

C A R M E N M O R I N

Music Mindset Podcast - Episode 7: Discipline Being Freedom with Jen Shukuda Episode 7 Transcript

Carmen Morin Introduction:

Hello and welcome to the Music Mindset Podcast. I'm Carmen Morin, and this is episode seven. Today I am very excited to welcome a special guest, Jennifer Shukuda, my colleague and dear friend. Now Jen is a fellow teacher, a performer, and a collaborative artist. I have seen her firsthand transform the mindset of countless families and students that she works with through her decades of teaching. Now Jen also draws on a very unique background, since as well as being an exceptionally effective teacher, she also has enjoyed a successful career in healthcare with a focus on mental health, as a business coach and leader emphasizing high performance, and of course, as a parent to her two beautiful girls.

Now in this episode, Jen is discussing a common thread at the root of fulfillment in all areas of life and how it is that she traces this back to the discipline and awareness that she developed through her musical training. I am so happy that she's joining us here today. She has so much wisdom to share, and I'm so happy to have her join me on this episode.

Carmen Morin:

Thank you so much for being here. Thanks so much for doing this. As you know, I was so excited to have you on the podcast. You and I have had so many chats about life and leadership and parenting and teaching, and of course, music. And I like to joke that sometimes I feel like an absolute nerd or a fan girl that I start to take notes when we're having lunch together just because I think you have so much wisdom just drawing from all of the things that you've done. So I'm happy to have you here.

So as I said, you've got a very unique background of expertise. So I mean, you've reached this high level of classical music as a performer yourself. You're also an exceptional teacher. You're a parent. And then along with that, you've also enjoyed a long career as a health care provider working specifically in mental health. You're an entrepreneur. You've been a business coach.

On this podcast, really what I try to do is we talk a lot about all of the connections between that process that we go through learning a musical instrument. So it shouldn't be any surprise when you started to point out all of these kinds of connections that you were making with your career. So in the past you shared that when you enter the process of learning an instrument, you said,

"Music lessons and piano are a tool that exposes who we are. We have an ownership to use this effectively in drawing out the most important life principles in our students and that the daily

Music Mindset Podcast - Episode 7: Discipline Being Freedom with Jen Shukuda
Episode 7 Transcript

habits that we draw out through this process will lay the foundation for the success we experience in life." And those are one of those things that I made a note of.

So if you had to articulate one way that the process of learning an instrument really guides us and our students through these most important life principles, what would it be?

Jennifer Shukuda:

You know, I think that one principle that I have found to be really key when teaching students is really to celebrate the hard moments. I joke around with my students that they don't need to inform me about the days that they're practicing because they have a positive emotional response prior to hitting the keys. I want them to let me know about the days where everything inside of them reels against coming to the piano but they do it anyway. And I think that this concept of really just acting out and starting to develop what you and I probably have talked about quite a bit about discipline being freedom, as soon as we can start to teach that to children, teenagers, even adults that we're teaching, I really believe that we can start to create some stability and some habits that flow out of that.

Carmen Morin:

And that's amazing. Now what jumped out to me is discipline being freedom. That's something that I would write down if we were to make a note. So can you elaborate on that? How would you explain that to someone who doesn't have a background in any of the classical disciplines or formal training?

Jennifer Shukuda:

Yeah, for sure. You know, I think that my first understanding of discipline stems from my very early days as a nurse. I was an internal medical nurse, and I had the privilege of being led by phenomenal serving leaders. One I have to edify every time I speak about her, saying Rhonda Niebrugge, where she really taught me that so much of the freedom was establishing just a rhythm in terms of, okay, no matter whether I felt good, whether I felt afraid, whether I felt comfortable or uncomfortable, I needed to develop a system in terms of every single day I arrived early to work. I would probably leave a little bit late just with that start well, finish well. And then embedded into the rhythm of everything I did in the shift was systems in terms of follow-through, whether or not the day was busy, whether it was chaotic or not. There was freedom in terms of knowing that I knew what I was going to do and how I would follow through in every aspect of it.

So, circling back to the idea that discipline is freedom, I think it becomes freedom when we start to let go of the expectation that somehow a calm environment, calm circumstances, wanting to

Music Mindset Podcast - Episode 7: Discipline Being Freedom with Jen Shukuda
Episode 7 Transcript

do something on the front end, that that is what we need in order to feel calm or joyful or peaceful. It is when we develop the discipline to follow through, even when we have stress or discomfort, that's where we start to develop the freedom of, "Oh okay, so I can have joy. I can have peace daily, despite any circumstances that will land in my roadway, in front of me."

Carmen Morin:

That's a beautiful lesson to experience in different areas of life. Because of course we can relate that to... Anytime learning a musical instrument it's like, I want to play this piece. That's so beautiful. I love to listen, but then I sit down and it doesn't feel that great. And I don't really feel like practicing and I'm not enjoying this. And what about all of that space in between where this is actually where all of that growth and beauty and everything takes place. Obviously, just learning how to enjoy... It's about the journey and not the destination, right? It's about that process. And just having that discipline of showing up and being in that uncomfortable situation, I think is what teaches all of us and our students that we can just feel so good sharing that with them as they go through the process. So how would you feel, if you look back through your musical training, how did that help you to kind of embrace that discomfort that comes along with growth?

Jennifer Shukuda:

Yeah. That's a great question. And actually, I think that there were very tangible bridges that were created both when I was working out kind of this way of overcoming anxiety, despite my environment, I had the gift of actually seeking out lessons from your dad. And interestingly enough, it was taking lessons with your dad that started to really help embed a lot of the macro principles, which helped me function as a nurse. He'd often tell me, "Okay, even when you're playing a piece that is agitated, that is very fast and furious. I want you to start to develop the ability to remain calm inwardly."

He used to joke around when I felt stressed out that he'd say, "Oh, no, it's okay. Nobody's going to call 911. You're not going to make the news if you make a mistake." And on many levels, I think he started to help me recognize those principles on the piano, I could then take to the unit where I just went through a span where it seemed like every single shift that I came to. I would have an assignment that was extremely traumatic if you will.

And a lot of what your dad was teaching me was applicable to my nursing skills in the sense that, okay, so even if somebody is passing away in front of me, I have an ownership to remain calm. I have an ownership to continue to act out the art form of nursing. And I think that anything in life, when we start to look at anything in the journey as formation, we're trying to develop an art form here. Then I think that we can see a lot of the pain points that we go through and oftentimes failures, which certain [inaudible 00:09:03] helped me work through Carmen for in my own life, in my own experiences on the piano. Then we recognize that failure, the good

Music Mindset Podcast - Episode 7: Discipline Being Freedom with Jen Shukuda
Episode 7 Transcript

moments, the bad moments, the shameful moments are actually a part of the journey of entering into mastery.

And actually, I have to share a quote. One of my favorite authors is Og Mandino. And he ties this together really well. He says "To put away aimlessness and weakness and to begin to think with purpose is to enter the ranks of those strong ones who only recognize failure as one of the pathways to attainment who makes all conditions, serve them and who thinks strongly attempt fearlessly and accomplish masterfully." And again, that's Og Mandino. And that principle or the many principles there, your dad really helped solidify in me in terms of almost like, okay, let's normalize the struggle and discomfort, and let's start to explore and dream bigger than where maybe our fears would have prevented us from going because we have now the tools. And I think the last thing that I'll say in terms of having a belief system that can overcome the discomfort, it is ensuring that we are attached to people that have fruit on the tree.

So when it comes to you as a teacher and performer Carmen, the reason why I value your education, your continued education, which I'm continuing to be grateful for as well as your dad. It's because I knew the fruit on the tree in terms of the students and their outcomes that your dad had created. I know you're playing capacity as well as your leadership capacity. So when I'm looking at the systems in place, which would be daily practice, as well as the influencer, which in this case would be you and your dad on the piano, that is where we can have comfort in knowing that the day in, day out will eventually create results. Even if it seems a little hopeless in the short term.

Carmen Morin:

Oh, that's wonderful. Yeah. And I think it's so interesting too. And just even hearing those connections in between, because if the growth has to come by going through those uncomfortable situations, it is, as a performer and a musician, it's impossible to avoid training without uncomfortable situations because you're going to have to get on stage. Right? And let's face it, building up the capacity and the experience to get on stage means a lot of, not even never being uncomfortable, it's just getting used to that discomfort, right? That this is part of it. And you know what's on the other side and then connecting that to something like, you have traumatic experiences in healthcare and in the hospital, being able to really see that that is such an important part of that journey, right?

Carmen Morin:

And I love that quote. So, going through that growth yourself, and obviously there are many different vehicles, as that say goes, many different vehicles that can take you to your highest

Music Mindset Podcast - Episode 7: Discipline Being Freedom with Jen Shukuda
Episode 7 Transcript

self, right? So it's like going through these uncomfortable situations and then being able to see them mirrored in different arenas of life. I think it's safe to say that you have really grown into roles as guiding and supporting others. Right? I see you as a teacher. You've always been such a wonderful friend and colleague and support to me, a musician. Is there one point when you kind of came to a fork in the road where you felt like pursuing music and the arts would be able to continue that journey further than in your health care? Or is it something that you're still kind of drawing from in both?

Jennifer Shukuda:

Yeah, that's for sure. I can think of the turning point because it took place just coming up four years ago now. And the reality is that my journey is, about 17 years I was a registered nurse. I really came to see nursing. And I've mentioned it just earlier on here, that nursing is an art form. It is the gift being, and the privilege of being able to enter into the most vulnerable places of somebody else and then just speak hope into that area. And so in some ways I've been able to maintain that because my dream, probably the last couple of years of being a nurse was just to be able to sow into one person at a time. And I have the privilege of caring for you, you and I both know, Jay. And so it's a gift to be able to actually explore more intricacies of focusing on one person.

Jennifer Shukuda:

And interestingly enough, starting to accompany yours and my friend and former Canadian tenor, Leon Leontaridis, starting to accompany, a beautiful opera singer. It started to, and I would say, he started to teach me to not only focus on the caliber of my sound, but to really develop the skill of almost like a wave coming underneath and supporting him. And so I would say caregiving now is my bridge. Even though I don't have a nursing license anymore, I still have the gift of sowing in and really understanding the beauty and the art form of working with one individual. I would say working with Leon was a beautiful bridge for me entering into prioritizing music because he taught me the gift of being able to take my eyes off myself, to still focus on the beauty of my sound, but to really serve on him and do my best to support him.

And that drew me towards, really starting to look at music as a priority again, and certainly your leadership ability and my cousin Janine's leadership ability in the studios that I get to be a part of. The fact that you two are very much focused on culture. You guys create safe places for other teachers to be their own selves. Their own individuals. You give plenty of room for folks to grow as entrepreneurs themselves. And I'm very drawn to a culture of freedom. And so I think all of these different facets very comfortably helped me, release my title as a registered nurse. So I think I'll always have the heart of a nurse if you know what I mean.

Carmen Morin:

Music Mindset Podcast - Episode 7: Discipline Being Freedom with Jen Shukuda
Episode 7 Transcript

So, a lot of what we do when we're teaching is working with parents of music, students, or adults who are learning themselves, how can we help to guide them through the process of either of them feeling like they can't do it or maybe, "My child can't achieve this". What is a guiding principle that you like to anchor in to really guide them forward through those kind of moments?

Jennifer Shukuda:

For sure. First of all, I think of it as twofold. I think that if we look at undertones, gratitude will always be the undertone that will help somebody action out a lot of the tools, a lot of the daily disciplines that we'll move and transition them from feeling like they can't, to being absolutely surprised that they can. I think you and I can think of many examples ourselves where, maybe something required far more work than we thought it would. Where we felt like we deserved results much sooner than we did. We thought maybe our stress tolerance would expand much sooner than it did. And I think it's that I get to play the piano. I get to practice. I get to learn from this phenomenal teacher. I get to perform here.

I think that it is that spirit of gratitude that will almost fuel our day in, day out rhythms, even when we don't yet see fruit coming about. And I think a second part is I like to ask parents or students the question of like, just giving them the option where I say, okay, I understand you feel like this is too hard. Do you think we should just no longer pursue anything that is hard? Or do you think that we should tackle it again and again, until you feel like it's no longer hard? And I am yet to have anybody answer the first response. I think they just recognize that they can actually own that decision. And again, they're not in a position where they actually have to do any big to work with us. They get to grow with us and they get to have the feeling of somebody that isn't above them, but certainly further down the road in terms of experiencing the pain of growth. Yeah.

Carmen Morin:

And I love that. What you just said. It's not a matter of being above them, more talent, more ability, more gifts, anything. It really is just, I can help to guide you only cause I'm further down and further down the line. I've, I've experienced more of the challenges, more pushing through those hard moments. Right? Yeah, I love that.

And then what about for those, because I absolutely love and vibrate on that same frequency. It's like as much as possible, try to find that gratitude, how thankful you can be to go through the process. And I think realistically, you and I will have a great deal to draw on from that in this process of music, because we've played for so many years of our lives. For almost our entire lives, right. I think since we were two and three years old, right? So going through that process, we can really see that there are fruits that will come from this experience. What about for those

Music Mindset Podcast - Episode 7: Discipline Being Freedom with Jen Shukuda
Episode 7 Transcript

who are starting music later in life or are coming from a place of limiting beliefs where those other people might be musicians but I'm not, and where's the value of my music and my artistry. And they have never actually experienced that process. You know, how do we guide? How do we guide everyone?

Jennifer Shukuda:

Yeah. I think that's a good point to unpack because you and I have discussed briefly how there can be that almost extreme swinging of the pendulum where there can be that positive toxicity or another way to look at that might be where somebody almost feels like they have to be somebody that they're not, or they have to put that positive front. So they have to act like they're okay when they're not. And that certainly isn't healthy. You know what we think of the authentic gratitude that will fuel us through pain points. I think it's important to recognize that's a muscle that we develop. Certainly it can be developed through what we say to ourselves. I find oftentimes if we ask ourselves questions rather than making statements, we will fuel that muscle such as you know, I use the example of like, well, Carmen is a phenomenal concert pianist.

I have the tools that she extends to me. I'm grateful for her time. Why can't I play like her if I practice like her? I think that this, and I think it is quite normal for us to develop this mindset later in life. I know that it was from my journey of, as you mentioned, being a business coach. That is where I learned that. I don't think I was ever taught to think and really manage those pain points or traumas. We do go through certain traumas that would maybe swing us into the victim brain. And it was like, oh, I have to edify the new Shiuchi, Tyler, Candace, Dean, and Marcy they're a circle of cutting edge entrepreneurs where what I was most drawn to was the fact that they always seem to never let pain go to waste.

You know, any hardship, like let's talk about sleep deprivation. Let's talk about relational trauma. Let's talk about grief. I was able to have the gift of being in the front seat or in the front row, watching them continually use pain, suffering and hardships as the reason to grow and not as the excuse not too.

And you and I have talked about that a lot as mothers, and being entrepreneurs and being folks that are so growth minded that we would take ownership. And I think you and I have held each other accountable to never let different areas in our life that are struggle or areas that we need to really persevere through to be the reason we don't continue to follow through. Yeah. And so I think just really clarifying the fact that gratitude can mean acknowledging suffering. It just means that we always maintain that "I get to" mentality. Like, "I'm so grateful for Carmen, because even though I'm having the worst day of my life, I can reach out to her and we can unpack this together." And then it's that spirit of solution seeking that comes from gratitude. Yeah.

Carmen Morin:

Music Mindset Podcast - Episode 7: Discipline Being Freedom with Jen Shukuda
Episode 7 Transcript

And I think that's such a beautiful distinction, right. Because I think often we can hear, "Well, we should just feel good about it". And it's still something that, is good for us, but I mean, acknowledging that pain and don't let the pain go to waste. I love that. Yeah. That's, that's wonderful. So if you had to name one trait or character value that music lessons instill in students, of any age, that you think can really support them in every area of their lives, what would that be if you had to narrow it down to one?

Jennifer Shukuda:

Yeah. That's a tough one. I actually have to think about that one. There's just so many. I think if there's one thing, it's the long game growth mindset, I think it's, it is the ability to start to look at the ups and downs as a formation. You and I talk a lot about hustle, about creating that drive. And I think all of that can be very, very effective when we recognize it's all about a long-term journey and in recognizing who we're becoming in the process. You and I both, and I think we can speak about most of our students, even the best students, they go through seasons where they have quite a bit of time where there is an intense degree of practice that enhances quite a bit of fruitful results. There can be difficult seasons in parents' life, relationally, financially.

There can be difficult seasons that children go through where I think the temptation can be a focus on perfection and outcome in the short term. And then I think that can create a result in people's minds where they think it's time to quit. But I think the "no quit" button comes in our musical journey when we recognize that it's a lifestyle. It's an art form. It's a beautiful tool that forms who we are and will actually not just impact us, but it's a generational gift that will extend. And you and I have been able to give that to our own children and I'm hundred percent positive our grandchildren one day two. Yeah.

Carmen Morin:

Oh, that's beautiful. The up and down is a formation. Ups and downs of that process are formation. That's another amazing way to look at it. All right. So one final question that I wanted to ask you, and I know it's going to be a loaded question and it can really be anything at all that comes to mind, but what is music to you?

Jennifer Shukuda:

Oh, great question. I think, and this might not resonate with anybody. Music to me is an echo of eternity. And I remember that hitting home, you used to always bring us to the... What is the museum downtown?

Carmen Morin:

The National Music Center.

Music Mindset Podcast - Episode 7: Discipline Being Freedom with Jen Shukuda
Episode 7 Transcript

Jennifer Shukuda:

Thank you. The National Music Center. Yeah. So there was a tour that we got to take where we were looking at some of the antique pianos. And carved in Latin and embedded in bold. It said music is an echo of eternity. And ever since then that's how I've seen music because I'm like, okay. So music can be a form of prayer. Music can be a form of healing. Music can be a form of grounding. Music can be a form of stimulation. And so I think that that probably would be the best way to describe music.

Carmen Morin:

Jen, thank you so much for being here. Thank you so much for joining me, your insight. As you know, and as I tell you, as often as I can, I just grow so much through our friendship and being your colleague and collaborating with you in so many different ways. So I'm so thankful that you could join me today. And thank you so much for being here and for sharing.

Jennifer Shukuda:

Well, thank you as well as you know, I call you the movie star of the classical piano world. Certainly you are, and I feel privileged to learn in life with you and certainly feel privileged to be a guest on your podcast today.

Carmen Morin:

Well the feeling's mutual. Thanks again, Jen.