

Ep #37: Top Five Regrets of the Dying and the Top Five Desires of the Living



Full Episode Transcript

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Dr. David Phelps and Evan Harris

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](http://DentistFreedomBlueprint.com) with Dr. David Phelps and Evan Harris

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You are listening to the *Dentist Freedom Blueprint* podcast, with David Phelps and Evan Harris. Navigating you through the uncharted waters of a turbulent economy with straight-forward advice to, transform your practice into a self-sufficient cash machine, compound your net worth assets, and multiply, multiply, multiply your passive cash flow streams.

David: Hey, it's Dr. David Phelps of the Dentist Freedom Blueprint Podcast. Today, my great friend and cohost, Evan Harris, we're talking about the real purpose of what we do, not just being busy to be busy, but really how do we live our life with purpose or practice for legacy. What do we leave in terms of significance? Let's talk about not living a life of regrets. Listen as Evan and I have a pretty deep conversation on this particular show.

Evan: Good day. This is Evan Harris with my good friend David Phelps. We're going to talk about Top Five Regrets of the Dying. It's an article that David sent to me, but it's something I'd like to spin on it, as I like to say the Top Five Desires of the Living. You know, David, we talked so much about freedom, and as I was reading this article that you sent to me, I was thinking how sad it could be if that was someone's true life but yet for those who could be experiencing freedom, how I think that list would look so different. David, are you there?

David: Evan, I'm here today. Yeah, I appreciate your taking the time to look at the article and give some feedback. Here's why I sent it to you, Evan. In the Freedom Founder's Mastermind, I maybe once a year I bring this out and talk about it because to me, Evan, it's so important in the busyness of our lives, everything that we do, and typically, as the bread-winners, the ones who are providing security for our families and doing the things that we feel like inherently we're built to do, we're drivers typically,

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and we really feel like we don't know any limits. I know for a fact, Evan, that some years ago, and I'll tell you, I'm nearing my sixth decade of life, but going back. Getting out of school, getting my degree, getting my license to practice, it wasn't so much that it was about the money for me, but I had this desire that I needed to take the work I've put into my degree and my effort in opening the practice and paying back some school debt and all those things, I just felt like I had to get on a fast-track and go, go, go.

I think there's a lot of people that feel that way. Now, I'll tell you, I've turned 180 degrees the other way. It doesn't mean I still don't value a work ethic, that I don't enjoy doing work, but for me, today, it's more about being significant and thinking about leaving a legacy and helping people. I think it's hopefully a natural evolution that people go through. I would just like to help more people at a younger age, even younger than maybe I discovered a real purpose in my life to start to see that purpose, and then everything else we talk about, Evan, all the strategies about optimizing our practices and wealth-building, that there's a real end goal to that. I don't mean end goal when we die, but an end goal today so we can serve our purpose today and our families and the people we care about.

That's what I think freedom's all about. I know you share some stories also. You want to talk about some of those, and then we can maybe talk about some of the findings that this actual palliative care nurse found as she was caring for people on their deathbed and the regrets they had. Why don't you start, jump in with some of the stories that you've got and see if there's some resonance with our listeners today?

Evan: Yeah, I'd be happy to. I just had one of my clients get diagnosed with a pretty serious condition, like life-threatening

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condition. This doctor that I've known for 20 years I would call a driver. This doctor shows up early, leaves late, comes in on the weekends, and the practice crushes. The practice does a lot of dentistry, but I can say that the feeling, the overall feeling in the office, isn't necessarily one of jubilee. It's not like a happy place. The team gets paid well, but it's not one that really seems like people are stoked to be there, and they're not real happy to be there, but they're providing for their families, so they put their head down and do the work. I think the doctor's really hard on himself.

When the doctor got diagnosed with a serious condition, there was a thought that that doctor might not be around. It rattled this doctor's cage big-time. Even though now we know that the doctor's going to be okay and the doctor's going to need to be out for a little bit of time and then come back, this doctor has a totally different demeanor, David. I can't even tell you. I got a hug. Like this doctor would not have been the hugger. Maybe a handshake on really good news, but not a hug. There would not be laughter. This doctor has laughter. The doctor now allows ... everyone's kind of having a sense of laughter.

Number 5 on this list was "I wish I had let myself be happier." These are almost the exact words that this doctor shared is that if this doctor's life had ended, then there would have been so much to be missed out on. Not just from a stuff perspective or an experience perspective, but from a joy perspective. This doctor was really working so hard, had so many files on their desk, and it just looked like this overwhelm. The doctor was overwhelmed. There was not the permission to be happier. It was almost like they had to live up to some expectation.

Reality, David, my hope is that our listeners, they don't have to get diagnosed with a serious disease or their spouse doesn't

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have to leave them to have the wake-up call that stuff around them probably is pretty great, and they can have gratitude for the very things that might just seem common.

David: Well, you know the wake-up call for me, Evan, came probably about 20 years into private practice for me. I was working hard in the practice, and I was also doing a lot of things in real estate, kind of handling both at the same time, and that was a lot and really wasn't spending probably the quality time I needed to with the people I cared about and my family. The wake-up call for me was my daughter who survived leukemia then subsequently had to have a liver transplant. It really took 2 times for me to finally wake-up and understand that life doesn't go on just because we think that we're immortal, and that wasn't my health, but it was my daughter's health that kind of took me to my core and made me really start to think about what is this all about. Meaning, what am I doing? Why am I such a driver? Why am I such a perfectionist? Why does everything have to be just so?

Realizing that our lives or the people we care about, their lives, can be snuffed out, can be gone in an instant. We have no control over that. Then, what are we doing to, as you said, to live our lives today with a sense of happiness and really crushing what life is all about?

Evan: I completely agree. Just to share this, I had a doc that had a serious accident. Nothing to do with any kind of a disease or anything like that, but just had a serious ... an accident doing a sport. The doctor was seriously not going to be able to do dentistry for it looked like 6 months. Fortunately, they had some procedures done, and the doctor was able to do dentistry again. I think what changed is that the doctor sensed a sense of freedom that they can be able to do the very things that they

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thought was going to be stripped of them, things like walking. Things like playing catch, whatever it might be. I can tell you that that doctor's lifestyle in the practice is totally different today. Now, I've seen it years later, and they're still keeping that sense of thankfulness where they're living their life differently, David.

Number 4 on this list "I wish I'd stayed in touch with my friends." This person went from having a bunch of friends in college, dental school, etc. and then really, although he didn't let go of their friends, there wasn't any steps to really rekindle those relationships or keep them vibrant. Now that doctor has a whole new connection with wife, children, friends. They're taking trips. They're doing things. The practice is paying for it. You see, what he was telling me was that the practice actually has grown exponentially as there's that sense of freedom. They tried to encourage it for their team as well. They asked their team what their goals are, and they had this thing back in the break room, like a little lunch area.

They had these little vision boards, dream boards, and they asked the team, "What do you want to do? Where do you want to go? How do you want to contribute? What do you want up there?" The team is really pretty transparent. One lady wants to go to Bora Bora, and so there's a picture of Bora Bora. Another person wants to get a kayak, and they want to kayak with their spouse right here in San Diego. They put those pictures up. This doctor's now encouraging them to go live out their freedoms because they never know if they might have an accident that might take them away from those freedoms.

My encouragement again is don't let that happen to really appreciate it. Rather, build forward. Stay in touch with the friends now and be happier now so that you're not having to have these kind of epiphanies through trial and tribulation.

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David: Evan, number 2 on the list is "I wish I didn't work so hard." There again goes kind of the heart of the matter. As you said, many of us are drivers. We tend to have that syndrome where we work and work and work, and this nurse that dealt with a lot of patients that were in their last 3-12 weeks here on earth said that this statement, the "I wish I didn't work so hard" came from every male patient that she nursed, that they missed their children's youth and their partner's companionship. That's something again, I think, nobody that is at the end of the line ever looks back and says, "Gosh, I wish I could have worked an extra day at the office," or "made an extra 50 grand or 100 grand" or "done an extra real estate deal." Those things, at the end of the line don't mean anything, and if we're not taking the time to spend time with the family, the friends, and cherish those memories, then everything else that we're about is really for naught.

That's not the place I want people to be. I want people wherever they are in their career and their practices today. Yes, you have to be diligent. Yes, you have to be efficient. You have to manage your time, but if you're not blocking time to take time out to spend time with the people you really care about, and if you're just using that old phrase, "Someday I'll get there. Someday when I have all these things just right, when my practice is right, and I've paid off debt, and I'm making x amount of money and everything's running smoothly, that's when I'll start to live my life."

The problem for way too many, far too many, is that someday doesn't come because as you said, Evan, health issues will creep up, either for the actual hard-working person or a family member or person they care about. When that happens ... either it could be a death or it could be a major health issue and it becomes a disability which impairs that person or their family

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or their spouse or their partner from being able to take trips and do the things that they were waiting for that someday to do. Now it's too late. Now it's too late. We've got to bear in mind, again, what we're all about, why we're doing what we're doing, and keep that top of mind. Otherwise, those years go by so, so quickly.

You have a young family, Evan, and I love to see the time that I ... I'll say this because you wouldn't say it yourself, but I know, Evan, you have a focus on that. You have, as far as I can see, pretty good balance. I can see things that you'll tell people about time you spend with your family, your kids, or a special date night with your beautiful wife, things like that that are so important. Yet, also, I know you're a hard-worker. You come from a work ethic background, your father a hard-worker. You have that instilled within you, but you also have this way of looking at life and balance, I think, at a relatively young age.

Evan: Oh, thank you. You know, I have to really give credit to the mentors around me. I really thank you, thank the practicing professionals that have been so open with me, both of their successes currently but also even some of their failures or some of the things that they would have done differently. I'm certainly not perfect. I'm looking to improve every day. I find that the people around me that have the freedom that we talk about, the financial freedom, the work-life balance, they are able to make clear decisions.

I had a doctor just recently close their office for 2 weeks because they were taking their kid, their last kid to college. It was really an emotional experience for them, kind of an empty-nest ... I'm not there by any means, but they call it their empty-nest syndrome. It was a time to really bond together. He and his wife and child to go to college and really spend time there

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and to help her, help the daughter, integrate into college. Then also kind of a vacation for just him and his wife to reconnect as they felt like they've been really purposeful in raising their child but didn't have a lot of purpose on just their relationship. They did early on before kids. It was all about them, but then once the kids came, the focus was on the children.

I really admire this doctor. I mean, I can't imagine how many thousands ... Well, actually, I can imagine. I think the practice does about 90k a month, so I'm going to say that's about a 45k loss. Now, certainly they can move some of those patients to other places, but they're pretty busy. I'm just going to say, if that's 2 weeks, that's a pretty expensive trip. It's not about the airplanes and the lodging; it's about the dentistry that wasn't done. What I admire about the doctors ... The doctor says he'll never be able to get a time again to take his last child to college, and he kind of missed it with the first two. This one, he was really making sure he was crushing it and then really loving on his lady, making sure that their life going forward was going to be one not of the empty-nest syndrome that he reads so much about, but one of really of oneness and a strong marriage going forward.

I really admire these people being able to share what they do. My hope is that this podcast can be really transparent and share the lives of other people because all of these people have given me permission to be able to share with others. I certainly don't have the answers, but I am an observer. I'm there. My hope is that my observations can somehow mean something and can be able to help other people because so many of my dentists tell me they feel isolated. They don't see other practices. They always think they're behind and other people are doing better, that they're the only ones coming in on

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Saturday and having a spouse angry at them for doing their lab work or their charts.

They're not alone. They're not by themselves. Other people are experiencing the same struggles. My desire, David, as you, as the doctor, and me almost like the custodian coming in and getting to be friends with these people, that we could be able to share real life experiences, wins as well as losses, so that people can be able to benefit from these stories and really be an architect of their life, not have life done to them but really be the creator of their life.

David: Well, I'm so glad that you mentioned the fact that as hard-working professionals, dentists particularly in this mode that we do tend to live and certainly practice in isolation. When we are around our colleagues, usually it's at trade industry meetings, conferences, and that's not really a place where you're going to open up and share feelings. Certainly, that's not something I do very well unless I'm really with some really good friends, but the camaraderie, where you can actually be around other people and you realize that you're not alone, that we all have these fallacies. My goodness, I'm always learning. As you said, I really try to surround myself with other people, mentors, that I believe are congruent with the life I want to live because I'm always trying to do better.

The things that we talk about on this podcast, Evan, and you and I both will be transparent about this, it's not because you and I have achieved the upper-most height of anything. It's just we have the recognition of some of these areas that we all need to work on. By being real about it, by talking about it, sharing where we are, then it's easier to go back and say, "I'm not a bad person. I can make changes. I can do these things. I can take action steps like making a list of the people important

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in my life, my family, my close friends, people that I don't keep up with." How can I on different intervals do things about quality? It's not quantity, but it's quality of time.

How can you do those things so that you're living your life as you go along? Then when the end comes, for yourself or for those you love, you don't live your life with these regrets.

Evan: Yes, David, that is so true. I'm thankful that you can be able to speak from an experience of actually running a practice. You know the ins and the outs of all of these people have responsibility for. I'm guessing many of them, as they enrolled in school, had no idea how many hats that they'd be wearing as they were probably desiring to be a healer, a helper, be someone that can be able to treat a patient, help their life be better. Then all of a sudden this whole package comes up as business leader and insurance battler, and I can ... HR department head. There's just so much. I so admire the people that we're talking to here. If we can be able to give them abilities to have their capital grow while they're working so hard or be able to share on a topic that they would like to know more about but maybe don't have a colleague that they want to ask, that we could be that resource.

My encouragement, anyone who's listening to this podcast, please go and comment. Tell us what you want more of. If you like what you here, please review us. Give us a great review so that we can have more people see that this actually has content, that it's not trying to pitch them anything other than pitching them freedom. Because, yes, I want you to be free. Whatever freedom means to you, that is what I desire for you. If you don't want to be free, don't be on this call, please. That is not our style. David, I'm honored that you, I think, really personify that and can speak from experience. I think you've got

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the mastermind groups to really bring these people together, speak peer-to-peer and be able to have their life change forever.

David: Well, Evan, I feel like it is one way that I can give back, through the ups and downs of life that I went through and lessons that I learned, in some cases the hard way, but certainly, I've found that the best thing I could do would be to engage, find other people who I could, in confidence, talk about the things in my life and see that there was a different road and that I didn't have to just live my life by what others expected of me, that I could actually seek the visions and the dreams that I had, the real dreams I had for my life and actually have them become a reality now, today, while I fortunately have my health. Right now, my family members, including my daughter, she is with the blessing of the great Lord, is she is healthy. I can spend that time and not be taking things for granted, which is the way I was for a number of years in my younger life.

Evan, I appreciate you letting me bring this topic to the forefront and sharing it with me and for our listeners. I know you do a great job helping that today, and I hope this had had some impact for our listeners. As Evan has said, let us know what you think. Give us some feedback. Write us. Give us some comments, and we'll see you on the next call.

Evan: Thank you, David.

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