



Episode 48- Living with intention and creating a more beautiful life with Amber Bosselman

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Mindy Henderson: Welcome to the Quest podcast, proudly presented by the Muscular Dystrophy Association as part of the Quest family of content. I'm your host, Mindy Henderson. Together we are here to bring thoughtful conversation to the neuromuscular disease community and beyond about issues affecting those with neuromuscular disease and other disabilities and those who love them.

We are here for you to educate and inform, to demystify, to inspire and to entertain. We are here shining a light on all that makes you, you. Whether you are one of us, love someone who is or are on another journey altogether, thanks for joining. Now let's get started.

My guest today is Amber Bosselman, a certified life coach who specializes in coaching people with disabilities. She brings a strong clinical background with a degree in psychology, blending that with practical and everyday tools she offers in life coaching. With over a decade of experience studying mental health and the human mind, Amber is committed to helping people with disabilities overcome obstacles and increase their independence. Amber, thank you so much for being with me today.

Amber Bosselman: Thank you so much for having me, Mindy. It's such a pleasure to be here.

Mindy Henderson: Thank you. Well, as we are ramping up this new year, I am really excited to have this conversation with you. Among other things you've shared with me your top three mindset challenges that you come across in your work with your clients. So we're going to delve a little bit into some advice that you have on those things and sharing with our listeners how they can develop some new thought processes in how they approach their own lives.

Lots to talk about. So let's dive right in. So as I said, you are a professional life coach. Can you tell us exactly what that means and what your role entails?

Amber Bosselman: Sure. So a life coach is someone who, it's kind of like a different flavor of counseling. We're not a licensed therapist or counselor in any way, but it's similar in that we help people just with the messiness that comes from just being a human being. There's a lot of challenges that come from living life, and my particular style of coaching is mostly focused on the mind.

So learning how to really manage your mind. It's the most powerful tool that we have. We're just not taught how to use it. That's where my niche as a disability life coach comes in. I specialize helping people with physical disabilities. There's a lot about our life living as a person with a disability that we can't change.

The amazing thing is that the quality of our life can vastly improve when we learn how to leverage our thinking, learning how to manage our thoughts, process emotions in a healthy way, things like that. So a life coach is just someone who helps you achieve the goals that you want, work on the areas that you feel stuck or just confused on and really start creating the life that you want instead of just letting life happen to you and going on autopilot. That's what I get to do as a life coach is help you accomplish those things.

Mindy Henderson: Beautifully said. How did you get involved in this field and why did you decide to focus specifically on clients living with disabilities?

Amber Bosselman: Yeah, let me answer the first part of that question of how I got involved in it. It started first with my degree in psychology where I first developed my love of human behavior and the human mind. I was planning to go on and become either a professor, teach at the university level, or do counseling. I saw this gap where people didn't maybe necessarily need full-on counseling. They were still struggling to make their everyday life the best it could be.

That's when I found life coaching. It's all the beautiful things that I love about psychology and that strong scientific research packaged in an everyday usable method for just the average person. So when I found life coaching, I thought, this is the gap that we need. More people just need help with their everyday life. So I found a certification program that blended well with the degree that I already had in psychology.

I couldn't help but notice as I went through certification, how many of the tools that I was being taught really benefited my life as a person with a disability. I just thought, oh man, this is so helpful for this area and this is helpful from this area. So I did some research and tried to find someone who's doing life coaching for people with disabilities and there aren't very many people out there that are doing that. So I thought, well there's a real need here.

Mindy Henderson: Absolutely. You yourself, you live with a neuromuscular condition, is that correct?

Amber Bosselman: I do. I have spinal muscular atrophy.

Mindy Henderson: Same as me. Okay, wonderful. Well, I could not agree more. For the longest time I wanted to be a child psychologist and clearly, I didn't go into any kind of a psychology field, but I agree with you. The mind is an absolutely fascinating thing and the power of our minds and the way that we think is, it's so interesting to me.

Amber Bosselman: Yeah, it truly is just the most powerful tool we have. We need to know how to use that a little bit better and then suddenly so many opportunities open up.

Mindy Henderson: Absolutely. Probably like so many things, practice makes perfect. So a lot of this is probably... I would imagine it's a lot of things that people may not be completely comfortable with right off the bat, but have to incorporate it into their lives and be really intentional about how to use the tools that you give them before it really becomes second nature. Is that true?

Amber Bosselman: It is. It is. You bring up a really good point, Mindy, that the practice is such an important part. What I found with working with my clients is that they're so hungry for a person who understands at least on a fundamental level what life with a disability is like. Many of my clients have worked with a therapist or a counselor or some mentor figure in the past, and they have to spend time establishing that foundational

understanding of what does my day-to-day life look like? How do I rely on other people and how does that affect my mental health?

So with my clients, we can jump straight into the nitty-gritty because we have that foundational understanding. Everyone's experience is unique, but we don't have to start from the baseline of like, I can't get out of bed in the morning, or I need help with all my tasks of daily living, and that's hard. We can skip all that and jump straight to how is your mental health affected and how can we help that be stronger?

Mindy Henderson: I love that. Do you have a neuromuscular specialization so to speak, or do you work with people with all kinds of disabilities?

Amber Bosselman: I do specify all kinds of physical disabilities. I [inaudible 00:08:04] be exclusionary just because we try and be so accepting in this community.

Mindy Henderson: Of course.

Amber Bosselman: My tools are for people with physical disabilities, not any sort of cognitive or mental disability. Beyond that, I think just because of my social circles that I work in, many of my clients do have a neuromuscular condition, but many don't. Clients with all sorts of different physical disabilities have found coaching beneficial.

Mindy Henderson: Fair enough. Honestly, I think that it's great that you do specialize. You, I hate to use the phrase stay in your lane, but stay in a lane so that you can serve your customers or your clients really, really well, and know them really, really well and the issues specifically that they face that may vary according to someone with a different kind of disability that they might live with. The issues and challenges might be completely different.

Amber Bosselman: Yeah, exactly.

Mindy Henderson: Yeah. Do you work with people virtually or in person?

Amber Bosselman: Virtually. I launched my practice during Covid actually. So at the time we were all meeting virtually, and that trend has just continued. I certainly could meet with clients in person, but again, with life with a disability, it's a little easier if you can just stay cozy at home in the comfort and safety of your own place. So currently I meet with all my clients virtually.

Mindy Henderson: Absolutely. I think that that's one of the beautiful things about the world that we're living in today post Covid is that those boundaries have really

been expanded with the opening up of the virtual world, so I love that. So as a life coach, what does a typical day look like for you?

Amber Bosselman: Great question. I love my day-to-day life. I've crafted it very intentionally. So a typical day in my life looks like waking up in the morning and I have caregivers who come in, in the morning. My husband is still here, milling around the house getting ready for his own work, but that allows me to have just some flexibility and independence in my schedule.

Caregivers help me get ready for the day. Then I'm typically working from about 10 to usually four or five in the evening seeing clients and wearing all the different hats of the business. I am a business owner. I have my own private practice, and so when I'm not coaching clients, then I'll be working on all the other aspects of the business. That's been a really challenging, but helped me grow in some beautiful ways to learn how to run all the aspects of the business.

Then mixed in there might be all the other disability life stuff. Like today I had a physical therapy appointment and maybe some exercises at home or errands out in the community. I drive a vehicle independently, which I love. It gives me a lot of freedom and independence. So once I wrap up my workday, then I'll have dinner with my husband and typically something relaxing in the evening.

Right now it's the winter here where I live in Minnesota and it's very cold, and so we've been doing a lot of cozy nights on the couch under the heated blanket with a book or a movie. Then I always make sure to wrap up my day with either some planning for the next day so I know what I'm going to be attending to or maybe some spiritual worship. That's another big part of my life. Just making sure that I'm ending the day on an intentional note before going to bed at night.

Mindy Henderson: That's fantastic. It sounds like you've got a great routine, but also as a business owner, a lot of flexibility that comes with the territory and is a perk of owning your own business and making your own schedule.

Amber Bosselman: It really is wonderful.

Mindy Henderson: Yeah. So I heard you speak at a conference, I think it was last summer. I wanted to say this before I delve into those key themes, three themes that I mentioned that you sent to me ahead of time, but I was immediately drawn to you. You're so poised and so articulate and you are so thoughtful. I could tell it was sort of a home; I don't think it was a home automation seminar exactly, but it was a seminar about making

your home accessible for you. Some of that was home automation and a bunch of other things.

Honest to goodness, you had some of the most creative ideas and things that I had never heard before. You're in this business for long enough and you start to hear a lot of the same ideas and things, which is validating, and it is great to hear those things reinforced, but I heard so many new ideas from you, which I absolutely loved. So I'm really excited to hear your advice on these three mindset challenges.

So the first one that you shared with me that you come across fairly regularly is the feeling of being unworthy of meaningful relationships. So how does this mindset often present itself in the community that you serve?

Amber Bosselman: The place I most often see it is in romantic relationships. It can bleed into all other relationships in our life, friendships, family connections, even just the quality of the connections of the people that we work with. I most often see it in romantic relationships. It's pervasive, Mindy.

There's so many clients who come to me feeling like they just are not worthy of a romantic partner simply because of the fact that they're disabled. That's why I wanted to touch on this one as a really common mindset challenge that I see because it holds us back from opening ourselves up to experiences and possibilities. At the end of the day, we are just as worthy of any loving relationship as the person next to us.

I think because we don't see that demonstrated in a lot of media or just we don't see that around us a lot in the world, somehow those seeds of doubt get planted in our mind that no one will love us just because we have to do life a little bit differently or we require more help to do day-to-day life than the other person. It's just so limiting and it's so untrue. It's really important to recognize that if that is a mindset that you yourself have.

Mindy Henderson: I think it's such a flaw in the culture that we live in day in and day out, which is I think what I heard you say, there's so much work still to do around perceptions and things of the disability community. Unfortunately, I think that you hear or see certain ideas for long enough and a lot of us in the community start to believe them.

I love that this is an area that you pointed out to me as something that you wanted to talk about because I think it's messaging that so many people need to hear and probably struggle with, like you say. So what are

some key points that you share with clients to reframe this kind of mindset and help them embrace their worth?

Amber Bosselman: There are two main points to this that I recommend, and the first is doing the work to recognize your own self-worth. It's tempting to want to wait for someone else to come along and see that and recognize that and reinforce that in you to say, I see that you are a beautiful loving soul and you're worthy of that love.

We have to do the work first to say, what is it about me that I love? Why do I think I am worthy of love? That self-confidence and self-love has to come first so that it's there, it's present, and it's not shaken by other people's reactions. Dating is messy in any world, especially with a disability, it can become a little more complicated. So developing fierce self-love and self-confidence is the first step.

Second, I think it's important to fill that gap that you mentioned of representation in society. So seek out examples of what you are looking for. I remember the impact it had on me when I was in my 20s and very single and very much not wanting to be and how comforting it was to see other inter-abled couples out there living life.

Just to see them and hear their stories and just to show my brain that this is possible. It's working for them; it will someday work for me. I'm going to find it in my own time and my own way. Give your brain some evidence to counteract the absence that we find in media and society and things like that. It takes some work to seek it out, but it's so worth it.

Mindy Henderson: It does, and you make such an interesting point because I think so often, we do look outside ourselves for that validation that we are worthy. I think that in listening to you, I had a bit of an aha moment because I think that it's, I don't know if you're going to agree with this, but maybe harder to do that work yourself and to go that deep and to look within yourself to find the things that you do love about yourself and all of that.

Whereas if we're looking outside of ourselves for that validation, it's almost like slapping a band-aid on the issue. As quickly as the validation is given, it can be taken away. If we develop it within ourselves, am I on the right track here, that it's going to be stronger and more withstanding?

Amber Bosselman: You're so spot on. It is harder to do that work yourself, but so rewarding and so worth it in the long run when you take the time to find those things. I would add too, examine what you bring to a relationship because really easy to see the areas where things would look different.

As a wife, I can't do the typical, have a hot meal on the table by 5:30 every evening when my husband walks in the door. I can't do that every night, but I can be very emotionally present for him when he comes home. Just a little example of things where find your strengths and what you would bring to a relationship to recognize that you do bring a lot, even if it looks different.

Mindy Henderson: We're certainly going to put information in the show notes about how people can connect with you. I hope that people will reach out to you to get into this and really do the work. Are there any little tidbits of some daily practices or things that you can talk about that you do assign to people to help them get started down this path?

Amber Bosselman: One fun assignment I would recommend if you want to get started on this learning to love yourself is dive in deep. I would challenge my clients who are working on this to make a list of a hundred things they love about themselves. Even your face just now, Mindy, you look a little surprised. Like, a hundred things? Yes, it initially feels so big, but when we force our mind to think big and not just instead of maybe daily writing down three things you love about yourself.

We're going all the way, it expands our mind and challenges us to think about all the areas of our life, all the nuanced and complex aspects of me as a human being. I promise you; you'll learn a lot about your relationship with yourself as you do that exercise of a hundred things you genuinely love about yourself. So that's a fun place to get started.

Mindy Henderson: Amazing. I'm going to try that. I could see where it might be easy to write down 10 things or even 15, but to come up with a hundred things, you would have to go very deep and get a little bit creative maybe even about how you're looking at yourself to figure out what kind of meter you're using to look at yourself. That's interesting. I love it.

Okay, so the second mindset challenge that you said that you see a lot in your community is the burden complex. This is one that really, really resonates with me. Can you talk a little bit more about that and what burden complex is?

Amber Bosselman: Yeah, just to introduce the term a little bit for those that aren't familiar, the burden complex is what we've kind of in the community come to call the belief that a person with a disability is a burden on the people around them because of the help that we need to do day-to-day life. It becomes a complex because we can get overly sensitive or triggered and we start to feel like a burden in every area of our life.

So that's just a little introduction to what the burden complex is. It is pervasive, I'm going to use that word again, that so many people feel like they need too much, that they ask too much, that just their existence is a burden to the people around them.

Mindy Henderson: Yeah, and it's such a heavy thing. I can feel my chest get heavy just talking about this and knowing like you say, how pervasive and prevalent it is in this community. It makes my heart sad to know how many people there are out there who struggle with this and feel this way about themselves. When in fact, just something so simple as framing it as you were talking, it slapped me in the face a little bit when you said because of the help that we need, and that's something no one should ever feel bad about is we all need help, disability or not.

It's something that I think that we tend to really judge ourselves about. Needing help is part of the human condition. So it's funny how you can hear somebody say something and it's like, oh my gosh, of course. It's true. So this is one I could talk to you about all day and pick your brain about, but what are some tactics then for reframing this particular mindset challenge?

Amber Bosselman: A tactic I would recommend to start with is separate the thing that you need help with that maybe feels a little triggering for you. Separate that from the response of the person who's providing that help. I think we have sadly had experiences in our life where someone responded poorly to a request for help. They planted that little seed, that's where the burden complex starts.

We said, "Hey, I can't do this. Can you help me do this?" Someone said, "Oh my gosh, I guess, yeah." Or they make you feel bad. They respond poorly to that request. What I want everyone listening to this podcast to know is that their response to your request for help is not your responsibility. That's on them. It hurts. I'm not saying you shouldn't feel anything. We're not robots. It hurts.

Bottom line is, like you said, Mindy, we do need help. That's a part of the human existence from infancy to elderly years. We all need help at different stages. So stay confident, stay strong in asking for what you need. I know that we always try and be kind and considerate of the needs of others around us when we make those requests.

As much as you can, if you're feeling like a burden, try and separate the request that you're making, the help that you need from the response that the person gives. Let them give whatever response they're going to

give that day. That is not your responsibility. Your responsibility is to meet your needs in the best way that you can. For most of us, that looks like asking for help in the most kind and considerate way that we can.

Mindy Henderson: That is so good. I got goosebumps. That response was absolutely brilliant. Of course this particular thing can show up in all kinds of relationships. Familial relationships, friendships, co-worker relationships, but I want to talk about romantic relationships for a second.

In the work that I do, we talk to people all the time who may live with a partner and also rely on that partner for care. It's something where the lines get so blurry. It can be really tricky to have both a relationship of a romantic nature and also rely on someone for your daily needs and help. Is this something that you've seen a lot in your line of work? What advice do you usually give people for addressing that nuance of their relationship?

Amber Bosselman: It is very common. I see it in many of my clients. The advice... Oh, that's a tricky question because it's so individual. I have seen couples who have loving, thriving relationships and they make it work where the partner provides 100% of the care. That's great, and they love it and it works. I've seen other couples who do not care, maybe the partner isn't going to provide any care and that's what they need to make it work.

So I think some tools that work for everybody are communication. I know that might sound basic, but truly you have to talk about this as you go so that there aren't these resentments or hurt feelings stockpiling and building up until they explode one day. I think too that some clear distinction of which role is in effect right now, have some separation between I need you right now as a caregiver versus I need you right now as my partner because they're different.

There are times when I need both from my partner. I need to tell him like, "Hey, I need care right now. So maybe that means that that argument that we just had an hour ago needs to be put on the shelf because I need to go to the bathroom and I need you to kindly help me do that." We need to separate that a little bit because I can't wait until we've cooled off and peace has been restored to go to the bathroom. I need to go to bathroom now. So being able to talk about that and address those openly is huge so that there can be balance between both roles for both people.

Mindy Henderson: Really, really good. So lastly, the third mindset challenge that you mentioned seeing a lot is getting stuck on trying to change things outside

of our control as being a pretty common stumbling block. On this one where do you usually start with people in helping them overcome this?

Amber Bosselman: The first step is awareness. Mindy, it's crazy how much we just don't realize how much effort we spend trying to control things that are outside of our control. Even with just what I mentioned earlier with the burden complex, we want the caregivers to be kind and happy and cheerful when we ask for help and we spend a lot of effort trying to change their response, which is completely outside of our control.

Instead, focus where you can on your own emotions, how you phrase requests. I think even this can bleed into the community at large. We are advocates. We are trying to impact the world in a good way, but you have to be careful with where you maybe focus your energy so that you are still taking care of your personal life and not spreading yourself too thin, things like that. So this is where I focus a lot on the mind.

I mentioned this at the beginning that our thoughts are completely within our control. I think that's very empowering. As people with disabilities living in a world that is largely outside of our control, there are barriers right and left and things that we cannot control. I cannot control my physical environment at all.

So recognizing that we have so much power and control in our minds because our thoughts are where everything starts. Our thoughts create the feelings that we experience, our emotions. Emotions drive how we act, what we do, and what we do creates how our life looks around us.

So if you know that the domino effect all goes back to your mind, the thoughts you think, the perspectives you have, the stories that you tell yourself about the day-to-day life that you're living, that is entirely within your control. That's something that can't be taken away by anyone. That's why it's especially important for us as people with disabilities to learn these tools is because we need more control in our lives.

Mindy Henderson: Absolutely. Absolutely. So I think that as humans, a lot of us, again, disability or not, go through our lives to an extent on some kind of autopilot. You have loops playing in your head all the time that you may not be aware of, and you talked about awareness. So if we are on that kind of autopilot and we're not used to stopping and reflecting or whatever it is that we need to do first or second or third to try to shed some light on the control that we're trying to impose when we may not realize it, what are some good ways to catch ourselves doing that? Is that a fair question?

Amber Bosselman: Yeah, I think I understand what you're saying there, and unfortunately it is the first and second and third things that you're mentioning. There's no cheat around that one. It's just good old-fashioned intentional living where you just have to practice it as much as you can. This is one reason why I also love being a life coach is it's hard to do that in the beginning on your own. So find some helps.

Journaling is a really good one where you can just sit down and turn on that reflection for the day, look back on what were my thoughts? How was I feeling? How did I react? If that's feeling hard, then maybe just try talking to a friend about that. It's just that again, turning on that intentional thinking. Schedule a session with a life coach. Go to someone who has some skills that can help you reflect and learn, okay, where are those blind spots? Where am I not seeing the own gaps in my thinking?

The freebie that I offer to everyone, I offer a free session to anyone who's interested in coaching. So my contact information will be like you said in the show notes, come to a session with me. Come try it out and come let me show you some of those thoughts where you're not even aware that you have some thinking that's getting in your own way.

Mindy Henderson: Amazing, amazing. So this last question I mentioned that we're ramping up in a new year, no pressure, but as we start this new year, apart from what we've already talked about, which there were some great nuggets of wisdom in there, what is your best advice for people to go into this new year with an empowering mindset?

Amber Bosselman: Yeah, I love the word empowering specifically. So the tip that I want to give to best help you feel empowered is to focus on specifically how your disability has set you up for success. I wish we talked about this more, Mindy, because disability, is seen as a limiting thing, an inhibiting thing, makes life harder, and we don't talk enough about how disabilities create and hone these skills within us.

You are so kind in your compliment today where you said I am poised and articulate. I credit that from my disability. Those were skills that I learned because I had to navigate life differently. There are unique skills that we have because life has thrown unique challenges at us. Once you can learn and harness the incredible superpower that your disability has created for you, a lot opens up and it will start to shift your own relationship with your disability.

Everyone has their own relationship with their disability ranging from, I hate it, to, I love it, to everywhere in between. If you want to move

forward on a path of self-love, self-confidence, which are key to overcoming those mindset challenges that we talked about, learning to love and accept your disability is part of that. So you can get started on that right now by contemplating and exercising what unique skills your disability has created in you and start to leverage those more.

Mindy Henderson: I love that advice so much. I wasn't sure what you were going to say as an answer to that question, and I think that's the best answer I could have asked for. Absolutely brilliant. Amber, you're wonderful. I am so glad to know you and so glad that you were able to spend a few minutes with me today and to do what you do every single day is you're empowering our community every day. So I thank you for that.

Amber Bosselman: Thank you, Mindy. It's been such a joy to talk about these things that I am passionate about and to share a little bit of that with our community. I hope that these tips and tools and perspectives are helpful and that people can get a fresh start to their new year for this.

Mindy Henderson: Amazing, happy New Year to you, Amber, and thank you again.

Amber Bosselman: Thank you, Mindy. You too.

Mindy Henderson: Thank you for listening. For more information about the guests you heard from today, go check them out at [MDA.org/podcast](https://www.mda.org/podcast). To learn more about the Muscular Dystrophy Association, the services we provide, how you can get involved, and to subscribe to Quest magazine or to Quest newsletter, please go to [MDA.org/quest](https://www.mda.org/quest).

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