

Paleo Solution - 295

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Robb Wolf:

I'm frequently asked how we feed our kids here at the Wolf household. I just did a quick cooking demo with my daughter Zoe that you can check out over at Thrive Market. I know most of you have probably heard about Thrive Market but if you haven't, this is a perfect opportunity to check them out. For the next seven days, Thrive is giving away a free jar of tava ghee to both new and existing members who make a minimum purchase of \$50. This offer runs until Monday November 16th or while supplies last. Go to ThriveMarket.com/Wolfghee and check out the video Zoe and I did and get your free jar of tava ghee. That's ThriveMarket.com/Wolfghee.

I think most of you know that I'm a big fan of Hylete. I was an early adopter of their phenomenal athletic gear. They've been huge fans supporters of all things paleo, all things Robb Wolf so very grateful for those folks.

They've come up with a really cool new program. If you go to Hylete.com/RobbWolf, then you will create an account where you'll receive a \$25 gift code that you can use on your first purchase. You will always receive free shipping and RobbWolf.com listeners get exclusive pricing. So if you want to check them out, if you've already checked them out, but you want to get additional discount, additional fantastic pricing or if you are new to Hylete, go to Hylete.com/RobbWolf and get signed up and give them a look and see.

Hi folks. Robb Wolf here, another edition of the PaleoSolution podcast, very excited for today's guest. Chris, aka, Squatchy actually put this book on my radar *The Myth of Stress* by Andrew Bernstein although we're going to call him Andy Bernstein today because he told me he only goes by Andrew if he's in trouble. But when this book first went across my desk, I was kind of like huh, this is a very different take on the stress response, clearly me being in kind of the ancestral health scene, I oftentimes look at stress as another discordant story, a mismatch between our evolutionary underpinnings and current day kind of environmental situation. But Andy first welcome to the show and how are you doing today?

Andy Bernstein:

I'm doing great. Thanks. It's a pleasure to be on here with you Robb.

Robb Wolf: Awesome. Cool, well I'm super stoked. I know we've run across each other a few times out in the real world and whatnot. Hey talk to folks a little bit about your background and then I definitely because you know, I think most folks that follow this show in particular they've got a little bit of an orientation in this evolutionary medicine, ancestral health scene. Give folks a little bit of your background and then definitely unpack maybe the misconceptions about a discordant story here with regards to stress. I think that would be really interesting.

Andy Bernstein: Sure. So my background is actually literary criticism. You know, I was on track to become a professor of literature and was steeped in critical thinking and then I had all these challenges in my personal life. Some loss of loved ones, my dad and my little sister and then some emotional – some like relationship stuff with my ex-girlfriend that just got me really interested in how to live a happy life and how to deal with stuff.

So I started trying stuff on my own a lot of different processes and then I ended up creating -- so the shorter version and I can expand on it if you like but the shorter version is I ended up creating a process that changes or challenges the way that most of us deal with these sorts of issues in our lives. So I took my critical thinking toolkit. I ended up applying it to self-help processes. I spent three years working with a woman named Byron Katie who is an amazing woman, bestselling self-help author and then had this idea for another way of helping people deal with challenges based on some of my experiences. So I started teaching that in 2004 and I've been teaching it ever since.

Robb Wolf: Interesting. So talk a little bit about the notion that our current type of stress. Like I've definitely been a subscriber to this that ancestral stress was punctuated somewhat randomized and no chronic and you know, today's stress tends to be more crushing, chronic, difficult to avoid, etc. etc. I think you had some differing views on that. Could you address some of that?

Andy Bernstein: Sure. So yeah and maybe we can get into the whole idea of Hans Selye, and stressors and stress being a biological --

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Robb Wolf: Right.

Andy Bernstein: Yeah. So the main, the party line idea is that the reason we experience so much stress today is because once upon a time our caveman and cavewoman ancestors would face challenges like sabre tooth tigers. In that scenario, hormonal cascade, adrenaline, cortisol is helpful. It's helpful. It's you want that because it's going to liberate glucose, you're

more likely to survive that encounter and then have offspring. If you didn't have that, obviously you don't survive if you don't have offspring. So over many generations that sequence of tiger, stress response, tiger stress response gets strengthened and then we're told it stops working for us. It works against us and because now there are no longer saber tooth tigers and we've got all these traffic jams and flight delays and issues with our kids and our jobs and money and our in-laws. What we're told as we become victims of our own biology. That what was an occasional helpful response is now a constant harmful response and all we can do is manage our stress.

That whole idea I call that myth of stress. So maybe I should just make clear that even though I wrote a book called the myth of stress, I don't think stress is a myth. Stress is real. But I think there's a myth here and for me the myth is that it comes from the external world, from circumstances, from what we call stressors. I think my argument is stress doesn't come from what's going on in your life, it comes from your thoughts about what's going on in your life.

I help people think differently about challenges. If it's a tiger, then the opportunity to think differently is moot. I mean you just want to run.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Andy Bernstein: Or fight it. So but most of us aren't really facing tigers anymore. Most of us are facing challenges with money and success and family life and work life balance. And that's a very different game. So I want people to step back and challenge the broader concept so you can see that it's actually coming from something in your thoughts and then that introduces the opportunity for...

You know, really what it does is it takes stress out of the physiological biological domain and puts in the educational domain so now stress is a skills gap. Now there's something that you could learn to think differently.

Robb Wolf: Andy, correct me if I'm wrong but this reminds me a lot of like kind of stoic philosophy and maybe even some elements of like Buddhist meditation and whatnot like basically trying to get some distance from one's thoughts. Instead of you know, which I'm not a neuroscientist but my understanding of like the amygdala and the emotional response and that reptilian brain hijacking our thinking and becoming kind of an ingrained pattern. Is there something to that that's occurring here?

Andy Bernstein: Yeah. I think a lot of the – there is. There’s something to all of that. The stoic stuff, the Buddhist stuff , and the neurophysiology stuff there’s overlap. Stoicism just to start with that one people now think that being stoic is about not having any emotions. That’s how the dictionary will define it like he’s very stoic in his lack of response.

But actually if you go back to Greek and Roman stoicism, it was not about not having emotions. It was about having lots of emotions but just the positive ones. They learned how to challenge negative thinking so they would only have the upside. Buddhism I think does something similar. You know, there are a lot of different ways of getting to a shift in mindset. What I like about the neurophysiology stuff today and the neurobiology is you can start to measure with scanning some of the changes that take place in the brain when you do have an insight or when you do have a shift in mindset.

For some people that’s what they need in order to take it seriously. If they can see a change and a scan, they’re going to say oh it’s real and so I want to learn how to do this. But whether you see it on a scan or not, you feel it. I mean you see it in your life. So you know, however you get there, whether it’s through religion or imaging scans ultimately we want someone to take seriously the fact that your thinking matters. And there are different ways to think about real challenges in your life so that you can address them more clearly.

Robb Wolf: Okay. Now correct me if I’m wrong also but my sense is that even though these stress inducing thoughts may involve a variety of different situations, money or relationships or what have you but you’ve said that it’s largely the same type of thinking that occurs. That causes the problem?

Andy Bernstein: Yeah. So if you look at stress as coming from the outside world, then every stress is a little bit different. Stress around work could be different from stress around your health or your body and stress around your family or your future. Those look like very different things and they get carved into different kinds of trainings.

But for me, on the inside they all have their roots in a very specific kind of movement that our brains happen to engage in very easily and very often because of how our brains evolved. This in the book I talk about the neocortex and the way in which we have abstract thinking capacities far beyond other animals.

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So I'm going to introduce it's a ten cent word here but to me it all comes down to counterfactual thinking. If you see life as it is, factually there's no stress response. If you just see a tiger the way you would see a tiger at a zoo, or if you were a baby tiger and you see your mother tiger, you just see the tiger there's no stress response. When you have a thought that tiger is going to kill me, then the stress begins. The thought happens very quickly. In that scenario, counterfactual thinking is really helpful. We want that. But what's happening now is our brains are thinking counterfactually all the time in ways that don't help us. So we think I should have more money, my spouse should appreciate me more, I should be in better shape. That kind of thinking and the stress that it produces gets in our way.

So I want to help. I would like people to get a little bit more sensitive to what's going on in their heads and then we can talk about how to challenge that thinking in a way that moves the needle.

Robb Wolf: You know, what's interesting to me about that is are you familiar with heart rate variability monitoring?

Andy Bernstein: I am.

Robb Wolf: Okay. SO HRV is interesting in that it's kind of a general sampling again of stress or like alistic load. It won't tell you that the person had a gluten dose or that they over exercised or some other thing. But it will tell you this person is probably not good to go for a blistering workout today. So I see some interesting kind of parallels there where it's a little path dependent in this story. You know, we disordered or inappropriate thinking or however you do the counterfactual thinking can end up hamstringing us but just in a variety of different circumstances.

Is it safe to say that it's probably easier for people to address counterfactual thinking in certain areas in our life relative to others? Like some of that is much more either entrenched or maybe more emotional content to it or maybe it's just not even on their radar. It's difficult to kind of even recognize it?

Andy Bernstein: Oh yeah, the sneaky thing about it is you wouldn't even think it's counterfactual. You think it's factual. You think well but I should be in better shape. I should be making more money. My mother shouldn't criticize me. Like that's a fact.

So there's a sneaky way in which our brain's ability to think abstractly and not see life as it is, to see life how we think it's supposed to be. We're not

even aware of it. I sometimes compare this to skiing where you know, we start on the bunny slopes and we just practice getting our balance and getting our legs under us and we don't start on just jumping out a helicopters and doing double diamond trails but we know it's the same. It's still skiing. Like it's possible to do that but you're not starting there and you're not going to go there until you've built skills up.

In the training sessions that I do, we start on the bunny slopes with this process. So we look for the thinking that we experience stress around like traffic or a relationship issue but it's not going to be too big a challenge. I want people to understand like we went and get our feet wet but without it being crazy, aggressive.

Yet if people stick with this, this the seven-step process that I teach can be applied to all of those biggest challenges. I work with abuse survivors, I work with you know, because of my background, I end up doing a lot of work with accidental deaths and those sort of traumatic horrific experiences where someone loses someone in a way that they just never would have anticipated. There are big things that we can work through once we know how to ski.

But we start with the smaller ones because we need to build the skill and we also need to surface some of the skepticism and just work through some of the questions that people have along the way.

Robb Wolf: This is maybe counterintuitive for folks or difficult to grasp but particularly I think if somebody is in a little bit of a downward spiral, but again you know, I apologize if I do too much of parallels between say like Buddhist meditation or what have you. But it seems like if you can really get a handle on this stuff, you can just simply be happy even though you're in. So you're not necessarily at the Bahamas, you're not necessarily Jack Dorsey with \$2B in the ban or something like that. But you're reasonably happy and significantly happier or more satisfied than what you were previously just by changing some of this, the cognitive programming that arises within our brain.

Andy Bernstein: Yeah. I mean it might be more accurate to say you're significantly less unhappy.

Robb Wolf: Okay.

Andy Bernstein: You know? Because there's some interesting studies where happiness and unhappiness don't have the same valence. Like it's a lot easier to get

upset about something and stay upset about it for a long time than it is to be happy about it and stay happy about it.

[0:15:14]

Robb Wolf:

Right.

Andy Bernstein:

We have a negativity bias. So there's a real interesting strategic question about if we want to live a happier life do we try to increase our happiness by spending more time with our family and doing things that we love or do we want to somehow decrease our unhappiness? Positive psychology which is a pretty popular movement now is all about adding more to the positive side of the equation right? So it's spending more time with your loved ones doing the things that bring you joy and I'm completely a fan and I'm for that.

But I think that if you really want to get more bang for your buck, learning how to find the things that drag you down that you experience stress around and that's for me a very broad term so any frustration, anger, sadness. And then finding a way to learn to think differently about it I think has could have more net value.

But it's tricky because that whole side of this psychology space is fraught with positive thinking and all kinds of things that I don't think really work that well.

Robb Wolf:

Right, right. It seems you know, so much of what I've read and even that I've experienced that just simply trying to get people focused on just do one thing today.

Andy Bernstein:

Yeah.

Robb Wolf:

If that's go out and check the mail and come back like if you have somebody that's very depressed and then it's like that's the one goal you have today take that off the list and then you get a little dopamine response off that and you're like hey.

Andy Bernstein:

Right, right.

Robb Wolf:

I'm not a complete piece of shit. I actually checked the mail today you know. So then it's like okay tomorrow you're going to check the mail and wave to your neighbor in the process. You know, and you start building that stuff incrementally. But where so much of the self-help stuff seemed to almost ensure failure by focusing on thinking versus activity.

Andy Bernstein: Yeah and a lot of that research now so again I'm not a psychologist but I read a lot a bit and I work in the space as a kind of lay practitioner. The science around habit formation and many habits and how to build habits that stick, It's really interesting and there's some great books that I'm sure your listeners know of you know, Power Path that was a big best seller. There's a book I like called Mini Habits which does a good job. The author tells a story about he always wanted to make himself workout more but who has time to go work out and go to the gym for an hour? But when he told himself to just do one pushup, of course he can do one pushup. I mean who can't do you know, you can find time for one pushup.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Andy Bernstein: And then the next day he would be like I'm just going to do one pushup and he always told himself I'm just doing the one pushup. Now when he's down there, he's going to do five, he's going to do 10. But because he kept telling himself I'm only doing one, that habit, that mini habit was so laughably acceptable to his brain that he could keep doing it.

And you know, I travel a lot for work and I always thought I don't have time to go to the gym this morning and I would have to get up earlier and head down to the hotel gym. But if I tell myself I'm just going to go for five minutes, it actually in a funny way it's like a Trojan horse. It can kind of get in. Of course I'm there longer but I always think I'm just going to go for five minutes. So I'm a fan of a lot of the current research spelling out how to make habits a little bit easier to make stick.

But having said that I think that the behavioral side of it gets over emphasized. We spend a lot of time on behavior and external change and I think maybe not enough time on mindset and internal change. So that's where I'm focused.

Robb Wolf: Cool. So Andy, maybe we can use some – a small case study here. I'm trying to get this risk assessment program off the ground and we're getting ready to do seed funding and the last six months I have done nothing that I enjoy, I'm good at or understand. You know?

Andy Bernstein: [Laughs]

Robb Wolf: I've been reading legal documents, and you know investment disclosure things to keep out of trouble with the securities and exchange commission and all this stuff. Absolutely hate it all. Don't understand it. Totally a fish out of water. I'm theoretically nearing the end of that

process but how could I have enjoyed that process more and to the degree that I'm still called upon to do things that I don't know a lot about and I'm not good at. So I internalize as being stressful or perhaps what is it that I'm doing to myself that makes that stressful?

Andy Bernstein: Well I probably need to probe a little bit more but --

Robb Wolf: Well probe away if you want.

Andy Bernstein: Yeah. Yeah. So are you having a thought like I shouldn't have to do this? Like somebody else should be doing this for me? You know, I've got more important things to do in my time?

Robb Wolf: No. My thought is I have no fucking idea what I'm doing and I can't believe anybody believes that I am qualified to be doing any of this so. [Laughs] That's some of it you know,?

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Andy Bernstein: Can you like have someone else do that and then just report to you and tell you this is what this is what this is about and get input from you or do you have to be the one who's actually plowing through it?

Robb Wolf: A lot of this stuff it just falls on me because I have farmed out as much as I can but some of this stuff I've just got to do.

Andy Bernstein: Yeah.

Robb Wolf: Myself yeah.

Andy Bernstein: Yeah. So I mean I think so maybe I should back up and just talk a little bit about how the process I teach works. Because then that will make more sense or the answer make more sense.

Robb Wolf: Okay.

Andy Bernstein: also I'll circle back to something that I just sort of dropped a little bomb and didn't really flesh out. so when I say that there's no such thing as a stressor or if stress doesn't come from what's going on in your life, it comes from your thoughts about what's going on in your life , and that means there's no such thing as a stressor, a very simple way to prove that to yourself is to think about how stress works. So if we all go out in the rain, we're all going to get wet. Because rain is a legitimate external circumstance.

If we all go into traffic, we're not all going to experience stress. Some people will but some people won't. Some people will listen to a podcast, like this one, some people will make a phone call or listen to music. They're always going to be kids in the backseat playing games somewhere. So you can't say that traffic works like rain and yet if you look at how the world talks about traffic or moving or getting married or getting divorced, we call these stressful life events. We say that they're stressors and yet they're not. they're not inherently stress producing.

If you have a thought like there shouldn't be so much traffic, then you will experience stress. If you don't have that thought, you can sit in traffic all day long and not experience stress. So that's why I say there are no stressors. That stress is always a function of your thinking and not your circumstances. It doesn't mean that we don't face some really challenging circumstances we do. But you know, I've worked with emergency room physicians. Doc Parsely and I were talking about Navy Seals at Paleo FX this year, there are people and circumstances that the world would say are inherently stress producing who don't experience stress. Navy seals don't experience stress because they're trained and they think differently. ER docs think differently.

So when I talk to people about stress, stress is real but this idea of stressors I think has to die. Because it confines us to thinking about our emotional reactions as driven from the outside in and it blocks us from getting smarter about figuring out what's going on in my thoughts if I'm angry at my wife. What am I thinking that's should be different, that's producing the stress.

So in the scenario that you described, you would have to maybe take a look at what am I thinking while I'm reading these things that's producing stress for me? If I'm thinking I should understand this better, it sounds like you're not thing someone else should be reading this for me.

Robb Wolf: Yeah. How about this is so boring and I understand so little of it that I --

Andy Bernstein: Yeah.

Robb Wolf: [Laughs] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Andy Bernstein: Yeah. Well so but people read boring things that they understand little off without the stress right?

Robb Wolf: Right.

Andy Bernstein: They're just bored.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Andy Bernstein: Until you have a thought like this is boring I shouldn't have to read it or people shouldn't expect me to understand this. There's some stress is always a kind of friction between our reality and our thoughts about how that reality should be different.

Robb Wolf: Do you think it's orientation towards wanting to – the time element. So like I'm really anxious to get this thing going so I'm like ma I wish this shit with Don.

Andy Bernstein: Yeah.

Robb Wolf: So that's probably like the you know, I wish it was done but it's not and I've got to get through it. So I just need to let go of the fact that it's not done and I just need to get through it to get done.

Andy Bernstein: Well so I'm not a fan of letting go.

Robb Wolf: Okay, okay.

Andy Bernstein: I don't think that works. I think that you could if you just recognize that this is on your plate you can't delegate it it's yours then you just put it on your calendar and say I've got to spend an hour today or three hours today plowing through it.

Robb Wolf: When I say let go I mean let go of the expectation that the thing should have been done. Like it's not --

Andy Bernstein: Yeah.

Robb Wolf: -- and I've just got to get through it and there's no way to alter that other than getting through the process.

Andy Bernstein: Okay. Yeah.

Robb Wolf: Yeah.

Andy Bernstein: I still don't think that letting go happens.

Robb Wolf: Okay. Okay, okay.

Andy Bernstein: NO. So I think letting go it happens but it doesn't happen through choice.

Robb Wolf: Okay.

Andy Bernstein: It happens when we realize that what we thought was true is not true. So like if I think someone else should be doing this for me and then I realize that's not true. Like there's no one else to do this for me. I'm going to be the one who does this. That kind of letting go happens but it's not through my decision. It's just because I've realized that that idea that someone else should be doing this for me isn't true. So it doesn't stick.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Andy Bernstein: So I think what I'm interested in doing is helping people identify their stressful thinking and then challenge it so they can see that it's actually not true because that's the thing that matters. It's not choice or willpower or desirability. The thing that make stuff stick or not stick is how true you think it is. If you think you shouldn't –there shouldn't be so much traffic, that's going to stick. When you realize in reality there should be so much traffic at this time because I live in a very populated area we all drive at the same times. You know, I live far from work.

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Like when you see that you no longer think to yourself you can't that belief there shouldn't be so much traffic won't stick when you really see it. So then we wanted them to extend or to extrapolate from that to the areas that of our lives where we're still stressed out about our workload or whatever else it is.

Robb Wolf: Interesting. Okay. Okay. I'm still that's interesting. Because I – well maybe that's why I still struggle with it. But you know, for me it definitely seems to be this time criticality piece where I'm just like man I've been working on this a long time, I want it to be done, this is a – you know, what a thought that pops up oftentimes is I definitely I have this internal kind of dialogue where damn I don't really understand this stuff, I'll get through it If the attorneys will explain it to me but my time could be way better spent generating some original content or something like that. I guess.

Andy Bernstein: Yeah.

Robb Wolf: Is that a pitfall that I'm throwing myself into?

Andy Bernstein: Well if you aren't spending your time the way that you think you're supposed to be spending your time, then thinking that you're supposed

to be spending your time that way is – I mean this could sound a little aggressive but it's a delusion right?

Robb Wolf: yeah. Yeah.

Andy Bernstein: Right, yeah. So and that's a funny thing about stress. Whenever we experience stress, we are delusional. Like there's something in our thoughts that think well reality shouldn't be like this. You know, I shouldn't have to do this. I should be writing --

Robb Wolf: No when you were describing like the traffic deal and everything I was like I've had a few crazy girlfriends that literally would be like they're just shouldn't be this much traffic. And you're like we live in LA and there are like 18M people in like a square mile. Like how could you not.

Andy Bernstein: Yeah.

Robb Wolf: And literally though they're just like they just can't... It's you know, so --

Andy Bernstein: So that Robb, that is the key.

Robb Wolf: - the disillusion. Okay.

Andy Bernstein: That is the key right there. [Laughs] So when your ex-girlfriend thinks there shouldn't be so much traffic and you realize that you live in LA that's the difference between stress and no stress.

Robb Wolf: Okay.

Andy Bernstein: Like that insight stress is a reflection of a lack of insight. If you have that insight we live in LA there's you know, millions of people living within like on city block then you no longer think there shouldn't be so much traffic, you're still in traffic but you're in traffic without the stress. So that's let's say that's a beginner topic. You then want to work your way up to a more challenging topic like my kids should listen to me or my partner should appreciate me more. And then when you see why that's not true at a single point in time, my kids in reality shouldn't listen to me at this time because they're very young. They don't have the attention span. You know, they don't understand the consequences. Like all that stuff then you have the insight there and when your kids don't listen to you, you don't get stressed out. You just speak with them and try and help them learn that skill.

And the so that's maybe a green you know, in ski parlance that might be like a big inner trail right?

Robb Wolf: Uh-hum. Uh-hum.

Andy Bernstein: And then you work your way doing inner media. So then you've got to work on well I shouldn't have to read I shouldn't have to do this work, this legal work. I hate it. And then you look at why in reality you should have to do this at this time because you know, you can't delegate it and you feel like it's important for you to understand this personally whatever it is. But as your mind moves from insight to insight you start seeing reality across these domains more clearly and even though we still have challenges, that doesn't change. We no longer experience I mean initially we experience less stress. As we get clearer, we don't experience stress anymore. We just have these challenges.

Robb Wolf: So what if --

Andy Bernstein: And the energy that we have been wasting gets recovered.

Robb Wolf: It's recovered and it's not further away. What if some of my you know, noodling on this, some of my anxiety around this stuff is just that despite the best efforts of the lawyers that we're paying enormous sums of money to help me figure this stuff out and get through it, somehow my idiocy is going to sneak through the cracks and undermine the success neighborhoods even though I've got an amazing team you know, from my cofounders on out to our legal support and all that, it's somehow despite their best effort at saving me from myself I'll be such an idiot that I screw this thing up. I mean that that's some of it too which is fear of failure.

Andy Bernstein: Yeah. Yeah. I think that so that would be probably a black diamond.

Robb Wolf: Okay, okay, okay. Like fear of failure is black diamond, okay, okay.

Andy Bernstein: No because it ties into stuff that I'm not Freudian. I mean I'm definitely not Freudian but I think that there's validity and that some of these beliefs came along when we were very little.

Robb Wolf: Uh-hum.

Andy Bernstein: Some of this stuff is just it's hard to chalet. Because it's one thing to get honest about okay I can see why there should be so much traffic in LA like I get the infrastructure. I can see that.

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But I can see why failing could be good for me or how I'm taking this on and doing more than I feel comfortable with is going to actually be in my best interest and for other people's best interest like some of these challenges strike us at a deeper level and threaten our sense of self and security. I think that they are skiable to keep with that metaphor but they require probably more time in a little bit more of a build up with thief skills.

Robb Wolf: Okay. Okay. That makes sense.

Andy Bernstein: You know, so yeah it's like I mean some of the same like the stuff I mentioned earlier about sexual abuse or you know, coming back for more like there's real or losing, losing anything that you care about whether it's a cross fit games or not doing well in the test. Like there's stuff that we get very emotionally connected to and I don't chase ambulances with this process that I teach because I think that people need a little bit of time to kind of get over certain things and they also need to build up skills. You don't just like run out and squat 700 pounds. You got to build up skills you know, and most of us don't even realize that's what's going on when we experience stress that we're missing a skill.

Robb Wolf: Interesting. Interesting. No that helps incredibly you know,.

Andy Bernstein: You might squat 700 pounds. [Laughs]

Robb Wolf: Well you know, I squatted almost 600 pounds one time but it was a four year process and I had two world champion expert coaches get me to that spot. So yeah. Yeah.

Andy Bernstein: I think what I like about the people I've met so I've taught this to a lot of the crossfit HQ trainers and the crossfit games champions and competitors. I just did some crossfit stuff recently with a bunch of teenagers at a box in Michigan. I like so because I'm trying to take the whole approach to stress out of the biological space and put it in the training space, I like that people who have a background in health and fitness and particularly athletes like they get that. They get that they're not going to just run and squat 600 pounds day 1. You're going to have to train and yet somehow we think we're going to master raising kids and building a business and dealing with the challenges of modern life.

We haven't been trained at any of that. We don't have any of those skills. So we have to start building that and reeducating ourselves and I think

just the first part is challenging the idea that stressors that our stress is externally produced and then when we get it that it's coming from something out of our thoughts, that opens a door to building this new skillset.

Robb Wolf: interesting. So I mean do you use that as just kind of even a little bit of almost mantra type deal? You know, it's like my stress is an internal process and not an external process and I can have control over it. Like how do you start moving people through that mastery?

Andy Bernstein: So the first part, the foundation is just helping people understand how this myth got built. So this idea that stress comes from stressors was built in the middle of the 20th century by this guy Hans Selye who is an oncologist working with rats. So I start off by helping people see how he built that myth. The experiments that he did with rats his interpretation and then why that's wrong.

All of that by the way so I teach that in my live workshops but it's also online free at my website. so I'll do one plug, resilienceacademy.com. Because I wanted to get that out. I want people to like we start. That's not I'm not charging you tot el you here's the truth about stress. I want that to be the base that we begin on and then once you get that I introduce the seven step process. So it's called active insight and it's just seven steps done on a guided worksheet. We started on the bunny slopes and I show you how to apply that to a relationship challenge.

In particular they should see it my way. So I ask you to think of someone in your life who you think should see things your way and then I coach you through applying these seven steps to that topic and that's all free too, the resilience academy. And then so if someone gets it then they can go further and there are training modules for relationships and work life balance and building a business and all sorts of things. If they don't get it and they're determined to continue believing that their stress is coming from the outside and it's other people's faults, then that's fine. You know, I'm not trying to pry open locked doors.

There are I think enough people part of what I love about the paleo space is that it's a community of people who have already challenged dogma and so like they've kind of they're sort of more likely to opt in and be open minded enough to hear this.

You know, you've already challenged the dogma about the standard American diet, and you understand how to think differently about food choices and exercise and movement and sleep then you're probably –

you've probably got what it takes to think differently about stress and dealing with challenges in life too.

Robb Wolf: Absolutely yeah that's a good lunatic fringe group.

Andy Bernstein: Right.

Robb Wolf: You get some buy in from yeah.

[0:35:03]

Andy Bernstein: Yeah.

Robb Wolf: Nice. So you know, I'm curious how does someone apply this to weight loss let's say? Because you know, which usually the implication there is over eating like I've been noodling a lot on kind of again the evolutionary biology of our eating situation like optimum foraging strategy and the hyper palatable foods and all this stuff. Part of what I've been looking at is that if you are not fat, sick broken and diabetic you're actually screwing up from like an evolutionary biology standpoint. Because we're actually wired to eat as much as we can and do as little as possible. So if you're doing something counter to that you're actually doing something very different than what most of our evolutionary history is kind of wired us up for.

So many of the things that sell easily whether it's booze or nicotine or caffeine or hookers or whatever it is it kind of plays to that kind of hedonistic dopamine driven part of the brain. How does mitigating stress feed into helping you or your perception of stress, how does that help you improve your dietary practice?

Andy Bernstein: If you look at why, most people don't have a real hard time figuring out what they should be doing differently, right? Like starting with diet is an art and figuring out what you're supposed to stop eating or start eating isn't really the hard part. We'll see this so it's now what –beginning of November? We'll see this in January when everyone around the world starts making their New Year's resolutions and it works for a few weeks right? So like we know what to do it's just that we get derailed by the thoughts that we have about the rest of our lives either about our rate or progress or you know, we're doing fine with our new paleo regimen but we get stressed out at work or our relationship breaks up or we've got financial concerns. And as we currently –kind of cross a stress threshold, and that's when I think are prone to some sort of behavior that works against us. So we have no problem adopting helpful behaviors when we're below that threshold but once we've got issue with our mother and our money and our kids and our boss then like I'm just going to run

to the freezer. I'm going to have a pizza and follow it up with some ice cream and a beer because I'm feeling it and I think part of why we're feeling it is the hormonal changes internally and the ways in which carbs can satisfy or you know, those swings draw us towards carbs and other foods sugars.

So I like to help I would want to help people stay below that threshold. If you want to stay fit and keep making the smart choices whatever those are, then let's look at the stuff you're thinking about your parents and your money and your coworkers and politicians and the economy and the environment because if we can work through that stuff strangely it keeps you below that threshold and you have a much easier time sticking to whatever the regimen is.

There's a story in the myth of stress about a woman her whole life she thought she should weigh less. That was her mantra. She thought that was a motivator. But I mean it is in a way. I should weigh less motivate a lot of shame and self-judgment and poor food choices. When she went through this process and she challenged some of her thoughts about her body it completely it blew her mind. It completely changed the way she thought about her body and as a result she started making very different – she felt different emotionally. She started making very different choices. We weren't targeting behavioral change. Behavioral change is just the outgrowth of an internal change.

So I think that we want to focus on if you want to stay fit let's talk about your relationship. Let's talk about your relationship. Let's talk about your concerns about success and your past and your future because that's what gets in the way.

Robb Wolf: What do you feel like is there a genre of change that's harder than something else? You know, I'm going to venture a guess that maybe figuring out how to not be stressed out by traffic or even this feels like it could get into some phobia type stuff like fear of getting on an airplane and some stuff like that. I feel like this might have some reasonably ready success there. Where are the areas that this is both very immediately successful and also some areas where it's like okay this is black diamond like right out of the gate?

Andy Bernstein: Yeah. I think so it's easier in my experience for people to have insights and see things differently when they're looking outward, when they're focusing on someone else.

Robb Wolf: Uh-hum.

Andy Bernstein: So relationship challenges are really good. If you hate your boss, if you're annoyed with your romantic partner or business partner, if there's someone in your life who you think shouldn't act the way that they're acting. As powerful as those can be, I mean they're strong, they can be strong, negative, long lasting experiences but those are actually fairly beginner level topics for this process because it's a little bit like we're wearing corrective lenses and your vision just snaps clear and you see them.

[0:40:25]

It's a little harder when we're working on ourselves and I find there's more resistance to challenging some of the self-judgments that people have successfully. So for me those are more advanced. And then categorically you know, some of these things like the death of a loved one or a friend or cancer some of the sexual abuse, incest, you know, some of that work and I would say also religion, sexuality, I mean there are some things in different parts of the country that people take much more strongly than in some of the major cities. But it's really a function of perceived validity, or strength of belief more than of any kind of external measurement and it varies. But I would say there are some things that most of us have strong beliefs about like death and so those become more advanced.

Robb Wolf: Okay, that makes sense. That make sense. Andy, where can folks track you down? Like your book is The Myth of Stress, where can they track you down on the inter webs?

Andy Bernstein: So resilienceacademy.com is my main online residence and I'm always thinking I'm going to have this new and fancy version up soon. We're actually just --

Robb Wolf: Does that cause you stress?

[Laughter]

Andy Bernstein:] Just disappointment.

[Laughter]

You know, I recognize my priorities in life. I've got a busy work life and a lot of travel and then a young daughter and another child on the way and it's just you know, I get it. But I started to apologize to people who have been waiting for this, but resilienceacademy.com is again free to join and I'm excited for 2016 because there's going to be an app version probably midyear and that's going to be really cool because it will be a lot more interactive and it's going to be you know, everyone is doing game stuff now but it's just going to be more fun and more engaging.

So in the meantime though, people can go to Resilience Academy. I've got a Twitter account @AndrewBernstein. We've got a Facebook group for Resilience Academy. I'm really bad at that Robb, you know, like I had never checked in on that stuff.

Robb Wolf: You know, --

Andy Bernstein: If someone would have like contact me through it, I would probably tell me and I would respond. I always want to respond I just never think --

Robb Wolf: Right.

Andy Bernstein: Yeah.

Robb Wolf: Well you know, it's funny there are people who actually do the work that they're supposed to be doing and they're the folks that hang out on social media all day so it's--

Andy Bernstein: Man.

Robb Wolf: It is interesting the social media scene definitely drives a lot of bandwidth and it's fascinating. This is something that's why I have some great friends who run crossfit type gyms and these folks are just chopping wood, carrying water, doing amazing programming and running great facilities and they have no online presence at all and folks know that. I think about them and --

Andy Bernstein: Yeah.

Robb Wolf: -- then you have these other folks that are really when you figured that they could type at like 600 words per minute they're still probably spending six hours a day online just by the volume of stuff that they put it. It's kind of like how are you coaching anybody or doing anything besides social media and selfies and all that stuff? That is a stressor for certain folks because they're like I feel if I pull away from running my day to day business to spend more time on the social media stuff that maybe the business would be bigger but I don't know that it would be better. You know, so there's some conflict there.

Andy Bernstein: Yeah. Yeah. And I'm thinking I'm going to hire someone for next year to actually help manage it because I've learned that I'm -- I'm obviously not doing it. I will call you out on using the word stressor though Robb. There are no stressors.

Robb Wolf: Right, exactly, exactly.

Andy Bernstein: It's your thought process.

Robb Wolf: You talked about it, yeah.

Andy Bernstein: Yeah but I am guilty of not doing it well and I'm fine with that for now. I'm hopeful that next year I'll do more of it because you know, and part of it is most of my work has been with Meryl Lynch and GE and Coca-Cola. Like I spend my days within a corporate space that they don't really—they're not tweeting about anything.

Robb Wolf: Right .

Andy Bernstein: So I haven't had to do it but now reaching out, doing some stuff with a few crossfit folks and Paleo FX was really fun for me because I mean that's everyone there seemed to be tweeting all the time.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Andy Bernstein: I didn't know what was going on.

Robb Wolf: Right, right.

Andy Bernstein: So I'm realizing that there's another party happening and as much as I'm an introvert, I like people. I want to be at the party. Maybe I'll just be watching from the corner but --

Robb Wolf: Exactly. Yeah.

Andy Bernstein: So.

Robb Wolf: Man, I just had my founder group out here in Reno for this cities that are a risk assessment gig. My CTO and my COO And it's interesting. Both these guys are super talented but both of them are introverts on that kind of Myers Briggs introvert-extrovert deal. Like very chatty and engaging but then at the same time if they had to like you know, be a bar tender or something they would be completely exhausted by the end of the day.

[0:45:25]

Andy Bernstein: Yeah.

Robb Wolf: You know, whereas if you give them a good book and watch a few movies, they want to hang out with some friends but then they've got a

lot more of an internal life and versus I'm a little bit more of a social butterfly. I definitely need my downtime but I like going and seeing people that's why I like going to jujitsu and Capoeira and stuff. It's not just the doing of the stuff. It's actually being there with people whereas those guys are just like yeah. I went to jujitsu but nobody was there. That would be better.

Andy Bernstein: Right. They want to do Trichy.

Robb Wolf: Right, right.

Andy Bernstein: I bet you could map extroverts and introverts across the martial arts.

Robb Wolf: Right, yeah.

Andy Bernstein: The extroverts are doing all the --

Robb Wolf: Capoeira and stuff.

Andy Bernstein: Yeah and the introverts are like doing taichi along the park.

Robb Wolf: Totally. Totally.

Andy Bernstein: Yeah but who would kick whose ass that's the question.

Robb Wolf: Exactly. Exactly. Yeah, yeah.

Andy Bernstein: [Laughs] Don't bet against the introverts.

Robb Wolf: That's true. That's true. That's awesome. Well Andy it was great having you on the show and again I have to give some props to Squatchy. He's the one that tracked you down and I think he saw you on TV or saw a media piece and thought that this was a very interesting different take on the stress topic which we talked about it a ton, you know, within the course of looking at crossfit and training and just sleep exercise. You know what before we actually wrap up, let me touch on that a little bit. You know what I mean? I would argue that lack of sleep is a stressor. Where are you at with that or your perception on that?

Andy Bernstein: I would guess so --

Robb Wolf: Where does that fit into this?

Andy Bernstein: So part of what Hans Selye did when he was teaching the whole world how stress works was he conflated physiological stress and psychological stress. So to him those were all part of – he felt psychological stress was a subset of physiological stress.

Robb Wolf: Uh-hum.

Andy Bernstein: So I think that he conflated things that are actually very different. Physiological stress is legit, that's real. I don't think we should call it stress just because we've confused things by using the same word for all of that. So homeostatic, allostatic load, stimulation, you know, goal setting all of that stuff, the physiological stuff that happens around that is real and not sleeping for – you know, if you don't get enough sleep, you do need more sleep. It's going to have a huge effect on your body. But I don't call that stress. I would rather you call that allostatic load or homeostatic load or hyper stimulation or whatever. Something that's purely physiological. And then we can look at when we talk about stress, we're just looking at the emotional stuff. Because you can be exhausted and happy, you know, I did this for a long time I worked 100 hours a week for my previous job and I was exhausted. I was really sleep deprived and I wish I knew about Doc Parsley and all that stuff that you guys are talking about. back then I thought I would just sleep it off and it was a long time before I was sane again.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Andy Bernstein: But I was happy the whole time. I wouldn't have said I was stressed out.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Andy Bernstein: So we've got chocolate in our peanut butter a little bit which maybe works fine for a candy bar but for the stress world I think we need to keep them separate.

Robb Wolf: Oh fascinating. That's one of the happiest years I ever had. I won a research fellowship like my junior year of college doing chemistry and I didn't have to do any work, I actually had some on campus housing that was ridiculously cheap and all I needed to do was do chemistry all day long. So I would set up like in two fume hoods with four reaction chambers in each one and so I would go in in the morning, work up the things I had from the night before, set up another reaction, get that thing going. Go play some Frisbee, do a little bit of exercise, come back, work them up at noon, set up another one. I did so much work but that's all I did. But I was ecstatic because it was almost, it was weird. It was almost

like being independently wealthy in a way because I had exactly the amount of money that I needed. I didn't anymore. You know I wasn't going to get any less. I had my food squirreled away, had my sleep living quarters squared away and I was not sleeping a ton because of just the schedule that I was on but I totally loved it. You know?

Andy Bernstein: Yeah.

Robb Wolf: I was perceiving no stress at that time for whatever reason so.

Andy Bernstein: Well you're experiencing those stress because you didn't think life should be different than it is.

Robb Wolf: Right, okay.

Andy Bernstein: You know, and that's again that's how it is whenever we experience so social psychologists call that flow right when you're just fully engaged and no sense of time. whenever we're experiencing flow, it's not because we've got money in the bank or because we're in a relationship and we feel loved. It's just because our thoughts are no longer causing friction. They're no longer butting up against how we think life is supposed to be.

[0:50:07]

And we can see this with young children. We see this –you know, I see this. I've got a 19 month old daughter. She's got flow most of the time. she doesn't have to do anything for it. She just doesn't think life should be different than it is. The part of the challenge of being an adult is working through some of our thoughts about how we think life is supposed to be different and how we think if we don't see that life is supposed to be different we're going to be giving up somehow.

But the people who can – who have the most flow and who see life as it is are actually the ones who are able to change things, the fastest and sustain that the longest because they're not burning energy thinking it shouldn't be this way.

Robb Wolf: Hmm.

Andy Bernstein: So I think that movement from friction to flow is really important and if I had one constructive piece of criticism for the paleo world I think that we do a really good job in helping people challenge their thinking around diet and exercise and movement and sleep. I don't think we're challenging the way we think about stress. I think we're still locked into Hans Selye's world and I see this across the blogs and in a lot of the

conversations. We're still talking about managing stress instead of digging a little bit deeper.

I don't know we talked a little bit before we started about specialty health, do you want to just talk about --

Robb Wolf: Oh yeah, yeah and you know what even before we get into that I kind of had another maybe insight on that. Like so sometimes when I'm just generally working, I'm like man I should really be outside getting sun because that's healthy for me.

Andy Bernstein: Yeah.

Robb Wolf: And that's stressful.

Andy Bernstein: Yeah. As soon as you have that thought --

Robb Wolf: Yeah.

Andy Bernstein: Like before you had that thought, you were fine.

Robb Wolf: Right, right.

Andy Bernstein: Then you had that thought and it's not that thinking is the enemy but when you realize that oh that stress, that just came from that thought and then you realize -- it could still be important to you that you get more sun than you'd figure out how to schedule your life to get more sun.

Robb Wolf: Okay.

Andy Bernstein: but you don't need the stressful thinking to do that and that's one of the things that I can't really --like I can't persuade someone of that. we think that stress is going to motivate us but actually the people if you look at areas in your life like the example you gave earlier of not being stressed out in traffic, the person who's not stressed out in traffic takes surface roads, finds another way. You know, uses Waze and then goes zigzags and the person who's really stressed out is just slamming the dashboard giving the finger to everyone. That's not a productive way of creating change.

So this idea that stress is motivating us or that we're going to create change in our communities, or in our personal lives, in our relationships or in our bodies by being stressed out is I think -- I just think it's worth challenging.

Robb Wolf: Yeah, yeah. No I mean it seems like it's totally setting us up for failure.

Andy Bernstein: Yeah. It starts us off with a huge burden, emotionally, hormonally and then I think behaviorally because it leads , that leads to a lot of wear and tear and poor choices so. But most of us are not at all familiar with the power of insight and mindset to change how we handle things. We're familiar with advice, motivation, pushing through, toughing it out. There's just something else.

Robb Wolf: Interesting. Interesting. Oh it's fascinating stuff and definitely bring folks up to speed on what's happening with the specialty health scene.

Andy Bernstein: Yeah. So part of what I feel like I'm coming out of my little cave in corporate world. You know, I have been doing this for ten years now working with business leaders but I haven't been doing public workshops and part of this came out of a conversation that we had at Paleo FX where I was curious about city zero and first responders and you know these are people who you know very well are not touchy feely. They're not likely to see a therapist or to talk openly about what's challenging in their lives by and large. I mean obviously there are exceptions. But because I work most of the time with business leaders who are also not touchy feely and very skeptical, I wanted to see if I can maybe, if this would have any interest. If there would be any appeal from first responders.

So I've started playing with through Chris, through Squatchy, I started you know, sharing this with some of the folks in that space. And so far they're liking it. I'm going to do more next year but I think that whether it's a cross fitters or navy seals or firemen and women or police. Like there are a lot of people who are experiencing stress who are not interested in therapy, who aren't going to go maybe read self-help books but who want a solution. If you can put it online through something like resilienceacademy.com or make them user friendly and free to join, then it lowers the bar which is important. You know, people aren't going to go to the A center. It's too high a bar. So anyway in which you can lower a bar and make something accessible and engaging I think could be smart. So I'm going to keep working on that. it's part of what I mentioned earlier with the amplifying, gamifying this whole thing. Like not only do I want to teach this to you but I want to make it fun for you and reward you as you get better at it so that you have just as much fun doing this process as you would going to the gym.

[0:55:12]

Robb Wolf: Awesome, very cool.

Andy Bernstein: Yeah. Yeah.

Robb Wolf: How exciting.

Andy Bernstein: So we'll see.

Robb Wolf: Yeah, yeah. Same deal with just getting City Zero actually off the ground. So I've been doing a lot of "well we'll see" so--

Andy Bernstein: Yeah, we'll see. If anyone if your listeners, you joke about your six listeners but if any of those six have thoughts about this and wanted to connect and maybe explore ways to reach out to people together, you would love them. I mean can I just give my email address or is that --

Robb Wolf: Absolutely. Give them, remind them. So your book is The Myth of Stress. Your website is --

Andy Bernstein: Yeah. So The Myth of Stress, resilienceacademy.com and then my name is Andy so Andy@resilienceacademy.com. I'll try to figure out ways to make this scalable because I'm always interested in reaching more people and I don't do as much one on one coaching anymore. But I would love to just figure out how this community can maybe help grow that.

Robb Wolf: Awesome. Awesome. Well it's very exciting and I'm super stoked to finally have had you on the show.

Andy Bernstein: Yeah. Thanks Robb. It's been fun chatting with you. I feel like we're just having a little private chat with in front of you know who knows how many people.

Robb Wolf: A couple hundred thousand people yeah.

Andy Bernstein: Yeah.

Robb Wolf: Are you going to be at Paleo FX again this year?

Andy Bernstein: I was planning on it but I mentioned my wife is pregnant. She's due that week.

Robb Wolf: Oh, okay. Okay.

Andy Bernstein: So probably not.

Robb Wolf: Come on man I did one of those gigs six days out from the due date of my first daughter so although my wife --

Andy Bernstein: Six days before or after?

Robb Wolf: Well it was six days before the due date. Yeah.

Andy Bernstein: You are a braver man than I am.

Robb Wolf: Oh man, Nikki wanted to cut off my balls and basically hang them from a tall tree but we pulled it off yeah, yeah.

Andy Bernstein: Yeah. Actually we have my wife's best friend lives in Houston now and we were thinking maybe we would -- before we got pregnant and before she got pregnant, before she got pregnant we were thinking we would both go down there and I would just drive over to Austin but now with the baby I don't know, I have to see.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Andy Bernstein: Game time, hopefully game time decision.

Robb Wolf: Yeah and then you're going to have what a like a 24-26 month old also to deal with? So yeah.

Andy Bernstein: Right. Yeah, so.

Robb Wolf: Yeah. But just remind yourself at that time, stress is a myth.

Andy Bernstein: Right.

Robb Wolf: [Laughs]

Andy Bernstein: That's true but there's no such thing as stressors.

Robb Wolf: Okay. Okay I like it. I like it.

Andy Bernstein: Yeah.

Robb Wolf: Awesome man. Well Andy it was great having you on the show. Looking forward to seeing you in real at some point.

Andy Bernstein: Yeah, see you soon Rob, thanks man.

Robb Wolf: Okay. Take care. Bye-bye.

Andy Bernstein: Okay.

[0:57:39] End of Audio