

## That's a Hard No

### Transcript: S2: E2 "Spinning Plates: Dr. Susan Landers on Burnout and the Invisible Load of Motherhood"

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*Heather:* Welcome to That's a Hard No, the podcast about saying no and setting boundaries.

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*Sarah:* So you become the authentic and empowered you that this world needs.

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*Heather:* I'm Heather Drago.

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*Sarah:* And I'm Sarah Saunders.

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*Heather:* Before we start, a quick reminder.

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*Sarah:* While I am a licensed professional, clinical counselor this podcast is in no way a replacement for one on one therapy with a mental health professional. If you notice the content in this podcast triggers some big feelings visit our website: [hardpodcast.com](http://hardpodcast.com) for mental health resources and other helpful links.

00:01:05

*Heather:* Thanks, Sarah, ready to get started?

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*Sarah:* I'm very excited about this interview.

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*Heather:* Me too. So we're excited today to talk with Susan Landers and she is an incredible professional and mom who has a wonderful story to tell and a lot of expert insight, so we're excited to just let you come on in and say hello and talk with us about burnout and working moms, so why don't you start, Susan? Just tell us a little about yourself

00:01:41

*Susan:* Thanks, Heather. I was a neonatologist for 34 years, that is intensive care physician who takes care of premature babies and sick newborns in the NICU. And while that provided me with a wonderful, fulfilling life, I loved every minute of being a doctor, not at two AM but most of the minutes, and I also had three children. I'm married to a physician and together we raised three children. They are now all young adults. After I retired, I sat down and started to remember special patients and their parents, NICU moms and dads, who had taught me so much about life, about work, about parenting. I started writing stories and then the girls in my book club said: well, if you're going to write those stories, you probably should include your own stories, and I did. I wrote all the stories, all the vulnerable, honest mistakes and triumphs that I had as a mom, as a working mom, and I put it together and I came up with a memoir and I'm really proud of that, because most doctors don't know how to write. I didn't either. When I started writing, I had to hire an editor and she kind of helped me and some days she'd drug it out of me. But I ended up with a book that I want working moms to use as a resource, not how to get things done, how to be the best working mom

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you can, but as a resource for reality. I made so many mistakes, I went through so many changes. I went through so many ups and downs with my three kids and I remember the NICU moms saying: oh, you've got to have perfect children, you're a pediatrician, you know everything and I'm going: "Are you kidding? No! My kids are imperfect. I make mistakes, I screw things up and they would say, oh, I don't believe it, and so I think my book is going to help people be realistic about how hard it is to be a working mom. Working moms today are so stressed, maybe like me, they start out to be a perfect mother, but you know that our culture tells them they're superwoman and they all work, way more than 40 or 50 hours a week and they're taking care of kids and they're doing household cares, way more than their husbands and they're all anxious and many of them are burned-out and I was too at various times in my life, and I want my book to be reassuring to women who are following in my footsteps as working moms that they're going to make mistakes. It's hard, what they're doing is hard and they need to give themselves a pat on the back. So that's why I wrote the book and that's what I'm all about now. I love talking about working moms.

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*Sarah:* So, Susan, I love how you are able to tell your story through being vulnerable, because that is the best way that we can connect and I feel like just hearing you share that. It feels like a warm hug and I'm sure it feels like that for other people, because when you can relate to someone else's story you don't feel as alone and I have been so looking forward to having you on this podcast because I think that this is so such an important message as a soon-to-be mom, I was telling you briefly before we met: I'm 38 weeks pregnant with my fourth. I will have five freshly four and under. I'm sorry, I'll have four freshly, five and under.

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*Heather:* Pregnancy brain, She's tired.

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*Sarah:* And being a business owner, being a mental health professional I mean life is really busy and I think back to me as a first time mom and I just want to hug her because the expectations that I had for myself or the things that I thought, quote unquote, being a good mom. Now, this being my fourth, I've just learned so much and I often tell people, especially clients I work with. You're a new parent at every age and stage of your child and I want to be gentle with the language of like and I'm air quoting right now: "working mom", because whether or not you actually have a career, all moms, all parents, they are working, they're working within the walls of their home and but then there's that added layer: when you have children and you have a career, and so from years in this field for you, can you share your experience of burnout and how it's stuck up on you, especially after successfully managing it for so many years?

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*Susan:* Sure I'd be happy too. I, like you, was not equipped to be a mother. I was busy. I was a doctor, I knew a fair amount about child development as a pediatrician, but I remember feeling a little helpless as a new mom, like many of us do. I had good friends who were having babies all at the same time and we talked and we compared notes and we asked each

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other questions and that felt really good. It was very supportive. My group of friends. We had all gotten married at the same time. We all had babies at the same time. While I was living in Houston. I had three kids, three little kids under the age of six. Then we moved to a different city, in a different state. My husband had a great job offer. My job was just still in medicine, still working as a neonatologist, and I went through so much stress. It was unbelievable. I think this was my first time to burn out as a mom. New house, new neighborhood, new schools, all the teachers, all the other parents in the classes. And I had a new job that started like a month after we moved there.

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*Sarah:* I'm having, like trouble, taking a deep breath just hearing all of those, All the newness and all the change.

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*Susan:* Right, newness, change, and all my friends from Huston left behind.

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*Heather:* Your support system.

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*Susan:* It was so hard. Well, I had a couple of friends at work, one really good one who was in a different department, and my job was really difficult and I just kept plugging away, trying to do it all, just plugging and plugging, and I would call my friends in Houston and ask them questions and I would cry with my husband and I think that I became depressed. One person thought it was postpartum depression. My third was about a year-old but it was more than being depressed. I was fried emotionally I was working 60-70 hours a week, taking call in the hospital, trying to manage three kids. We were lucky enough to be able to afford a nanny. So I had great help at home, but I kept trying to do everything. It was just like: do it all, do it all this same idiot mentality that I had always had and I worked with a psychiatrist who was brilliant. I'll tell you. He said: let's sort through all the things in your life and whether I was depressed or burn out, I needed to sort through everything. My husband loved his job. I didn't like my job, it was too hard, I didn't fit in. My skills weren't right. I described to him that I was like the person on the ED Sullivan show who twirls sticks and spins plate on the top of the stick and he runs around the stage and he's got all these plates spinning and he's just spinning and if he sees a plate wobble he'll run over and spin it and he keeps them all in the air. And that's his trick. And I said that's me and my shrink. He laughed, he laughed out loud, he chuckled I said what is so funny, he said: why don't you just take down some plates? It was an epiphany, it was an epiphany, and so with him over the next six months I decided what was my priority in medicine for my career, what was my priority for my children, my marriage, friendships, and I let go of a lot of things at work that I had heaped on my plate to try to prove something to somebody, now my husband, and I still struggled because there was that imbalance. He loved his job and I wasn't very happy, and that contributed to my unhappiness and disappointment.

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*Sarah:* Well, Susan, you bring up so many good points in this and I can totally see that visual and other as we're recording and we can see each other. We're both like bobbleheads over here, you know, nodding and oftentimes with the women that I work with specifically, we talk about who's mothering, the mother? Right and so really trying to figure out like, yes, I'm spinning these plates, I'm showing up, I'm doing these things, but who's taking care of you? And so I'm hearing you say I sought out help. I, you know, talked to this psychiatrist, talked to this therapist, and I think that that's so brave, and something that I know we really want to get across is that it does take a village and we're not fully equipped for these things. And then we find ourselves in these positions where we're feeling, maybe some marital dissatisfaction, or not feeling completely in alignment with the things that we're doing, and so learning more about ourselves and what we need is so imperative for us to be growing and healing through this journey. It's, it's not about fixing it, it's about how do we best show up and navigate with the season that we're in.

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*Susan:* Exactly, I was in my early forties. I enjoyed being a mother. I loved playing outside with my kids. I volunteered at the school. I did as much as I possibly could do when I was not in the hospital. But the imbalance with my husband was a challenge. Leaving friends behind from a previous community was a challenge. I did develop one really good friend and she and I worked very closely together. I had a mentor at work that made a huge difference, somebody that could really give me feedback and help me figure out my direction and my strengths. And she was honest. And so not only did I start taking care of myself because the first year we were there I didn't take care of myself, I just ran around taking care of everybody else. Lots of working moms do that. I started to exercise two days a week. I made a point to go for walks with my son. I made a point to go out to lunch with my friend. I made a point to go on date night with my husband and we did some really down and dirty conversations about what are we going to do, hun? Ya know you're really happy here, I don't like it here. We were paying private school tuition for three children. That was ouch. That was hard. That's a lot of pressure and I had the best nannies in the world. I was so lucky, always had people that were easy to work with. That would, you know, give and take and pick up the kids and I could call them and say no, I'm going to get the kids. But it was a struggle. If I had not had therapy if I did not have a professional therapist help me sort through that mess. It was a mess. It was hard work. It was three children. One of my kids had been bullied in the first grade and I was dealing with that right after we moved there. By the time we had been there a few years, one of my children developed dyslexia. I didn't know anything about dyslexia. I had to go learn about that and get her evaluated in the hearing and the vision and all the testing and all the tutoring. It was so intense.

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*Heather:* More plates!

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*Susan:* And I didn't know how to do that. Luckily, I had great OT, speech therapist, teachers,

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educators, good pediatrician. I used my support community to help my kid with dyslexia. My son, who had been bullied years several years before, managed to get through it all by himself. That's a whole 'nother great story, but I learned so many lessons while I was struggling through all of this and my husband and I really came together as a couple. This man loved his job and he would say to me: I just hate it that you're not happy and I said: well, I am happy with you and with the kids. I mean just this isn't the job for me and I didn't know what to do and the mentor suggested I do something different. So I pivoted literally. I took a position as a medical director for an HMO, health maintenance organization, a day job, medical administrator sitting around reviewing cases, going to meetings nine to five. It was a piece of cake and during that, it was interesting. I shouldn't say it was a piece of cake. It was not difficult, not like being in the NICU. It's very interesting. I loved the meetings. I got some training as a medical administrator, went to some fancy meetings. That was fun, but I didn't it wasn't a fit either. I didn't feel like I wanted to work for an insurance company. That wasn't why I went to med school and did all the training. So again my husband and I said: Well, what are we going to do? This isn't right for you either? I said: could we just move somewhere where maybe both of us could get a better job and he, bless his heart, was willing to do that and we started looking, and so I only had to stay in the place where I was unhappy for five years. That sounds horrible to say. I stuck it out for five years, but I did. I stuck it out for five years.

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*Heather:* Yeah, but Susan, how many women would not have asked, can't we both be happy someplace? Can't we find something for both of us? How many women would swallow it for their entire lives?

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*Susan:* Oh man, I hate to feel like some women would do that. I'm just so out there with my feelings. I just have always thought that sharing your feelings is the only way to solve problems and I made my husband uncomfortable. I said, honey, we really need something where we can both feel fulfilled.

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*Sarah:* I think that that is a beautiful message to share. The reality is oftentimes there's a negative connotation with conflict. There's a conflict within us and we notice something feels out of alignment. But sometimes we do, whether it's generational or societal messaging, that we we freeze up and we don't have that conversation, but really reminding ourselves that conflict is a way to connect and if we are able to be vulnerable and share what it is, that's where the problem-solving can happen.

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*Susan:* I'll tell you another great story. You'll love this as a therapist. We were in that position right when Mars and Venus books came out: John Gray, James Gray, what's his name?

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*Sarah:* Yes.

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*Susan:* And you know, men are from Mars and women are from Venus and I read those books. I just stopped them all up and I had to teach. My husband would come home from work and I would be frustrated and I would tell him things and he would say: well, let's figure out how to fix this, let's do, let's let's figure out how to do this. And that I said: honey, I don't want you to fix anything, I just want you to listen to me. Don't do anything! When I come home upset, just sit there and listen. He learned how to do that! I'm not kidding he learned how to sit and listen and I learned to let him go and sit in his office and go in his cave and contemplate things, because the way he worked through his feelings was really different than the way I worked through mine. And if I hadn't had those books, Mars and Venus books, I would have never figured that out. I guess I would have always fussed at him or something and bless his heart, he learned how to talk about his feelings too.

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*Sarah:* The key thing that you keep saying is learned, and I'm like loving it.

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*Heather:* Yeah, I was just going to pick up on that, yeah, isn't that fascinating?

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*Sarah:* Yeah

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*Susan:* Oh man.

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*Heather:* You're continually learning.

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*Sarah:* As humans, we are not fully skilled in these things and so it is. It's learning as we go. You know one thing that I do want to circle back to. That you mentioned is that although your children were going through some pretty, you know, different developmental stages and you did have a beautiful village, you had different therapists, you had different teachers, you had a nanny. I think so often that that power of, and we talk a lot about this, feelings can coexist. We talk about that in episodes of this idea that we can feel extremely grateful for all of that support and extremely overwhelmed.

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*Susan:* Right! We can.

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*Sarah:* Yeah, and so I'm I'm wondering, for you and any listeners out there that feel a lot of gratitude for all of the cooks in the kitchen, per say, all of the people that are helping. How did you navigate, not feeling burned-out with having to communicate with all those different people? Because that's also alot.

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*Susan:* Yes.

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*Heather:* And also the guilt, asking for help or saying things aren't working, even though you had all these resources.

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*Sarah:* Right.

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*Heather:* There are so many women who say, well, so many other women have it worse than me and I shouldn't say anything.

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*Sarah:* Which leads to the feeling dismissed and minimized.

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*Susan:* And my husband could have said my job is more important than yours and we're staying here. He could have done that and there was one conversation we had. Where? Where I said if we don't go somewhere else, I'm going and I didn't even know if I meant it. I don't think I meant it. I don't think I would have ever left. I'm like one of these old-fashioned you get married and you stay married people. We've been married for 38 years. I have so many ups and downs in marriage that I could write a book about marriage. But to answer your question, I trusted my mentor. She was really helpful. I still loved my husband. I resented him. oh, resentment. That's a powerful one. I resented him because he was so happy, I adored my children. I loved their school, I loved their teachers, they worked with me, they let me work with them, they were fine and they kept me posted and I remember there was, there was one time when I was at an end of the year party for my oldest daughter and they were giving out awards, superlatives and this was a fourth grade teacher that I had my older son and then she had Anne too, and at the end of the session she was giving out all the awards. You know, most athletic boy, most artistic girl. At the end of the session at school I kind of got a worried look on my face and the teacher looked over at me and she winked and smiled, and then she presented the award for the best all-round girl to my daughter and I started crying and she came up and gave me a hug and she said: were you worried that she wasn't going to get an award? And I said, yeah, I was actually. I had that kind of teacher. My kids had that kind of teacher, somebody who would look at me and wink and say: oh don't worry, professional mom, your daughter is just as stellar as you are and I loved having personal connections with their teachers, my friend, my mentor.

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*Sarah:* So I'm really hearing you say that I was leaning into this rather than allowing the guilt or

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*Susan:* Yes.

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*Sarah:* This negative self talk of I can't do this on my own, rather, it's better with more support.

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*Susan:* I guess I somehow innately knew that, because I knew that I had done everything on my own up to that point and it didn't work. And when my friend, my mentor, actually suggested I see a therapist because she thought I was depressed and she said: I know a guy, a great guy, and that's how I got hooked up with this psychiatrist. She's the one who was honest enough to say: you really aren't acting like yourself, you really do need to talk to somebody, and I had talked to her many times, and so I'm really glad in retrospect that she steered me in that direction, she could have said: oh don't worry about it, you're okay, you're just tired. She could have blown me off, but she was honest. She was one of these high level professional women too. She went on to become chair of the department and when we left, when we decided to leave that city and move to Austin, she said: I'm really sorry to see you and your husband go, but I want you to be happier and you will be happier with this other job. I mean that's how much she cared about me and so.

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*Heather:* That's awesome.

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*Susan:* Mentors are just so important for women who work outside the house, not just good friends, not just a pastor, not just your spouse but mentors as well.

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*Heather:* We'll be right back.

00:25:00

*Heather:* And we're back with Susan Landers. So, Susan, I'm going to backtrack a little bit. You were talking about how you are just running around the first year, just reacting, reacting. So many moms do that and they just get so overwhelmed they get burned-out before they know it. Thinking back to when I was first a mom, I jokingly call it my Martha Stewart phase, when I felt like I had to have the perfect house and the perfect food and, very like, crafted everything. Just you know, it was just spun myself in circles and after a while I was like. This is unrealistic. I can't live like this.

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*Sarah:* We are both recovering perfectionists.

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*Heather:* Yes, yes, yeah, so I'm thinking about. You know, Sarah, and I talk a lot about talking to yourself more than listening to yourself and all the voices in your head that tell you all the shoulds and coulds, and so I'm wondering, as you were kind of coming out of that year and working with a therapist and and like relearning or unlearning, I should say: like what voices were you hearing in your head before? Were you even aware of them and like what did you have to start telling yourself?

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*Susan:* The voices that I was listening to were: you have to be perfect, you have to achieve and accomplish because I became a doctor before I became a mom and I had this "I'm going

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to be an academician, I'm going to write papers, I'm going to do research," I had this idea of what I was going to do in medicine and I had a couple of mentors in Houston and was emulating them now. Neither one of them had children. One of them wasn't even married, and so the things I told myself with "you should do this. You need to be able to do this. You're not doing enough research, you're not writing enough papers, you're not spending enough hours, you're not taking the work home with you" and it was all negative. Everything I told myself was should, should, should. And when I finally started looking at my plates, I thought my children were more important than that research project and I thought my marriage was more important than revising that paper for the third time. And I thought my friendships were more important than developing a new program in the clinic. And so I actually sat down and made decisions. I weighed things out and I said what makes me happy, what brings me joy? And I don't know how I learned how to do that. I guess I read some things that said we can make choices as working mothers and an older mentor in Houston. She was also neonatologist. She was also married to a nephrologist and she said: be able to do a lot of things in your life, but you're not going to be able to do everything, and that was one of the best pieces of advice anybody gave me, and I believed her because she was an accomplished physician too. So what I started to tell myself was I need to do the things that are most important and my children really needed me. I mean they all had various challenges at various stages. My little three-year old daughter, the year before she was diagnosed with dyslexia, she suffered a dog bite in the face. We were out in the neighborhood. It was horrible, it scared me to death. She was ten feet away from me and this family dog, spring Springer Spaniel, snapped her and laid open her lip. And that terrified me and I thought, oh my god, if I hadn't been there? Heather, I would lapse back. Into the oh, I'm not a good enough mother. How how could I let this happen? And how did I let a dog bite my child? I was ten feet away. I couldn't keep the dog from biting her, and so things would happen that would remind me that I was not a perfect mother and I kept trying to be. I have to admit, you know, if you're a perfectionist, it takes a long time to unload that. It takes a long time to say you're good enough the way you are, you're really good enough. You don't have to go to every swim meet, you don't have to drive two hours to get to every soccer game, soccer tournament, whatever it is.

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*Heather:* You have to let go.

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*Susan:* Yes, you have to let go of some things and you have to make choices. And so, and my husband was so good at that, he was good at saying: just loosen up a little. I'll tell you another secret why I recovered so well. I'm a terrible cook and my husband is a great cook and he loves to cook, and so he's always done all the grocery shopping and cooking, including with the kids, and I always did everything else. The nanny and the teachers and the PTA and the sports and the uniforms and all that. And so we had a great division of labour. A lot of moms have a terrible division of labor and try to do too much.

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*Sarah:* There is a book called Fair Play by Eve Rodsky and she talks about this, about that equal partnership, and specifically she has a game that she created, that there it's a deck of cards, and so this deck of cards has all of the things to manage the household, to manage the family, to manage the finances. And it's not about blame, shame, judgment or criticism, but just acknowledgment, and so to take that deck of cards out and then say who's responsible for this one, who's responsible for that one? And more times than not, what couples recognize is that the woman, he has more of the cards, and so it's really trying to just understand, as recovering perfectionists, as people that do like control, what can we delegate? What can we give up control and trust our partner to do that? But I think that's really hard.

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*Susan:* Right it is.

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*Sarah:* And so this almost invisible load that mothers carry, because we don't always see the things behind the scenes today, like you know, had to register my son for safety town and I had to, you know, order their pictures that they had just gotten taken for spring pictures. Like all of these things, it's like an invisible load that my husband doesn't realize. He sees, you know, ching ching, ching ching.

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*Heather:* Yeah, things just happen.

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*Sarah:* So when I'm talking to clients and understanding this idea of invisible load of motherhood, there's often this mom rage that it's like we talk about our check engine light goes off, there's something deeper under the hood, and so when it comes to burnout and there are so many unrealistic expectations that are placed on moms, we get things so mixed-up whether it's from what we witnessed from our upbringing or what society is kind of telling us this again. Air quoting "perfect mom", what specific advice or recommendations would you give to these women who feel these false messaging or these limiting beliefs for them to, you now, acknowledge that this is not serving them? What what advice would you give them?

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*Susan:* I would advise them to bounce it off a very good friend, my good friend the pathologist, had a husband just like mine. He was involved and he enjoyed cooking and he was there and he helped, and so she and I compared notes. I would advise them to take any resentment they feel as a big red flag. I think resentment is the worst thing that can come in a marriage and when I felt resentment, "my husband has an easier life than I do". It was horrible for me, and if my therapist had not helped me work through resentment, I probably would have broken up my marriage. I was so mad and so resentful. I didn't have the sense when it first started to know that I was doing too much, that I had literally created my own burnout by getting overwhelmed with everything.

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*Sarah:* So that resentment was a signal to let you know - ok, there's something deeper going on, and then you were able to unpack that.

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*Susan:* Exactly, I think resentment is a big red flag for women, and not having someone to talk to is a huge detriment. You know whether it's your best friend or a therapist or your mother, your mother-in-law friend at work. I suspect the pandemic has isolated people so that they have not been able to talk as much to their colleagues at work and that has been a handicap. I feel certain of that. I've talked to lots of working moms in going to the fitness center where I go, now, their younger working moms, and they say: "I feel so alone". Call somebody up, go do something, go take a walk together. You've got to have somebody to lean on to open up to, and I never found a friend that was surprised at my stories. They were always going through something that was comparable or worse, or it was just I mean, we all go through the same things. We all have all these challenges that pull at us from all these different areas and it's okay to say to a friend: man, I'm really overwhelmed. I don't know what to do. What would you do and it's so helpful to share your feelings with another person.

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*Sarah:* And allowing ourselves, giving ourselves permission to do that, and Heather, you often talk about your two close friends and how you're always going to them, and you know they're kind of your accountability buddies, your accountability partners, and I just think one thing that I all struggle with, even though, as a mental health professional, I have all of these tools, it's it's being human sometimes and recognizing I can tell these people I'm struggling, and that doesn't say less about me, and so I think I don't know if either of you, but sometimes that can be really hard. It's because we want to make it seem like we have it all together and yeah.

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*Heather:* Oh yeah.

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*Susan:* We do.

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*Heather:* Yeah, it's hard to let people in and see, you know the frayed.

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*Susan:* The frayed edges.

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*Heather:* Yeah, yeah it's hard sometimes, you know, I found when I was young (er), raising my children, that the expectations I was getting were a little bit from society, from Martha Stewart, and you know all that "perfect mom" stuff. But also because. I didn't grow up in a home with a traditional nuclear family: you know I was a single kid, raised by a single mom and my grandmother. And we had Lot of struggles. I've talked about it before, so I had this

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idealized picture in my mind: of the perfect suburban home with two kids and a husband and a pet. And so I kind of piled a lot of expectations, unrealistic expectations, on myself, of what that should be. And speaking of resentment, like I had resentments that I then kind of built-up because I wasn't communicating expectations I had for John, my husband, and he had some resentment because he was feeling the pressure, you know, of like, providing, you know and so like, it took us a while to really acknowledge those things and talk to each other and talk about things aren't always 50-50 in a marriage, sometimes it's four and 60, sometimes it's 60-40 and it's over the long haul you, you call it counterbalanced, Sarah, like sometimes someone needs to give more and someone needs to take more. So there's a lot of forgiveness and letting go and just realistically looking at your life and not comparing yourself to other people

00:38:04

*Susan:* Right, right!

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*Sarah:* And constant communication. I think you know that is just so big/

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*Heather:* Right, right.

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*Sarah:* And as you're sharing this, I'm thinking about, like the load currently in my home and our situation is that with these three young children, me getting ready for maternity leave and also being very pregnant, there's certain things where sometimes I feel like you have an over functioner and an under functioner and giving yourself permission to say here's what I am able to do. Here's where I need you to better to show up and being able to be on the same page. So we don't have this again. I call it the shitty committee, Susan, that meets in my head that that tells me all of the reasons, all the things I'm not doing well, but I have to remind myself, you know here is how I can best show up and I'm also very, you know, fortunate to have a partner who can compensate during times and he's not resentful towards that because we're we're talking about those expectations.

00:39:11

*Susan:* Right right, yeah, I was lucky to have that kind of partner too. He was perfectly happy to look after kids. When I was at the hospital for 24 hours, we alternated weekends, so I was there when he was at work and vice versa, and so sometimes that worked, sometimes it didn't. He was happy enough cooking and shopping for groceries and he was really happy to let me do everything else that had to do with the children in school and sports. So I was really lucky that we were balanced and we were also balanced in personality. I am much more of a go-getter nose to the grindstone kind of person and he's real laid-back real easy-going I mean he wouldn't even fight with me. It was terrible. "We need to talk about this!" We don't need to talk about it right now. You need to calm down first. I mean so I was so fortunate to have a spouse that balanced out all of my anger, fatigue, overwhelm. He would

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look at me sometimes and say: you look pretty overdone today. Why don't you go and take a nap? I mean things like that are so important in a marriage.

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*Sarah:* And most men they do want to show up. I want to do those things. The problem is is that as women, we feel as though that's part of our responsibility, and then we also think that, or at least I did. I thought well he should know he should be able to read my mind.

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*Heather:* That's me, ding ding ding. Doesn't he know this already?

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*Susan:* Yeah, they should read our minds, they don't know how to read minds. That was the period when I learned to tell him what I needed him to do, I need you to pick up the kids at this time. I need you to meet me for the parent/teacher conference. I need you to cover this Saturday because I've got to take Anne to a swim meet and sometimes I would even write things down. And of course there's a family calendar and his schedule and my schedule and teams and sports and all this. But I got really good, finally, at telling him what I needed him to do and he would do it.

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*Sarah:* And part of the work that I do, working with couples, doing a lot of relationship therapy, Gotman Institute has a lot of really great free resources for things like this, but also it's it's that soft versus harsh startup and making sure that when we are communicating these things we are being direct in verbalizing, but not in a way where we're talking at the person but we're talking to them.

00:42:01

*Susan:* Right.

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*Sarah:* And so I think it's important that we continue to have those open conversations, because again, and I'm going to go back to this language of like mom rage, that happens where you know we get really upset or we're noticing that our feelings are more intensified if we don't take time to take a good deep breath to really reevaluate. You know the dynamics within, you know the family, that's when those things were completely disregulated, and so that's where the burn out and things like that, you know, can happen. So communication, open, honest, direct communication is imperative.

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*Susan:* Communication is key. I'll tell you all another instance that happened years later. I don't know if it was full-blown mom, burn out, but it was pretty close. My third child was a rebellious teenager. She skipped school, she wrecked cars, didn't turn in work, she hung out one night with her boyfriend, she got tattoos in Austin. It was really easy to get tattoos and I was coming unglued, I was busy at work, but not so busy that I was preoccupied. But I became preoccupied with her trying to control her and she was a teenager that I couldn't control, and I almost it almost got so bad that I felt like I wanted to give up on her. And my

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husband said you need to go talk to somebody, because you and Laura are butting heads and he he didn't interact with her like I did. He didn't fight with her, I fought with her, and so my husband helped me realize that Laura and I had developed this adversarial relationship and I had to get help again, another time in my life, I got professional help. And learn how to prevent my daughter from triggering me. She would say things like you're never here, you didn't do so, and so it's your fault that so and so happened, and she would just be this horrible teenage self, and here I was going. This is my fault. I've created this. Oh my god, I've created this monster. What's going on? And so I had to learn how to not react to her. I had to communicate with my husband, I got some professional help and we got through that phase. But it was a really difficult one year phase, really difficult. The teenage years are tough, they are very tough. I know it's tough to have little ones. All the stages are good and bad in their own way.

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*Heather:* I tell-all my friends with younger kids like when they're younger its physically exhausting because there's just no let up and you're just physically doing all the stuff. But as they get older, bigger kids, bigger problems, I have 25 and 20. They still have, you, they still need their mom.

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*Susan:* Yeah, big problems.

00:45:14

*Heather:* Yeah, big problems, so it's tough, it's really tough.

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*Susan:* That was a time of almost motherhood burn out and my husband helped me to recognize that I was going down the rabbit hole trying to fix her and I couldn't fix her, and I had to take care of myself and learn how to not react to her. And and we got her some help too, and she had a great assistant principal who thought she was funny and he thought it was all amusing, all of her bad behavior, and so we got through it and she got accepted to a good college and went away to college, and it was like a weight lifted off my shoulders.

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*Sarah:* And I really appreciate you sharing that and you know, to reiterate what we talked about in the beginning, you're a new parent at every age and stage and we all need different help and support during different seasons and I think in a lot of research shows, as humans we go into that fix-rescue-save mode and it's really about holding the base right. And so what you were able to do, and again, this is not default anyone. It's the reality that these are skills that we just never learned, but it's never too late to learn and to recognize that when people have these big feelings like we all do, how can we hold space for one another to allow their humanness to be present while also problem-solving and supporting and knowing that it's temporary. It's not permanent and I'm so glad to hear that, although I can't imagine how long a year felt for you with going through, you were able. That's part of your story.

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*Heather:* Right so we're almost out of time and I mean I feel like we could go on forever about mom burnout. I know you also have specific insights into burn out in relation to the medical field, and there's a lot of people right now. There's a crisis going on where people, because of the COVID situation, have gotten burned-out and have left the profession or are considering leaving. So I wonder if you can just share some of your insights and experiences relating to that.

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*Susan:* Oh, I'd love to. I suffered my final episode of burn out at age 60 before I retired and it snuck up on me. I'm sure the folks who've been through the pandemic do not feel like it's snuck up on em, but I recognized that I was physically exhausted, emotionally overwhelmed. Then I started to detach from my patients and not care as much about them. And finally, yeah, I would dread going to work when bad things happen to little babies. I just I was so tired of dealing with it and I can't believe these healthcare workers that have looked at all the death and all the suffering during the pandemic. I know it's trauma in their brains. Finally, I felt unfulfilled. I felt like I wasn't making a difference and I bet a lot of these doctors and nurses early on in the pandemic felt like they weren't making a difference. I read about burnout again I talked to a therapist, which helped a lot and I changed my practice. I cut my hours back to 35 a week. I went and worked at a low risk labor and delivery setting-normal newborns-for the most part, I did things like take a yoga class, exercise three days a week, journal, take friends out to lunch and rekindle friendships. I took piano lessons. It was wonderful, it was great. Well, I played piano when I was a little girl, but I took piano lessons and you know you get lost in the music and the practicing and it's so good for your brain and I picked up a hobby. I love needlework, counted cross stitch, so I healed my burn out over a couple of years and I was lucky to know all the techniques to do to recover. I don't think nurses and doctors today take very good care of themselves because we haven't taught it very much in medicine and nursing, and so I'm a big proponent of talking about burnout and letting physicians and nurses know where the resources are. The American Medical Association and the American Nurses Association have have lots of resources online. There are tools that they can use to assess whether or not they're burned-out there are things they can do in their workplace that make a difference and they can get a coach. There are lots of professional coaches out there that talk to doctors and help them heal in place. I was fortunate to heal in place kind of on my own with a therapist, not with a coach. But a lot of younger physicians and nurses may need a coach or a mentor to help them recognize that they're burned-out, accept that they need some treatment, and there are lots of different ways to treat it listed six or seven of them, and then work towards preventing it in their workplaces. That's the work we have to do, Heather and Sarah. The medical establishment is filled with healthcare systems that are sluggish, that are

00:51:00

*Heather:* Inefficient,

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*Susan:* Very inefficient, and doctors and nurses, as they get through this pandemic, are going to have to say what things did not work for us. We need to change. The things that did work for us. We need to do more of it. Each practice should have a wellness champion, a physician or nurse who says we're going to talk about wellness. We're going to survey once a year. We're going to measure things in our practice, that work. We're going to get rid of things that don't work, and there again there are lots of resources. Stanford has a whole program called WellMD, Mayo Clinic has a good program, and so I think, as healthcare workers go through this experience, my hope is that they will take advantage of some of these resources and that they will demand that healthcare organizations change. They should demand that we've got to fix this system so that we can stay well and healthy while we're taking care of other people. There's nothing better than being a doctor or a nurse, but you have to take care of yourself in order to do that.

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*Heather:* Do you think, prior to this COVID situation, that there was like a bravado thing going on where people wouldn't admit that they were burnt-out or that they needed help? There was a stigma to getting help?

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*Susan:* Yeah.

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*Heather:* Do you think that's over with now?

00:52:33

*Susan:* No, because recently Medscape surveyed physicians and about 60% of them said I can handle it by myself. I don't need therapy and they're fearful of medical boards getting notice and they're fearful of insurance companies knowing that somebody's in therapy. I am sorry to tell you, Sarah, only nine percent of physicians have professional therapy currently, for burnout.

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*Heather:* That's ridiculous.

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*Susan:* That is so low.

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*Sarah:* Wow.

00:53:03

*Susan:* I hope that the number that use coaches is quite a bit higher, but they're not going to therapists now, the millennials. This Medscape survey is very interesting. It just came out in January and it's from last year, at the end of 21, and it showed that millennials are willing to talk good, especially at work, with facilitators and groups and support groups and things like that. So to answer your question, I love to talk about physician burnout because it's such a

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real thing and it hurts really bad and physicians and nurses don't need to hurt to do their jobs. They are so giving and so loving.

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*Sarah:* Which makes them even more susceptible than to the burnout.

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*Heather:* Yeah.

00:53:52

*Sarah:* I just I feel if I had a magic wand like I would love for when women give birth, part of their discharge summary paperwork is that they have, like three sessions with a therapist. I think, when people change jobs, and especially people in the medical field, that that's just part of their compensation, that's part of their their benefit package exactly. And so you know one of the things that I really loved that you had touched on, and part of our mission of this podcast is saying no to things to allow for more yes's.

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*Sarah:* And so you had the ability to start to reevaluate here things that I need to say no to. I need to say no to how many hours that I'm putting forth in this work I need. I'm needing to say no, temporarily, not that it has to be forever by the population and specifically I'm working with an order for me to leave room for these yes's, that that was the healing, that was the recharging that you needed to sprinkle in to then start to live a life feeling more an alignment, still serving, doing the things that you wanted to do and honoring your experience in what you need and, I think, more people, I hope more people can resonate with that and start to practice that in their own lives.

00:55:27

*Heather:* Yeah, absolutely, thank you so much.

00:55:30

*Susan:* You're welcome.

00:55:30

*Sarah:* Thank you for sharing your story.

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*Heather:* Fascinating on many levels and I know a lot of people can relate, so thank you. We'll make sure to link to your website and your book, your social media stuff, we'll put that all on our show notes so people can find you there.

00:55:46

*Susan:* Thank you, I appreciate it. This has been a great conversation and thank you so much.

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*Sarah:* So Heather, what a great interview, that was with Susan.

00:55:59

*Heather:* Amazing.

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*Sarah:* It ran a little bit longer than what we normally do, but I think that actually has to say on the cover is so wonderful that we're going to go ahead and we're going to skip the listener question for this episode to make room for all of the content that we just had with Susan.

00:56:22

*Heather:* That's a good idea.

00:56:23

*Heather:* For listeners be sure to still message us and let us know what questions you do have. Our next episode we will be sure to that there will be answers to your questions.

00:56:36

*Heather:* So that's it for today. Thank you so much for listening. Visit our website [HardNoPodcast](#) for this episode's show notes with all those great resources Susan shared with us also for past episodes, downloadable and links to resources. Also you'll find links to each of our websites: [CleverGirlMarketing.com](#) and [PurposefulGrowthandWellness.com](#)

00:57:00

*Sarah:* Make sure to follow and get in touch with us on social, so we are [@HardNoPodcast](#) on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

00:57:09

*Heather:* And please do us a huge favor. If you don't mind, if you like what you heard here, please subscribe, rate and review our podcast wherever you listen, so others can find us too.

00:57:21

*Sarah:* Thanks to our friends and family our villagers for listening and for your continued support.

00:57:27

*Heather:* That's a Hard No is a joint production of Clever Girl Marketing and Purposeful Growth and Wellness.

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*Sarah:* Marketing and production coordinator Maura Del Rosario.

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*Heather:* Production support: Evergreen podcasts Noah Foutz: Producer.

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*Sarah:* Music by Gigi Riggs.

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*Heather:* Until next time. Thanks for listening.

00:57:49

*Sarah:* And remember saying isn't just ok.

00:57:51

*Sarah:* Saying no is the key to living an authentic, fulfilling life.

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00:57:56

*Sarah:* So do it. Find your "no" and say it, unapologetically. That's a hard no.