



3 Core Emotional Needs to Regulate Your Energy

Jason Prall interviewing
Alex Howard



Jason Prall

Well, I'm very excited to have our next guest on. Alex Howard is the founder and CEO of The Optimum Health Clinic, one of the world's leading integrative medicine clinics with a team of twenty full-time practitioners supporting thousands of patients in fifty-plus countries. Alex and the research team at OHC have published research in a number of leading journals, including the British Medical Journal Open, Medical Hypotheses, and Psychology & Health. A randomized control trial on the OHC approach has NHS ethics approval and is currently underway in the UK. Along with founding and leading the OHC practitioner teams for the past 17 years, Alex Howard is an immensely experienced psychology practitioner, having delivered over 10,000 consultations. He has also led therapeutic coaching practitioner programs since 2005, training the next generation of psychology practitioners. Since March, 2020, Alex has been documenting his therapeutic work with real-life patients via his "In Therapy with Alex Howard" YouTube series. And today, I'm super excited because we're gonna keep this extremely relevant and practical. Right now, we've got a ton of stuff going on in the world. It seems like there's triggers all over the place. And I actually myself noticed that I got a little triggered the other day and was a little bit more emotional, a little more heated, than I normally am. And I thought, you know, this is perfect. You know, we all go through this type of thing. So we're gonna be talking about how to regulate and manage your energy on a day-to-day basis, and in potentially chaotic circumstances. So, welcome Alex!

Alex Howard

Hi Jason, it's always a pleasure to talk together. Thank you for having me.

Jason Prall

So what comes to mind, as I sort of mentioned that, right? We're going through our day, and we get triggered, and we have these emotional outbursts. And it can be grief, it can be anger, it can be disappointment, all these things. But it seems, and this has always gone in



my life, where I get emotionally overwhelmed, and kind of explode, or go in to some pattern. But it seems like that's really, really ripe right now. There's a lot going on. We were talking beforehand about the sort of the Joe Rogan thing that's going on that's really getting people worked up. So, what comes to mind when I kind of say this type of thing? And I'm curious if you notice the same, that it seems to be right now there's a lot of things going on.

Alex Howard

Yeah, I think there is. And I think, as we'll get to, I'm sure, in a bit, there are different elements to trauma and our reactions to what happens. And I think it's so easy for us to get caught in the, the narrative and the story and the external events of things that are happening, and to forget that what's happening in us, like our feelings, our emotions, that's us. That's not the events, that's our response. That's our triggers. That's our feelings about what's happening. And often what that's informed by is the things that we haven't fully metabolized and digested and processed. And it's not to say that we wouldn't otherwise still have perspectives or beliefs or things that we care about. But when we have those trigger responses, in my experience, what it is, is an invitation to turn in and go, "What's actually happening in me?" And I was just saying to you, before we started recording, that a few weeks ago, I had this experience that was a good example of this. I'm somebody that I pride myself in being really good at self-regulating my emotions. In fact, we were recently interviewing for a new team member, and they wanted to speak to some of the people around me. And it sort of came out, people that worked with me for 10, 15 years were like, "Oh my God, I've never seen Alex lose his cool. I've never seen him like blow up at someone and have like a massive reaction." And I was like, "Yeah, I guess that's something I'm good at." But it turns out I'm not perfect, because a couple of weeks ago I was coming out of the supermarket. We're very lucky to have a farmhouse... we live in London, but we have a farmhouse down in Hampshire that we go to at weekends, and I'd had a long week at work, and I'd driven down there. And it was kind of a few hours drive out of London. And I went and bought my shopping and I'm coming out of the supermarket. And then, it had been cold and icy and the ground outside was a little icy, and I slipped and I fell over. And it wasn't like terrible. I didn't break anything or hurt anything. And two very sweet people came over and they were picking up my bags of shopping that rolled everywhere, and, you know, "Are you okay? Do you need anything?" I was like, "No, no, I'm fine." And in that moment I was actually, "Oh, these people are really sweet!" Like I felt really appreciative of the care that I was getting. And then somebody else walks over and says, "Oh yeah, you know, my husband, "he just fell over there 10 minutes ago. "And we just told the staff "and they haven't done anything about it." And I just like flipped. And it's like, I got, so at this



point I was, I was standing up and I got my shopping, and I kind of walked to the side, and I was shouting, "Oi! Come over here!" And I was like, I wasn't being violent, I wasn't being like really aggressive. I was being very measured in my words. But I was really, really angry. And at the time, I'm like, of course I'm just like in the rush of anger, and I come out, and then the trolley guy, who's clearing up the trolleys, comes over, and he says to me, he says, "Well, you know, maybe it's your shoes. "Maybe you should wear better shoes." And I'm in an almost brand new pair of Adidas trainers. I'm looking at my shoes, and I'm like, and in the moment I'm like, "This is victim blaming." This like the most unhelpful... I'm kind of tearing this guy's head off, and long story cut short, I get in the car and I'm driving the last bit to the house. And I phone my wife and I'm relaying the story of what's happened. And firstly, I just notice how much better I feel, like it's like a vent that's been allowed to explode, and like something's kind of cleared and moved through and I feel better for it. But then reflecting further, what I realize is that the wound that I'm carrying that few days, like the thing that's been triggered inside of me, is I have a history and a pattern of taking a lot of responsibility, and being somebody who thinks a lot about other people. And I have, you know, something like 80 people in my companies, and I care about people. And I think about the details to do the best I can. And that sometimes is a burden.

And the thing that I realize has triggered me is that there's people that are not taking responsibility, not doing the things they're supposed to do, and I'm paying the price, and I'm thinking, "I could have broken my arm," and that would've been like a whole drama for my work. So yes, there's an objective reality that that shop's not being run properly. Absolutely, they should have dealt with that. They should have dealt with the ice, and that's still true. But what's also true is this whole volcano that's exploding inside of me, that's my stuff. That's my unhealed, unresolved wound that's getting triggered. And I can stay in my story, and I can stay in my venting, and I can feel justified in doing that. And I am justified in doing that. Like if I had fallen and broken my arm, and I'd sued them, you know, it would've been a big thing. But the thing that's actually most helpful for me is to see, well, what do I need to heal here? What's actually the work that needs to happen in me because everywhere I go, there I am. So I'm gonna carry my wounds into many other situations, replay my patterns. And maybe as we'll get into in a bit, the real wounds of the trauma we experience is often not the trauma itself. It's the way we get wired and set up in response to it. And you know, what I just, that little anecdote is for me an example of that.



Jason Prall

Yeah, I love that story. And that's a perfect example of what I'm talking about. Because that's kind of day-to-day stuff that we all experience that. And whether or not we externally blow up, right, which sounds like you had a little bit of that, and I certainly do that, even when we resist that, we can actually bottle that anger, or that frustration, or that emotion, right? So no matter what expression, sure, to some degree, I think it can be beneficial to temper our response sometimes. And then yet, sometimes we have to be really careful not to suppress our anger, right? 'Cause then we can disown it. I mean, we need to move that stuff, right, somehow, in a healthy way. And so this is exactly what I think is so important to do is to be able to manage this stuff, not in a way that suppresses it, that doesn't show my anger, my sadness, my emotions, but rather we are able to process it, and then we can get back to a state of neutrality on a nervous system level, right? 'Cause that's really what we're talking about when it comes to managing our energy. And then there's ongoing effects, right? If I'm all wound up and charged up, and I'm holding on this emotion, we see it all the time, particularly in marriages or relationships where, you know, one person just gets super angry, or overwhelmed, or reactionary about something not really that important, and really it's the ramification of something else that I'm holding onto, right? And so I guess my question is, is that you mentioned trauma and some things that happened in early life, what's kind of going on there, how would you sort of describe trauma? Is there a process to it? Like what do you think about trauma?

Alex Howard

Yeah, so how I look at it is, what people often think is trauma is an event. Like trauma is something that happened. And that could be what's kind of classically, you know, adverse childhood experiences, like physical abuse, or sexual abuse, or significant neglect. But also, I think more recently, people have come to realize that many of us haven't had those big-T trauma events, but we still have trauma triggers and reactions in our system. There's also what we call trauma with a small-T. That might be just not getting the emotional or physical holding that we needed as a child. Or it might be having parents that, that maybe parents that grew up in an environment of significant lack and poverty. And they've worked really hard to build a level of financial stability in their life. And they believe the most loving thing they can do for us as a child is to push us really hard to be successful at school and go to a great university and get, you know, great qualifications. But what we experience is this constant push, and this constant message that you're loved for what you do, not for who you are, which as a child is actually very, very painful. But trauma is not just the events. Because if it was just the events, you could have two people go through the same experience, they'd have the same outcome. But one of the things we know to be the case,



that you can have many people go through the same experience and actually have quite different outcomes from that experience. So the event really is the first of four stages, or four elements that needs to happen for trauma to ultimately shape and impact us in our lives. So I'll run through them quickly, and then I'll break them down a little bit more. So there's the events. There's then our response. There's how our nervous system responds. There's how the people around us respond to the event. There's then the meaning. There's what do we make that event and that response mean? What do we learn from it? What are the beliefs about ourselves, about other people, about the world? There's then the fourth stage. And that's the defenses. What I mean by that is if we've got all of these feelings and emotions that are not processed, that are not metabolized, and they're all happening there in our system, it's like one of the analogies I use, it's like a big black sack of all these emotions that we've shoved in there. And that black sack energetically can get pretty heavy and a big burden to carry around. And a bit like my example of coming out the supermarket and slipping over, the lid on the sack comes out and all that stuff comes bursting out for a moment. So we need to have ways to defend ourselves against those feelings and emotions. And they might be defenses like always being busy. Or I gave the example of responsibility. So one of my ways of managing some of my trauma was just to be super responsible and to always be there for everyone else, to sort of be the loving, attentive parent that I didn't experience. But often the meanings that we create, like "people don't love me," or "the world is not a safe place," or "if you express your feelings, people will reject you," often those meanings, and then these defenses against all of them, it's often those that really create the suffering in our lives, because the event's happened, and the event might have happened 20, 30, 40, 50 years ago. And as horrific as the event may have been at the time, or it may not have been hugely horrific, it was just unpleasant, but the meanings and the defenses then become themes of how we, our whole life, in a sense, gets shaped. And so to really understand trauma and to understand our triggers, we have to go further than just look at the events of our lives, although that's part of it. We have to understand our response, the meanings that we made, and the defenses that we've then used against all of that.

Jason Prall

Yeah, I love that. And I think what comes to mind as you mentioned all that is just the various people I know that have different ways of being, different energies about them. And some are bright sunshines as they come into a room, and you just wanna be around them, and they're infectious and there's something that's just so amazing about their energy. And others carry around a different energy that's a little more sullen, a little bit more fatigued, a little bit more emotionally unavailable. And all I can think about is what really led to that?



And of course we're all different. So we all carry different character styles and different energies and different constitutions. And these aren't necessarily a bad thing. But I just think about how much this really impacts the ways of being for people. And some people I know, when something little happens, it just takes them down. Like their whole world has just collapsed. And when they're in a good mood, they're a totally different person. So it really, really impacts them. And others, something little will happen, it'll take them down for a minute, or it'll knock them off a little bit, but they're right back, and they're right back in the saddle. So I'm just curious, you know, you work with a lot of people. How do you start to turn this around for people? I mean, there's a lot there, right? I mean, of course, if it was just one trauma that you could go in and help resolve, then boom, we're done, and fantastic, right? But there's layers upon layers, and multiple aspects that are happening over years, right, that are being repeated to create these conditions. So, how do we, how do you, as a practitioner, and others, as maybe clients or patients thinking about their own self, how do they begin to discover some of these and work some of these things?

Alex Howard

Yeah, so what I think you're really talking about is emotional resilience. It's like, what is our capacity to meet the bumps and the bruises, in a sense, the challenges of life. Because, and there's a lot to this, and we could have this whole conversation just about the events of trauma, right? And adverse childhood experiences. We could have a whole conversation about beliefs and meaning, a whole conversation about defenses. But I think to sort of zoom in on a piece of this, to bring it a bit more to life, the response. The response that happens when we are very young, in those around us, is what shapes the response that happens inside of us. Because we are modeling and we are learning from those around us. But also, as infants, just like we are dependent upon the outside world to meet our physical needs, like our survival needs of food and protection and safety, we're also dependent upon the outside to meet our emotional needs. And I think I should be clear, they're not emotional wants. They're not emotional, like, great if you can get them, don't worry if you don't. There are certain emotional needs that for us to meet our psychological and emotional potential, those needs need to be met. Now if those needs are effectively met as children, we learn how to meet those needs for ourselves. So we model what happens in the environment around us. If we learn how to do them for ourselves, that means two things. One, it means in our life, we can meet them for ourselves, but it also means in our relationships with other people, we can use those needs to relate in a healthy way, because going back to what we were saying earlier, the big impact is not necessarily the events, it's the response, the meaning, and the defenses. So if we went through some difficult experiences as children, and these needs were met, and we'll come to these needs in a



moment, if these needs were met, they may still be painful experiences, but they're painful experiences that we worked through and we dealt with. If those needs are not met, again, two things happen, one of which is there's a big impact in our system, which is much larger than it might be. But then we have to deal with that through our lives. We have to make it mean something. We have to then defend against it and all of the different strategies we might use to do that.

Jason Prall

So in other words, we create a reality around us that fits the narrative, or the belief, or the idea, that we've been, that we've created for ourselves, or we've taken on. So it's like, that's how the world works, right? And that's really interesting because it means two people can look at the same world and think very, very different things, which in my experience is exactly how it is, right? If you see two people debating and arguing, it's fascinating the different lenses they're looking through about the same scenario. And I think there's some information there for us. So it's not totally worthless, but it is interesting that that's what's shaping our reality, is our previous experiences that maybe have been unprocessed, or the things that we've been taking on.

Alex Howard

Yeah, well, you know, the point we're taping this, ..."taping this," the 1980s! We're recording this! We've just had this weekend, by the time people listen to this, they're gonna know how this played out. We don't know right now. But right now, there's the Joe Rogan Spotify situation. And there's Neil Young and there's various others that have come out and have said, "I don't want anything to do with Spotify "whilst they have this content." And I'm not so interested in getting into the personal opinions around that. But I think what's interesting is when it's an incredibly emotive issue for people, what is that sense? What is that that's being affected and being triggered? That to me is the piece that was really interesting. And not to negate there are objective truths. And right now it's very hard to get to objective truths because there's so much, so many people that have very strong opinions around lots of things that aren't always really grounded in evidence in the ways that they might be. But if we go back to what these three core emotional needs are, I think it's a really interesting way of framing this. So the first one is boundaries. This is the need to have, as children, boundaries that are strong, that say, this is okay, and that isn't okay. Boundaries that are intelligent, that are actually thought about, not, "You have to go to bed at seven o'clock, "whether you like it or not. "You've got a friend for a sleepover. I don't care." There's an intelligence of thinking about where that boundary's appropriate. Also boundaries that are



responsive. Sometimes a boundary's put in, and actually it needs a little bit of give, and it needs a little bit of move in it. Boundaries that are empowering. So not boundaries that are so hard that they crush our will, but boundaries that actually are more, "You got this, you can do this. "I absolutely, I know this feels scary right now, "but I believe you can do this!" That we have that encouraging, empowering boundary from the caregivers around us. The second of these needs is safety. This is where we learn. Well, firstly, those around us can help us self-regulate our nervous system. So let's say we come home from school when we're five years old and we are devastated about something that's happened and we're crying and it's completely overwhelming. What we need is to feel physical and emotional contact with a parent that helps our nervous system calm. Because, their nervous system is calm. They're able to give us that sense of, "You are okay. "I know right now it feels terrible," but the message is, "You are okay, you are safe." I use a very beautiful phrase that "you have a soft place to fall." That you can fall apart. You can feel all of those difficult feelings, but there's a safety in the holding that we are given.

Jason Prall

I think what's interesting about that is that, you know, when we're infants, when we're, you know, two, three, even, we don't have language, right? So a parent can't say, "Oh, you're gonna be okay," and the child understands. All they're picking up on is the energetics and the physical environment that's actually showing up, right? So is the child being held? Is the parent's or the caregiver's energy nice and calm, and really exuding this sense of, "As you are my dear, you're okay." You know, like I've got you. That's a different feeling. And most of us haven't been trained, or we don't practice those types of things of how to embody that level of energy, right, how to speak that language through our energy. And of course we have an intuitive capacity for these things, right, particularly mothers. This is what mothers are really, really sort of amazing at.

Alex Howard

Yeah, right.

Jason Prall

But either way, it's like, we can lose that capacity to some degree and not be able to communicate that to our children when they're young.



Alex Howard

Absolutely. For all of these three needs, and particularly safety, the energetics are much more important than the words.

Jason Prall

Right.

Alex Howard

Right. So I could say to you, "Jason, you're safe! "Don't worry, you're safe!" Or I can say, "Jason, this is really scary right now." Like the way you say it is way more important than the words. And what your body says is of course even more important than that.

Jason Prall

Right, so there's multiple levels of the language here of communication, right? It's the physical communication through the body language. It's the tone. It's the pacing, right? And then it's the actual physical energetics that are coming from the somatic aspects of our body. There's so much.

Alex Howard

That's it like, what the child, and actually five is quite old, we could go way younger, we could go down to like a week old, a few months old. What the baby needs, typically on the mother's breast, but of course it could be any primary caregiver, is that the mother's heart rate or that that person's heart rate and their nervous system soothes us. Now it can go the other way. It can be that where, you know, if I think about when I was born, my mother had left my father, was divorcing him on grounds of mental cruelty, and it was a pretty ugly situation. I don't imagine my mother's nervous system, you could be superhuman and your nervous system's not gonna be well regulated going through a trauma like that, that she was going through. And so my nervous system was merging with a nervous system that was hyper-aroused and hyper-stressed. And it took me a long time in my own inner journey to figure out that one of the reasons why my nervous system was always dysregulated. And we'll come to the third of these, these emotional needs, in a moment. I know some people, it's very important to complete pieces, "What about about the third one?" But just to say as well, that what's really important here is there's what we experience as children, but what's so important is that teaches us, it models for us to learn how to do that for ourselves. So if



we are not taught, not sat down and said, "Right, here's how to meditate," when we're six months old, but taught energetically how to be safe and how to self-regulate our nervous system, we're not gonna have that as a skill available to us in adult life. And we can come back to that in a minute why that's so important. But the third of these needs is the need for love. And this is not just, "I love you, you're wonderful." What truly makes children feel loved is a few things. You could put it in a love language, I guess, in some ways. But part of that is physical. It's age-appropriate, responsive, tender, loving touch. You know, I think about my kids. When they're super small, of course, they want to be loved and embraced. They get to a point they want to push parents away. And if you resist that and you force them, that's not demonstrating love. It's to find what's appropriate. So as they push away for a while, and then they come back. So it's having that responsive ability to give physical and emotional affection. But I also think one of the often under talked about elements of, I think, a child feeling truly loved is the deep interest and curiosity of that parent in that child's inner world.

Jason Prall

Mmm, no, that's big. That's a really big one, Because, I think, as parents, we want to guide and teach and essentially force our way, our way of the world onto the child. And even their personality, we wanna guide that and mold that and shape that. But what you're talking about is like, who are you? What are you interested in, what's going on in your world? How can I, you know, enjoy you and know you, right? And that's a very, very different thing because, lest we forget, that we are all individuals. We all come in with a uniqueness. And our parents, and I'm a parent of a young one, I have a genuine curiosity, and thank God I waited so long to have kids, because I wouldn't have known any of this ten years ago. And yet I have the luxury of, of actually getting curious about who he is, without me, so to speak, like, who are you? What are you interested in? What do you want do? How do you approach this thing? without me forcing myself in there.

Alex Howard

Yeah, I'll give you an example from my childhood. One of my most happy and most memorable childhood memories was I was super into rock music and guitars as a kid, you can see I've got a guitar on the wall, and we had very, very little money. And I used to have a paper round where I got up at six o'clock in the morning, and I walked to the local paper shop, and I got paid £1.25, which is like a buck-fifty to deliver newspapers. I used to spend, by the way, 25% of that buying a chocolate bar to fuel me round my paper round. And I was doing this paper round for like months and months and months, and I was saving up tiny



amounts 'cause there was an electric guitar I wanted to buy. And I used to go to the local music shop, which was between the school and my grandparents, where I used to go after school. And I used to do like a weekly pilgrimage to go and visit this guitar in the music shop. And my uncle, who was a very strong influence from a distance in my childhood, found out that I was doing this, that I wanted this guitar so much. And one day he phones me up and he tells me that he's bought the guitar. He's phoned the local music shop. And the guy in the music shop knows exactly who I am. And he's watched this kid come in for like a year at this point to look at this guitar. And he's bought me this guitar and this amplifier. And it was like, so I then get to go the next day to the music shop. It was like such an amazing, wonderful, wonderful thing. But it wasn't the fact that someone bought me a guitar that, I mean, of course that was pretty cool, but that wasn't the thing that actually was so powerful. It was the fact that he'd been interested enough to know what that was and not just pick one out of a catalog, whatever, but to actually have it, that kind of personal touch and contact. And I think about, you know, my middle daughter, who's like really obsessed with Harry Potter right now. And that you can go on YouTube, if you put "Harry Potter puppet song," it's like this really silly two-minute video, it's got like 200 million views on YouTube. So our way of connecting right now is the first thing when we see each other in the morning, and the last thing when she goes to bed at night, is to do impersonations of characters in this two-minute video on YouTube, because that's the thing that she's obsessed by right now. So going back to love, telling a child you love them is almost white noise and irrelevant. Yes, of course it has a place. It's the physical and it's the emotional holding, and it's the genuine curiosity and interest to not, as you said, not to try and control their inner world, but to enter, and of course that changes, they have different interests as they get older. But I think, if we go back to these core emotional needs. So as children, we are dependent, entirely dependent, upon the people around us to meet these needs. But then, if that's done really well, we learn to meet these needs for ourselves. So boundaries. What does that mean in terms of boundaries in yourself? It means being able to say, "I need to do this thing, and it's hard. "But I'm gonna commit to doing it." For example, "I recognize I need to do therapy. "And there's times in therapy hard things are gonna happen. "But I've got the discipline, "not in a punishing and cruel way, "but in like, I need this and I'm gonna show up to it."

Jason Prall

And I'm gonna skip that party that's going on, that sounds really exciting and really fun, right? Like that's a tough one for some of us, where it's like, "I wanna go do that. "That's all my friends are doing it. "And it's this, you know, once a year thing." And it's saying no to something so that you can say yes to these other things that are really important.



Alex Howard

To say "yes" to yourself, you have to learn to say "no" to other other people, right? Part of this as well is, is doing that in a way that's not cruel to yourself. Like, you know, we could go into a whole rabbit hole here of boundaries, but there are boundaries that we have as kids that are too harsh and they can tend to crush our will. But also there are boundaries that are too weak. Like often these things are like pendulums that swing. And I think there's a generation at the moment that have been raised that their parents had boundaries that were too hard. So they think the resolution is to have boundaries that are much softer, but actually it just creates a different set of problems that come from that. But we have to learn how to have boundaries with ourself. We have to learn how to self-regulate our own nervous system. We have to learn how to create a sense of safety in our own system. We have to learn how to create a sense of love and kindness and gentleness towards ourself, to be truly curious about our inner world and our inner experience, because that's what it's gonna take to be able to unpack and understand these different things that shape us. And then also it's these three core emotional needs with ourselves, but also we have to do the same thing with the people in our lives. So we were just touching on, we have to learn how to say no to others, how to put up appropriate boundaries and say, "That's actually not okay with me. "If you are gonna be that way with me, "you are not gonna be a part of my life. "That's just simply not okay." But if we didn't learn boundaries as a child, you know, you can have someone that's had some very traumatic experiences as a child, and they've normalized to a world that don't have boundaries. And so they might find themselves in a relationship with someone which is abusive, but not notice it's abuse because they've normalized to not having boundaries. The developing of our boundaries around others is a very important part of stopping ourselves being in more situations that can perpetuate those trauma cycles. Being able to be safe in our emotions around others and not always be triggered by what's happening in the world. Being able to be clear of what's love and what isn't. To be able to let love in. You know, for a lot of people, the challenge is not that there isn't love for them in their lives... dogs are gonna kick off, there's someone at the door... it's also the challenge for being able to let that love in. And if we don't believe that we're lovable, because we didn't get this emotional need met and we're not meeting it for ourselves, there can be a lot of love and a lot of appreciation, but we can't feel it.

Jason Prall

Yeah, that's great, I mean, these are three core things I think are really important when we talk about, again, managing our energy and figuring out how to regulate ourselves on a day-to-day basis. And again, I think it's super practical when we talk about something like boundaries. Another way I'd like to sort of think about this in a more generalized term,



because it includes maybe perhaps some other things too, but is my "alignment," right? Like, is this in alignment with what my core values are and what I want for my life? And for me, that allows me to navigate some of these things in an easy way. And it helps me feel into these things, like these boundary issues, and, you know, is this good for my wellbeing? You know, is this following these core needs? Is this providing more love or is it providing more suffering, right? And this really becomes an important kind of North Star for me is figuring out if what I'm doing or not doing, even something like work, am I working too much, right? Is that really in alignment with what I want? It can seem to be, but if I'm taking away from my meditation practice, or my time with my wife or my son, or what have you, then it actually isn't, right? It's solving one problem or one issue in my life, but it's creating four more. That's not in alignment. So I need to learn how to create boundaries around that to be able to live my life in a way that's conducive to wellbeing, and in that, that's regulating my system in a very strange way, right, it doesn't seem like it's a regulatory sort of practice, but it really is. It's learning how to manage my day and my time and my energy so that I can maintain this level of wellbeing, and I'm not dysregulated on a more regular basis.

Alex Howard

I think that's really true. And another way of putting it is, what do I resonate with, like when I feel aligned, what resonates with me in that place. And if these core emotional needs were not met as a child, and we haven't subsequently learned to meet them for ourselves, what we resonate with is a world that is not boundaried. What we resonate with is a world where we are not regulated in our nervous system. What we resonate with is a world where people are treating us cruelly and unkindly, and not in a loving way, because that's what we've learned, that's what we are familiar with. And also we've made meaning about that. We've learned that the world is a cruel place, or we've learned that if you put your boundaries up, people will smash them down. Or we've learned if you express your emotional vulnerability, people will take advantage of you. And then we have all these defenses, we haven't really got into, but just briefly, like avoidance and distraction, like I'm gonna constantly be busy so I don't feel all these feeling. Or state changing. I'm gonna use drugs, or sex, or alcohol, whatever to...

Jason Prall

Coffee!



Alex Howard

Try coffee, right, to constantly try and change how I feel. So, in a sense, in a strange way we almost end up resonating in the world from a place of dysfunction, because we've got all of these things that we've normalized to being in a way that actually they don't have to be. And then we are attracting, and we are bringing people and choices into our life that perpetuate that cycle of suffering. And the way to really heal that, 'cause in a sense people go, just follow your bliss or just follow what resonates, but often what's resonating is in of itself the problem. So if we can go back and really the resolution to a lot of this is, as children, we are dependent upon our primary caregivers to meet these needs. But as adults, as true adults, we can learn to meet these needs for ourselves. And that's really the healing work that we are doing. We're learning how to have healthy boundaries with ourselves and healthy boundaries with the world around us. We're learning how to regulate our nervous system, how to create a feeling of safety within our own system. We're learning how to be loving of ourselves, to become truly curious and interested in our inner world because then if we do that and we heal in this way, we are gonna find what we resonate with with other people is different. Like, I think about the people that I was attracted to in intimate relationship before I did some of the really important healing work on my own trauma was very different to who I resonated with on the other side of that.

Jason Prall

Yeah, I love that. And I'm curious on the sort of more therapeutic side, or even with yourself, as you're sort of coaching yourself, and resolving some of your own past traumas and conditionings. What are some things, how do you evaluate that for yourself? Like in that situation when you were reflecting, you know, I think self-reflection's a fantastic one, whether it's through meditation or just taking a walk, but really kind of evaluating things that are going on in your own mind, in your own thought processes is important. But what are some other things that you like to do? Is there a way that you go about figuring some of those out with yourself and then also with your patients and clients, how do you help them work through some of this stuff?

Alex Howard

Well, just to be clear, Jason, I haven't got any issues, right? Just to be clear.

Jason Prall

Hypothetically.



Alex Howard

But if I did, hypothetically, I tend to think about it really that there's two parts to it. So firstly, there's the awareness piece. And I'm a huge believer in the importance of cultivating that self-awareness. And one of the phrases that I use a lot is, "If you can see it, you don't have to be it." Like if we can really have that capacity to step back and see the different patterns and responses and ways, the meanings that we make, and the defenses that we use, that in and of itself gives us some choices. Now, sometimes the awareness alone is enough, particularly if we've done some work on resolving some of these issues. Because as I'm driving back off the situation that we talked about, I'm reflecting, and I'm going actually what's happening is firstly, I've taken on some responsibility in some places that I actually have some resentment about. So I need to deal with that. One of things was I need to hire some more people to help with some pieces that I'm stepping in. I also need to just step back in a few places and not try and rescue some people. But also I'm recognizing that I just needed to vent. And it wasn't the most skillful way of doing it. I can have my narrative that I was justified and me blowing up probably helped the problem not happen again. And there was value to that. But I just needed some emotional release. And there's better ways of doing that than blowing up in the supermarket.

Jason Prall

Well, yeah, I like what you're doing there. It's almost a superficial release, but it's an important release, right, like you're venting, you can vent to your pillow or to your wall, right, or to yourself, but you're still getting it out, right, instead of holding it in. And then as you let that sort of initial wave of raw emotion out, then you can actually get in there and go, "Hmm, what was going on there?" And you can start to evaluate and then do the deeper work too, right, to further process what's stuck from before perhaps.

Alex Howard

Right, and also notice what I'm not doing in that situation is I'm not shaming myself and judging myself and going, "Oh my God, I'm a terrible person," and partly because there's a line that I didn't cross, like, yes, I was angry and I had a vent, but I wasn't being personally insulting towards anyone. I wasn't being physically intimidating towards anyone. So there's certain kind of moral, value lines that I just, I didn't cross, and I don't think I would cross. So the awareness piece is really important, but awareness alone isn't always enough. Like I sort of joke, people sometimes say to me, "Alex, I'm seeing it, but I'm still being it!" "Like how do I work with that piece?" And that comes down to having really effective tools and strategies. And there's many, you know. And I think sometimes there's certain tools I think there's real



value in spending significant time in self-mastery. And then there's other tools that different things help in different situations. Sometimes the things that I'm most drawn towards, people watching this, or listening to this, might have completely different things. I'm not sure there's right and wrong. It's just what we find works. But certainly one of the tools that you've mentioned, I think, a couple of times in this interview, which has got an enormous amount of research to show that for the vast majority of people is immensely helpful is some form of contemplative, or meditation, or mindfulness practice. Now it's true to say that there are some people that have significant trauma that actually the practice of meditation, until they do some of the deeper processing, takes them closer to their trauma. And actually that's not helpful. So it's not a blanket, everyone should be doing it, but certainly for the majority of people. Because what you are really learning to do, you're learning to do a few things. But one of the things you are learning to do is you are learning to self-regulate your nervous system. Going back to this safety piece, you are learning that if your system ramps up, you are learning strategies and tools that will help you calm that. That's like a, in terms of emotional resilience, that is a superpower, to be able to not just be led by the events and the triggers and the reactions and things that happen, but you can directly impact and influence and you can notice that, I'm hyper-aroused, what do I need to do, I need to train, I need to in this moment, calm and ground and settle my system.

There are then, I find in a lot of the work that I do, some of the tools around retraining habits and patterns can be very helpful. So learning how to catch and break and reset patterns of thinking. Strategies around how do you metabolize and process emotions. So going back to my example earlier, we've got this big black sack of all this emotion that's shoved and the kinda burden of carrying that around. Well, part of the reason, all that stuff is in that black sack is it's just unmetabolized. It's like you can put it in the language of this conference, it's energy, it's unmetabolized energy in our system. And we need to metabolize it. The metabolizing of emotion is a natural process. The problem is things get in the way of that process. And the analogy I use is it's like digestion. To digest food, we need to chew on it. We then need to swallow, we need to kind of let it go down. There's a metabolizing that happens when we sort of break it down and we take the nutrients. And then there's an expelling and rejecting what we don't need. With emotion, chewing is like talking about it. It's the reflecting. It's the kind of sharing with friends that can hold space for us while we're just like, we are making sense of it. The swallowing is like the letting go. There's a moment with emotion you just have to let yourself feel it. And that feeling can be scary. Like if we've learned to defend and get away, we have to learn to sit with and feel the feeling. But then in that there's a natural process of metabolizing and healing that happens. So there are different ways of doing this, having strategies and tools that allow us



to actually process and to feel those emotions. So we need the awareness piece. We need to be able to really make sense of, and understand, and recognize why and where and how these triggers are happening. We need ways of self-regulating, of calming our system. We need ways of breaking some of those patterns that perhaps have a little bit too much momentum behind them. And we need ways of working with the emotions and feelings. And there's lots of ways of doing each of those pieces.

Jason Prall

Yeah, I love that. I love that you're mentioning all the layers, right? Because there's things like, even just mindfulness, right? You can do journaling or, you know, any kind of process like that at the end of the day. And that helps you consciously acknowledge parts of your day, right? Like what went wrong, so to speak, or what are some things that you wish you could change, or you weren't really proud of, or what have you? And then what are some of the good things that you did really well, or that you, that you were grateful for, right? So we can have gratitude practices. We can have, you know, all kinds of different things that are on the mindfulness level, right, the conscious level, that helps bring us closer in our awareness to what's really going on, in that contemplative sort of reflective practice. And then the deeper aspects that, I think, are of course, really, really important, but oftentimes they do require another person, a therapist or somebody, that can help you process some of these deeper aspects. But all the while, no matter what we can do, you know, whether it's the meditation or the breath works, right, to help move some things through and to keep us regulated, all of that is then creating a greater balance, more regulation throughout our day as we go forward. And that's what I've noticed is so powerful when we go through these chaotic times where there's just a lot of emotion in the environment, and there's a lot of things that can stir people up. And I'm not saying it's for a wrong reason, that it's even a bad thing per se. But it's much easier for me to go through my day and not get so wound up about things.

Alex Howard

Yeah, I'm gonna give you an example of, I feel like I'm gonna vindicate myself of my outburst in the supermarket with a hopefully, hopefully slightly more skillful kind of way of responding. So we had some family over for lunch a few weeks ago. And a family member, we were talking about our kids and schooling. And, you know, we're at a kind of transition point of where they kind of go next. And I have some very strong personal beliefs around boarding school. So boarding school is a very big thing in the UK of sending children away, sometimes when they're very young. I wasn't personally sent to boarding school. My wife



was, and a number of good friends of mine were. And for me, the evidence is pretty clear about the traumatic impact of children being separated from parents. And a family member was... part of our challenge is that the schools we really love for our kids are not very near where we are, and do we move, and they were, "Well, "surely you just send your children to boarding school." And I have a very clear position around this. And I could feel the place in me that wanted to go to war over this issue. And then there was a place in me that was like, there's no reason that's helpful. I don't need to go to war right now, because ultimately this person's not gonna make the decision. I'm gonna make the decision with my wife. There's no value to me, you know, of course, if that person was trying to push this, I might need to have a stronger boundary. And in that moment, I could feel my reactivity. I could feel the righteousness, and the story, and all the reasons, all the evidence, the research, the personal narratives of people in the family. And in that moment, I was just really able to recognize all of that and just let it go. And not in a collapsing way, like to be really clear, this is how I feel. But also to let the conversation move on and not be harboring and rageful. Because in that moment, I could have my feelings, but I didn't need to, yeah...

Jason Prall

To let them take over, right?

Alex Howard

Yeah, and I didn't need to make this other person wrong. And in another situation, it might be that I'm working with a patient. And, you know, perhaps they have young children and their husband or wife is trying to force them, and they need shoring up. But in that situation, I might be encouraging them to have their boundary and to have their power. It's being able to respond to what's appropriate, as opposed to just being triggered, and it's almost like our response is predefined by all these unhealed wounds, that someone rubs the wound a little bit, and then we just keep on reacting to that.

Jason Prall

Right, yeah, and this is exactly my point with sort of the politics aspect is that we, we argue as if we're going to have an impact, as if we're gonna change things, but it's like, they're doing things over there, and somehow we're arguing and we're getting emotional in a conversation with a friend or a loved one, as if this is the conversation that's gonna change the reality. And it's just not, right? And so it's just fascinating to watch ourselves and others get so worked up in a situation that actually, it's just a conversation. It's not going to create



a massive impact. And so those are the things that I think are really important to check ourselves with and recognize, am I creating some strife here? Am I creating emotional turmoil, with perhaps somebody I love, or somebody I care about, over something that doesn't need to get all this worked up about. So, you know, this is the day-to-day stuff. And you see this at the grocery store. You see this in the return counter at Costco, right? Like you see this in situations where people are getting so worked up, and I include myself in this, that just doesn't need to be. And again, as we mentioned before, it's like, when I'm lashing out, for whatever reason, I'm actually impacting the other person, right? I could be ruining their day, so to speak, if they're not able to regulate what I'm throwing at them. So it has a domino effect perhaps to 30/40 different people, just my one interaction here with this individual, right? Like that's meaningful. And so if I can learn to regulate that, not only in myself, but I'm impacting others in a huge way.

Alex Howard

Absolutely. And I think, you know, like there's a place where one can be loving and empathetic and have a really clear, "no," that can be empowered by one's strength, and one's, you know, kind of raw power as a person. But it doesn't have to become shaming, or hateful, or cruel, or rejecting of others. A strong boundary, and love and kindness, can coexist together. And I don't have, you know, I think it's, again, I'm always a little bit nervous to get into kind of public things that people feel strongly about, A, when we are recording several months before it's gonna come out, 'cause it's like we could date ourselves very quickly in the opinion, but also I'm always very reluctant to hurt or wound people that may feel very strongly about something. But as a comment, I absolutely think that people have their right to say, "I want my content taken off this platform." If that's how they feel, I think they have a right to do that. I think there are places where I felt very strongly about my position and my integrity, and I think people have that right. I think what's more interesting is how people, as you say, have absolutely no power to do anything about it, and yet days of their life are consumed by their reactivity. That's the piece that's interesting. What is it that's been triggered? Because it's in a sense, it's like hatred is like swallowing poison and hoping the other person dies. Like we are the one that suffers. Now hatred is an emotion that absolutely we have to learn to feel and metabolize. And within our hatred is great power and that's an important emotion to process. But just living in a place of constant reactivity, we're less empowered to change events because we're just in reaction the whole time. And we're causing enormous suffering for ourselves and the people that have to be around someone that's being triggered the whole time. So learning how to process that, metabolize that, and if we still feel strongly about something, absolutely we should show up in the world for the things that we care about. But it's doing it in a place where we are



not just showing up in our reactivity and causing more reactivity, we're showing up from a place that may be absolutely clear, absolutely firm, "I do not want my content on the same platform as this," if I feel strongly about that issue, but doing it from a place that's also respectful, and loving, and caring, and constructive, and wishing to find solution as opposed to divisive, and just causing more trauma, ultimately.

Jason Prall

Yeah, and that's really, I think, the message that I really wanna hit home again, is that going back to your example in the grocery store and potentially breaking your leg, it's the fact that, you know, I see so many of us, and I've been in there myself, when we get caught in these processes, that we feel so righteous, we feel so right. I'm right to be angry, I'm right to have this response. And I think what I want to make clear is the separation between perhaps being right in the moment in what you're responding to, but also the separation between that and, and the way it's delivered, the emotion, and the charge, and the vitriol perhaps that's coming with it, those can be separated, right? And that is what's worth doing. It's not necessarily that you're wrong of having this opinion, or what have you, or that if it's important. I'm not saying it's not important, right? That's not what we're saying at all. It's just, we can separate the response, and the charge, and the emotion, and the energy that's being worked up in somebody, because it has real, real effects, especially if we can't fully process it. If we're stirring up that much energy and then it gets essentially stuck, now we're carrying that around with us forever or until we're able to process it. And that's what has such long lasting effects.

Alex Howard

Also I know that personally, the less I'm in my reaction, the more powerful I actually am.

Jason Prall

Of course.

Alex Howard

So to give you an example, as I was, you know, I'd got home, and I'd sort of had a shower, and cooked dinner and relaxed. And I was sat there, and I was like, I could have been so much more deadly in my reaction, right?



Jason Prall

Right, right, yes.

Alex Howard

Because me in my calmer self would've walked in and said, "I wanna have a conversation with the manager." And the manager would've come over. And I would've said, "I need you to know that I nearly had a serious injury. "And your staff didn't do..." And I would've been empowered. I would've been calm. But I actually would've enacted change in the situation because if I felt really strongly, I wouldn't have let it go. I would've wanted a report of what had happened. I would've, "I wanna speak to head office." I could have been deadly powerful in impacting what the situation, as opposed to being written off as a guy that had a tantrum.

Jason Prall

I love this. Yeah, I love what you're saying. I think it's so important. And this really is the crux, right? It's like, when you can maintain your composure, when you can stay within yourself, now you can stay within your intellect, within your logic, within your reason, and within your heart, more importantly. Now you can act from those places and that's where you can have the biggest impact on the world. So yes, important that they get their shit corrected, but more important, that you help that process, as opposed to being potentially having an impedance in that process, right? And so I love what you said. I think this is really, really critical, and being able to manage your energy from being dispersed and scattered and all over the place to being here in your center, in your heart, in your own mind, in your intellect, that's where we can make the biggest impact.

Alex Howard

And it's also the place where when one stays in their heart, they also are able to hear and respond to the people around them, because the truth is that it may well have been the case that the staff were over-worked and someone was having a dreadful day. You know, maybe the person whose responsibility it was to go and put up the signs to block off the ice, or to put some salt or something down so the ice wasn't slippery, I don't know, maybe that person had just found out something that was personally very devastating. Like there's all kinds of other things that may have completely opened my heart and changed the situation that I was unable to hear, because I was in my rant.



Jason Prall

Totally, and going back to your, going, you know, back to your point about going to the manager and speaking to the manager in a more effective way, perhaps the manager did tell that person to do that thing. And that person was off being delinquent and intentionally not doing that thing for whatever reason. And now the manager can take proactive steps to either discipline, or get rid of, or fire, or bring somebody in to resolve that situation, right? So there's you being in your heart and in your alignment, now you can take effective action, and perhaps the store, or the manager, or whatever, can make the effective move. Whereas if you're just yelling at one of the coworkers, then perhaps the manager never finds out because these two are friends, and you know what I mean? So there's so many scenarios that you really don't know what happened, you know, to cause your injury.

Alex Howard

Right, and also the truth is I have a responsibility to show up and be a citizen that says, "Look, hey guys, "this thing wasn't okay, this thing shouldn't happen." But also the gift to me is that I then get to go away, and because I have an approach in my life of wanting to learn, and wanting to understand myself, and wanting to heal my triggers, I'm then able to take the gift from me of, wow, I got to the point that I had a, like the joke with my wife is, now when I go to the supermarket, I hope they're gonna let me in, 'cause I might be back. I mean, I'm making it sound worse than it was.

Jason Prall

You're blacklisted now.

Alex Howard

Exactly, exactly. But it's like the gift to me is that I was able then to look at there's a piece that I'm not dealing with, that's meant that I can be triggered in this way. And the gift for me is I get to go and learn from that and figure that out, so I don't find myself in that place next time.

Jason Prall

Yeah, and again, I can't let go of this idea that coming from the heart and acting from your alignment can produce results that are really surprising. Perhaps, again, you speak to the manager, and I know you're married and everything, but if you weren't, perhaps you strike



up a conversation with the manager who you might never have otherwise known, and you work out a business dealing, or you fall in love and there's a relationship. Like this is how life works, right? When we come from our alignment, when we are managing our energy in a way that it comes from love, amazing things can happen. So, again, I'm just trying to plant seeds, 'cause I've had these experiences where I act from that place, and like unbelievable things unfold. And it's only because I did the thing that allowed me, I did the thing from my heart that allowed me to follow that process and have a result that I otherwise wouldn't have had, right? So, again, there's so many unexpected consequences from doing this thing. So Alex, I mean, we can go on forever. I love the work that you do. And the way you approach this, you're clearly in the mastery phase of this piece of work. And so please tell people where they can find more of what you do.

Alex Howard

Thank you, Jason. So the simplest place is my website, alexhoward.com. And there you can find signposting towards the different things that I'm involved in. So just very briefly, I have a 12-week online coaching program, the RESET Program. We really go into a lot of what we talked about here in more detail. There's a free three-part video series for that at alexhoward.com. People can check out my YouTube channel. I have real-life filmed therapy sessions, which is right on the edge of just what happens. They'll find links to that. And also our practitioner training, where we train people in this methodology of therapeutic coaching, which is integrating psychotherapeutic approaches and coaching principles. They'll also find signposting to that as well.

Jason Prall

Beautiful. Alex, thanks. So glad to be here with you. It's so wonderful to hear your words and I appreciate you sharing your time with us.

Alex Howard

Thank you, Jason. I always enjoy our time together. I always like the fact that we can go in with a very light plan and just enjoy each other. So thank you, I appreciate it.