you supported me to become aware of my feelings. And then you also gave me a moment to go make myself a coffee. And you chatted with me. And that was enough time for me to process a little anxiety and re-relax. And then we began recording. And that felt so good.

AARTI DHANDA: Yeah. Well, I'm glad. I think it's just -- we have to encourage each other to have that space to do that. Right? Because this is about -- like, we talk about sustainability, in terms of the environment. But what about sustainability in terms of our own mental health and sanity? Right? We have to think about how am I going to, in the long run, maintain connection, I mean, genuinely feel joy? And so that's the AEIOU. And the Y -- again, this is Brené Brown's words. She says, yay, what went well today? So --

PABLO GONZALEZ: Okay. That's good.

AARTI DHANDA: So the Y is not about, again -- like it could be. Once in a while, it could be I got this thing done. That's fine. But I think you want to be expanded from that. What are you grateful for? That's what the Y is. Right? And you want it to be very specific so that you notice more things you're grateful for over time. I think all of us will be grateful for some of the big things like having a home, having the ability to receive healthcare or to have the opportunity to work or be in school or, you know, all of these big things that, you know, are easier to notice that we're grateful for, which are important to be grateful for. But in addition to that, it's also important to be grateful for the little things that happen in the day, like my roommate unloaded the dishwasher for me, and I didn't have to do it. Just going back to the initial example. So that's the AEIOUY tool. And I'm going to share one more because it's easier. And it's the one I started with. It's the three Cs. So the three Cs stands for courage, compassion, connection. So if you can't think of all of those things, this is a good place to start. And talking about the authenticity, this is a tool to really help you figure out if that's happening for you. So courage, meaning -- not courage in the terms of like, you know, the way we think about it, in terms of being the hero, but more in terms of what's courageous for me. Right? If I'm a more shy person and I'm afraid to speak up because I'm worried about sounding stupid or something like that, it depends on the reason. Maybe some people are quiet. And that's not really the reason why. And they're just genuinely comfortable in their own skin. So then it wouldn't apply. Right? So what's courageous for me? Would finding a small step towards coming out of my bubble and taking that little risk be courageous for me? Right? If I'm the type of person that is the opposite, where I talk a lot and I talk a lot, a lot, a lot, because I want to, you know, show my value and my worth, and that's how I kind of cope with my insecurity, then how can I be courageous in stepping back a little? Right? So she talks about it in that way. Like, whatever is courageous for you really depends on how your perfectionism and how will you hustle for your worthiness. Okay? And then -- so that's courage. Compassion. So the antidote to the shame and guilt is compassion. And we have to have to start to find ways to encourage more compassion. So whether that's having compassion for each other and trying to judge less, but then also taking it a step further to how do I then extend that compassion to myself? And the way I talk to myself in my head, would I ever talk to someone I love that way? Right?

PABLO GONZALEZ: That's a good question. Right?

AARTI DHANDA: Yeah. And then connection. Connection is the last one where because perfectionism creates so much disconnection, how can I connect? And it doesn't have to be with another human being. But you have to connect in some way. So whether it's you're connecting through the pandemic. Sometimes, we have to connect with ourselves, right, because that's the person that's available. And we connect with ourselves in some way. We do something that nurtures us. Or we connect with nature by going for a walk, right, or walking around trees and just noticing the change in season. Or we connect with another person. So it's just connecting in a way that makes you feel some sense of joy. So that -- those are the two tools that I would share.

PABLO GONZALEZ: Those are fantastic and fantastic things even just to think about in terms of compassion and thinking about ourselves in respectful and loving ways.

AARTI DHANDA: Yeah. And I think, like, it really lends itself to the pandemic, the last one, because, you know, we're all going through uncertainty and hard times right now. And it can -- you know, one of the ways that people have been coping is focussing on accomplishing things. And that's not necessarily, like I said, a bad thing. It's just recognizing that if you're having a hard time accomplishing things right now, that's also part of what happens when we're experiencing more stress. So then it allows you to practice that second seat of compassion. So I just wanted to share that.

PABLO GONZALEZ: That's fantastic. Yeah, we're not -- many of us are not at our best in this moment in time. And it's so helpful to think about ourselves in more compassionate ways right now. Aarti, thank you so much for talking about yourself and being vulnerable with me today and with the audience. It's such a nice offering. Thank you.

AARTI DHANDA: Yeah. I love talking about this.

PABLO GONZALEZ: I don't want to reward your perfectionism. So I'm going to say that you did a really good job. And the real thing that I connected to was your vulnerability. And so for that, I'm going to give you a sticker. You get a star.

AARTI DHANDA: Thank you. I'm actually looking for a physical sticker.

PABLO GONZALEZ: I'm going to send you one. I'm going to mail you one. I promise to mail you a star.

AARTI DHANDA: I like really shiny big stickers.

PABLO GONZALEZ: Okay.

[music]

>> So this concludes today's episode. Thank you for joining us. If you have any questions, feedback on our episodes, suggestions for future topics, or wish to book an appointment with our counsellors, please send us an email at letstalk@georgebrown.ca. Come by again and let's talk.