



Cultivating Bold and Brave Resilience

Guest: JJ Virgin

Alex Howard: Welcome, everyone, to this session where I am super excited to be talking with JJ Virgin. Firstly, JJ, welcome. Thank you so much for joining me.

J.J. Virgin: Oh, well thank you for having me.

Alex Howard: So I think this is going to be a really important interview. My sense is that part of what we're doing in this interview is exploring the life journey of what people go through when they experience what I think is probably one of the most traumatic things that one can go through in their life.

Before we come into it, I'm sure many people will know who JJ is, but just to give her professional background, Triple Board certified nutrition expert and fitness hall of Famer, JJ Virgin is a passionate advocate of eating and exercising smarter.

JJ and her team help people stay fired up and healthy as they age so they feel the best they ever had at 40 plus, which is good for me because I turned 40 in about a month's time so I'll be staying in touch.

JJ is a prominent TV and media personality whose previous features include co-host of TLC Freaky Eaters, two years as the on camera nutritionist for Weight Loss Challenges on Dr. Phil and numerous appearances on PBS, Dr. Oz, Rachael Ray, Access Hollywood and The Today Show.

She also speaks regularly and has shared the stage with notables such as Seth Godin, Lisa Nichols, Gary Vaynerchuk, Mark Hyman, Dan Buettner and Mary Morrissey.

JJ is the author of four New York Times best sellers, *The Virgin Diet*, *The Virgin Diet Cookbook*, *JJ Virgin's Sugar Impact Diet* and *JJ Virgin's Sugar Impact Diet Cookbook*.

Her latest book, which is what we're going to be exploring today, *Warrior Mom: 7 Secrets to Bold, Brave Resilience* shows caregivers everywhere how to be strong, positive leaders for their families while exploring the inspirational lessons JJ learned as she fought for her own son's life.

As I've been reading your book over recent days, one of the things that was very prominent in my mind as a father of three daughters is, I think, the greatest trauma as a parent we can go through is the potential fear that we're going to lose one of our children. And I found it very moving reading some of your story.

Just to sort of frame this, back in 2012, JJ's 16 year old son Grant was hit by a hit and run driver. And that obviously catalyzed that enormous journey for both JJ, her son and the family in general. JJ to open that a bit, just perhaps start by telling us a little bit of the story of what happened.

J.J. Virgin: Sure. And also the book could also be called Warrior Dad. So it's, you know, it actually started out as a miracle mindset. And, you know, as I really started to dig into it, I really went, it's really about being a warrior. And, you know, being a caretaker. And when you get down to it, we're all caretakers right? Now more than ever. And where we really need to start is with ourselves.

So I agree with you. I always said that I could handle anything as long as my kids were healthy and happy and safe. And I'm not going to take it further so I can just handle anything. But I had to go through this to prove it. So it was a very interesting time.

And some of this actually isn't in the book. Everything that was going on at the time that even just compounded this. I was a single mom and basically the financial support from my two sons, they're 15 and 16. And that first book you mentioned, the Virgin Diet, was coming out in a month.

Now, when you're writing a book, the easiest part of writing a book is writing the book. The biggest challenge in writing a book is launching that book. It takes so much energy to do that, and I had invested the entire book advance into the launch of the book. I'd also borrowed some money. I was determined. I knew that this was going to be the thing, like this was gonna be the catalyst that could help me get my message out into the world and also help set a future up for my family. So I went all in. And they say if you want to take the island, you've got to burn all the boats. My boats were burned, Alex. I was like in and it's this month before; my son goes out, crosses the street, like going to a friend's house. And the next thing I know, my fifteen year old son, Bryce - Grant was 16 at the time - comes running into the house and says Grant's been hit by a car and airlifted to the local hospital.

Now I mean, think of all the things that would run through your mind at that point, because they don't airlift you for a broken leg or a broken arm. I don't have any information. Even calling the hospitals or racing to the hospital, because he didn't have any information on him. The only reason we knew that he had been airlifted was because a policeman saw my son Bryce and said a kid got hit and looked just like you because they were one year apart.

Alex Howard: Wow. Wow.

J.J. Virgin: Yeah. Irish twins we call them. So we go to the hospital. And, you know, it's been so interesting before that. And if anyone's a working parent, they kind of get this. I kept writing in my journal every day 'I'm present for my children. I'm present for my children', but I wasn't doing anything about it. And when I was working, I was feeling guilty that I wasn't with my kids. When I was with my kids, I wasn't really there. I was working in my mind, you know. I mean, that whole work life balance thing to me is B.S. It's more like finding harmony. Right?

So, you know, here I am racing at a hospital with a bag. I'd throw my laptop and all this stuff with me. What am I thinking? Running to the hospital? I've got it with me. We go into a conference room, the doctor walks in and says, 'your son's been hit by a car and he is in a life threatening situation. And he's going to die sometime in the next 24 hours. He has a torn aorta, that kills 90 percent of people on the scene and he's got multiple brain bleeds. And the only way that he can survive this, is if he had a surgery. But we don't do the surgery at this hospital'.

And he said, 'you know, if we airlifted him to the next hospital, he'd never survive it. And even if he were to survive that, if we did the surgery, he probably wouldn't survive that. And even if you were to do both of those, he'd be so brain damaged, it wouldn't be worth it'.

And, you know, my son Bryce, my mathematician son, looks at that doctor like *grimace*. Fortunately, my son Bryce and both my kids had always been trained, first of all, to kind of defy authority.

Alex Howard: Having an entrepreneurial mum!

J.J. Virgin: Maybe just question it. To question authority a little bit, but also to see the possibility. Right?

And so the possibility Bryce saw was that it wasn't zero, that it was 2.5% chance. And Bryce looks at that doctor and he goes, we'll take those odds.

And I walked outside and I just got quiet, about present. And I listened.

And my question was just, 'Grant what do you want?'

You know, because when you're in a situation like that and they brought us to see Grant and Grant was covered in road rash, I mean, it was a picture I'll never get out of my mind. He's bloody. There's glass sticking out. There are bones sticking through his skin. He's on a

ventilator. He's got a tube coming out of his brain. Machines are beeping. And I walked outside and they said, 'Grant, what do you want?'

I just got present and I listened because, you know, I thought, I want to do what he wants. I don't know what the future holds. What if I go through all this stuff and I bring him back and he's a vegetable? What do I do? Do I fight?

And I got it, like, I was standing there, and I just got hit like, "fight for me, mom". Which is where *Warrior Mom*, after I published it for the first time I was like... *sigh*.

And so we went in and we said, we're overruling you, to this doctor, who is very angry, by the way, that we were gonna overrule him.

And we got him airlifted to the next hospital where we had five surgical teams, where they're assembled and ready to do what they do.

In fact, the doctor who was in charge used a stent to put into him that was as part of a study that was supposed to be used for adults. And the study was over. He goes, you know, I figured I'd ask for forgiveness. Which is the type of surgeon you want.

So he survived the airlift. He survived that surgery. And then I went in to see him. And first, the orthopedic surgeons had put in his rods. I go see the neurosurgeon, they go, 'we don't think he'll ever wake up'. I just thought, you know, I'm just not gonna listen to you.

I went in to see him and I'm standing there and he's got all the machines beeping. He is in a deep coma, multiple brain bleeds. He's got one finger, one finger there. I grabbed that finger and I said, 'Grant, I love you so much'. And, you know, the machines are beeping. Nothing happens. And I said, 'your brother is here and he loves you so much'. And I feel a squeeze. But that wasn't supposed to happen, right? Because he's in a deep coma, non-responsive.

Alex Howard: He's already defied the odds at that point.

J.J. Virgin: Right. And I feel it. And I'm thinking, OK, I'm really tired. I'm really tired. And then I threw out, 'and Grammy loves you so much' and I get nothing. And then I said, 'your girlfriend Mackenzie loves you so much'. And I get a squeeze of the finger. And the attempt to kind of lift my finger, my hand up.

And I was like, he is in there and he can hear me. And from that moment on, I remember looking and I said, 'Grant, you're a warrior. Your name means warrior. And you're gonna be one hundred and ten percent. And this is gonna be the best thing that ever happened to you.'

Because I fully believe that, you know, thoughts create. And I was gonna make sure that he knew that we were fighting for him and he had to fight and that I was bringing everything he needed to get him to 110 percent.

And that's what became my mantra from that moment on was what do I need to do to help my son become one hundred and ten percent?

Alex Howard: But that's a remarkable way to respond to such an ultimately traumatic experience. One of the things that touched me in the book is and I'm not sure if it was before this, so it might be in a later surgery, but you wrote an email to friends and you signed off the email saying, please pray for my son. I don't need your pity, but I need your strength. I know that was very touching, about what we really need in those moments of crisis.

J.J. Virgin: Yep, that was actually that first that first day I went. Now, it was very interesting, when I first went and saw him in the hospital. It was like I was watching a movie. I thought it was like this could not possibly be real.

I think your brain must do that, to go, this is not real. This could not be happening. And then as they were preparing him to put him on the helicopter and we did not know, I mean, they said he probably won't survive a helicopter ride like that. His aorta was going to rupture at any minute. Any minute. And I'm standing in this room with my ex-husband and my son, Bryce.

And then I went through the whole, like, it's my fault, like, you know, that whole thing. I shouldn't let him walk down the street, like all that stuff.

And my son Bryce is acting... He's sort of, he's, I feel like he's Yoda. You know, he's so old... And he's like, 'Mom this is not your fault'.

He walks back in to see Grant before we all have to leave. He goes, 'Dude, you look really ugly right now. But if anyone can get through this, you can, you know'.

And I'm like, who is this kid and how does he have this strength?

But, you know, after, as I was driving to L.A., it was a two and half hour drive, I left at 2:00 in the morning, I just called friends. I started calling friends on the West Coast. As it got a little later, I still started calling friends on the East Coast and I just let them lean in, like I let them. I was like going, I can't feel, I can't. And they just said, he's gonna get through this. I just leaned into them.

And then, you know, once I got to that point, as he was in surgery, that was the letter I wrote because I knew that I could not go through this alone.

And, you know, in life, like, I was never someone to ask for help. It's vulnerable. You feel weak. It's scary.

When your son's life is on the line, there's a lot of stuff that you never would have done before that you do. But one thing that I've really learned from that is that we are meant to do that.

We're meant to lean in with each other. I mean, that's probably the biggest challenge right now in this pandemic is not being able to be together and be strong together and lean in together.

So, yeah, I sent that letter out and said, listen, I just need your strength, not your sympathy. And people just poured in. They came to visit the hospital. They made me want to be a better person. I thought, would I be doing this like people I didn't even know? They drove hours to come pray for Grant. People were bringing us food baskets. It was amazing. And I let them, I let them all in, you know, like let them really in and just let that strength in. And, man, it really helped.

Alex Howard: There's something about having such an intense situation where those normal defenses get sort of blown out. It's like you can't respond in the conditioned, normal way because you're too much in shock, in a sense.

J.J. Virgin: Yeah, and what's interesting, you know, I wrote that whole book and I talked about the lessons that I learned while I went through this. But here's the reality of that, that I didn't realize until after, because so many people, as I was going through this experience, because part of what I was going to tell you, that I didn't get to yet is that, I had that book coming out and I actually had to launch that book, which I'll get to in a moment, from his bedside, with my son in a coma, you know.

And people kept saying, how did you manage to pull all this off? And, you know, tell me how you did it. Give us the lessons. But I realized that, what really I had been training my whole life, to be able to handle this level of stress. And so I think that we need to reframe the challenges that we go through, the trauma that we go through as we learn how to process through it.

That when you learn these tools, that you learn how to bring gratitude and how to ask for help, how to practice forgiveness, those become tools that help you deal with higher and higher levels of stress and trauma. Right?

Alex Howard: I think a lot of the conversation around trauma, and for understandable reasons, can be that how trauma causes suffering and wounds and some of damage that has to be healed.

But I think you're speaking to a very important point, that actually when one goes to the gym, what one actually does is, they cause a form of trauma to their muscle, they tear the muscle and the muscle grows back stronger as a result of that.

And it strikes me that in a sense, physically, you were in great shape and you had a physical capacity that meant you could be driving through the night and you could handle that pressure on your system. But also you've grown your capacity to think that things that one could frame as being negative, bad traumas, had actually been the preparation.

J.J. Virgin: Yeah, they were. Research and development. So that first night, the first 24 hours, that next night I'm now in the ICU. They've moved him to the paediatric ICU. He is front and center, in the middle in the paediatric ICU.

He looks like the Incredible Hulk because he's so swollen. And I'm standing there and I'm thinking, he's going to be one hundred and ten percent. I had to keep that in my brain. Like, I wouldn't let any picture of him, anything less than one hundred and ten percent, in. And so he had to be one hundred and ten percent. I'll tell you how I learned how to do that technique, because it's a really simple technique that can make all the difference.

I thought, all right. I'm not leaving. Turns out the number one cause of death for children is brain injury. One of the top three leading causes of death is death by doctor, like death in the hospital. So I'm not leaving. And if I don't make this book go, I will be bankrupt and I will not be able to help my son get to the one hundred and ten percent because this is going to cost a lot of money.

What the heck do I do now? And I realize that in order to help to save my son's life, be there still for my other son and get this book to go bigger than I had imagined it to be before, that the first thing I had to do was put my selfcare on the top of the list. And it helped me really reframe this whole idea.

I wrote a book that was to help with weight loss and in weight loss the biggest thing that happens is people tell you, 'we'll do it tomorrow'. And I kept going to health and I thought, here I am. And what if I hadn't walked in at the top of my game? You know, what if the level of stress I had to handle, the sleep issues at first, I mean, what if I hadn't walked in the top of my game?

I immediately set up my situation so I could get the sleep I needed, have great food. I had stress supplements. I set up my whole environment to be able to be successful and handle that level of stress. It was super duper important.

But I'd also been training for it for years. I'd had a mentor early in my thirties, who taught me that in order to be better in business and better in life, it's all about your mindset.

You know, mindsets to muscles like we talked about. And then the first thing she taught me was, the minute you had a limiting belief, she had me wear these rubber bands around my wrist. And whenever I had a limiting belief, she taught me to snap and say, cancel, cancel.

I lived at her house. I moved in. So, I mean, I now, I still have that, like, mental cancel, cancel. And so she taught me that thoughts create and that there are no limitations. They're only in your mind. And so I sat there, looking at Grant, you're gonna be one hundred and ten percent, which doesn't exist right?

And I just went from that premise forward. And even though the doctor's like, 'okay, this crazy lady over here...', they started treating him with more possibility, you know, it just started to shift because Grant is gonna be one hundred and ten percent. Plus I, that's the question I was asking, it's a very different question, 'how do I help my son survive?' versus 'how do I get my son to be one hundred and ten percent'?

Alex Howard: It's good old school psychology. It's great. And I think that mindset is infectious, right. When you're coming from that kind of perspective, it also impacts the people around you.

One of the things that also really strikes me JJ, is that I often think when we're going through an enormously challenging life situation, we need this sort of interesting mix of the sort of strength, that of the discipline and the commitment you're talking about, with what you've also spoken to, which is that place of surrender and that place of letting go and that place of trust. And I wonder, what helped you navigate those? Because both of those capacities were there.

How did you know when it was time to fight and push when it was tough? Because I think people can get too caught in either, they're fighting so much, they burn out from the fight or they're surrendering so much that they're a victim of the circumstance. And I wonder how you navigated that?

J.J. Virgin: I tend to be the one that jumps in and fights. My ex-husband tends to be the one that sits back and surrenders.

And then I had a really great friend who is an amazing psychologist. She's a professor at Pepperdine. And she would come over a couple of times to just sit with me. And I don't know what would have happened if she hadn't done that truthfully, because I would have probably been in fight mode all day long. Right? My ex-husband helped temper me. He'd come in with flowers, everything else, and go, OK, chill it, you know?

But she would come, and it was like someone just gave you a blanky. It's the only way I could explain. She'd come and just sit.

And it's a really important lesson if you have a friend or family member who's going through a challenging time because you know, you don't know what to say. Right? You don't need to say a thing. She would just come over and sit.

And it was so soothing and comforting, that I could just breathe and let my guard down, you know?

And so I think, if anything, that's what helped me, is that she helped me kind of just sit, trust and and take a deep breath because it wasn't going to be, like, I felt like I was kind of like darted up, adrenaline up, a lot of the time.

Alex Howard: In a sense, she was doing for you in a small way what you were doing for Grant, in a sense of just being there as a loving presence.

J.J. Virgin: I also knew, it was very interesting because I had some energy medicine, like when this happens, I had people sending me Tibetan Scrolls, holy water. They were like lighting candles in Catholic churches in France. And I'm like, 'great we'll take it all!'

Alex Howard: Not selective!

Alex Howard: I'm like, all of it. One and all. Like, let's do everything. Now I don't remember where that was going...?

Alex Howard: So you are talking about your friend coming and sitting with you and having that presence and having that support, someone being there.

J.J. Virgin: Oh, yes. OK. So someone sent me an energy healer who was a real... Who had nearly died. Near-death experience, just like Grant had a near-death experience. And he would call me as I was driving to the hospital every morning, like 0530 / 0600 in the mornings and tell me what was going on with Grant.

And the first time, you know, a friend says, 'here I'm going to have this guy call you' and I'm like, 'Oh, brother. Right. And. OK, I'll humor you because you're trying to be helpful. Fine'. And I'm talking to this guy. I walk in and he says, 'Grant's blood pressure is up. Just hold the phone up. I'm going to bring it down'.

I walk in, Grant's blood pressures up. I can see it on the machine. He does whatever thing he does. It comes down. I'm like, all right.

But he also made me realize, as I started to watch, is that Grant and I have always been very, very in tune. So, if I'm upset, anxious, Grant's upset, anxious. So, I knew that if I was going to be around Grant, I had to be calm and if I couldn't be, I needed to go out.

I only really actually lost it once in the hospital, which I was pretty thrilled about, you know. But the person that I yelled at, it was a friend of mine. I yelled at them like anything I was upset about ever in my whole life, he got yelled at for.

Alex Howard: We all need that person sometimes.

J.J. Virgin: I apologized after, he was like, 'I know why you were doing it. It's okay. It was fine. You just let me have it.'

But I also knew that with Grant, that whenever I came in, I had to come and play confident. I had to come in knowing he was going to be a hundred and ten percent. I couldn't let any of that stuff in. I knew he could feel it. And I knew he could hear me. And he even said, you know, 'Mom, when the gray man came down and asked me if I want to live or die, I really wanted to stay over there. It's amazing over there. But I kept hearing your voice, so I decided to come back.'

Alex Howard: Wow.

J.J. Virgin: So, you know, I think that energy you know, Jim Rhône talks about that, was that your incomes is the average of the five people you hang out with. It's not your income. It's your mindset. It's your weight. It's your everything. So... And it can be infectious. I was so clear on the things where Grant was going to be and, you know, pulling people in for this, that everybody starts to rally to the cause. Right?

Alex Howard: I've got this picture of, I think warrior mum truly is the right title for the book. I've got this image of you, as the warrior mom, being there for your son with the sort of army of support kind of coming in whilst launching a book. I mean, we know that the book was a blockbuster. But tell us how the story moved from that?

J.J. Virgin: So where do you want me to jump in from?

Alex Howard: Well, I guess particularly the piece actually that I'm curious about here is as the story was unfolding and moving forward and Grant started to make signs of progress and started to respond to that treatment, one of the things that I think can also be very tricky in these situations is, I'm sure there were many, many micro decisions along the way, like, do we go this direction or that direction?

And I think that's also true for many people that are on their own healing journey. One can get an analysis paralysis about every decision that has to be made. And one of the other lessons I really liked in the book is you made the point that you can't course correct when you're standing still. You have to be moving to get the feedback and the information.

J.J. Virgin: And by the way, I pushed the doctors faster than they wanted to go. I feel like, I'm a mom. I know, I really, really could feel where he was at. So I was pushing a little faster, like early on when he was just coming out of the coma, which, by the way, in the movies, when they come out, if someone comes out of a coma and opens her eyes and says, I love you, it is not like that. And all the doctors said was, 'when he wakes up, it will be ugly'.

But I didn't know that they meant five years of that and that when someone comes out of a brain injury, they come out over time, especially when it was one at the level the highest severity of a brain injury you can have, which is what he had.

And when he first woke up, all he did was stare off into space, to the side and move an arm. The only arm that was the only body part that wasn't in a cast, he moved it back and forth all day long and stared off into space and his eyes were vacant. And I remember thinking, I'd like to manage a mindset at that point where you're going, uh oh, you know. And I had to just find those signs every single day. So I started looking for them.

So what I did was, I started using essential oils because I could see his nose wiggle. I started getting popsicles and I wanted to see if he could sense a cold, if he could sense sweet. And I just started playing with his senses. And what I was looking at was, how do I wake up his senses?

As he started to connect more, I still remember when he actually started to make eye contact with me and started to smile. And I was doing touch. I had someone come in doing acupressure. I started throwing a ball at him. And, you know, I just, whatever they said, I kind of pushed a little further. I had a nutribullet in there. He spit out his own feeding tube and I was like, game on. I'm all in now.

Alex Howard: 'That's the sign I was waiting for.'

J.J. Virgin: Yeah. And I was like, here we go. So that I remember, once, I fed him too fast because he had to learn how to eat all over again. He had to learn how to eat, how to talk, how to tie shoes, how to go to the bathroom, how to brush his teeth, everything.

It was like having a 16 year old baby and I fed him too fast.

He proceeded to throw it all up. I'm going like, 'Oh, whoops', you know? But, you know, I just kept pushing it a little bit. I pushed it with the supplements and I looked at risk-reward because one of the things that, you know, when you have someone in a coma, is that the longer they stay in the coma, the higher the risk is that they'll always be in the coma and they'll die.

And then he had cachexia. He was wasting away. So it's like, I got to get the stuff, these nutrients, and he's certainly not going to be getting them from the hospital food. So, you know, and even when we moved him from one hospital to the next hospital because the hospital that saved his life was not a rehab hospital. And when we moved him to the next one, there got to be a point where I knew even though they wanted to keep him there and it would've been easier to keep him at that hospital, it was very structured. You know, I had built my office into the part of his hospital room. But we had nurses and rehab people all day, every day with him. And he was in a zipped up posi bed because he'd get so violent sometimes coming out of the brain injury. And it would've been way easier to keep him there.

But I knew that he'd gotten as far as he could there and the doctors were like, no, he needs to be here at least four to six more weeks. Well, as soon as his blood pressure was stabilized, which was the one I was looking for, I was like, we're gonna we're going to take him out.

Because I just felt like, if he was at home with recognizable things, we would progress faster there. And that made it a lot harder. I'm not going to lie. I mean, hard and scary, but I think it was a necessary thing. And who knows? I can't go back. Maybe that was the wrong move. But I think the worst thing you can do is nothing. And I'm an entrepreneur. We take risks and we stay in action. Right? So...

Alex Howard: I laughed out loud at one point where in the book, where there was a scene where the doctor said, you know, one of the things I want you to do is play table tennis and to play as much as you can. And before he got a chance to respond, you were like, yeah, Grant loves table tennis. So that's sort of, there's something about that determination and that sort of radical commitment that you do, whatever it is that you mentioned earlier, the analogy of if you going to take an island, burn the boats.

My question is, I wonder what supported and what cultivated that level of conviction and commitment from you?

J.J. Virgin: So many people have said, I couldn't do what you did. And I go, you never know. You know, we're never better than when we're challenged. You're a parent. You're sitting here looking at your kid. You hear about moms lifting cars off their kids.

I mean, I think when you're looking at your child and the quality of their life, there's nothing we won't do for it. And for them.

Alex Howard: But there's something particular I think, about going against, not going against, but questioning the path that's being laid in front of you.

J.J. Virgin: Ah, well, you know, I'm very fortunate in that I had a lot of graduate and doctoral courses in science and taken a lot of work in functional medicine. And my friends were all doctors. So all along the way, I was doing basically a risk reward analysis. I was never going to put my son's life in danger, but I knew that a bigger danger was not progressing. And so all along the way, I had amazing people that I was consulting with. I mean, Dr. Daniel Amen was coming to the hospital. So I had incredible people helping because, yes, I was doing stuff behind the doctors' backs at the hospital. I was giving him higher dose fish oil. I kicked up vitamin D, but I knew what those things were. And I also knew from my background in nutrition and functional medicine, that the hospitals are very traditional and they lag way behind. And that he had a far bigger risk not taking these things than taking them. So I just figured out how to get them to him.

Alex Howard: I guess at this point in the story where, you know, Grant's sort of home and he's obviously made enormous progress from the initial accident. But as you say, it's a very gradual, a very bumpy process when one is recovering from that.

One of the things that also strikes me is that often what happens when we go through a trauma is, initially that has that massive hit of adrenaline and stress hormones, that sort of, we adapt temporarily. And then at some point, there's normally an enormous crash that happens.

What's interesting here is, it wasn't just dealing with that situation, it was also a book launch, which is an ongoing and grueling process. It's then getting him home. And I want to get back to what you kind of mentioned earlier, about that your self care was critical, but say a bit more about how critical and how you were fitting that in? Because normally, a bit like you were saying with weight loss, people say I'll start tomorrow when it comes to self care. In crisis, people say, well, I don't have the time to do it.

J.J. Virgin: Yeah, well, make time. I had a great mentor early on in nutrition who said, if someone tells you they don't have the time, tell them to make time, you know?

And here's what I'll tell you about that. I'd been in a very stressful financial situation before this, where I'd had that high adrenaline and it basically took me out. And so I had already known that you can not do that.

And after the first 24 hours in the hospital, again, standing in the paediatric ICU and going, all right, this is not, you know, this is not a week long thing, I didn't know it was gonna be seven years to get him to one hundred and ten percent, but I knew it wasn't gonna be a month. And so that's where I went, 'I've got to show up here. I've got to show up for my family and I've got to do this book. And I can't afford to get sick.'

You know, if I get sick, I cannot go in and visit my son. I can't be here. You can't walk into the paediatric ICU if you've got a sniffle. It's just like, now I look at what's going on with the pandemic, you know, it's like most people can't afford to get sick. And so what do you need to do? Like, is this a wake up call so that we practice that self care that we need to practice so that hopefully if we do get sick, we get through it quickly?

And so that's what I did. I just made sure I walked in healthy already. But then I made sure I put the time in and I was getting to the hospital between 5:30 and 6:00 in the morning and usually leaving somewhere between 8:00 and 9:00 at night. I made sure that I got at least eight hours of sleep. So whatever I had to do in there to swing that. So I got my eight hours of sleep, I made sure that I had healthy food and I found a gym that was a quarter mile away and Whole Foods would deliver, and sometimes I just ran up and down the hospital stairs and took my son out and pushed him around once they could put him into a more cardiac, big wheelchair.

But I just prioritized that, that my top priority was my self care, because if that wasn't there, I was not going to be able to do what I need to do for my son. And I certainly wasn't gonna be able to do what I need to do for that book launch. There were things coming up in that hospital on a regular basis that were life and death decisions and that I had to be a part of. And you have to be able to think straight.

I surveyed my audience a couple years ago and I said, if you are not where you want to be with your health, you're not where you want to be with your weight. Why not? And we just asked an open ended question. And honestly, I thought that they would say, oh, can't give up my ice cream, you know? Oh, you know, I thought it would be those things, oh I don't have time. But we had an overwhelming response. I mean, people writing pages. And the number one reason people told me they weren't where they wanted to be with their health was because they didn't feel worthy. They didn't feel like they were important enough. And so I always question when someone tells me they don't have time, right? Because you really vote with your time, don't you?

Alex Howard: I think one of the things that can also happen when someone's in a caregiving role, as you were in such an intense way at this point, is they almost feel that they need to suffer alongside that person. That your son, that you know, you love as much as anyone in the world, and it's like, well, who am I to go and feel good in my body and to exercise and to eat good food and get enough sleep? I have to sacrifice all of myself for him. And of course, the point that you're making, which I think is so important, is actually your act of love for him is also taking care of yourself.

J.J. Virgin: Right. Absolutely. Yeah, I think you've really got to flip that whole mindset, because if you want to be able to show up strong as a caretaker, here's the thing, we are all gonna go through tough times. I mean, I just had been fortunate that I'd gone through some

really rough stuff before this one hit. And then I had an amazing mindset mentor at 30 who made this all a part of me. And I'd had a chance to to exercise it for years, so that when this hit, it all was already in me.

We know we're gonna have tough times and we know also that part of life is taking care of others. And if you have not taken amazing care of yourself, if you can't show up strong, you're not going to be able to take care of them. You're just not. I've got a friend right now who is taking care of a loved one who had ALS and then she came down with breast cancer because she was sacrificing herself. And we just have to manage this. And it's possible. It is. But it first starts with that mindset shift of, in order to take the best care of my son, in order to take the best care of my spouse, it first starts with making sure that I'm 100 percent because I have no margin for error. Right? That's what I knew. I go, what happens if I get sick and I cannot be at the hospital for him?

Alex Howard: Well, it was, to use a not perfect metaphor, it was like your Olympics, right? It was like the moment in your life that you wanted to be your greatest strength and your greatest capacity. And when someone goes the Olympics, they're not out partying every night. They take care of themselves to perform their best.

J.J. Virgin: Exactly. And here's the thing, I looked at my whole schedule, so that first night, the first 24 hours, I'm staying in the hospital, I'm realizing that, you know, I've got to make sure that I have my time for sleep and I get my exercise in very efficiently, I wasn't going to the gym for hours, I was like, very efficient. I had good food. I went through and I go, what doesn't need to be in my life? I like the acronym ADD for this. What can you automate, delegate, delete? I literally looked and I went, there are so many things. Like somebody says, 'Oh, I can't take care of myself'. But look at all the stuff that you are doing that you really don't need to do. Someone could do it faster, better, cheaper. It just really doesn't matter at all if you do it anyway, you know, and you'll find that time.

So I looked at this and I went, all I have to do right now is make sure that I'm at the top of my game to be able to pull this off and be here for my son and sit bedside while I'm here with my son and make sure that I crush this book launch bigger than I ever imagined, imagine even bigger than that. So that my son, whatever I need to do to get him to one hundred and ten percent and beyond, I can do.

Alex Howard: So many people don't know what happened with the book launch. So just for folks that don't, can you tell them what happened?

J.J. Virgin: So it was great because the hospital gave me a room to be able to do interviews and sometimes now I could run if I had to do TV stuff. But my book was on The New York Times for 26 weeks.

I broke my first million dollars in my business, sitting beside, pictures of me getting the news on my laptop, my business basically 10x. I reached, gosh, a million people. I had a really successful public television special. And I'll tell you what's interesting. I wonder, would it have been that successful if you know, it's if success wasn't optional here, it wasn't mandatory, like I had to make that.

There was no I, I put myself already there with everything I'd invested in it. And I know it would have been successful, but the level that it was successful was beyond what I'd imagined. And I do think, you know, there was no option there. It had to be. And I had such a bigger purpose. I was talking in business, when I'm doing business, you know, coaching or even when I'm doing weight loss and health coaching, I'm going, what is your why? And make sure that it's big enough to keep you moving forward.

Well, I had a "Why" that whatever happened, I was gonna make darn sure. And we had all sorts of stuff blowing up during this thing. But all I saw was Grant at one hundred and ten percent. And this was one of the things that I had to do to get him there. So I was going to do whatever it took.

Alex Howard: It's an amazing story. And let's just complete then. And I know you said several times that it wasn't like Grant completed that first stage of rehabilitation and then it was happily ever after. So just say a little bit about those eight years ago that it happened. You said it's taken seven years to get it back, 110 percent.

J.J. Virgin: Yeah, well, he's better than before the accident. It was very interesting prior to the accident. He'd struggled with what they thought was bipolar disorder. I never really felt like he fit anything. And so it was very interesting having him come out of a coma with some psych issues and no one knew who the heck he was going to wake up. Compounded with, when you have a brain injury, you lose your filter. So for him, he became super angry and violent and scary. And we never knew, like, you would start to see it between his eyes, he'd get this furrow here, like the Incredible Hulk. We're like, oh, it's coming out.

So that happened, and that's cycled for years. Along with that, traumatic brain injury can make people severely depressed. It's one of the highest risked for suicide. And he tried to kill himself multiple times, too. In fact, when I was writing this book, he tried to kill himself. And I remember thinking, you know, he's going to kill himself. Like, you know, at some point you're not there 24/7. And I thought he could kill himself and this book is coming out. And then I thought, this book is not about Grant getting to 110 percent. This book is about how you show up, and what you need to do. It's not the outcome. It's what you are doing moving towards that.

But I'll tell you, like, I wasn't going down without a fight with him.

Alex Howard: That doesn't surprise me JJ.

J.J. Virgin: I mean, I remember once, I was like, you know, he's here. He'd had a knee surgery and he had all this pain and he needed more pain medicine. He'd taken all he could and went, I'm just gonna go, I'm gonna go walk in front of a car and get hit by a car. And he had a walker and he wasn't really putting weight on the knee. And I'm trying to hold him. And he's now like a hundred and eighty pounds. I'm trying to hold him down.

Alex Howard: And of all the ways he's threatening to end, he's trying to end it...

J.J. Virgin: Right. I'm like, the hell you are. We just went through this. No, you're not, you know. Anyway, he is now walking down the street with a walker. I'm trying to hold on to him. I'm calling nine one one.

The paramedics are streaming down in a fire engine. I thought this was just ridiculous. But I kept telling him, we did not get here for you to do this. This doesn't end this way. Forget it.

He swallowed a handful of pills once and it was like the same thing. The paramedics come and we are piled on top of him, holding him down. They're walking in, they're like, huh? You know, the paramedics in our neighborhood got very, very used to this.

But I just kept telling him, like, you're going to go through these things and come out of them. And then I just kept doing things, we did stem cells, we did biofeedback, we did hyperbaric. We just kept doing more and more stuff.

Then I found a doctor who said, you know, did you ever look at Lyme disease or any of the confections that have Khosro inflammation? What he had prior to the accident sounds like that. And that was the final thing that we've done as we worked with that and worked with an infectious disease doctor who works with another one in Africa and uses all the special stuff. And Grant is now one hundred and ten percent. And it is the like, wildest, craziest route to get there.

But I think, you know, if you have the super clear why and this big vision goal and you really get that the only limitations or limitations is your mind, you just keep taking a step forward and step forward. And the path is like all over the place. We get here. Right.

Alex Howard: Yeah, if I was a kid going through an accident, I'd want you as my mom. I mean, it's an amazing testimony to, you know, to you as a person, but also the teachings and the things that many things have prepared you for that moment.

J.J. Virgin: Well, that's the takeaway, that's really important, you know, I grew up, I'm adopted, my brother's schizophrenic. My dad had this really horrible death from cancer. An

uncle hung himself in the garage. I had, you know, we had some really challenging business things that happened.

And I don't think I'm unusual. I think we all have these things. And that if you work through these every time you go through these, there's lessons and silver linings and all of them.

Heck, there's silver linings all over the place in the pandemic. And so, you know, if it doesn't kill you, makes you stronger.

I mean, you just keep showing up and getting stronger. And then you look at the most successful people out there. It's not that they had the easy stick hit him. It's really that they just have better resilience. They have more stress tolerance. They've had more life lessons. And they've learned how to manage these things because we're all gonna go through them. We might as well get good at it.

Alex Howard: I mean, but that attitude is also a choice. Those silver linings, one can choose to see them or one can choose to not. And I think that's part of what's very inspiring about this story is what you went through, I can't imagine anything more traumatic that I could go through, but you made a number of choices along the way, which would not have always been easy choices about how you chose to respond to that.

J.J. Virgin: Yep

Alex Howard: JJ, I'm mindful of time. For people that want to find out more about you and your work. We haven't even touched in this interview, about other bodies of work. we've sort of mentioned a few times your first book. But say a bit about where people can find out more and what people can find.

J.J. Virgin: Everything is at my Website, jjvirgin.com.

I really see the mindset of work as the most important of all, because once you have the mindset down, the rest of it becomes fair, you know, then you just need strategies, right? But strategies without mindset, you're going to fail every single time.

So you'll find I've got my blog, my podcasts, my YouTube channel, all sorts of recipes, programs, books like anything you could need to be successful. But if I was going to say to start somewhere, I would start with *The Warrior Mom* and probably *Miracle Mindset*, the whole training we have through it.

Alex Howard: Awesome. JJ Virgin, thank you so much for one of my favorite interview of the conference. Thank you.

J.J. Virgin: Thank you.