



Achieve Your Goals Podcast #141 -
Life After Cancer
(Interview with Melissa Weaver)

Nick: Welcome to the Achieve Your Goals podcast. You're listening to the podcast guaranteed to take your life to the next level faster than you ever thought possible. In each episode, you'll learn from someone who has achieved extraordinary goals that most haven't. He's the author of the number one bestselling book, *The Miracle Morning*, a hall of fame business achiever, international keynote speaker, ultramarathon runner, and the founder of Best Year Ever Coaching. Here is Hal Elrod.

Hal: Hello, hello. Welcome to the Achieve Your Goals podcast. This is your friend and host, Hal Elrod. Goal Achievers, thanks for tuning in to another episode. Today's really an inspiring episode with a very inspiring individual. I met this woman, Melissa. She spoke at our event last year, Best Year Ever Blueprint. She wasn't technically a speaker per se at the event. She actually was a recipient of the Front Row Foundation. In 2013, she was diagnosed with breast cancer. In fact, I'll have her share her Front Row story so I don't want to go too much into that. She actually spoke at the event when we hosted the Front Row Foundation.

If you aren't familiar with the Front Row Foundation, it's an organization, a charity that I am very passionate about. They send people that are braving life-threatening illnesses to the front row of the event of their dreams. It could be the World Cup, or the Olympics, or a play, or a concert, sporting event, you name it. It's really the idea about a metaphor for, not just going to an event, but really living life in the front row, being fully present, and engaged, and living everyday in the front row. It's really a beautiful, beautiful foundation. They really focus on inspiring this kind of movement. Melissa has been a huge part of carrying their message and their mission forward.

A little bit about Melissa. In 2013, as I mentioned, she was diagnosed with breast cancer. As you would imagine, life as she had known it changed forever. She really does not define her life by cancer. Instead, her purpose and her identity are centered around the idea that she is chosen amongst all of the difficulty and the loss to really build a more purposeful life and become a source of inspiration for others. She wants to be a source of inspiration for other individuals that are facing great adversity and tragedy. To really carry that mission forward, she recently wrote a book entitled *Reconstruction: Define Cancer and Building a More Purposeful Life*. Her ultimate mission is to create a life worth living and she wants other people to know they are not alone. She wants to be there to support and be a voice of hope and inspiration for others. Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful purpose. Melissa, welcome to the Achieve Your Goals podcast.

Melissa: Hey, Hal. I'm very excited to be here. Thank you for having me.

Hal:

No. It really is an honor. I've gotten to know you more over the last year since last year's Best Year Ever Blueprint, and see your journey, and see your book come out. As a fellow author, it's such an exciting thing because I know how big of a deal it is to write a book and publish it and all of that. I would love to hear ... If you're open to it, I'd love for you to share your journey. You can start where you want, if you want to start in August of 2013, and what it was like to have that diagnosis of cancer, and how you came through that, and got to where you are today.

Melissa:

My journey did start in August of 2013. I was diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 37. Before the diagnosis, I had a private practice. I'm a mental health therapist by trade and I had a private practice. Unfortunately, I had to stop seeing patients and close that practice because I had to have chemo and radiation that would last for approximately a year. In doing that and making that very sad but crucial decision, it allowed me to spend that next year amongst all of the treatment to really take a deep look at my life and how I was leading my life, what my goals were, what I wanted to accomplish and how I was best connecting with other individuals. As I was going through this transformative process, and as you know, anytime that you face something that's life-threatening, it really impacts us in a very deep way that at times difficult to put into words, but it really forces you to take a look at where you are, and what you want to be, and what you want to do, and who you surround yourself with.

As I was going through this process, I came in contact with Front Row Foundation and Jon Vroman. It really took my life to this whole new level after I was a recipient for the live event of my choice, and they sent me to this amazing concert. At that concert, they actually ... I don't know how they did it. Basically, I ended up on stage with Sarah McLachlan. That was my concert of choice. I ended up sitting on stage. As I looked out from the audience, I realized that I was actually sitting on the stage of my life. I was not only sitting in the front row, which is the name of the organization, but I was actually sitting on the stage of my life.

It was after that moment and actually after a chance meeting of receiving your book, and really going into depth, and reading *The Miracle Morning*, I really just put all of those pieces together and decided that if this was the life that I was given, whatever it might be and whatever challenges might come, I wanted to live my best life. That was the moment. It was a culmination of all of these different events. Actually, I was going through chemo and at the same time I'm going through chemo, and I'm having this physical transformation, I was parallel having this emotional, and spiritual, and intellectual transformation. It was after that time that things just took off, and I really started to really search out ways in which to take my life to this next level.

Hal: Wow, wow. It's something that sometimes for some of us ... Tony Robbins had write it. Take either moments of inspiration or desperation and I think sometimes both, right? The perfect storm of desperation that leads to inspiration which sounds like, for you, was really a catalyst for this purpose now that you're living. So powerful. The overcoming or the transcending of the

cancer, what was that moment when you found out you were cancer-free and that you had made it through that?

Melissa:

I finished my cancer treatments in the summer of 2014. Well, actually not until the fall when everything was done so almost a year after being diagnosed. I think the moment that had really started to take my life back was I had a scan. I was having some symptoms and I had scan soon after my treatments ended. It was after that scan, when it came back, that they could not find any evidence of cancer. It's called NED which is no evidence of disease. It was after that moment where I realized, "Okay. Well, I don't know how long that I'll have this same diagnosis right in front of me of being cancer-free but I have it right now."

I think that something that I've had to hold onto because I think that before cancer, myself along with probably most everyone has this innocence related to time. We think that time is this thing that we've been given and we don't imagine ourselves having illnesses or facing great challenges until much later in life. The truth is none of us know how much time we have. None of us. It's this illusion, this beautiful illusion of time. I didn't have that beautiful illusion in front of me anymore. I realized if I want to do something, I have to do it today. It lit this fire within me to really take charge and say, "I want to have these things in my life and I want to give back," which I think is even more important and I'm not going to wait. I'm going to do it now.

Hal:

I love it. So many people wait, right? It's like when I have more time, I'll help others. When I have more money, I'll help others,

right? When all the stars align, I'll pursue my dreams and my goals and live my purpose. I think that's such a powerful lesson, right? You can't wait to be great. One of my mentors, Kevin Bracy, used to always say that. Don't wait to be great, right? What are you waiting for? Stop waiting. You don't wait to be great. I love that. I think that's just so powerful.

Melissa, talk about Your Best Year Ever last year. Since then, you accomplished some pretty big goals and some ... One in particular was very measurable. Talk about that. What are the top three goals you achieved after Best Year Ever Blueprint and then what are the top three lessons that you can share with our listeners that they can immediately implement to improve their results and the goals that they're working towards?

Melissa:

I do want to discuss the top three goals. Before I do, the one thing that I want to say, the thing that I actually took away from the BYEB event was just this inspirational feeling of, yes, I can. I think when we carry the, yes, I can with me, I think that we can. I think that's one of the biggest things that I took away from the event being surrounded in this room of all of these individuals saying, "Yes, I can. Yes, I can give back. Yes, I can accomplish these goals." I think that when we all gather together with that focus, it's amazing what we can accomplish.

With the three goals, the first thing that I accomplished was the book. Actually, that started at the event which is amazing. I was introduced to the self-publishing school. I chatted with a couple of individuals. After I did my speaking engagement, they said, "Maybe you should write a book." I said, "Well, maybe I

should write a book. I don't know. Yeah, I could do this." Actually what started me on the path of writing the book was two things. The first thing was I didn't want to just write a book. I wasn't okay with just writing a book. If I had a mission and a purpose, I was okay with writing the book. Of course everyone should do it for whatever their reasons are. My two reasons were I did not want other individuals to ... I wanted other individuals to know they are not alone. Whatever tragedy or whatever adverse event they are experiencing, they are not alone in that. There are other people out there. That was the primary reason.

The second reason was to raise money for Front Row Foundation. That was important to me. It was so important to me that I find a way to give back to an organization that gives to so many individuals. Writing the book was my first goal. I would not have done that without going to the event, and so that is huge.

The other thing was it has been a life-long dream to become a professor at a university. That's one of my ways of giving back is to teach others. I've done so many trainings and so many speaking engagements but really being in a classroom setting and really fostering the development of those individuals that will go on after me is so important to me. I was offered a position as a professor this year at Virginia Commonwealth University as an adjunct faculty member. It was a huge goal of mine. I think going back to being at the event and receiving that inspiration of, yes, I can was why I kept that door open.

I think the third thing that I accomplished, the third goal, was just that, to focus on my goals, to really put those goals in perspective and gain that clarity on what the goals are, setting goals and then carrying out those goals. I really think that those are the three main things that I carried away from the event and really the three things that I accomplished within the last year.

Hal: I really want to acknowledge you. You're living by example. You know what I mean? They say the best way to lead is lead by example. You're leading by example, Melissa, so I really just want to commend you for that. You're really an inspiration, very much so.

Melissa: Thank you. Then the three things that I learned, my life lessons, one is connect, to connect with others, to connect with the world around you. So much of the time we spend time talking about connecting, or we plan to connect, or we email about connecting but we don't truly connect with the world around us. A great example of this was after I'd written a book and I was in this fever of trying to get the book out there and really trying to spread my mission, and I thought to myself, "If I could just spread my mission, I can raise all this money for this great organization. Why wouldn't people want to buy the book? It's for this great cause." I was pouring all this energy into it and then I would become deflated at times.

One morning I woke up and I was crying and it was because I realized I was not living my book. I had become so wrapped up in the book that I had stopped living what I write about and that is to connect with people. The minute I stopped with this

feverish pace and I've put down the book and I started connecting with other human beings and other organizations was when the book really started to take on a life of its own. That is the first life lesson that I have learned.

Hal: I want to mention, by the way ... I'm sorry to cut in.

Melissa: No, go ahead.

Hal: I'm on Amazon looking at your reviews. You have a 100% five-star reviews, which is really rare. The reviews are just a reflection of the way you live, your purpose and mission. I'm going to just read a few snippets here. "Raw, honest, triumphant," says Kate Elliott. "I am in awe of your strength, your committed love to Suzi and your daughters, and your commitment and determination to live through this trauma." How does it feel to hear that, to have somebody take the time to write about the impact that you're making in their life at this point, at one point? When you were at Best Year Ever, you weren't even thinking of writing a book. Now, how does it feel to hear that and to know that you're making this impact?

Melissa: I think that it's an amazing feeling. I think the moment when I said, "No matter what, I think this book is a success," is when I received a review from someone who said, "I just read your book. I have been recently diagnosed with cancer and now I know that I'm not alone." I thought, "There you have it." That was it. That was the reason for writing the book. To know that it's out there helping people and inspiring people even if it's just

to get up and fight one more day, then it was worth every moment of writing this book. Thank you for reading that review. I think the reviews from others, it's such a key component because it lets me know that, hey, it really is inspiring other people. That's really important.

I think one of the other life lessons for me was really about setting goals and achieving goals. As to where before cancer and before this life transformation, I was always definitely an individual ... I won an award for too stubborn to fail when I was training for a marathon because I injured my knees to the point where the sport physician said, "You cannot finish this marathon. The only way you could finish is if you did water running." I had no idea what water running was but I soon learned that what you do is you get this flotation device, and you run in water at Gold's Gym in a pool for hours. I did it everyday for two months. I finished the marathon.

I think I've always been an individual that if I set my mind to something, I really give a 110%. However, I don't know that I ever paid attention to what my goals really were. I don't know that I ever really sat with myself and I said, "What is it that I really want to do and how do I prioritize those things in my life?" That is what I had been given. That is the life lesson that I have learned is, not just to set goals randomly, but to really set those goals.

One thing that you talk about in your book is setting those intentions, and I've really tried to follow that. Every night, I'll set intentions for the next day. They might be really small but I

really try to meet those specific things rather than add 10 others to the list before I complete those tasks at hand. That's a second life lesson.

Then the final lesson is living in the moment. We spend a lot of time living in the past or living in the future and not enough time living for right now. I don't mean for six hours from now. I literally mean for right at this moment. Before all of this, if I was doing this podcast, I might be trying to check my emails because I just wanted to get it all done because there's so much to do. Now, I'm doing nothing else. I'm literally sitting here talking to you and I-

Hal: I'm glad you're not checking your emails.

Melissa: I know. I know. There is no doubt in my mind that it will show in the interview that I am actually fully engaged in this process with you rather than trying to engage myself in 15 other things. I really think living in the moment and being present in the moment is one of the largest life lessons that I have learned.

Hal: I'd love to expand on that because living in the moment is something that is ... Did you ever read *The Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle?

Melissa: I absolutely did. Yes.

Hal:

Right. When you read that, you realize, "Wow, the essence of life is the moment." Nothing else is real. The past doesn't exist anymore. The future doesn't exist yet. The only thing that's ever existed is this moment and then this moment and then this moment, right? It's always this moment. That's all that's real. Yet, we're always typically thinking about the past, worried about the future, right? Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. I'd love to hear if you have any expansion on how do someone do that? Is it meditation? Is it through breath? Is it pausing? What are some tactical ways that you apply the lesson to be able to actually live in the moment?

Melissa:

I think it's all of the above and then some. I do practice meditation and I try to practice daily meditation. This summer is a little more challenging for me because no one is perfect, and my children are with me all of the time which is absolutely wonderful, but it's hard to find that time. I also try to stick to my morning routine of getting up and really doing these things first on my list, these self-care acts such as meditation. I think meditation is one of them. I think breath is obviously very important, taking a pause when needed. I think another thing that is crucial is really saying to yourself what am I gaining right now from this moment? I'll give an example of this. Let's say that you're at a ...

I was in Vermont this year. I took no pictures or maybe I took five. I could have spent the whole time behind my phone being the person behind the camera taking all the photos, but I wouldn't have been in them. I really equate that to a life moment. I really wouldn't have been physically in them but I

also wouldn't have been a part of that moment. I would have been taking photos of that moment. That's not to say that photos aren't important because they are, but there is something to be said for taking that photo in your mind because you're actually seeing it. I think that's really a key thing is just to say to yourself ... If you find yourself multitasking, say to yourself, "What am I gaining from this moment right now and what do I want to gain from this moment right now?" It might be that there are times where we do have to do ... We have to multitask. I think that there is something to be said for really deciding when that is essential and when it's essential that we just sit with one thing at a time.

Hal: Melissa, you just reminded me of a passage that I have in my affirmations, and it's actually a screenshot from the book that we just mentioned, *The Power of Now*. For all of you *Achieve Your Goals* listeners, I'm going to read this because this is what I read every morning to remind me to be in the moment. It actually gives some tactical ways to do that. Melissa, are you okay if I read this passage from *Power of Now*?

Melissa: Absolutely.

Hal: Cool here we go. Just become intensely conscious of the present moment. This is a deeply satisfying thing to do. In this way, you draw consciousness away from mind activity and create a gap of no-mind in which you are highly alert and aware but not thinking. This is the essence of meditation. In your everyday life, you can practice this by taking any routine

activity that normally is only a means to an end and giving it your fullest attention, so that it becomes an end in itself.

For example, every time you walk up and down the stairs in your house or place of work, pay close attention to every step, every movement, even your breathing. Be totally present or when you wash your hands, pay attention to all the sense perceptions associated with the activity: the sound and feel of the water, the movement of your hands, the scent of the soap, and so on, or when you get into your car, after you close the door, pause for a few seconds and observe the flow of your breath. Become aware of a silent but powerful sense of presence. There is one certain criterion by which you can measure your success in this practice: the degree of peace that you feel within.

Melissa: Excellent.

Hal: I read that every morning because, otherwise, I run up the stairs and I wash my hands really quick, and I get in the car and I go ... Do you know what I mean? We just go, go, go, go. We're missing out on the essence of life which is the present moment. I'd love that you shared that. Thank you so much. Melissa, any last words or thoughts to share with the listeners? Of course, I'd love to know where they can find you and your book.

Melissa: I think that the last thing that I would share is we all fall down. We all have moments where we lose that ability to focus on the here and now. We lose that ability to set goals and achieve

those goals. We get lost, essentially. I think that that's okay because I think that when we discover our way back, when we fight our way back, I think that's when we really achieved those life lessons that we will carry with us. I think that's what I want to say to the listeners is as I'm saying all of these things, it doesn't mean that I am successful at each one of these things everyday. I'm not. What it does mean is that I always get back up and I try again. I think that can be applied to our business, our personal practice, our relationship practice. I think it can be applied to most things we do in life.

Hal: I absolutely, absolutely agree. Thank you for that. Melissa, it's been a joy talking to you. Thank you so much for being on the show. I really appreciate it.

Melissa: Absolutely. If people want to find me, they can go to reconstructedliving.com. That is my website and it will link you to everything else. My book is available on Amazon. Like you said, it's *Reconstruction: Define Cancer and Building a More Purposeful Life*. I also say to the listeners, check out all of the other amazing inspirational books out there because there are so many awesome writers that are really putting some great material out there. I think we can all learn from one another.

Hal: Again, agree 100%. Well, it's been a joy. Thank you so much. For anybody listening, if you have not yet signed up for Best Year Ever Blueprint and you want to join me, and Melissa, and about probably 400 other Goal Achievers as well as my good buddy, Jon Berghoff, at the Best Year Ever Blueprint this year, go to bestyeareverlive.com. As I always say, just scroll down a

little bit and watch that video you see there toward the top and you'll know within ... It's a three-minute video. You'll get to see what the whole thing is about. You'll either know that that is somewhere you definitely want to be the second week in December or you'll know that you want to be as far away possible from those inspired weirdos, engaged in planning their Best Year Ever. All right. Cool. I keep calling Best Year Ever podcast. Goal Achievers, I appreciate you. Love you. Thank you so much for tuning in. I will talk to you next week. Melissa, I appreciate you. We'll talk to you soon.

Melissa: Thanks so much.

Hal: You got it. Take care, everybody.