

**Ep #297: Michelle Mudge Riley & Laura Brenner Studholme – Shifting Careers and Finding a New Direction**



**Full Episode Transcript**

**With Your Host**

**Dr. David Phelps**

**[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps**

## **Ep #297: Michelle Mudge Riley & Laura Brenner Studholme – Shifting Careers and Finding a New Direction**

You're listening to the Dentist Freedom Blueprint podcast, powered by Freedom Founders with your host Dr. David Phelps, where the word retirement is bad and true freedom can be secured in three to five years or less. You'll get anti-traditional advice to maximize the value of your practice and multiply your transition options. Create safe and steady wealth building through highly curated real estate and build extraordinary freedom for what matters most to you without depending on the volatility of Wall Street. More at [FreedomFounders.com](http://FreedomFounders.com).

David Phelps: Good day, everyone. This is Dr. David Phelps of the Freedom Founders Mastermind Community and Dentist Freedom Blueprint podcast.

Here today with two friends of mine, two compatriots. Now, two people that are so much like who we all are, went down the pathway to getting the education, the degrees, the professional hat to go into being a doctor, a dentist and things change in life. Most of the time, not the way we plan it, but obstacles come up. Challenges, maybe just even a decision to think in true terms, "Who am I really? And is this really, this whatever I'm doing right now, am I really cut out to do this for the rest of my life?" And it's a hard thing to come across. In fact, for most of us, we don't even give ourselves permission to think about that. So without further ado, let me introduce my guests today, Dr. Michelle Mudge-Riley and Dr. Laura Brenner. Great to have you both here today.

Michelle Mudge Riley: Thanks, nice to be here.

**[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps**

## Ep #297: Michelle Mudge Riley & Laura Brenner Studholme – Shifting Careers and Finding a New Direction

David Phelps: So we met each other through referrals, which is the best way. And I met Michelle first through a friend of ours at our college or university, Trinity University in San Antonio. Again, we went there at different times, but the connection was real. And so we connected a few years ago and I got to know Michelle a little bit about you, we'll dig into your story. Laura, we also went to the same dental school again, about 18 years apart. I discovered different generations, but still I love the fact that we have this commonality and that the three of us have all switched gears from wearing the hat of being clinical with patients, which is what we trained to do and we're doing things differently. All for different reasons, all three of us for different reasons and different cause.

But I think the conversations that you two are having individually and collaboratively, some things you're doing together which I think is really cool, it's something that is often not even allowed to be spoken. In other words, it's almost like you're heretical if you talk about, "I went to school for all these years, I spent the time, the capital to get to a certain point and things changed in my life." Let's talk about your individual stories and we'll talk more about that. So, Michelle, let me go to you. Let me give you a little bit of your background just that I have right here in front of me. I know these things about you, but I think it helps to just give the particulars.

So your company name, Dr. Michelle Mudge-Riley, is Physicians Helping Physicians and Scout A Career. And you have been in the last number of years building communities, helping people who have been in careers look for alternatives, whether that's completely out, or maybe just outside adjunctive passions, developing skill sets to make their life more satisfactory. You've been doing that for physicians, dentists,

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

## Ep #297: Michelle Mudge Riley & Laura Brenner Studholme – Shifting Careers and Finding a New Direction

pharmacists, natural paths, physicians assistants and others, helping them start scale their businesses. How many years were you in practice?

Michelle Mudge Riley: Yeah, yeah. So I actually was in practice for one year before I left and did something different. I went to a medical device company because I didn't know what else to do at the time when I realized that what I had trained to do for so long wasn't what I wanted to do for the next 30 years. And that was really hard because I had no idea what was out there and I just sort of got into the easiest thing, pharma device and insurance were the things that I knew might be alternatives. But interestingly, I did years later start a practice again, happy to talk about that if you want. But yeah, I left very early in my career.

David Phelps: Can I ask you, when did you think you really realized that, "This is not really for me?" What point?

Michelle Mudge Riley: Yeah, so I'd always wanted to be a doctor. That was my dream and I fulfilled my dream when I got into med school and the first few years were bliss. I mean, they were really the best years of my life. I made wonderful friends, I was doing what I had always wanted to do, I was intellectually stimulated and challenged. And then we got into clinical rotations. And when I started doing the actual patient care aspect, I realized, "Hmm, this may not work for me for decades and decades and decades." And that was really scary because what do you do as a doctor, you take care of people. And so how do you talk about it? How do you ask others about it? How do you even address it in your own psyche? Because you went to medical school to be a doctor. And so that started the difficult years of trying to figure it out.

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

## Ep #297: Michelle Mudge Riley & Laura Brenner Studholme – Shifting Careers and Finding a New Direction

David Phelps: Were you married at the time that you were a year out and you're not. So...

Michelle Mudge Riley: I was not married at the time.

David Phelps: So no spouse to weigh in, right? Which helps, right? No other responsibilities, children and other things of that nature. And did you have a solo practice that you then sold? Did you actually start a practice solo or were you with a group? What was your initial situation?

Michelle Mudge Riley: Well, and I'd like to add no spouse at the time to support me so I had to find health insurance and a job. I was at a academic medical center, so I'm a pathologist by training. So it all employed and so it was just a matter of leaving. That part was relatively easy, the hard part was figuring out what I was running to and really even using that language, because at the time I was just running away from something.

David Phelps: Did you at sometimes doubt yourself and your own ability to be concrete about direction in life? Obviously you're very intelligent, you wouldn't be where you are today so that's not a factor. But just doubting yourself about, "Gosh, I shouldn't have this figured out?" I mean, do you ever have feelings like that? And also, "What do my peers or family, or what do they think of me?" Did you have to deal with that part?

Michelle Mudge Riley: Those were both huge barriers. I did very well in school, I've always done well in school which is probably why I went and got more degrees, but I'll get to that at some point. But yeah, I definitely doubted myself and I tell people my worst mistake was losing confidence in myself because I definitely did. I had no idea what to do and everyone around me had no idea what to tell me to do. And so it was the blind leading the

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

## Ep #297: Michelle Mudge Riley & Laura Brenner Studholme – Shifting Careers and Finding a New Direction

blind and me trying to figure out not only what to do, but how to do it because as professionals with a professional background, we usually don't get any training in how to network, how to find a job, how to write a resume, how to even think about these things. So think about it, there I was at zero and I had to figure out how to get myself to 100 where I wanted to be. Yes, I absolutely doubted myself.

David Phelps: I empathize with how you're feeling. I know Laura does too, and we'll get to Laura's story in a minute as well. But I give you huge kudos, five stars for having the courage to do what you did, especially just a year out. I don't know if I could have done that even if I was compelled for whatever reason, I think I would have just think, "Well, I've got to go do this for a while and show that I even showed up," right? And I'm not saying you didn't show up, but you know what I'm saying? It's just sometimes we just have to prove ourselves and then come up with the excuse later on, "Okay, but at least I tried it." And some people might say, "Well, you didn't even give it a try, Michelle, you didn't even really..." But see, you're being true to yourself and I think that's where the courage comes from today. And it's hard to do because of societal peer pressure that says, "Wait a minute, are you kidding me? You did all this?"

So we'll flip back around. I want to get to my colleague from other Baylor, Dr. Laura Brenner. So we were just chatting a little earlier about some of the people we knew that were there, even though we were there at different times. So Laura, let me just give a little bit of your background, we'll dig into some of the personal aspects of your story. Today, your company is Lolabees Career Coaching. You were for a decade, so 10 years in practice considered by your peers, your patients to be a successful and talented dentist. But your husband and your

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

## **Ep #297: Michelle Mudge Riley & Laura Brenner Studholme – Shifting Careers and Finding a New Direction**

dog, I got to find out what kind of dog do you have? Because I love dogs and your dog and your reflection, look at yourself in the mirror, you knew the truth about how you really felt about your career. Graduated from Baylor College of Dentistry in 2001, private practice 10 years before you left clinical dentistry behind for good. Once you quitted, once you quitted, that's a good word they will... We'll just leave that there.

How flexible I am. After quitting dentistry, you started Lolabees blog and after your article went viral, this is great, "The 10 reasons your dentist probably hates you too." That's so good, but gosh, so truthful, so authentic. You start connecting with other dentists from around the world who also felt unsatisfied with their careers. And then that inspired you to go on to become in 2017, a certified professional coach. You launched Lolabees Career Coaching to help dentists find career happiness in or out of dentistry. Yeah, right. You don't have to leave completely something it's just an opportunity to change a path, to change the gears, right? Put it together. So, let's talk about that. So you were obviously married and had a dog during this period of, you're thinking, 10 years. So you stayed at 10 years and the whole time of your clinical practice that you felt conflicted was early on or did it develop later? I'm just kind of back to Michelle. When did you first determine, "Ah, I'm not sure if this was quite what I want to do."

Laura Brenner Studholme: Sure. I enjoyed dental school kind of like Michelle. I mean, I realized looking back it was school that I liked, right? I mean, so we can get fooled by just enjoying the process of school. And so when I got out of school and got into practice, it was exciting for me and it was fun. And so I was distracted enough that the first three years it was okay, but it was hard as we all know that the pressure that comes with this

**[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps**

## **Ep #297: Michelle Mudge Riley & Laura Brenner Studholme – Shifting Careers and Finding a New Direction**

kind of work. And so by year three was when I realized I didn't want to do this anymore. And you could probably say I had all the signs of burnout. Looking back, this was 2004, I don't think anyone was talking about burnout in dentistry or medicine, not the same way that they are now.

So thinking that if I were to even consider it being burnout, I would have never thought that that could happen to someone so early in their career. So in year three I knew I wanted to leave. And I actually reached out to a Burkhart rep who I was friendly with and I asked him about his job. Kind of like Michelle, I didn't know what to do and I knew I needed to change. And he talked me out of it, he made me realize that I really did owe it to myself to try getting another job. I never wanted to be an owner and I think that was probably a smart move to not get too committed if you don't really know how you feel about a career. So I owed it to myself, it was only three years in just to try it out and see. So I ended up getting a different job, which was really supposed to be a dream job. And then over the next seven years, things just never got better for me. I just, yeah, go ahead.

David Phelps: Yeah. So what was your positions in associate positions with private practice or was it a corporate position or what was your setting?

Laura Brenner Studholme: Yeah, the first one was a heavily insured private practice. And I was seeing about 30 patients a day, constantly worrying about getting sued. I couldn't focus on the patient relationships and that was what I learned was this stuff I really liked. And then I went to the other practices that I went to after that, but the two over the next seven years were not insurance-based. They were the dream private practice that so

**[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps**

## **Ep #297: Michelle Mudge Riley & Laura Brenner Studholme – Shifting Careers and Finding a New Direction**

many people think is going to create all that happiness for us. And I went to Pankey Institute, I went down there, I think, four times to try to make things right. So I put all my effort in, we can give myself that, but I didn't put the effort in. And I loved going to Pankey, I would always kind of like being in school. I loved the learning, I loved that environment. And then I would get back into practice and I would just feel like I didn't know how to turn these dreams into reality. And so I always felt like I was not good enough and waiting for the next disaster to happen and just worried all the time.

David Phelps: Yeah. I think everybody listening today can empathize with that feeling. For people who care, which I'd say the vast majority of our colleagues really do, but the stresses of whether you're an owner or not, you said the stresses of working with real people in a sensitive area of the body and where outcomes are not always predictable and just the expectations can be so high and it's just the physical work, the mental work, it is draining. And then if you're trying to run any aspect of that as a business itself, it's a tremendous amount of work. So let me just ask both of you, I kind of know the answer, but let's just go back and hit it. Michelle, let me go back to you. So how many years has it been since you made that decision a year out to switch and go this direction? How many years has it been for you?

Michelle Mudge Riley: 16 years.

David Phelps: So quite a few years. Looking back, even though it was a tough decision and as you said, there was really no pathway that had been created, I mean, you just had to figure this out. Looking back now, any regrets at all about that decision?

## Ep #297: Michelle Mudge Riley & Laura Brenner Studholme – Shifting Careers and Finding a New Direction

Michelle Mudge Riley: No, because it all worked out for me and I have been able to do a lot of really neat things. You always kind of do wonder, "What if I had gone down this other path and what would it have led to?" And so I don't really call that a regret, but I think sometimes as we get older, we think about, "Hmm, if I would've done this or that, how would my life have turned out?" I can tell you, I don't think I would be any happier. I love what I do, I'm energized by it, I'm excited by it, I look forward to waking up in the mornings. I'm healthy, I have a wonderful family who supports and loves me and all those things that I think we're all striving for. If that's kind of how you define success, well, I've been successful and that's what our careers are all about.

David Phelps: Yeah, that's well said. Same to you Laura. And so how many years has it been? Well, 10 years. This is 1,2, I can do the math here in my head, I think, 2011? About when you...

Michelle Mudge Riley: Almost 10 years.

David Phelps: Almost 10 years, okay.

Michelle Mudge Riley: Almost 10 years out of practice.

David Phelps: Yeah. All right, so same thing for you. Are you very, very happy with the decision? Any regrets, anything that still is inside you that's maybe still a little bit of a conflict at all?

Laura Brenner Studholme: That's a big fat no. No conflict for me, no, I'm absolutely so happy. When you are in a career that you've invested so much time and so much energy in, and it makes you so empty inside, there is nothing like that pain. So to continue with that, it just tears you apart. So that experience in itself has made me feel really grateful for not feeling that anymore. And so I think Michelle described it perfectly that my

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

## Ep #297: Michelle Mudge Riley & Laura Brenner Studholme – Shifting Careers and Finding a New Direction

life feels fulfilling now. I feel energized by what I do and that allows me to help other people in a way that I could not help them as a dentist. I was resentful for helping people and who, as a patient, who really wants their dentist to be that way, right? I mean, they don't. So now I can give because I'm not sacrificing myself in order to give to others. And it's fun, life is fun again and I have absolutely no regrets.

David Phelps: You both mentioned the energy level. And see, I relate to that 100%. All of us can to an extent show up, put on the game face, right? Act decided, be there to cheerleader that we know we're supposed to be as leaders of our group, our tribe, our staff, you could do that, but if it doesn't energize you and inside it's sucking energy from you, you just can't do that indefinitely. And many times I felt the same way. Now, I admit a lot of it is just due to my lack of leadership skills, which is something that always evolves and whatever you're doing you need to enhance those, we all do over time, but I'm the same way as you two are describing is my days. I don't care what day of the week it is because every day for me is like it's great.

Because I know I'm going to get to interact with, connect with, have impact on people that I know that I can breeze something into them and have that impact. And you're the same way describing exactly how I feel. Well, just like today, I mean, I get to have great conversations with the two of you. If I were still in the dental practice, I would have the conversations with probably insurance companies and people that weren't happy about the shade of what was A1, B1 and I don't know. Michelle, that's a dental thing, but you get what I'm talking about, right?

Michelle Mudge Riley: Yeah.

## Ep #297: Michelle Mudge Riley & Laura Brenner Studholme – Shifting Careers and Finding a New Direction

David Phelps: So that's really interesting, the energy levels. Let's talk a little bit about your clients, the people that you are helping, your colleagues you're helping. And this is where I have a real interest because as we were talking a little bit before we started the recording today is, like you, I also get to get deep inside our colleagues and when they have trust, they'll open up and spill the beans and not everything's bad. I mean, we're all blessed. Look, we're all blessed people here. We have the ability to go out and make a living, but still inside there's the conflict. And I'd like to hear from you, is there any general themes that you hear from our colleagues that you're helping them with? Any particular thing to stand out? And what are some of the ways you help them with breakthroughs, to help them see where they are today and where they could be, but that gap.

Okay, yeah. You're painting a picture for me, Laura, Michelle, that I'd love to be able to do that, but the reality is I've got all these anchors or anchor me down. So I'll let you just both jump in and give me some of that through a lot at you there but that's kind of what I want to hear from you today and probably our listeners do too. How do you help with that?

Michelle Mudge Riley: Alright, you go first on this one.

Laura Brenner Studholme: Okay. I was going to give you the lead, but I'll go first. So we work well together, don't we? Well, let's see. So the typical things that I see is we have invested... Oh, by the way, hello grammar. You said something earlier and now I just said the typical things I see is, so hey, I'm trying to catch up. The typically things I see are the following. So we have invested so much time and energy into getting where we are. So many of us thinking about becoming a dentist started out as a childhood dream. For me it was getting my braces off, the day

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

## Ep #297: Michelle Mudge Riley & Laura Brenner Studholme – Shifting Careers and Finding a New Direction

I got them off and seeing my smile was so inspiring to me and I thought I wanted to help other people smile. And so if you get into something like this and you've invested so much of your heart and soul into it, it becomes your identity.

And we touched on this before the recording that who are you after you try to change? So while money is probably the biggest external reason that people have a hard time changing, I've even seen people who have all the money in the world and they could retire at a young age, but they don't feel like they can and that goes back to this identity piece. So my whole thing, when I'm helping someone is twofold. One is we have to figure out how can you change your belief system to realize that you do have options, you do have skills. And to touch on what Michelle said earlier about the self confidence is for such a successful, accomplished group of people, we are so good at beating down our own self confidence. And so if we can really start to understand that that's not true, that most people in the world can't do what we do and that we are not lazy, we are hard workers. That's how we got here in the first place.

That's what we tell ourselves now once we get stuck years, that I'm lazy, I'm not good enough. And so if we realize that that's not true, that we did get here, we're all accomplished, we're all successful, we can do anything. So it's changing that mindset. And then for me, it's helping people get into action. And that action doesn't mean that you're finding your passion and that you're absolutely jumping into this huge career commitment right after leaving, if you want to leave dentistry. It's dabbling, it's playing, it's experimenting, it's getting curious. And so we had a laugh about this last week. I actually sat in my basement and brewed gluten-free beer, which, if you know me, is so insane because I'm not a huge beer drinker, it's for my

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

## Ep #297: Michelle Mudge Riley & Laura Brenner Studholme – Shifting Careers and Finding a New Direction

husband, he loves beer, but this was years ago. It was at least 10 years ago.

We were just starting the gluten-free era and so I was seeing this as an opportunity. I liked cooking, I liked... It was like baking. And so you do something like that, knowing that it may have nothing to do with what you'll end up doing, but it opens you up in a way that you change from within. It's become the dance between action and changing your mindset. And then once you start to see that you have more creativity, you have more options, then it's a lot easier to take steps forward.

David Phelps: That creativity that you speak about gets stripped away at an early age, does it not? Because we're expected to go from kids to creative side, the imaginative side, the exploring side, the dabbling side, to, "Get your game on, figure out what you're going to be and focus," right? And then so we were not allowed to do that anymore. It's like, "What are you doing messing around with this or this, you're supposed to be focused on this," right? And so we don't give ourselves the chance to experiment anymore. And we get, as you said, sunk costs into, "This is who you are, this is the identity so don't even think about changing up."

Laura Brenner Studholme: 100%. And when I was going through my really hard years in my career, I worked with a career coach. And that was the first thing we worked on was I was so disconnected from any sense of creativity that I had, that I was just out of touch with who I was. And it's amazing how important that is.

David Phelps: Well, I cannot speak about medical school, but we can speak about dental school and dental school is very good about

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

## Ep #297: Michelle Mudge Riley & Laura Brenner Studholme – Shifting Careers and Finding a New Direction

stripping away any parts of you that are you and making you almost robotic. Okay, I said it. There you go. That's all I say to trash, but I said it.

Laura Brenner Studholme: Please say it.

David Phelps: Alright, Michelle, to you, same question, your observations, the themes, the issues and how you help bridge your clients who are seeking to be something different. How do you help them? What are the barriers again that you see that are common or different than what Laura expressed?

Michelle Mudge Riley: Yeah. Well, and I think this is why we all get along so well and why Laura and I have connected is they're very similar. I think medical school and dental school and even I'll go as far as to say other professional schools, even though I haven't been through pharmacy school or law school, they strip away that creativity and there's a reason for that. They're creating you and you're having to really figure out your new identity. And while that can be a positive thing, there are some negative parts to it as well. So I think we all do go through that and pile on that the fact that we don't get help with, or practice with some of these skill sets that would enable us to be successful in the world and actually as professionals, as dentists or doctors or attorneys.

And that's a real shame. I think that's a gap in all of these professional schools. So the physicians that I work with and then the others that sort of sneak their way in, and now I send them to Laura or I send them to other career coaches if they have a similar background. But they all are wondering, not only, "How do I figure out who I am," but, "What are my barriers? How do I identify those? How do I get past those or know that

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

## Ep #297: Michelle Mudge Riley & Laura Brenner Studholme – Shifting Careers and Finding a New Direction

they are going to be a piece of this?" And so I will need to factor them in because that's the reality, right? We have mortgages, we have families, we have geographic locations. And some of those things will be barriers. And some of them will have to be worked with, because as grownups, we don't have the freedom to just throw it all away and go reinvent ourselves completely. So there's that.

And then understanding the practical aspect. So I've always been a really practical type of a career coach. And I think that's just because that's what I needed and I felt was lacking for me. So I really try to address very quickly, okay, what are the things that you will need in order to get yourself to where you want to be? You'll need a resume, you'll need cover letters. You'll need to know how to operate within this world and that means social media in a professional way. You'll need to be able to brand yourself, you'll need to know what your options are. And so all of those things we deal with, and that's why Laura and I found each other and decided to make what we're doing bigger is because we felt like helping dentists to understand what their options are, is a huge benefit.

All of us wonder about that. Laura and I just talked about the fact that we didn't know what we could do. She brewed gluten-free beer, I dabbled in a lot of things. I got more degrees and had we known what our options were, I don't think it would have been any less hard, but we may have been able to sort of figure it out and get ourselves to a place where we could thrive maybe a little bit faster. And that's what Laura and I are aiming to do, is to really empower dentists and help them to get to where they would want to be a little bit faster because none of us have time to waste.

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

## Ep #297: Michelle Mudge Riley & Laura Brenner Studholme – Shifting Careers and Finding a New Direction

David Phelps: Exactly, exactly. So I know obviously you work with people, each of you works work with people, your clients one-to-one, what about on a somewhat of a group basis? What I'm getting at is, I would feel very comfortable working with either of you because you're very, very authentic, very transparent and you walk your talk, your story. But I want to know that I'm not the only one that it's like, "No, again, is there's something wrong with me, or there are other people like me that just haven't expressed themselves?" So in context of knowing there's a community, you talked about building communities, what is the overall community look like for each one of you or what's your collaborating on building together? And then we're going to get to, I think, what's going to be a really great virtual event coming up in a couple of months. But let's talk about the community overall that supports what you're both doing.

Michelle Mudge Riley: Well, so the community that we are aiming to build is an extension of what we've both built on our own. We both realized early on that this is hard to do by yourself and it's much easier when you have like-minded individuals around you, both of us benefited from that. And so we've both built communities of professionals with similar backgrounds who want to help others nonjudgmental, remember what it was like to be there, want to help others. And so I think collaborating together, we just kind of grew that community, which is really cool, made it interdisciplinary as well. But yeah, that community aspect's really important. I mean, you know, right? You've built your own community really successfully.

David Phelps: So as a community right now is it virtual, is it online, is it Facebook, how do you tie your community together?

## Ep #297: Michelle Mudge Riley & Laura Brenner Studholme – Shifting Careers and Finding a New Direction

Michelle Mudge Riley: Well, we both have different ways of doing that and there are different ways of bringing people together, I think in this day and age. So certainly there's a virtual and online component to it, and that includes different Facebook groups. I know Laura has started a really interesting group that I hope she talks about, and I don't have a Facebook group, but I'm a member of many private physician-only Facebook groups where we come together and we talk. LinkedIn is another place where there is a community of like-minded professionals who are looking to connect with others. I think those are the easiest to kind of talk about, especially in these COVID times, because we can't really get together in person, but that's also a piece of this. So Laura, I think you should speak to your community and sort of how you've grown it as well.

Laura Brenner Studholme: Yeah, thanks Michelle. So, I actually started out locally in the... I partnered with the local, the Metropolitan Denver Dental Society to create some group coaching events for their members. And it's been a member benefit and I really wanted to create something that was real. I didn't want it to be this, another happy hour for people to get together and discuss things that weren't real. And when I was in my early days of practice, one of the things I know was missing was that support and that comradery. We have that in dental school and I think that's what makes getting through dental school a little bit easier. And when I got out of dental school, I moved to new city, from Dallas to Denver. And I didn't have any of that. I mean, I was completely isolated.

So on a local community level, I've been able to create these monthly meetings where it's a very exclusive group of about 15 dentists. One group is dentists within their first six years of practice. It's almost like a group coaching/support group in a

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

## **Ep #297: Michelle Mudge Riley & Laura Brenner Studholme – Shifting Careers and Finding a New Direction**

way because we get to come and they get to vent about the challenges, just like those happy hours at the end of the day in dental school, right? They get to come and vent, but then we discuss the situations, the challenges, and then we create solutions so that they can go back to work the next day and have something to change and to work on it, to improve for themselves.

And I really wanted to do that with young dentists because my job here is not to try to get everyone to quit dentistry. I mean, that's not what I want. I want everyone to have a successful career in this field, but if it's not the right field for you, I absolutely want you to go find what is. So we've now just extended that to an older group of dentists that is... They're working on more of that, you know that midlife crisis type of mid career thing?

David Phelps: No, I have no idea what you're talking about. This totally found me.

Laura Brenner Studholme: Never, right? Exactly. So it's similar to the young dentist one, but now they're burned out or they've been doing this for a while and they're questioning, "What is this all about?" So that's actually been amazing to have a live community that hopefully someday I can create a virtual community and reach other people who don't live in my immediate 10 miles. And then my blog has been a huge community, believe it or not, because I've been so honest in writing about my experiences and at a time, 10 years ago, when I started this blog in 2011, nobody was talking publicly about disliking their career or the challenges. I mean, I was like a lone wolf, just thinking this and then when that blog post went viral, that was when I started writing about it.

**[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps**

## Ep #297: Michelle Mudge Riley & Laura Brenner Studholme – Shifting Careers and Finding a New Direction

So people comment and then just recently, it's real small now, but I want to make it as big as these physician groups that Michelle is part of. I created a group on Facebook called Dentist Side Gigs. And it's just kind of modeled, I mean, why reinvent the wheel? Right? It's modeled after what these physician groups are doing. And it's a place for us to come together, whether you're looking for what's next, or you've already created what's next, or like what you do, David, in helping people. So well as diversifying, "What can I do on the side so that eventually I can just have more freedom." So this is kind of a place to build the community next.

David Phelps: Yeah, that's excellent. These communities are so important because what I learned and I know that both of you have learned is that until you have a place to express yourself where it is nonjudgmental, where you can be authentic and you can be vulnerable. I mean, it's so hard for us to be vulnerable because, again, we're supposed to have it all together because of our position in society and in our industry, our professional, we're supposed to have it all together. And we all know that none of us have it all together, there's always areas of our lives that need work, need help. And if you can't express that, then there's no way you can get help.

If you keep burying it, as we all have done, we've all done it. We buried it, pushed it aside. We don't want to talk about that, that's a no-no zone and it never gets fixed. And once you can talk about it, as you're both doing and getting the conversations out, then those who have some issues right now in practice, a lot of times they can be resolved because you're not alone and there's other people dealing with it. And now you get some solutions go back and go, "I feel better because I don't feel like

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

## Ep #297: Michelle Mudge Riley & Laura Brenner Studholme – Shifting Careers and Finding a New Direction

it's all about my shortfalls. I'm not up to par here and I'm supposed to be, right?"

So I think those communities are so, so important. So you have set up and I'm really honored to be a participant in your November 13th coming up in, well, we're almost October 1st here, so let's call it a little more than six weeks out an event. Tell our listeners a little about that event and what we are going to learn as attendees or participants that... Michelle, do you want to take that?

Michelle Mudge Riley: Yeah, sure, sure. So really excited about this, because it's modeled after what I've been doing with physicians for years now. And I always tell Laura, I feel like physicians are 10 years ahead of dentists and that we started talking about this burnout thing. We started looking at alternative careers and we started actually doing those things and then helping each other. And so, I mean, we have some pretty evolved Facebook groups that started five, six years ago that have over 100,000 physicians in them. And so I really see this as a huge opportunity for dentists to be able to understand that, yes, you can talk about the fact that you may not be 100% fulfilled by your clinical career and yes, you can do other things and it doesn't have to be full time, but it can be. It can be part time, it can be a side gig.

So we're putting together a community where people can understand what their options are and learn about those from people with similar backgrounds. So you're a dentist, David, you'll be talking about what you've done and your background and why you did it and so other dentists may relate to your background. Laura will be talking about similar things. We have other professionals who have gone into pharma, biotech,

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

## Ep #297: Michelle Mudge Riley & Laura Brenner Studholme – Shifting Careers and Finding a New Direction

insurance, real estate, their own business, entrepreneurs, sales, all of these things are options and dentists feel like they might not be, or how do they find these things?

Or they may not even be thinking about them, but this is a place to learn about these things in a very safe and nonjudgmental way, ask questions and then figure out your own path all while also doing some of that personal work, which is getting over those barriers, changing that mindset and that's why Laura is going to be so valuable in all of the things she's going to be talking about. Because she'll be addressing that, she does that on a day to day basis with people. And so anyway, I get very excited about it, but that's what we're going to do.

David Phelps: So who should think about attending?

Michelle Mudge Riley: Any dentist who is curious about what else might be available for them. So dentists that are just sort of feeling that, "Hmm, I'm not sure this is what I want to do for the next 30 years." Even if you've just thought about it a little bit, it doesn't mean you have to leave, it only means you're curious. So as with doctors, there are a good percentage of physicians that come to my conference that stay in clinical practice and that's great because we need doctors in clinical practice. I mean, like Laura, I never tell people to leave. I encourage them to stay actually. But if you are curious and you don't scratch that itch, it's not going away. And so it's going to be important to at least understand what else might out there and then you can make a good decision about what's right for you.

David Phelps: I often talk to the dentist and people I talk to about just having a plan B, the side gig, the thing that you can explore and might give you additional fulfillment. It could turn into a hobby,

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

## Ep #297: Michelle Mudge Riley & Laura Brenner Studholme – Shifting Careers and Finding a New Direction

additional revenue streams. It could be something that is your next so it's never too early to be exploring those other options. And as you said, just being aware of it, no matter where you are just being aware of those things, it's a good thing to be doing. So, yeah, I would encourage anybody who no matter where you are in your career, these conversations can only be helpful to anyone who has any questions.

And we all have about, "Where are we at? Where's all this going?" And those questions. It's a great community to be a part with other people who are like-minded but have the same thoughts. And it's okay to think those things, it's okay to have some questions about, "Am I where I should be? And what's next?" And those things. It's A-OK, it's actually normal. It's healthy to have those questions. If you don't express them, then you're doing yourself and your family probably a disservice.

Michelle Mudge Riley: Absolutely.

David Phelps: So we will put the link in the show notes. Do you have a URL we can just verbally state, but I'll put the show notes because people that are driving or something, I don't want them to try to click a link while they're driving and we cause some issues. So go ahead and give us the highlight of that, Michelle.

Michelle Mudge Riley: Sure. Yeah. If they just Google scoutacareer, all one word, then they will find the dentist conference. But yeah, we'll provide a link and we can even provide a coupon code for your listeners so that they get a little special VIP treatment.

David Phelps: Very cool, very cool. Like a special VIP dinner at their home?

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

## Ep #297: Michelle Mudge Riley & Laura Brenner Studholme – Shifting Careers and Finding a New Direction

Michelle Mudge Riley: That quite that special. Just maybe a few dollars off of their registration.

David Phelps: Well, then they can have their dinner delivered to them by Uber Eats and make it a special occasion so we can always do that, right?

Michelle Mudge Riley: There you go.

David Phelps: All right, great. Alright. Well, Dr. Laura Brenner and Dr. Michelle Mudge-Riley, I thank you so much for your time today. It's been great to visit with both of you and have these conversations that again, I think are going to continue to be a strong part of our respective universities and they need to be out there. So thanks for all that you do, I look forward to being a part of your event November and hope we have a lot of people that come to also just see what's there and let their creativity come back up from where it was back when they were in their early years of childhood.

Michelle Mudge Riley: Thanks, David.

Laura Brenner Studholme: Thanks for having us.

Michelle Mudge Riley: You bet, it's been a pleasure.

You've been listening to the Dentist Freedom Blueprint podcast. If you're tired of trading time for dollars and you're uncertain that Wall Street has your best interest at heart, then take the next step to more cashflow, security and ultimately more freedom. Text the word newsletter to 972-203-6960 to receive David's monthly online newsletter for free or text the word book to receive your new free copy of David's book From High Income to High Net Worth delivered right to your home. Text 972-203-6960.

More@freedomfounders.com.

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

**Ep #297: Michelle Mudge Riley & Laura Brenner  
Studholme – Shifting Careers and Finding a New  
Direction**