

Mastering the art of aloneness

Guest: Lauren Mackler

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Alex Howard - [00:00:09]

Welcome, everyone, to this interview where I'm super excited to be talking to Lauren Mackler.

Firstly, Lauren, welcome and thank you for joining me.

Lauren Mackler

Thank you for having me. It's lovely to be here with you.

Alex Howard

I think this is a really important interview. I was just saying to Lauren before we started recording, that doing a conference on relationships, and to not talk about really the most important relationship in our lives, which is our relationship with ourselves, would have felt like we were missing something really important.

So as Meagen and I were researching possible guests, I came across Lauren's book, *Solemate*, and I'm sure we'll be talking about some of the ideas in here. And I was like, that's an interview we have to have as part of this conference.

So, Lauren, I'm really happy that you're here.

Just to give people Lauren's background, for more than 20 years, Lauren Mackler has helped individuals, couples, groups and organizations around the world to live boldly, to liberate their potential and achieve the vision to which they aspire.

She is a coach and psychotherapist, media commentator, creator of Illumineering Coaching, speaker, and author of the international bestseller *Solemate: Master the Art of Aloneness & Transform Your Life*.

Her work has been covered widely in the media, including *NPR*, *CNN*, *Wall Street Journal* and many other media outlets.

Lauren has served as a guest lecturer at Harvard and a feature presenter at Kripalu, Omega and Canyon Ranch.

So, Lauren, one of the things that touched me as I was dipping into your book was the personal journey that you went on to discover this as a body of ideas and work. So, I'd love just to start a bit there really. What was your journey with aloneness? How did this become an alive topic and conversation for you?

Lauren Mackler - [00:02:05]

Wow, well, there's a lot to say. I'll start with the beginning, which is not the beginning, beginning. But when I was 23, I got married. And I never anticipated that I would marry that early, but I was an aspiring singer, I was in show business and that was my first career. And I met my then husband. He was on vacation. He lived in Europe, he was European. And I fell in love. And I just walked away from everything, my career, and just went off and thought I was marrying Prince Charming.

And by the time I hit my 30s, my mid 30s, my marriage was kind of falling apart. Like most people that are sleepwalking, they're not really very mindful or conscious about coming into a relationship. We kind of came together from our life conditioning and our habitual patterns vs, now let's see, are we a good fit? Are we compatible? What do we want in relationship? We're just on autopilot, which is how most relationships come to fruition.

And so, I realized in my mid 30s I was replicating my mother's life, basically. She gave up her career. She married a physician, which is what I did. And had a couple of, I have two children and things weren't going very well.

So the marriage fell apart. And I should say that I was very independent when I was younger. In fact, I was a 14 year old runaway. I left home at 14. It was a huge shock for me by the time I got divorced, or separated first, and all of a sudden I started to panic being by myself because I had always thought of myself as very fearless and independent and bold. And I was having panic attacks when we separated.

And I realized, after the fact, that the reason was I had been conditioned to believe I needed a man to take care of me, that I was unable to provide for myself, which is why my condition self unconsciously pulled a guy in to take care of me at 23.

So that set me on a journey. And I was already a psychotherapist, I should tell you. And I had never really fully done my family of origin work to really understand the underpinnings of the patterns that had caused us to come together and the patterns that had caused our marriage to fall apart.

And that was really the impetus to go and do that work and understand, I never thought I'd get divorced. What the heck happened here? And I started to do some very deep work. I moved back from Europe because I had gone and based my whole life on him, on his country, I even worked in his medical practice. I was dependent on him professionally as well.

And I came back here and I couldn't take care of myself financially or my kids. I had to go back to school and get my American credentials because I trained in Europe. And I couldn't find a therapist to help me at that time. And so I thought, okay, I've got to somehow figure this out. I was in such a depressed place when I came back here that I said, I have to somehow figure this out.

So I was back in school and I was getting my American credentials in psychology and I did a paper for school. And I called it a self renewal program. And I put together this program that I was personally doing every single day. And I thought, well, I'll submit this for school. And my professor wrote, when she was grading it, she wrote, you could turn this into a self renewal kit and make a million.

And years later, when I was writing *Solemate*, and I should let people know it's S-O-L-E-M-A-T-E, not the other kind of soulmate, I remembered that whole thing of the self renewal kit. Because, in fact, I used pieces of that paper in *Solemate*, actually.

And that was really the origin of this whole concept around, wait a minute, I have to have relationship with myself that is intact and healthy and whole before I can have a happy life, before I can have really healthy relationships with others. And that was the underpinning of this.

Alex Howard - [00:06:28]

But that's a really important realization, because I imagine a lot of people in that situation, you moved back to the U.S, you're having panic attacks, you're feeling some really difficult emotions. Often what people would do is go, I'm feeling this way because I'm on my own. Therefore, the remedy to this is to find a new relationship.

Lauren Mackler

Right.

Alex Howard

And it must have taken a lot of courage. But I'm also wondering what allowed you to not use that as the, in a sense, Band-Aid?

Lauren Mackler

Because nobody could date. Seriously. So I spent the first 2 years of my separation in Europe, in Germany, where I lived. And I immediately got into another relationship after my marriage broke up. And I had this neighbor who is divorced with three kids, and she kept saying, you have to learn how to be alone. I was like, yeah, yeah, yeah, I know. Yeah, I will. I will. Later. Later. And I was so resistant.

And then when I left Germany, and had to leave Germany because I literally couldn't pay the rent anymore. So we came back, I sold everything I owned, and the kids and I came back here together.

And we moved back to where I was raised in a small town. There literally was nobody to date. And so, I also had that realization that, wait a minute, there's nobody who's going to rescue me. I have to rescue me. There's no therapist that's adequate for me to work with. I don't have that kind of support system here. I don't know anybody other than my family. And I was back in school.

And so, in the beginning everything was set up to force me to have to go inside and do that work. Even though I knew I had to do it, I did resist it for a while. But then it was like, okay, I've got to do this.

Alex Howard

Yes. And there's something about, it's hard, but not impossible to work on one's relationship with themselves whilst in an intimate relationship with another.

I guess what I'm interested to particularly explore is why is aloneness, because I think people almost see aloneness as the failure to be in a relationship as opposed to a choice of itself. And I'd like to hear a bit about why aloneness is so important? What are some of the gifts? And how that creates a space for that relationship with oneself?

Lauren Mackler

Well, aloneness, what I mean by aloneness, it's not loneliness, it's not even necessarily being all by yourself or isolated. It's about wholeness. It's about relationship with oneself. Our aloneness, our solitude, our connection to ourselves.

And if you think about it from the time we're really young, we are conditioned to always focus on relationships with others. There's very few parents that are saying, listen, you are the primary relationship because you are the only person that is going to be with you 24/7 from the time you take your first breath until you release your last breath.

And so it's only good common sense that you make your relationship with yourself the primary one because it is the one that you can't get away from. You can't divorce yourself. And depending on the quality of the relationship with yourself, that's either good news or it's really pretty tragic news and pretty torturous news. Because if don't have a healthy relationship, if you don't have a positive, good relationship with yourself, if you don't like yourself, if you don't respect yourself, if you don't treat yourself well, it's constant torture because you can't get away from you.

So that's number one. And by how we treat ourselves and the quality of our relationship with ourselves is reflected in our relationships with others.

And you said,, you can work on your relationship with yourself when you're in intimate relationship, but it's much harder. And it doesn't mean you have to go get divorced to do the whole mastering the art of aloneness process. But it is easier if the only relationship you have to focus on is yourself, because if you're in partnership then you have to focus on the issues of the partnership as well as your own issues with yourself.

And when I'm working with couples, I work with them each individually, and I work with the couple. So there's three clients involved. There's each individual that has their own work to do to be able to do the couple's work. And then there are other couples issues. And that's a distraction when you're just trying to work on your relationship with yourself, it can be done, but it's much easier. And wouldn't it be nice if we could be conditioned from childhood on to really focus on that relationship very early on?

But that's not what we do. It's always about how to have the playmates, gotta do the play dates, and then you got to get a boyfriend or a girlfriend, and then you've got to get a spouse, and we get lost in the shuffle.

Alex Howard - [00:11:24]

And I think also, particularly as one gets older, there's certain cultural stigma, there's sometimes shame that's tied to someone that's not in relationship. But perhaps you could speak to that a little bit as well.

Lauren Mackler

Well, the interesting thing is that nearly half of American adults are single. Nearly half.

Alex Howard

Is that right? Wow.

Lauren Mackler

And so we don't realize that because when people are single and they're lonely and they're not happy being single, well, it's like everywhere they look they see couples because that's what they're focused on.

And there is this whole stigma. There is this whole shame thing about there's something wrong with you. But what I tell people is people that are single that long for a relationship and don't want to be single, I say to them, you are single by choice. If you really wanted a relationship, if you put the bar down a little bit.

Alex Howard

Might not be a good one.

Lauren Mackler - [00:12:27]

You will find a relationship if you really want a relationship, but you're choosing your aloneness. You're choosing not to be in relationship. And that is an empowering realization for people when they realize that. They're choosing that. They could settle. And there's plenty of people that do settle. And that's why there's a lot of conflict ridden relationships. The majority of them are not conscious partnerships that are healthy, that are loving, that are working, that are really working.

Alex Howard

One of the reasons that I think people can be serially going from one relationship to another relationship without really any time in between is the fear and anxiety that comes up when they're on their own. And you spoke a little bit in your story around you having panic attacks. And I think often that sort of panic is we feel safe because we're in relationship with someone. It gives us a certain holding, a sense of familiarity, a continuity, and we know who we are through our relationship to that other person, and you take that away.

And that can be quite unsettling and somewhat destabilizing for people sometimes. And I'm curious as to how you help people navigate through that piece? Because if one can't work through that, they're just going to keep using relationship to fix that feeling.

Lauren Mackler

That's right. To avoid those feelings of fear. The other thing that's interesting is that there's several drivers of romantic relationship. So there's the driver of how we are drawn to what's familiar to us from childhood, and it's not that literal that we marry mom or marry dad.

Alex Howard

Although sometimes it's pretty close.

Lauren Mackler

Sometimes it's pretty close, but it's more complex than that. It's not necessarily that literal. It can be that there's something about this person that the dynamics between us, the feelings that come up inside me with this person are familiar from childhood.

So it can be literally, the attributes are similar, the dynamics are similar, the experiences and emotions are similar. That's one of the drivers.

Then there's the driver of we are also drawn to people who embody, what I call our lost parts. You'll call them the shadow. I don't like to call them the shadow parts. I call them the lost parts because I think about our innate wholeness to our life conditioning process, we adapt to that system, and the things that are okay to express and to be are further developed and can flourish.

And the parts of us that are taboo in our family system, not okay, or get eroded in some way or diminished become our lost parts. Well, if you remember homeostasis from school, which is the law that says, that is, all living systems are always in motion to come back to a balanced state. It's an automatic thing. It's like you get too cold, you start to shiver to generate heat, you get too hot, you start to perspire to get cooled off. The same dynamics happen in relationships.

And so we are also drawn to those people that embody those parts of us that we no longer have access to. And that gives us that sense of wholeness. So that gives us that feeling of, ah I found my other half.

And the problem is in the beginning that produces a sense of chemistry, and it's pleasurable. But remember, those are the parts of us that had to go underground that were negative. So what we

initially are attracted to, we come to disdain later. The conversation changes, give it a year or two, a few months, whatever.

So I just want to come back to your original question, which I can't remember what it was, Alex.

Alex Howard - [00:16:21]

My question was around how we navigate the fear and the anxiety.

Lauren Mackler

Those feelings.

So that fear and anxiety has an opportunity inherent in it, which is, it was like my panic attacks. What is this about? And I realized through, I finally found a therapist that was really good that I worked with for 8 years, actually, that the core limiting belief of I am incapable of providing for myself. By leaving my marriage I was defying that. And that part that held that belief was freaking out going, what are you doing? We can't take care of ourselves and our kids. What are we going to do?

And so, it's really understanding getting to the roots of those emotions and understanding those feelings are a messenger that you're not in balance with yourself. You're not in a state of wholeness.

And when you can do that work and come to that state and then find someone else, if you want to be a partner. Listen, partnerships are wonderful. There's nothing more delicious than being in love. Let's face it. It's not about relationships are something to avoid, but when you have two individuals coming together from a place of wholeness it's a completely different type of relationship than two conditioned selves that are replicating the patterns from their dysfunctional childhood, which is what most people do.

Alex Howard

Yes. And I think something else, you use slightly different words, but what I heard you say was when we're in relationship with ourselves, yes we're not necessarily at that point in an intimate relationship with someone else, but it's not an absence of that. It's the presence of that connection to ourselves. And perhaps you could speak about how beautiful that can also be.

Because it's almost like we think about the intoxication of being in love or infatuated with someone else. But we can also feel a sense of joy and beauty and connection in relationship with ourselves whilst alone. And I think that's important.

Lauren Mackler

And I would say that experience is the byproduct of the work. That's the byproduct. It's the joy, it's the admiration for oneself, it's a sense of respect for oneself. And it's not in an arrogant, conceited way. It's just in this grounded way of, wow, I admire the person I am, right?

But not only do you get the pleasure of those emotions and that experience, it's practical. If you haven't done the work to know who you are. If you're so focused and distracted by relationship with others, then how can you know what your needs are in relationship? How can you know where your boundaries are? How can you know what you want and need in that relationship? How do you know what your strengths are and what your limitations are to be able to honor those things within a partnership?

Those people that have focused so much on relationships or gone from relationship to relationship. And I would say, I don't like to generalize, but I do see patterns in my work, and one of them is especially women tend to lose themselves in relationship. They morph into or adapt to the partnership in a way where they can lose themselves.

And men do, too. But I think men are conditioned to have more compartmentalized lives. And those patterns still permeate our society and our DNA and our way of operating. Even though things have changed a lot, those old ingrained patterns are still there. Also just pragmatically if you have to do this work, if you want to be able to really be present and show up in a healthy relationship to know who you are.

Alex Howard - [00:20:31]

And for people that are in relationship, which is the other half of the population that are listening to this interview and recognizing themselves in a lot of what you're saying. They can see that they're caught in these patterns. They can see those lost parts of themselves are being somewhat completed in relationship and don't want to, ultimately the relationship is good, they don't want to leave the relationship, but they want to cultivate and perhaps negotiate time to be with themselves.

Because I think when people do that, sometimes the other person in the relationship can get suspicious or feel rejected.

Lauren Mackler

Or feel threatened.

Alex Howard

Right.

Lauren Mackler

Right.

Alex Howard

How does one navigate that process?

Lauren Mackler

Well, I think communication is number one.. Communication is so so important. And I would say poor communication or lack of communication is probably the number one contaminant or root cause problem in most relationships that are experiencing conflict.

And so, letting your partner know, saying, I want to do this work. And what's really great is you do it together. If your partner is up for the work. *Solemate* is written as a process. So every chapter has information, examples, my story, client stories. But at the end of the chapter, there's work to do. So it's designed to be a process, an active process.

Because I'm very practical. I don't like just theory. I like, okay, what is the actual concrete tool or process? How do you do this? So you can say, I'd like to do this and invite your partner. Say, would you like to do this together?

And that way, I remember I got a new client one time, and all my clients have to get a copy of *Solemate* because we use the book through our work, different pieces of it, I'll have them do reading, whatever.

So the client was married and got the copy of *Solemate* and had this book, *Solemate: Master the Art of Aloneness and Transform Your Life* on her nightstand. And the husband is like, what do you want, a divorce? Really didn't understand, and was really threatened by it.

And your partner may not be up for this work right now, and that's okay. Everybody has their timeline. Everybody's an individual and has their own journey. But letting the person know, I'd like to do this work, and that means that I might need more time alone than I have up until now. And become more individuated, be able to be more independent and take some time and that kind of thing and looking at the patterns.

But when you start doing that work and you're doing it without your partner, you're going to change. And so your partner may find that threatening. And again, you can communicate as much as little as they can handle or are open to. But I think communication, honest communication is very, very important to the process.

Alex Howard - [00:23:43]

And there's something about the more one takes care of themselves, the more the quality of that relationship has the potential, at least to be closer. Because while you're able to be vulnerable and more able to be seen in a deeper way.

Lauren Mackler

That's right. And that's part of the communication, can be part of the communication, which is I want to learn to be the best partner for you I can be.

Alex Howard

Right.

Lauren Mackler

And so I want to do this work because I love you that much, and I love me. And I want to cultivate that love for myself, which there's some gaps there.

Alex Howard

I remember once coming home from work and being in a foul mood and saying to my wife, I don't want to be with me right now. So you probably don't want to be with me either. Just leave me alone.

Lauren Mackler

Yeah. Do yourself a favor.

Alex Howard

It's not a rejection of you. I don't want to be with me right now, either.

Lauren Mackler

But you can't get away from you. My point earlier.

Alex Howard

Exactly.

You make a distinction in the book, which I really like about the difference between living deliberately and living by default. Can you open that up a little bit? Because I think that automatic way that we can live, this is a good example of potentially challenging the status quo of a relationship to actually catalyze change. I think it's a really good distinction.

Lauren Mackler - [00:25:11]

So as I said earlier, most of us come together in relationships from old conditioned patterns. And so we're living by default. We're not thinking we're not aligning our choices, our behaviors, our actions with the desired outcomes. We're just on autopilot.

And 9 times out of 10 when we're on those default patterns, when we're operating from those default patterns, we're actually not getting the results we want. Because remember, those patterns are developed and habituated by the time we're about 7 years old. The original template of how we see the world, how we see ourselves, and how we respond to the world around us are pretty much laid down by the age of 7.

So, think about a child, a child's reactions and a child's choices. They're not thinking very consciously. They don't have the sophistication to say, well, when I do this, this outcome happens.

And so, it's like having a map like the old fashioned maps. And you say, get in your car. And you say, okay, I'm going to drive from New York to California. And you get in your car but the map you have is to get you to Maine. And you take the map and you get to Maine and you go, wait a minute. I had every intention. I visualized, I read the secret. I visualized that I was in California and I'm in Maine. Well, because you took the road map to get to Maine.

So the old pattern of the road map is to adapt to and function and stay safe and get as best results as we can in the family system in which we are born into. But they're not designed to get the results we want as an adult.

So living deliberately vs by default is simple. It is aligning your actions, your choices, your responses to the outcomes that you want to have. It's that simple.

And imagine if someone had said to us when we were little, now be very mindful about every decision you make, every choice you make, every behavior and action, because it's going to produce a result and make sure it's the result you want.

And the other thing is the cumulative result of all the choices we make, creates your future life. And I remember when I had that thought one day and I thought, wow, the life I have right now is a result of all the choices I made all those years. And I ended up divorced, and I ended up with no money and having to rebuild my life. And it was all a result of all of those choices that I made for my early life conditioning. Profound, really.

Alex Howard

It is. And I think it's also, it's interesting as you were speaking earlier, that one of the things about your story, one of the things that I noticed is, I was thinking about courage, and it takes a great deal of courage sometimes. And yet when I asked you about being on your own vs just going to another relationship, you're like, well, I don't really have any choice there wasn't anyone there. Life can be brutal sometimes. That we have the same patterns, for example, that repeat and repeat and repeat.

And at some point, we reach a point where we're like, I just can't live like this anymore. But I think people often have, and I think sometimes self-development work can lead to a misunderstanding that courage is some resource that some people are really courageous, and we feel like we're just not a courageous person.

My experience has been courage is what happens when you have no choice. But I'm curious as to your thoughts around that. And people perhaps that are listening to this and going, God, I'm now where Lauren was, but I couldn't have done what she did. What would you say to someone that feels that way?

Lauren Mackler - [00:29:12]

Well, I think people have different relationships with change. Some people do really well with change. Some people get completely paralyzed by change. And that's driven by a unique personality type, that's also by conditioning and learned patterns around changing learned experiences around change.

It doesn't really matter what the catalyst is. It might be, like in my situation when I had the opportunity, the first two years of my separation, I got right into another relationship. And then I moved back to America to a small town where there really was nobody to date.

And that was where it's like, okay, there's no therapist. There's no one to date. I've got to figure this out. I'm a resourceful person. I can figure this out. I have to because I have to. I mean, I was suicidal. I was so depressed. It was really bad. So I had to. I had two kids to take care of. I didn't have the luxury of having a breakdown or not functioning.

Alex Howard

But being that desperate is also a very powerful place.

Lauren Mackler

That's what I was going to say.

Another catalyst is pain. So whether the catalyst is courage, motivation, or pain, it doesn't matter. It's about, it doesn't matter what necessarily gets you there. And so if you feel like your self image is somebody who's not very brave or not very courageous, but you're in pain, use that as your catalyst. And where you feel like, like you said, I can't live like this anymore. It's just too painful. That can be the point where you say, okay, then you find the courage because you have to, because continuing on like that, it's like you're done with it, and you're ready to now step into and embrace the change, even though you feel afraid.

I felt afraid a lot of the time. And I always, through that process, had that part that was saying, you can't take care of yourself. You can't take care of yourself. You can't take care of your kids financially. You're not going to be able to do this. And I had to then go to the experience where now, then create the reference point and experience of being able to do that.

And oftentimes people think, well, I have to first get courageous, and then I'll do that. No. That's what creates the courage and the confidence, if you do it. And now you look back and you have a track record.

So what do you do in that gap time? Well, it's a leap of faith. It's a leap of faith. I believe I can do this. There's a part of me that does believe that I can take care of myself.

Alex Howard

It's almost like someone's watching this or listening to this and is in that place where their mind is telling them they can't do it. They're in just the right place.

Lauren Mackler

Right.

Alex Howard

That means they're on track for something new to happen.

Lauren Mackler - [00:32:14]

And really taking a look at what part is that? Who is that that's telling me you can't do that? When I'm working with a client, I do a technique called voice dialoguing. And we look at those, we identify those parts and we give them names. We have fun with it.

Alex Howard

You give them a voice.

Lauren Mackler

And I talk to the parts directly with the client. So it might be, not good enough Nancy, or incapable Inez or defiant Deedee, these different parts that hold those limiting beliefs. We actually create personas or parts so that they understand. Wait a minute. That's not me. That's a protective part that I developed in response to my life conditioning and my belief system that I internalized to no fault of my own. And I was a child. I had no control over that. I was a sponge just taking things in.

And when you can dis-identify with the part and say, wait a minute. That's just one part of me. That's not all of who I am. Then you start, even if that other part that believes it can, even if it's just a little spark, you start there and you have faith in yourself. But sometimes it takes the pain, tremendous pain to get to that place.

Alex Howard

And I think that faith in oneself is sometimes also, and you spoke to it, that we grow. It's almost like we grow our own respect for ourselves and going, wow. I thought I couldn't support myself and my kids, and I just did it.

I think sometimes we're, certainly my generation in their parenting of kids, are sometimes a bit too quick to just give kids, of course you want to install self worth and self esteem in kids. But I also think about my own life that I've earned my self respect, in a sense, by my actions. And I think that's a powerful thing, as opposed to just thinking, I'm wonderful whatever I do so I'm not going to bother doing the hard stuff.

Lauren Mackler

And that's the difference between the ego, self image. That's not really grounded in your beingness. It's like entitlement. It's, I'm wonderful, I don't need to do that. Or I deserve X. And as opposed to I deserve that. And that is a difference I think, it's a subtle difference.

Alex Howard

It's an important one.

Lauren Mackler

It's an important one.

And I remember the first moment after doing all that work, I'm really focused on my relationship with myself, and all the underpinnings of looking at all the choices I made and my belief system and doing all the stuff that I then put in *Solemate* to help other people.

And I actually created the Master in the Art of Aloneness workshop 10 years before I wrote *Solemate*. And I taught it at Kripalu, which is a big center here in the Northeast for 10 years.

So I had been doing that with other people. And then somebody said, you should make this into a book. And that's kind of what happened. But, I lost my train of thought.

Alex Howard - [00:35:48]

We were talking about earning self respect.

Lauren Mackler

And I remember it was Valentine's Day, one year, and I decided I was going to send myself a dozen long stem red roses. So I called the florist and I told them the card I wanted them to write. And the card was, I love and admire the woman you are.

Alex Howard

That's beautiful.

Lauren Mackler

And then on Valentine's Day, do you have Valentine's Day in the U.K?

Alex Howard

Of course, yeah.

Lauren Mackler

Okay. So on Valentine's Day, I got this delivery in this big box. And it was like, wow, I really have a lot of admiration for who I am.

And I went from someone who had self loathing, I mean, I learned to hate myself. I learned to feel that I was not okay who I was. And so I went from that place to a feeling of genuine love and appreciation for who I was. And not in an arrogant, ego, conceited way, but just like, I'm a good person. And it was to do that and give that to myself was very symbolic for the first time. It was really quite a beautiful, powerful experience for me.

Alex Howard

It's very beautiful. It's very beautiful.

And it does tie nicely to, I also wanted to explore with you, you talk about becoming the partner that you seek. And there's something about what you just described there that was quite visceral for me, in a sense of that's the sort of person that you actually want to be to attract someone that you're going to demand and expect that level of care and love of yourself.

Lauren Mackler

And I'll mention there's actually a YouTube video up there where I talk about how to do that process. So there's a little exercise that people can look at if they Google 'Become The Partner You Seek' with my name you'll find it.

The whole thing behind 'Become The Partner You Seek' is going back to the lost parts. So most people seek wholeness through finding someone that complements those parts that could help them have a semblance of wholeness, that embodies those parts that they're missing.

And one of the types of coaching I do is relationship coaching, and I work with couples and I also work with singles that are wanting a relationship and wanting to look at their relationship patterns because they're not having success in their relationships.

So one of the exercises I do, which is that video that I talked about, I have them make a list of all the attributes and qualities and things that they're looking for in their ideal partner. And they have a great time doing this. It's like, okay.

Alex Howard - [00:38:38]

It's like a Christmas list.

Lauren Mackler

Yeah a Christmas list.

And then I say, okay, now I want you to go through that list, and I want you to circle all of those things that are true about you today, that you have today.

And so obviously, most of the time, they're not going to be able to circle all of them because they haven't done that work. And then I say, okay, the things that you haven't circled, those are what I call your gap areas. So instead of looking for someone else to fill those gaps, do the work. This is part of the roadmap. This is one of the ways that you can identify what parts are missing for you that you're trying to seek in another and work on bringing those attributes to fruition for yourself, those life experiences, that amount of money, that house or whatever it is, confidence or a good job or whatever that thing is.

And also, there's another aspect to that, which is if you are in relationship, is taking 100% responsibility for focusing on you becoming the partner that you want to have. Because can you imagine two people focusing on themselves being that partner for the other one? Then you've got two magnificent partners.

So there's two aspects to that. One is for singles to look at what they're trying to compensate for in a relationship. In other words, what's lacking in them. And number two, if you are in relationship, most people are focused on, well, they don't do this and they don't do that. And they're not giving me this. And they're not being emotionally vulnerable. Well, okay. Focus on what you're doing or not doing. And turn the mirror around and look at yourself.

Alex Howard

It's much more empowering as well because I often think people, and I think we can all be guilty of this, that we can build the story that a relationship is not working because of the other person. Rarely does one go, my relationship isn't working because of this thing I need to work on. It's much easier to go, it's that other person's fault. But the thing that I always say to people is, if that's actually true you're stuck because you can't fix the other person. And there's something that's also very empowering about, if I work on this, then this is going to be better.

Lauren Mackler

That's true. And I often say to people, it takes two people to make a great relationship. It takes two people to make a bad relationship. It only takes one person to change a relationship.

Alex Howard

That's great. I like that.

Lauren Mackler - [00:41:16]

Because a couple has their dance steps. They do the dance. They get into the same issues over and over and over again, and it's usually the same three to five issues that just rotate constantly. And the reason that they never get resolved is because they can't move through the conflict properly to go through the stages, to go through identifying the issue, identifying the root cause and the contributing factors, brainstorming new options, choosing a strategy and having agreement and then implementation.

They can't get there because they get stuck in the communication and the conflict and the power struggle, the fighting and all that, so they can't move through and finally put the thing to bed.

So they get into their dynamic, and this one always does this and says that, and this one always does and says that. That's the dance. And it produces the same outcome.

Well, if you change your dance steps, you don't hook in. You say this doesn't feel productive. I don't want to continue the conversation or let's defer this to later. Or you sound upset. Help me understand. What did I just do or say that caused that reaction? Whatever it is that you're like shifting and doing a pattern break. The other person can't do the dance anymore because you just changed the dance steps.

The other thing I want to mention, based on what you said a couple of minutes ago, because I think it's a really, really good point around you can't change the other person, and it always takes two people. Every relationship is a co-creation. Every single relationship. And even in situations of infidelity, so classic conventional wisdom counseling is the victim and the villain. The villain is the one that cheats. The victim is the poor wife or husband that had no idea.

And when I'm, I'm actually working with a couple right now where there is an infidelity, and my position is let's look at even the person that is cheated on. Now, it's painful. Betrayal is incredibly injurious and painful. However, every relationship is a co-creation. So what was your part in the deterioration of the relationship that created the circumstances for an infidelity to take place?

So it is really important for accountability to look at your part. And most couples that get into the power struggle and they're so angry and resentful by the time they come for help that all they can do is constantly vent about the other person and not really look at their own stuff. And you have to. You've got to look at your own stuff.

Alex Howard

And it can be hard and it takes courage, but it's ultimately the only way that things are going to change.

Lauren Mackler

That's right. That's right.

Alex Howard

I'm mindful of time, Lauren, but I'd just love to, as we start to come to the closing, just think about people that are watching this, listening to this that are feeling stirred up and thinking, I need to work on this relationship with myself. And we'll come to in a minute how people can find out more about your work, and certainly the book is a great place to start.

But what are some of the practical steps that you would suggest people start with to begin that journey of cultivating that relationship?

Lauren Mackler - [00:44:51]

Two things come to mind. One is to start paying attention to your internal state. Start paying attention to your reactions, your reactivity, your feelings, your emotions. That's number one, because your emotions and feelings are always byproducts of things that you've told yourself, perceptions, habitual perceptions of yourself in the world around you. And some people are more visual, so they'll play a movie and have more of a visual movie. And some people are more auditory, so they run their narratives. So start noticing what reactions you're having.

Then you say, okay, what just happened prior to that reaction? What was the trigger? The trigger might be an internal trigger. Something you told yourself, I'm so clumsy. Oh, you're so stupid. You never do that right. Or someone says, boy, you seem really spaced out. What's wrong with you? Or whatever it is. It can be an internal trigger or an external trigger.

So looking at your reactivity. Why did I react that way? What is it about me that causes me to when someone says something critical or they are even mean, are you okay? You seem spacey. I immediately take it as criticism. What is that about? Start digging and looking at that stuff. Start exploring it.

The other thing is, start listening to yourself talk. What do you tell yourself? Are you cultivating an internal garden? Are you cultivating an internal junkyard? So we are creating our emotional state, our internal state all the time by how we are treating ourselves, talking to ourselves, talking about ourselves internally and to other people and our reactions. And start to be the investigator of your own life. Start putting yourself under the microscope. Try seeking to understand vs to judge yourself.

So if you can start with those two things, start paying attention to what you tell yourself, how you talk to yourself, how you treat yourself and your emotional state. Those can be two practical ways to start the process of becoming more aware and learning more about what's up with you.

Alex Howard

Fantastic.

Lauren, for people that want to find out more about you and your work. What's the best way for them to do that?

Lauren Mackler

They can go to my website, which is my name, laurenmackler.com

There are also a lot of, people who are Hay House community members of Hay House Radio, I believe, I'm not maybe up to date, but I'm pretty sure those community members will have access to my radio show, which was called *Life Keys* that I did on Hay House Radio.

And then on iTunes there's also a lot of free podcasts of the *Life Key* show. If they put 'Life Keys with Lauren Mackler', they can get access to that. There are a lot of free resources there.

I have a blog on my website that has a lot of free articles and videos. And then on YouTube there's a lot of videos up there. And if they are interested in getting in touch with me because I work with people all over the world via Zoom, then they can also do that via my website.

Alex Howard

Fantastic.

And just a plug again, your book, *Solemate*, which I also highly recommend.

Lauren Mackler - [00:48:27]

Thank you.

Alex Howard

Lauren, thank you so much for your time. I really enjoyed this interview. Thank you so much.

Lauren Mackler

My pleasure. Thank you. I enjoyed it, too.