

Ep #16: You Don't Have To (You Get To)



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With Your Host

Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

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It's so easy to get wrapped up in the stories of the things you have to do; from brushing your teeth or following a specific nutrition plan, to meditating or showing up for work. And we can lose sight of our own power and agency to choose to do these things, to potentially even find joy in the fact that you've taken loving care of yourself today, whatever that may look like, when we're telling a story that starts with, "I have to."

Today, we're going to take a look at these words, have to versus get to, and how the words we use to describe our lives and choices affect the way we feel about how we're living. Have you been rolling around in have-to stories? Are you feeling burdened by all the things you have to do today? Well, you're not alone, so listen in as I talk about how I shifted away from telling a have-to story, the peace and love and joy I've found in telling get-to stories, and of course, my tips on how to get yourself there.

You're listening to Feminist Wellness, the only podcast that combines functional medicine, life coaching, and feminism to teach smart women how to reclaim their power and restore their health! Here's your host, Nurse Practitioner, Functional Medicine Expert, Herbalist and Life Coach, Victoria Albina.

My perfect love, hello, hello, how are you? I'm doing so well. I'm so excited. It's starting to feel like summer. I love the heat, the sun, the barbeque, the days in the park and at the beach. New York city is perfect this time of year; not quite hot enough to be all, like, stifling and smelly, not yet humid, though my curls really do love the humidity. That is a bonus to the humidity for sure. It's perfect out and I feel it in my little heart every day when I wake up to sunshine.

So, last week, we talked, you and I, about how suffering is optional, how things happen in life that we may not like, like my aunt dying; didn't love that, your partner leaving you, your boss saying they don't like your work, what have you. And you get to choose to add to your suffering by blaming

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or shaming yourself or others, telling stories about how you should have done something differently, therefore choosing to send that second arrow of suffering right into your own tender heart.

I've obviously been thinking a lot about this; about the choices we make in our lives and the words that shape every inch of our experience on this planet. And I have a deep belief that not only is suffering optional, everything is optional. And I think that differentiating between obligatory and optional is so important.

So, suffering, not suffering, you have a choice there. Finding joy in life, despite the situation or circumstances, you have a choice there. Eating gluten, dairy, sugar, drinking alcohol or coffee, working out, now working out, taking your supplements, your medication, going to work, you have a choice there, my loves, in all the daily activities of life. And when it comes to the stories we tell about our lives, the science backs me up.

I believe in the cognitive behavioral science-based framework of the think-feel-act cycle. Life happens, we have thoughts about it, and because of our thoughts, we have feelings. We take action based on what we feel and the results we see, or don't see, in our lives are based on this cycle, which starts with our thoughts.

When we want to change our lives to take a different action, feel a different way, create a new outcome or result, we get to change the way we think about our lives to make that new action possible. Think the same old thoughts; feel the same old ways. Take the same old actions; have the same old results.

So when I say that everything we choose to do in life is optional, my point is this; if you're looking at the actions you need to take to get new results and you're thinking, "I have to work out or eat vegetables or not drink alcohol or forgive myself, I have to not body shame myself, I have to not hold onto

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resentments, I have to change the way I think if I'm going to feel a new way."

See, when you're thinking a negative thought about that choice, that will make you feel upset, frustrated, angry, resentful and not excited, grateful, optimistic, energized, motivated, and not even the baseline feeling that enables us to take action even when we don't want to, which is feeling neutral about the action we need to take; not negative or positive, just accepting that doing X will lead to the Y we most desire to feel the best in our bodies.

It's from that accepting place that we can get shit done in our lives versus the negative holding pattern of angry at life, or grumpy about a change. It's impossible to take life-affirming action from that place. Negativity breeds negativity. Acceptance creates space for new beginnings. To say it quite clearly, the destination will feel just like the journey.

Let's say you're like most people in the northern hemisphere. You see summer coming, you think beach, bikini, and you start to feel terrible about yourself, so you starve yourself to lose weight and feel like crap about yourself the whole time you're dropping those 20lbs. Beating yourself up, shaming yourself, et cetera, it's unlikely you'll feel joy and deliverance when the scale gets to a specific number. And you'll likely just find something else to critique yourself about, versus if you decide to shift your nutrition and movement choices from a place of self-love and acceptance and choose to stop buffering with overeating or what have you.

And if you take yourself out for a walk every day because you promised yourself you would and it feels great to learn to trust yourself again, then the journey towards health will feel like a beautiful one. And as these new choices become habits, the destination of being someone who eats in line with their intuition and who moves because it's life-affirming for them to do

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so, will feel like a gift you've given yourself rather than a burdensome slog towards that perfect beach body story.

Each and every time, my love, each and every time, the destination will feel like the journey, and that is our focus today; how to shift the story of the journey with just a few little words to begin to create the space that will allow you to shift your thoughts and feelings so you can take the actions that will get you the results you want in this one precious short little human life.

And those words, those words are, "Have to." So I see have to as an external pressure, something forced upon us, something we don't own. Get to is an internal motivation based in empowerment and agency. Get to is by you, for you. Your body, your choices, and you get to choose which language works for you, which one serves you.

I know I used to say, "I have to," all the time with this, like, womp-womp energy, "I'll be with you guys in a minute, I have to meditate. You know, whatever, I like, have to work out. I have to call that friend back." And in doing my daily thought work, I've come to see how much my thoughts and framing my self-care and my thought work, my job work as obligation made it feel like an obligation, like a hate-to versus a get-to.

One of the most powerful shifts I've made in my health and wellness is to choose a new thought about the things I choose to do, and that starts with recognizing that I can make choices in this life, that I get to work out, that I get to eat food that makes me feel amazing, that I get to own my part in an argument or disagreement and I get to apologize, to make amends and to release myself from that burden.

I get to feel my feelings, from anger to sorrow to joy, to process them through my body and right on out. I get to take care of myself, my family, the folks in my care, and that is a massive privilege, a fact I don't take

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lightly, and recognize may not feel as accessible for everyone based on social location. I want to acknowledge that clearly and I get how this can feel quite complicated.

I don't live in a food desert. I shop at a cooperative grocery store in a fancy little Brooklyn neighborhood. I don't walk around this world in black or brown skin. I can code shift quickly and easily. I speak multiple languages, have educational privilege, on and on. And get-to, as I'm proposing it here, is a mindset, even when life feels like a set of have-tos.

Only you know whether this is the right framework for you to approach the challenges you face in your life, but it can't hurt to try. For most of the folks I work with in my practice, starting to shift your thinking away from have-to to get-to leads to a sense of freedom and empowerment. Each moment, you get to choose whether this idea, this very notion, is helpful and I want to honor that this concept is complex and complicated in terms of putting it into action. And as a mental exercise, it can be so helpful for so many of us and we each get to choose what we want to do and we get to recognize when it's safe and possible to apply this framework.

And when it comes to the daily tasks of my life, I get to do so many things in order to have a healthy digestion and mental health. I don't have to do any of these things. I can eat gluten. I can drink alcohol and caffeine. I can skip my meditation and my workout. I can do all of that. And there will be consequences, and I can choose to take those consequences on. That is totally available to me.

I can go back to having terrible daily heartburn, IBS, depression, anxiety. I can go back to being bloated, to having belly pains, joint pain, inflammation, sadness, that's 100% available to me. And it's clear, at this point in my life, that there are behaviors, actions, thoughts, that I can engage in that can keep me feeling my best. And I can also choose, in the moment, to get more sleep if I'm tired and to put a task off if doing so is

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truly a net-positive for me. I can recognize when I get to make those choices. I can choose to skip a workout if I'm sick and I can recognize that I get to choose rest.

And if I'm on a road trip and I'm hungry and out of snacks, I can choose to eat what's available, or to be hungry until we get to food that I know works better for my body. I get to make those choices. As always, my message is one of balance and deep self-love, about listening to your perfect human body and showing up in the healthiest most checked-in way possible and staying in the flow of what that means one day at a time.

And most days, I choose the path that keeps me feeling balanced, sane, well, the path that allows me to show up for myself, for you all, for the people I love. And doing the daily things that keep me well doesn't feel like a burden when I recognize that I don't have to do any of it, not a single thing; I get to, and I'm so grateful.

We can also apply this framework beyond the things we actually may want to do and to the things that we experience as burdens, as struggles, as challenges, as frustration points in our lives. One of the ways I hear these have-to stories showing up the most for my patients and clients beyond the, "Have to take supplements, have to give up gluten," that whole thing is around housework. And so, I've been thinking a lot about my own relationship to daily domesticity.

So stay with me here. I was socialized as a woman and was socialized to clean, to do chores, to be a good little Latina, to take my dad's dish to the sink after dinner, to prepare breakfast for myself and my sister through middle and high school because both of our parents were working. At some point, some patriarchal story about a clean home being a sign of womanly success got into my head, particularly as a Latinx femme.

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And I judged myself against what I thought others would think about me based on how spotless and tidy my house was or wasn't. It got all mixed up with my valuing myself as a human. Needless to say, I have had a complex relationship with housework as an adult.

My partner, an amazing human animal, sees housework differently than I do. And this was a source of tension for some time because I was coming to the issue with a specific story about how it should be done. And as a feminist, I have a lot of thoughts about equal distribution of labor, the importance of cooperation, particularly in the domestic realm, and the ways in which mammals who are socialized as women are asked to do not just the physical labor of keeping up a house, but the emotional labor and psychic labor of noticing when there's not enough toilet paper and making sure to buy it, recognizing when the little things are about to run out and always staying one step ahead.

In the last few years, I've done a lot of thought work on this issue and have come to think about and talk about my own standard for cleanliness, tidiness, et cetera from a place of get-to and not have-to. I mean, at first, let's be real, because have-to feels like crap and was leading to discord in an otherwise phenomenal relationship.

I've come to realize that if I want the house to look a certain way right now, that is my thought leading to my feeling and that I get to choose to keep things looking how I want them. It doesn't matter if my partner doesn't want to do the things I want them to do exactly the way I want them done when I want them done. They are an adult and they do plenty around the house, don't get me wrong, and they don't have to do anything they don't want to do and I don't have to get mad about it or frustrated about it, let alone make it mean anything.

I can own the part of housework that's what I want done and I can do it myself without any martyrdom or feelings of being put upon because I have

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come to realize that I don't have to do it. I could let the laundry pile up, but I don't want to. I could let the compost pile up, but I don't want to. I could let the dust bunnies enjoy their dusty lives under the couch, but I don't want to. So I clean because I want the house clean. And therefore, cleaning is something I want to do.

And if I want help, I ask for it in a calm resentment-free way because I know that I'm not being put upon by my own stories of what a clean house looks like and the stories about what it might mean about me. I want things a specific way. I can be picky, I'll own that, so I tend to it.

I changed my thoughts to change the way I feel, which allows me to take action from a place of feeling empowered, to keep my living spaces and my office the way I want them for me, on my terms, without grumpiness or any kind of bullshit. And to be real, dropping the rock of being annoyed, frustrated, resentful with my partner has opened up such a gorgeous space for us to find compromise and cooperation and for them to show up for household work in so many way.

It turns out that they are a very helpful human, they just don't want to be nagged. And that's the action I was taking. Again, I will own that, from that place of being so aggrieved by my own choices. And dropping those unhelpful stories about my sweet love being unhelpful has opened up space for me to see the tasks that they do for our family that I have no interest in doing.

They move the car twice a week, which is a thing New Yorkers will understand, for sure. They book and plan all our travel. And when they want the house to be cleaned in a specific way, they do it because they want to, not because they have to.

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This realization has led to so much harmony in my life. It's a really beautiful thing and has been a great place to apply this framework that we don't have to, we get to.

So, you may be thinking, "Hey, Vic, yeah, so this is cool, but I have to feed my kids, I have to pay my taxes, I have to go to work." But the truth is, you don't. You can choose not to feed your kids or look after them, but you might lose them pretty quickly one way or another. You don't have to pay your taxes, but why don't you go ahead and ask Al Capone how that one works out? Probably not a great plan.

You don't have to go to work, but your boss might have something to say about that, and you may get fired, lose your home, have to sleep on your cousin's couch, and that may not be what you want for your life. There are consequences for not doing certain things in our lives, for sure, but that have-to energy, man, that energy sucks. It sucks the life and the joy and the peace and the calm right out of your life.

If you have access to a machine that plays podcasts, then you likely have the privilege of being able to feed your kids something. How remarkable, so many people in the world live with food insecurity and literally don't have access to food. If you're being asked to pay taxes, you likely have a job or some kind of income, that's awesome. And if you have a job to go to, man, what a beautiful thing, even if it's not the job of your dreams, even if you'd like to quit and take on a radically new career, for today, you get to go to work. Right on.

We get to pause and go back to the science. Folks who choose to sit in gratitude have reduced levels of circulating cortisol, less stress chemicals in their body, and have less incidents of everything from heart attack to cancer. Gratitude is a beautiful practice, and when you sit in the get-to the gratitude just flows.

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And while we're talking about health and healing, I hear this have-to story from folks in my medical care all the time. "Do I have to take all these supplements? Do I have to quit coffee?" I think you know the answer. The answer is no, of course not. You don't have to do any of it. But your tummy might not feel better and you might still be anxious with all that caffeine in your veins. But you're an adult and you just don't have to, but you get to if you want to heal.

It's that simple. As humans socialized as women, we're told that there are a thousand things that we have to do; be thin, be pretty, remove the hair that nature puts on our bodies, make children and raise them, not speak up in meetings lest you upset the boss, not rock the boat at home by asking for what you want, not own your sexuality, toe the line, be a good girl. And I want to call BS on all of that.

You get to do what you want to do for your own life. No one else gets to write your story. If you don't want to do a task, you don't have to do it. And if you don't want to, I don't know, shave your legs or your underarms, don't. Just know that someone might say something about it, and that's cool. That's just them voicing their thoughts about your body and you don't have to make it mean anything.

Meanwhile, if you want to shave or wax or whatever, go for it. Again, your body, your choices. This week, my love, I want to invite you to ask yourself, when you're feeling annoyed by a task, find yourself buffering against doing or feeling something, spiritually bypassing a sensation provoked by your thoughts, ask yourself, is this something I truly have to do? Is that a fact? Or do I get to do whatever the thing is?

Can I find a way to hate doing it just a little bit less just for today? Could hating it a little bit less open up some space to just get it done? And if you decide that you honestly don't want to clean up someone else's mess or don't want to do your job or eat vegetables or skip the gluten or whatever it

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may be, remember that you don't have to. But if you choose to, do so without resentment, recrimination, anger at yourself or others.

You made that choice as an empowered adult human. Own it, my love. I hope that this new framework has been helpful for you. I want you to feel so amazing in your body. I want you to feel so healthy, strong, happy, and well, and you get to choose what that means for you and how you want to get there, completing self-care tasks by grumpily checking things off a list is unlikely to get you the joy and confidence-filled life of your dreams.

Take a deep breath, you got this, and you get to live your life to the fullest. Breathe into those moments where you hear yourself saying, "Have to," give yourself a little love, it's just an old habit, and see if you can shake yourself free from those old thoughts and shift it to see where you get to.

Take a moment to hop on over to my website to download your free have-to get-to worksheet at victoriaalbina.com. Say hey over on my Instagram and Facebook @victoriaalbinawellness. I'd love to hear from you. I'd love to hear your comments and most of all, I hope that this podcast and everything I'm making for you is so helpful. Be well. Take good care of yourself, and remember, when one of us heals, we help heal the world. See you next time, my love. Be well.

Thank you for listening to this week's episode of *Feminist Wellness*. If you like what you've heard, head to VictoriaAlbina.com to learn more.