

Ep #122: Upper Limit Problems



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With Your Host

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[The Widowed Mom Podcast](#)

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Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode 122, Upper Limit Problems.

Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, the only podcast that offers a proven process to help you work through your grief, to grow, evolve, and create a future you can truly look forward to. Here's your host, Master Certified life coach, grief expert, widow, and mom, Krista St-Germain.

Ever wondered why sometimes you start to have success, but then sabotage it? Or why you experience happiness in one area of life but then create drama in another? Why is it that when something great happens, you can't enjoy it, or you start worrying about losing it? What is actually going on?

The answer just might be an upper limit problem. These are patterns I've coached many widows on, and I've noticed in my life from time to time, but not really understood on a heart level until very recently.

So, today we're going to talk all about the idea of upper limit problems. I'm going to tell you what an upper limit problem is, let you know how it's been showing up for me, and help you recognize where it might be happening in your life—even if it hasn't happened yet—because if you're working on truly loving life after loss, I'm guessing it's only a matter of time until it happens to you too. So, please listen all the way through. Ready?

Okay, first, a little backstory from my life to kind of put this in context. So, in the early days after Hugo died, I didn't want to eat anything. I genuinely wasn't hungry. About the only thing I could stomach was smoothies from Smoothie King.

Then later, when my appetite came back, I went into the period where I started eating everything, especially my feelings. And the meal train was happening in full force. People were bringing us meals, gift cards

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constantly, and they weren't necessarily the healthiest meals. But I ate them gratefully because I didn't want to cook.

And then, at night, after I would get the kids to bed or when I was lonely, I would eat ice cream or chips or cookie dough or whatever was around that helped me avoid the feelings that I didn't want to feel. And needless to say, I ended up wearing those feelings in the form of excess fat storage on my body. And it didn't feel good to me.

So, when I enrolled in my first coaching program, because I was trying to figure out what to do with my life next and how to be happy again, I decided that the first thing I would tackle was my weight. I went all in on what the program taught about emotional eating, and I really did learn how to feel my feelings instead of eating them.

Fast forward a few months, and I'd lost 30 pounds, down multiple clothing sizes. I was exercising regularly again, taking great care of myself, feeling amazing again. And other shifts were happening too. Right? I was so in love with coaching that I decided to become a coach. In about a six-month period, I went through coach certification. I quit my corporate job. I went all in on coaching.

And then, my first major milestone as a coach in terms of goals was to make \$100,000 in my business. But honestly, I'm not going to say it was an easy milestone to hit—because it wasn't—but I always believed I'd make it. I always believed that that was possible for me.

So, it wasn't really until the next couple of years when I started making more money. Quarter of a million. Half a million. Three quarters of a million. And as my business was growing, I hit my goal of becoming a Master Certified coach. And then just before COVID, I met the boyfriend, and I started feeling the happiness of that relationship—that deep connection.

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And then, about five months ago, we bought a beautiful house that was almost five times more in both dollar value and size than the house that I had built when my oldest daughter—oldest child; she's my only daughter—was born, about almost 18 years ago.

So needless to say, things were getting good. Like, really, really good. But while my income and my happiness were climbing, you know what was steadily climbing right along with it, right? My weight. And I've spent so much energy and time thinking about it and feeling bad about it and avoiding it. And meanwhile, putting no energy toward actually changing it or my thoughts about it. I've not been taking care of my physical health.

But it wasn't just my physical health. It's been my ability to enjoy the good stuff in my life that I've created. My ability to receive the abundance that's right in front of me. And my brain has offered me the crappiest thoughts about living in this house—about living in a neighborhood called “the Pinnacle.” So apropos, right? “The Pinnacle.”

Sidebar: I used to drive through this neighborhood when I was in my early 20s imagining what it would be like to live in one of those big houses and have beautiful Christmas lights like that. I even put—the first business I ever owned when I was in my 20s—I literally put it a mile away from this house just because I knew the demographic of this area and I wanted the women who lived in this neighborhood to come to my business.

And now I get a house in that neighborhood. And you know what my brain says? My brain says, “Who do you think you are? You are getting too big for your britches. You don't deserve to live in that neighborhood. And not only that, you don't belong. You're not a doctor. You're not a lawyer. You're not a fancy CEO. You're just a life coach.”

I have held back from telling people about the beautiful new house that I earned the money to pay for—I created the money to pay for—in the

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business that I built. And yet, I've been worrying that other people would think I was bragging or that I thought I was better than them or, even in some cases, that they would use my success to make themselves feel bad.

So, I've been doing it with the house. I created the freedom to be my own boss so I could do things like schedule a massage and a facial during the middle of a Friday. But then when I've done that, I haven't really looked forward to it. I haven't truly enjoyed it because of this upper limit problem. "Who am I to get a massage and a facial when everyone else is working?"

Another one of my goals for this year has been to slow down—to stop working so much. But holy cow, has it been a struggle for me. I have felt so much resistance when I try to slow down and when I try to cut back. It's like a low-grade anxiety that just kind of buzzes in my chest. And all of these imposter syndrome thoughts and thoughts of losing what I've created have been popping up.

And guess what else I've been doing more of in these last few months? Worrying! Sounds fun, right?

So, what I've seen is that, as the things that I told myself I wanted and had worked so hard to create kept showing up, my ability to enjoy and receive them seemed like it was shrinking.

So, the good news is that the more compassionate, the more curious I've been with myself, the more I've been open to what's going on, the more it's become clear to me that this is hidden fear in action. It is an upper limit problem. "What is an upper limit?" you ask. Well, so glad you did.

Let me read a passage from a book called *The Big Leap* by Gay Hendricks. And Gay Hendricks coined the phrase "upper limit." And he wrote, "Each of us has an inner thermostat setting that determines how much love, success, and creativity we allow ourselves to enjoy. When we exceed our

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inner thermostat setting, we will often do something to sabotage ourselves, causing us to drop back into the familiar zone where we feel secure.

“Unfortunately, our thermostat setting usually gets programmed in early childhood, before we can think for ourselves. Once programmed, our upper limit thermostat setting holds us back from enjoying all the love, financial abundance, and creativity that’s rightfully ours.”

And he goes on to write, “If you make a spectacular leap in one area of your life, such as money, your upper limit problem quickly enshrouds you in a wet-wool blanket of guilt that keeps you from enjoying your new abundance. Guilt is a way our minds have of applying a painful grip on the conduit through which good feelings flow.”

And this is what’s been happening to me.

Gay also write, “When the old belief clashes with the positive feelings you’re enjoying, one of them has to win.” Right? Where is this happening for you? “When the old belief clashes with the positive feelings you’re enjoying, one of them has to win.”

And maybe it’s not happening to you yet. Gay teaches that upper limit problems are, at their root, caused by at least one of four hidden fears. And I can tell that there’s one of those fears in particular for me that has absolutely been the root cause. But let me tell you all four of them.

So, the first hidden fear is, “I’m fundamentally flawed.” Right? It’s when we believe that there’s something wrong with us; therefore, we don’t deserve this level of happiness—this level of abundance. Because something is fundamentally wrong with us in our core. So, maybe you recognize that for yourself.

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The second one is, “More success brings a bigger burden,” meaning more money, more problems. Right? Or, “If I already perceive myself to be a burden, then if I do bigger things with my life, I will be an even bigger burden, especially to those I love.” So, of course then, when you start to experience more success, the old belief will clash with the new feeling.

So, “I’m fundamentally flawed...” “More success brings a bigger burden...” Number three is the “crime of outshining.” Maybe you learned growing up that you shouldn’t be too bright. Maybe you shouldn’t make your sibling look bad. Right? Because “it’s bad to outshine others.” So, if so, then when you start to shine, then the hidden fear of shining can have you dimming that light. Maybe even snuffing it out.

The fourth one, which really is the one that’s been popping up in my life, is the fear of disloyalty and abandonment. And I see it so clearly now. And that fear says that, “If I’m too successful, I’ll leave my people behind.” That threatens that primal need that we have for safety and for security.

This has definitely been my biggest hidden fear and it has shown up in so many ways. I have felt guilty about how hard my parents and grandparents had to work for much less money in jobs they didn’t like. Like, “Who am I to have a career that I love and get paid for it—well paid for it—when they didn’t make this much money? And they didn’t even like their jobs! Who am I?” So much guilt.

I’ve realized how many of my thoughts about money came from experiences in high school when I was surrounded by friends whose families had so much more than my family. And I came from a solid middle-class family. In fact, growing up in elementary school, I remember in elementary and middle school, thinking, “Wow, my family is really blessed.”

And then I got to high school, and I saw all these other kids with just all kinds of cars and houses and all the things, and I really didn’t feel like I

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belonged in that crowd. I wasn't one of the cool kids. I wasn't one of the rich kids. I wasn't one of them.

And so now, in this house with this money, old beliefs I didn't even remember that I had were clashing with positive feelings, and one of them had to win.

I've also discovered that I've been afraid that people I care about will abandon me if I get too successful. Right? If you're too successful, your family won't relate to you anymore. Your old coworkers will think you're too fancy. Right? Your clients won't relate to you anymore. You won't be able to help them. Right? They'll think you're a special snowflake. They won't want to work with you. Right?

Like, you. You, listener. I have had a fear that you will abandon me. Isn't that the craziest thing? That people will think I'm too far away from the reality of what it's like to be a new widow. That I won't understand their pain anymore. Basically, that I'm too happy. That I've got it too good, so I can't help them. Right? That the underlying narrative: "Don't let it get too good or you will be abandoned."

And I've also noticed for widows specifically, there can be a sense of disloyalty and abandonment of the life that we had with our spouses that a part of us still really wants. And it's not only loyalty and abandonment of the life that we had, but a sense of loyalty and abandonment to the spouse. Like, "Why do I deserve the happiness that Hugo wanted but isn't here to enjoy with me?"

And then this other hidden fear gem—the little gem that I found in my brain: "Remember, the last time you were this happy, Hugo was killed." In other words, "Don't get too happy, or it will be taken away from you—again." Because that's how it felt the last time—that I was on top of the world, and within 24 hours, at the bottom.

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Now, to be clear, this level of awareness didn't come instantly for me. It's funny how when it's not your life, when it's not your brain, you can see the pattern. I can see the pattern so easily for other people—for my clients. When I'm coaching, it's very clear to me. But when it's me, it's different.

And so, I've been doing a lot of self-coaching, a lot of tapping, a lot of tuning into the feelings and what's behind them, and it's just now really clicking with me to the point that I see it clearly and that I'm ready to share it with you.

And some of these thoughts are still there. Some of these fears are still there. And I have a feeling that what will happen is that as I grow and evolve and I set new goals and I expand, that just new levels, new layers of those same hidden fears will keep showing themselves to me.

And this is why the skills that we teach inside my Mom Goes On group coaching program are so important. It's a six-month program, so of course participants make great progress on the issues that they're currently facing, right? And doing the work on grief and their issues from the past and learning how to move forward with grief and, you know, all of that.

But what's really important to me is that we give them the skills and the tools they need to be able to coach and support themselves through the challenges that will happen after the program is over. I've been doing this work for years now. And as I grow and I set new goals and my life changes and my relationships evolve, new challenges are constantly revealed. New limits keep showing themselves. That's the way of it.

And my vision for Mom Goes On is that not only do we work through what's right in front of you, but we give you what you need to keep going long after you finish the program. I am so perpetually grateful that I have the tools that I have, and I want everyone to have them.

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Now, will these kinds of “it’s getting too good” upper limits show themselves in our initial six months together? Not likely. Not likely. Right? Most of us are still in that crap-tastic place where we’re just trying to figure it all out and, you know, the idea of it getting too good seems like a laughable pipe dream. Right?

But I’m also starting to see this in my Mom Goes On Masters members, some of whom are coming up on two years with us. You know who you are. Right? So, I want you to be prepared for this because I know you want to love your life again. I know you’re working on it, which means someday you are going to love your life again.

And when that happens, just like it’s happening for me in increasingly amazing ways, be ready for those hidden fears to show up. Be ready for the feeling to conflict with the old belief that you don’t know is there, so that when it happens to you, you will see it and you will be ready.

I’m going to leave you with a quote from Marianne Williamson. It’s probably familiar to you. If the term “God” doesn’t feel right to you, I encourage you to substitute it with whatever does feel right. So, “universal truth,” “divine mind,” “the universe,” “the I AM presence,” right? Whatever it is for you.

This quote has resonated with me. It’s called me since I was 14 or 15, at least. And it’s fascinating to me that, as my life continues to unfold, that I continue relating to it in new and even more profound ways. It makes me emotional just thinking about it. Here it is.

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light—not our darkness—that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, ‘Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?’ Actually, who are you *not* to be? You are a child of God.

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“Your playing small does not serve the world. There’s nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It’s not just in some of us. It’s in everyone.

“And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

Y’all, I had to record that about three times. I can’t even get through it without crying. That light is in you. You didn’t put it there. But it’s there. And the only person who can take responsibility for liberating you from your fear is you.

So, to everyone who listens to this podcast, I hope you are starting to realize the power that’s in you. Not just some of you. All of you. And I hope you’re starting to see that that power is so much greater than any trauma could ever be, including your spouse’s death.

And I don’t have it all figured out, but I’m going to keep doing my best, and I’m going to keep working through new levels of my own fear, doing my own work, and letting my own light shine. And I’m going to keep showing up and sharing it, trusting that it’s helping you.

So, thanks for listening today. Remember: I love you and you’ve got this.

If you like what you’ve been hearing on this podcast and want to create a future you can truly get excited about, even after the loss of your spouse, I invite you to join my Mom Goes On coaching program. It’s small group coaching just for widowed moms like you, where I’ll help you figure out what’s holding you back and give you the tools and support you need so you can move forward with confidence. Please don’t settle for a new normal that’s less than what you deserve.

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Go to coachingwithkrista.com and click Work With Me for details and next steps. I can't wait to meet you.