

This is the **DO IT SCARED PODCAST** with Ruth Soukup, **EPISODE NUMBER 63**. On today's episode, we are going to talk with marketing executive and business coach Michael O'Brien about how to slay your internal doubts in order to create massive success in your life and business.

Welcome to the Do It Scared podcast. I'm your host, **RUTH SOUKUP**, and each week on the show we will talk about how to face your fears, overcome obstacles, and, most importantly, how to take action and create a life you love.

This episode is brought to you and made possible by the world's very best tool for managing your time and getting your life in order, the Living Well Planner. Created by yours truly, the Living Well Planner is designed to help you organize your time, manage your budget, plan your meals and your to-do list, and crush your goals, all in one place. It literally is the tool that keeps me sane every day, and it can absolutely do the same for you. You can find it online at [livingwellplanner.com](http://livingwellplanner.com). And be sure to use our promo code "doitscared" to save \$10 on your order in our special offer just for podcast listeners.

Hey, there. And welcome back to the show. As always, my name is Ruth Soukup, and I am the founder of Living Well Spending Less and the Living Well Planner, as well as the founder of Elite Blog Academy, and the New York Times' bestselling author of six books, including my newest book, Do It Scared.

In today's episode, we are going to be talking to author, entrepreneur, and business coach Michael O'Brien about what it means to slay your internal feelings of worry and doubt so that you can create the success you want in both your life and your business. Michael is the founder of Peloton Consulting, which provides business leadership coaching as well as the author of the bestselling memoir Shift: Creating Better Tomorrows. Since launching his coaching career, Michael experienced a life-altering event that completely changed his worldview. On July 11th, 2001, he was struck head on by an SUV, while out on a bike ride. Now he considers that his last bad day, and he channels his energy into helping others realize their potential.

And ultimately, that's exactly what this podcast is all about. It's about taking the steps that will help us make necessary changes so that we can create a life we love, because in the end, courage doesn't mean we're never afraid; instead, courage is being scared but taking action anyway, despite our fear. It's putting one foot in front of the other, even when we're not quite sure where the path is going to lead.

Okay, guys, so, just a couple more quick things before we dive into today's episode. First, you can get all the show notes for this episode, including all the links to

everything we talk about, by visiting [doitscared.com/episode63](https://doitscared.com/episode63). Once again, that's [doitscared.com/episode63](https://doitscared.com/episode63).

And then, while you're there at [doitscared.com](https://doitscared.com), if you haven't already, be sure to take our fear assessment to discover your fear archetype. It's so insightful, and it's such a great jumping-off point for just dealing with fear and uncovering fear and then addressing it in your own life. So, again, you can get all of that at [doitscared.com](https://doitscared.com).

And, then, if you have any questions, or if you just want to share feedback on this episode, you can send me a message on Instagram or tag me in your stories.

And now, without further ado, I am so honored to introduce you to the incredibly inspiring Michael O'Brien.

**RUTH:** All right, so, Michael, thank you so much for being on the Do It Scared podcast. It's so great to have you here today.

**MICHAEL:** Well, thanks for having me, Ruth. I've been a big fan, I've been a big listener, and as we mentioned offline, I love your personal story, and I'm just thrilled to be on your show.

**RUTH:** Thank you. Thank you. And I'm thrilled to have you because you have kind of an amazing story, and so I just want to start there. You've told me, you listen to the shallow regularly. So you know I love starting with the story, and I think there's nothing more important than hearing people's stories because that's what we connect to most as humans. And yours is incredibly powerful. So can you just give us the sort of broad overview first, and then we can go into all the details? Tell us who you are, what you do, and then how you got to where you are right now.

**MICHAEL:** Sure. Well, so who I am. I'm Michael O'Brien. I live in New Jersey. Never thought I would say that ever. We moved up here 20 years ago from Washington, D.C. Today, I'm an executive coach, speaker, and author, but before I did this, I spent 22 years in corporate America, and I had that one big moment that a lot of people have. It shifted everything in my life when I was 33 years old.

**RUTH:** So let's talk about that.

**MICHAEL:** So that I call my last bad day. So if you met me, Ruth, before that, I spent a good part of my early part of my life doing what I thought society wanted me to do, right? I went to college, got a degree, got a gig, met a girl, married the girl, was about to buy a house, start a family, do all that, climb the corporate ladder. And I thought I was following what society wanted me to do, to the letter, dot i, cross t, to the script. And what was really happening, though, is I was doing a lot of doing, almost mindlessly doing, and pouring a lot of stress inside.

So I thought since I was a leader at work—I was the marketing director—I had to have all the answers. I had to be Superman, if you will. And since I was the provider for my family, I thought I had to be Superman at home. But I didn't want anyone to notice that I was stressed inside, that I was, to the spirit of your podcast, I was scared, but I wasn't necessarily doing it. I was trying to repress all the stress.

And I was out in New Mexico for a company offsite meeting on July 11th, 2001, and I brought my bike out because I've been an avid cyclist since my high-school days, and I thought I was being really smart. I was going to bring my bike out, I was going to get some exercise before the meeting began, and on the fourth lap of a loop I created, out the back of the hotel, up the main drag, an SUV, White Ford Explorer, crossed the center line of the road, going about 40 miles an hour, and hit me head on. And I remember the sound of me hitting his grill, the sound I made as I went through his windshield, the scream of brakes, and the thought I made as I came to the asphalt below. I remember this, Ruth, like it was yesterday. A lot of people are like, "God, that's like a really bad memory to remember." And for me, it gives me some context as far as what started to happen that day.

And of course, I was knocked unconscious, but when the EMTs arrived, I regained my consciousness, and then I asked the question that only another cyclist, maybe you have some cyclists in your audience and your listeners, only another cyclist can really appreciate this. I asked them, "How was my bike?" Like, all right. Like, I knew just lying there—I was in a neck brace. I was in the worst pain I had ever felt in my life. You know, let's try to cut the tension with a little humor, and they just looked at me, and I think they marked down some notes to say, "Check for traumatic brain injury." They're like, "Your bike is fine, sir." And I was having a hard time even just saying my name and saying my contact information and all that jazz. And I just remember trying to will myself not to fall asleep because I thought if I fell asleep, I would lose control over the situation, as crazy as that sounds, because I had lived my life trying to control things, right?

**RUTH:** Mm-hmm. You were holding it all together.

**MICHAEL:** I was trying to hold it all together. I was like, "Michael, don't fall asleep. Stay awake. Don't fall asleep. Stay awake. Don't fall asleep." And I definitely had points in time where I just wanted to drift off to sleep, and but that scared me to death. I was like, "Got to remain in control. Got to remain in control." And then they called the helicopter, the medevac helicopter, to bring me to the trauma center in Albuquerque because that was the only way we could get there fast enough. And as I went onto the helicopter, I told myself, "Hey, if you live—" and I knew this was in question just because the vibe of the scene, "—if you live, Michael, you got to live your life differently. You got to stop chasing happiness." And that's what I

was doing.

**RUTH:** Wow. You had that thought as you're lying there, waiting for the helicopter.

**MICHAEL:** Well, one, the thought I had was, "Do we really need to take a helicopter?" because I was scared of flying back then. I was like, "Really? Can we just take an ambulance?"

**RUTH:** That's the thought going through.

**MICHAEL:** Yeah. So, the brain gets a little crazy. And they're like, "No. We have to take the helicopter. You're 45 minutes away from the hospital. There's no way you're going to make it."

What I later learned, the doctors told my wife, after my first big surgery that lasted about 12 hours, they said, "Had Michael, had your husband, been 10 years older or not healthy, he certainly would've passed away before he even got to the hospital," because what happened, I broke a little bunch of everything, but I shattered my left femur. And when the left femur shattered, it lacerated the femoral artery of my left leg. So, in essence, I was bleeding out in the Middle of Nowhere, New Mexico.

But yeah, I had the state of mind to say, "This is crazy. How you're living your life is crazy. You have to stop chasing happiness," because I was doing that thing that so many people do. Like, I'll be happy when... I'll be happy when I get promoted. I'll be happy when I buy that new car. I'll be happy when my business gets to whatever. I'll be happy... And I was conditionalizing my happiness.

**RUTH:** Because that's the dream. All of these things, we think we're doing what we're supposed to do—your words exactly. We're chasing the dream, we're chasing the destination, and we never get there.

**MICHAEL:** Never get there. And what was painful to me in hindsight is that sometimes I caught it, right? I bought that new car, and everyone's like, "Ooh, new car." I was like, "Yeah, new car." And then after about three days, that feeling just went poof. Vanished. And I was back to chasing. Or I got promoted, so I got all this extra responsibility. I got the money, and I got the prestige and the status and all that, but then you learn, hey, more levels, more devils, and whoop, back to chasing. And I just knew that I wanted something different in my life.

Now, at the time—I would love to tell you, "Oh, I knew exactly what it was," but I hadn't really; I had no clue. All I knew is I didn't want this.

**RUTH:** But that was the catalyst for you to say there is going to be something

different. From this moment, this is not going to be how I live the rest of my life. Which, looking back now, do feel some sort of gratitude that you are able to remember that moment so clearly, because it's still there? It doesn't go away.

**MICHAEL:** It doesn't go away. So, I ooze gratitude. Back then, I didn't gratitude practice. Keep in mind, this is 2001. This is before the Internet got big, before courage—

**RUTH:** Before all the self-help came out.

**MICHAEL:** Right. So it was before Twitter and Facebook and LinkedIn and everything.

**RUTH:** You were helping yourself before it was popular.

**MICHAEL:** Yeah. So the gratitude I have—because a lot of people ask me, “If you could go back in time and eliminate this event, would you want to?” And the answer is always no, because this was one massive pause button for me to sort of think about what kind of life do you really want? So it goes back to the Mary Oliver poem: What do you want to do with your one precious and wild, crazy life? You know, I sort of botched it, but in that spirit. And I had never really thought of that, because I was following what I thought was a script. This gave me a whole bunch of time, more time than I probably signed up for, but a whole bunch of time to really think through that.

**RUTH:** I bet. So what was the recovery like from that?

**MICHAEL:** Well, the recovery. So what happened after the first surgery, I spent about four days in ICU. And as I came out of the ICU, the doctors started to paint a very grim picture of my life. They were like, “Listen, Michael. You're lucky to be alive. The people that had this accident in the past, or these types of injuries, they have a lot of pain and suffering, more surgeries, a lifetime of dependency.” And they really did paint a grim picture. And in the spirit that we go where our eyes go, I got really bitter and angry. And the driver had a revoked license, so I was mad about that. I just thought life was so unfair, and life was getting different, but not in the way that I wanted.

So I was getting really angry, frustrated, and just fearful of who was I going to become if I couldn't be the person I once was? So dependency, pain, suffering, those weren't Superman qualities. So I was like, “Well, what's going to happen to me? Is this the rest of my life?” And they were like, “You might be able to walk again; you're probably never going to be able to ride your bike again.” And so I stayed in that funk for a long time, until they brought me back to New Jersey, and then I finally entered my third hospital where I had a big aha, or the way I like to say it is my shift, where I realized, if I wanted to become the person I really wanted to

become, I had to start shifting my mindset and my energy and my habits to make that happen.

**RUTH:** So was there something that caused that shift? What was the difference? Where did you go from feeling sorry for yourself, laying there, to going, “Okay, it doesn’t matter that this bad thing happened to me. I have to be the one to change the way I look at it”?

**MICHAEL:** Yeah. So I would say this. I’m a big believer that life sort of happens in the moments in between your moments, right? So we make a big deal about big moments, like the big aha. But I think there are a whole bunch of little moments that lead up to that. And so I had a huge aha during a physical rehab session, where I just looked around the room, and I saw some people getting better, and I saw some people not getting better. And I was in that camp where I wasn’t really making the type of progress I wanted to make, because I was a high achiever. I was like, “This isn’t working fast enough.” But I think what happened is that I had all these little moments that I didn’t necessarily recognize. I didn’t have awareness around, that were little seeds that were planted that made that moment possible, when I realized, “Hey, you know what? Let go of all this comparison that you suffer from. Let go of the chasing, let go of all this stuff, and just sort of step into a new identity. Just try to become the best husband, father, friend, leader, you can be. Let go of everything else. Let go of all the big chase.”

And I was like, “Okay, well how am I going to get there?” And I knew mindfulness and mindset and how I manage my energy and how I created my habits was going to be the start of that. But in that moment, I didn’t have a game plan. I just knew I wanted something different. The pain was so intense. The dissatisfaction I felt, I knew I had to make some type of shift.

**RUTH:** So it started with the desire.

**MICHAEL:** The desire, yeah. So, one, awareness; then, acceptance of hey, this is what it is. You were in a horrible accident. You can argue all day long, but arguing with reality doesn’t really lead you anywhere. So first, I had awareness, acceptance, and then, that action or desire to create a different type of life.

**RUTH:** So then what happened? I mean, how long did it take? How did you get there? What was the first step? Where did you go from there? I mean, it’s one thing to think I want things to be different. Okay, this is what’s happened to me. Accepting that, which is huge, because a lot of people would stay stuck in the bitterness forever. And a lot of people do stay stuck in the bitterness or stuck in all of the bad things and all of the hard things and all of the trauma, or “Life is unfair. I’ve had it so rough. My



parents didn't love me enough," or whatever it is that people get stuck in, that, for a lot of people, is the end. There's nothing past that, because they think, nope, that's it for me. I don't have a shot. So you didn't get stuck there. You believed that things could change, and you wanted to change, but then what? How did they change?

**MICHAEL:** So the first thing I did the very next morning, I woke up early, got into my wheelchair, and I wheeled myself to a quiet spot in the hospital. I went with my intuition. I went with my gut. And I just said, "Well, I'm going to sit with some quiet. I'm going to connect with my breath." I didn't know about mindfulness or meditation or anything like that, right? It just felt right. And I was like, "I'm going to try to get my head on straight," in terms of how I wanted to show up. So I sat with some intentions in the beginning of the day, some meditation, just connecting with my breath, and I really tried to focus on what was my bigger purpose now. And that bigger purpose was everyone else in my life—my wife, my daughters, my friends, my colleagues. Up until that point, life was a little bit about me, right? And we always trip up when we make life about us. So I just start—

**RUTH:** You thought you were doing all these things for other people, or you were telling yourself you were pursuing all these things for other people, to take care of your family or whatever, to have the American dream. But really it was about you, at that point.

**MICHAEL:** Oh, totally. Yeah. Now, in the moment, if you asked me, "Oh, no, no. I'm a servant leader. I'm making it about other people." But really ego-wise, it was about me.

And what I realized is that I have to legitimately make it about other people. And then I started to take action. Well, how can I do what I can do—so I can be there for my wife and my daughters and my colleagues and my friends. And I knew getting better and getting out of hospital, back on my feet, was one way to do that. So I spent the morning just reframing my rituals and in stepping into my rehab session. And eventually, over time, I put some of those days together. I finally got back on my feet, and then I got out of the hospital.

And then I had to make a determination, well, where do you go next? Because I wondered, okay, you almost died. What do you do? And so I had a moment of well, maybe you sell everything and go to Nepal and go trekking to find yourself. But that didn't seem all that responsible because I had a mortgage to pay and two daughters to raise and a family to support. So I decided I was going to go back to my corporate job. But in terms of going back to my corporate job, in the way that I used to do it, I went back with my own terms, with my own sense of purpose, my own intentionality, and a new set of values that I really wanted to honor.

**RUTH:** Wow. How interesting to me, though—there's a couple of things I want to

unpack about that. But the first is that the first realization that you came to you after deciding, I'm going to change my life, is that you had to take care of yourself first, that you were of no use to anybody else, even though you believed in fully of serving your family and realizing that you needed to make your life about other people, you couldn't do that unless you first took care of yourself. It's such a good analogy just to so many people because you don't have to have your body completely broken to be in a spot like this, where you need to make a shift or you need to change your life.

But so many—I think this happens for women especially, because that's primarily the audience that I deal with a lot of times and talk to a lot of times—but for women, there's this feeling like, I can't take care of my own stuff because then I'm being selfish, or I'm taking away from my family if I ever focus on my own needs. And there's just this resistance to self-care. But it's so true that if you don't take care of yourself first, you can't serve other people. You just can't do it. You burn out or you're useless to other people because that's where it starts from. But when you do take care of that first, then you have the ability to be so much more amazing for everyone else. You can show up fully and completely because you filled up your own tank first.

It's kind of crazy how it works. And I think that's so amazing that that was the very first conclusion that you came to is realizing, okay, first, I have to take care of me. I have to get better. I have to get out of this hospital. I have to do those things, because if I don't do those things, nothing else matters.

**MICHAEL:** Nothing else matters. And then I actually become more of a burden to my family because now my wife has to do a ton more. You know, she was schlepping to the hospital from our house to the hospital, 45 minutes each way, twice a day, every day. And Elle, my oldest, was three and a half, and Grady, my youngest, was seven months old. And so it goes back, Ruth, to the whole, you have to put your oxygen mask on first on the airplane.

Just like you see with your clients, I see with my clients. It's like, I can't do that. I feel guilty. I don't deserve self-compassion. I don't deserve self-care. But it's so critical, because what happens, I think to so many people, especially nowadays because the pace is faster now in 2019 than it was back when I had my accident in 2001, that we put all of our energy into our work or serving other people. And then we basically have leftovers for ourselves or leftovers for those people that we care about the most.

So I run into a lot of corporate leaders who burn all their matches at work, and as soon as they drive home and they walk through the front door, they have nothing left in the tank for the people that matter most, or probably matter most, to them in their lives. And they know, hey, those



people will forgive me because Dad's working hard or Mom's working hard. But if we don't get better at managing our energy, then we're going to have even more burnout as a society as we go forward.

**RUTH:**

Oh, it's so true. And because you can't sustain that forever. It's just not sustainable. So if you're giving everything to work, giving the scraps to your family, and you're giving nothing to yourself, that only lasts for so long. There is a point where you go to empty, and then you either make bad decisions, or you feel completely burnt out and you just give up on everything, or you blow a gasket at... However you unload, there is a time where you can't serve anyone. And so I think there's just so, so much wisdom in that, in the way that you pursued this and made those changes in your life, and so much to learn from that.

And then I think the other really interesting thing from what you said is the fact that you thought about doing all of these things, but you realized that the thing that was going to serve your family was to go back to work. But it was almost a complete night-and-day experience because now you had the mindset shift, and you had your own values, and you were looking at it from a completely different way. So how did that work? Because I think sometimes—I see this, too, and I'm sure you do, too, where people think, I'm stuck in this job. I can't quit my job. You talk about starting a business or whatever. I need to work because I need to take care of my family. And I think so often, we don't realize that we can change ourselves, and that will change everything around us. If we can change the way that we look at the situation that we're in and our perspective of the situation that we're in, whatever the job is that we have, whatever our current life situation is, that can change everything. So talk about that a little bit.

**MICHAEL:**

Yeah. So this was big because my mind was everywhere, Ruth, in terms of what I was supposed to do. Go to Nepal was one thing. The other thing was, well, maybe I'll do something major. I'll do an Ironman to show the world and myself that I'm strong and I'm back. But I was like, wow, that's a little bit of an external merit badge. So it looks good in the moment. And nothing wrong with doing Ironman. I have a lot of friends who have done it. But it just wasn't my jam back then. I also thought about just quitting my job and finding a new job and going to a nonprofit. But I was like, no, I love the people. And the people were so kind to me during my recovery. They were really patient with us as a family and very supportive. So I wanted to go back, and I wanted to make a contribution.

So, one, I had no idea what my values were before my last bad day. So I spent some time, okay, what are the values I really want to honor to sort of frame my day? And then I started to weave in the morning ritual, sort of self-care, if you will, of hydration and mindfulness and intentionality, also threw in gratitude at the end of the day. And then I tried to remember to take breaks throughout the course of the day just to manage the pace of

work because we can get so reactive because we're going from meeting to meeting to meeting and eating our lunch at our desk if we eat lunch, and then we do a whole bunch of email on the couch before we pour ourselves into bed. So I reworked my whole day.

Now, I will say that, and I will also say, I was not perfect, right? So I do not live in a land of unicorns and rainbows, and the whole idea of declaring your last bad day, as I did, isn't about that. It's about, hey, here's the day where I'm making a commitment to live my life differently.

**RUTH:** Did you do that out loud?

**MICHAEL:** Oh, yes.

**RUTH:** Did you actually—you said it. So you were very intentional about it. So it wasn't like people just started noticing. It was like you had said, this is my last bad day. I'm putting it out there. So then the pressure was on.

**MICHAEL:** And then the pressure was. I told my wife, "That's it. July 11th, 2001, mark it down. That's my last bad day." And she was like, "Okay. All right. Maybe it's the drugs," because I was on a lot of meds. And I was like, "No, it's not the drugs speaking, honey. This is going to be my last bad day." And all the things I just mentioned were really critical in that.

And it's not that I haven't had bad moments, right? I've had things where I've been scared, where I've failed, but I decided I wasn't going to let a bad moment take any more time than it deserved, because so many times in life, we have a bad moment, and it turns into a bad weekend or a bad week. And so it's also not to repress basic emotions, like sadness and frustration. I have those too, but at the end of the day, we get to choose our labels, because all our life events are neutral until we label them. And I just choose not to label my day as a bad one, because if I can go to bed each night, and Grady and Elle and Lynn, my wife, are in my life, then how in the world can I label that as a bad day? I have three people who are the main people in my Peloton, my tribe. I can never have a bad day if they're with me. And so—

**RUTH:** Yeah. That's so true. We actually play a game in our house called High, Low, and Interesting. Have you heard of this game?

**MICHAEL:** No, no, no, no.

**RUTH:** So, I've heard of High, Low before. I'm not sure where that came from, but we added the Interesting part. But the purpose of that, and the rules of our game are pretty simple. So you share your high for the day, your low for the day, and your most interesting for the day. And we added the Interesting so that we could get our kids to share a little bit more about

their day. Because, also, we're a very competitive family, so, of course, I've turned it into a competition, so then at the end, we all vote for the most interesting, and the winner gets a dollar, and that's a big, big deal.

But the rules for High and Low are that you can always share two highs. You can have a high, high, but you're never allowed to have low, low. You don't get to have only a bad day. You get to share, this was a bad thing that happened, and this was a good thing. And for every bad thing that happened, you also have to talk about a good thing that happened. It's a simple thing for kids, but it's such a good thing for adults, too, because there are days where my husband and I think, you know, both of us are like, "We don't even want to play because it was such a crappy day," but then we're reminded that we have to always take the good with the bad, that there is no such thing as an only bad day. There is always something to be grateful for every day.

**MICHAEL:** And for me, my worst day, in a lot of ways, has turned out to be one of my best because I learned so much about who I was and who I want to become and building greater connections with the people I care about the most.

**RUTH:** It changed everything.

**MICHAEL:** Yeah, it changed everything. And then I brought that into work, and I just tried to shape my work differently. And I also got more comfortable leading with love, which is something that we don't like to talk about in corporate America. When I do, when I go out and I'm like, "I want to talk to you guys about love," they're like, "Oh boy." I go, "Well, we can re-label it compassion." But, you know, we got fear. That's prevalent in today's society. But that compassion, that love, the courage to be empathetic, the courage to be vulnerable, I started doing that more and role modeling what I wanted to see in others as opposed to preaching, because I was never the type of leader that got up and preached, but I was that type of leader that just role modeled the behavior and made connections one person at a time to say, hey, let's— and so they could be heard and seen before it was popular to be heard and seen, because now we're doing a lot of great work about belonging, which is fantastic—we could have used it 50 years ago or 20 years ago—but on those principles, because I remembered when I was in the hospital, I remembered how I felt on the day of the accident, on the road, how lonely I felt. I was surrounded by people all the time in the hospital and at the accident scene, but I felt incredibly alone. And I use those experiences, those stories, to sort of bring back, well, how are people feeling at work? How are people feeling back in the community? And how can we bring together more connection, because we need more connection today than ever before.

**RUTH:** So, when did you make the shift, then, because you went back to your job

after your accident, and then at some point, you made a shift into actually becoming a business coach, right?

**MICHAEL:** Yes, in 2014. So one of the things that folks will learn if they read my memoir is that a seed was planted in the ICU that I would become an executive coach one day, because I kept on repeating to my wife. So in ICU, I told my wife to buy Amazon stock. Back then it was selling for \$15 a share. We did not buy any.

**RUTH:** What? Oh no!

**MICHAEL:** Yeah, I haven't forgiven her for that. Here's the crazy thing. I also interviewed her for a job on my team, and I went through the whole interview guide, and I didn't hire her. So I guess I didn't—

**RUTH:** She's forgiven you for that.

**MICHAEL:** Yes. And those two moments, clearly the drugs were talking. But there was a gentleman that I met six months prior to my accident who was an executive coach, and up until that moment, I didn't even know executive coaches were a thing. And I told my wife, "Go find David. He will show us the way. He's our leader." And when she told me this, after I got out of the ICU, I'm like, "Why are you bringing up his name?" because I would never talk about work at home. And I was like, "How do you even know his name?" And she said, "Well, you kept on repeating his name. You kept on telling me to go find him." And I was like, "Whoa, that's a moment." So I was like, that's a seed that was planted. So I knew one day I would get into executive coaching and doing the work I do today, but it was only really a matter of when.

So what I did is I used those 13 years, as I was watering and fertilizing that seed, that sort of set up the conditions that would trigger me leaving corporate America and starting my own firm. So when our company changed again, and I got a new boss, because my boss of 18 years got pushed out, I was like, "That's the universe telling me it's time to make this call." And within 36 hours, I had made the decision to step into my new identity and my new world.

**RUTH:** That's amazing. And then you wrote a book.

**MICHAEL:** I wrote a book. So, when I left corporate America and started my own firm, so many people came to me and said, "You got to write a book about your story." And I was like, "Yeah, okay." They were like, "It'll be great for speaking and your business." But for whatever reason, and probably because I was scared, because it's my story. If people don't like it, they're not going to like me. I was like, "I don't know. Will people find it interesting?" And I kicked it around. And as I was writing it—because I

had all these journal notes from my accident days. I was writing down in journals. So I had basically a collection of journals but not necessarily in a format of a story.

And what I decided to do, after talking to my wife, is to donate all the proceeds to charity, because I didn't want—the whole idea of, you have to write your book so you can make money, that felt very like me-centric again, and I was like, that doesn't feel right. And that's not to say that people who write books for profit and for money are wrong. It just, it wasn't for me, and I was really trying to move away from that me-centric approach. So we decided to give the money, the proceeds, away to World Bicycle Relief because they help girls in countries like Kenya and Malawi and Zaire conquer the challenge of distance by giving them a bicycle. They give them mobility. And since I lost my mobility for a time—something I took for granted along with my health—I decided, well, let the story sort of breathe and help other people halfway around this wonderful planet of ours gain mobility.

**RUTH:** That's really neat.

**MICHAEL:** Yeah. So they get a bike, and they get to stay in school longer. And when they do, they graduate, they marry later, they have smaller families, but, more importantly, they have economic vitality, they have economic independence. And so when someone reads the book, I hope they get a couple pearls out of it to help shape their life, but they're changing someone else's life. And there's a beautiful ripple that I think that happens with that.

**RUTH:** That is an amazing ripple. I've never heard of that charity before, but just the thought that—there's so often, so many times that you think that, oh, I'm just one person. What can I really do? But my goodness, I mean, buying a book that helps provide bikes for people, that changes their entire life, which changes entire communities. There's so much power that we have as humans to effect change around us just in the smallest ways, and I think you're such an amazing example of that.

**MICHAEL:** Well, thanks, Ruth.

**RUTH:** So, here on the Do It Scared podcast, we talk a lot about fear, as you know, and about the ways that our fear holds us back. So as a business coach, what do you think is holding people back a lot of times from achieving their own goals and dreams and from realizing their vision of success? What have you seen, and what have you experienced from your own life?

**MICHAEL:** Well, certainly, there's the fear of failure, but I think there's also the fear of success, that if we put ourselves out there and we—

**RUTH:** I see that a lot.

**MICHAEL:** Yeah. And it's not necessarily talked about all that much. You know, the whole fear-of-failure thing, like, "Ugh, I got to go for perfection." We know that story really well. But if we put ourselves out there and we reach a new level, I think that freaks a lot of people out as well. They say, "Wow, if I get to this new level, do I deserve to be at the C-level?" And then you get a little imposter syndrome sneaking in. And I've experienced that in some of my promotions, like, "Hey, you know what? They're all going to figure out that I don't have the jets for the job, so I'm just going to hold back and not put myself out there."

But I think the fear of getting to the next level and performing at that level and keep on evolving at that level, I think, does scare a lot of people. And I see it not only with the entrepreneurs, but I also see it in the corporate setting, because so many guys and gals who are moving their way up the corporate ladder, where there are fewer chairs at the top, they see how often the musical chairs is played up on top, and they see the other people that took those roles and they're no longer at the company, and they're like, "Well, if I take that role, I have confidence I can do that role well. But, man, what about if I don't? What about if I'm not that good? Now I've stepped into that role, and I get fired. What does that mean for my identity? How do I provide for my family? Can I get the same type of job somewhere else?" So I think a lot of those leaders hold themselves back from even applying or pursuing those types of promotions.

**RUTH:** Oh, so true. So true. Yeah. It's amazing. I mean, the fear of failure is there, and maybe it's connected to the fear of failure because it's almost that, "If I have the success, that I might lose it all. That I'm so afraid of losing the success that I gained for myself, that I don't want to try at all." And it's really interesting of what that will mean and how you even move forward from that. That taking-risks piece, too, I think is so scary for people of, "If I take this risk, am I giving up more than I can afford to lose?"

**MICHAEL:** Absolutely. Yeah.

**RUTH:** So how do you decide that? I mean, how do you push past it? What have you learned about that?

**MICHAEL:** Well, so one of the things I talk about as a cyclist, I talk about my Peloton, so my tribe. And so a lot of people, when I go out and talk and whatnot, people're like, "Hey, Michael O'Brien from Peloton," and the word sort of hangs out there, a lot of people think it's Peloton cycles and spinning bikes. But for me, a Peloton is my metaphor for tribes at work or networks or communities. So I believe we should have a lot of thought and a lot of intentionality in terms of like, who's in our Peloton? Who can we lean on for clarity? Who can we lean on when we have a crisis? Who do we want



to celebrate with? You know, sort of bounce ideas off of each other. So I think that's the first step is, do you have the right people personally and professionally in your life that can help counsel you in these moments where you might feel stuck? That's one.

I also think, two, is just determining what you want and why do you want it. You know, again, before my last bad day, I thought I wanted that corporate ladder and all that jazz, but I didn't necessarily know why. What happened after is, hey, I just wanted to be the best husband and father I can be, because I think the world needs more of those types of guys. And I let go of that big pursuit, and I just focused in on doing a really amazing job each and every day, although each and every day, I didn't necessarily do an amazing job, but hopefully more days than not. And as a result, I let go of that attachment to the final destination, and then eventually I got there. You know, I got that big executive job, but again, on my own terms.

But I think the first stop in all this is really who's around you that you can really lean on, that won't judge you, that can be objective, that can be caring, but also can give you that push? All those wonderful qualities I think—

**RUTH:** Your truth club. That's what I call it.

**MICHAEL:** Yeah. Yeah. So if we have that group and we really nurture that and we're there for them as they are here for us, I think that just sets us up for greater success.

**RUTH:** So true. So, do you have any tips? How do you find those people in your life, because I actually hear a lot about that, too. Like, "Ruth, you talk about forming your truth club and having these people in your life, but I don't have those people in my life. I don't have people who are pushing me to be better or who I can talk even about having goals or having..." How do you find those people that will both lift you up and give you the push that you need when you need it?

**MICHAEL:** Well, professionally, I think, within your community or within your business, you can ask other people, "Who at your company is really great? Who at our company is really great in mentoring people and bring out the best in people?" And we start asking who those sort of subject-matter experts are. Who is the person that's the biggest cheerleader here at work? Who is the person that can help clarify things, that asks really great questions? So we can ask a whole bunch of people at work who those people are. We can also tap into our friends—who are those people at your place of employment?—and try to set up some type of mentor or mentee type of relationship. I think professionally we can do that.

On a personal front, I think it gets a little bit more difficult, but I still think

it can be done. And we start to pay attention to other people, maybe in our community, that are having success, and we try to figure out, “Well, who are you hanging with? Who are you talking to? Who are you following?” And we start to become part of their community by, first, giving to them as opposed to just sucking from them. But I think the harder part in all of this is that we all have a group of friends, right? We all have members of our Peloton and our truth club right now that may not necessarily be the right people. And now we have to make some tough calls about, hey, you know what, thank you for bringing me up to this point, but our relationship has to evolve to help us both get to that next point. And that is a really difficult conversation, one that we can have, but a lot of people are like, “I don’t want to have that.” So we just let those people stay in our lives, and drip by drip, they do sort of suck our energy. And, hey, I’m guilty of it, too. I’m not saying this is easy. But this is also part of the process. Who do we need to sometimes cut out of our Peloton or a truth club in order to reach that next level, whatever the next level happens to be for us?

**RUTH:** Yeah, that’s a good point to make. And I think that relationships are never cut and dry, so there’s never an answer of “you just need to do this across the board.” Each one is unique. Each one is individual. And I think there’s room to expand your circle. But then you also just have to be careful about toxic people in your life and who are the people that are sucking energy out of you. There might be some people you can just kind of just let it ride the way it is. There might be other people who are actively bringing you down, that you have to say, okay, enough of this. And it’s never easy, and I think relationships are always a work in progress, no matter who you are or how many amazing friends you have or what kind of a truth club you have in your life. They’re work. It’s a lot of work but worth it, too.

**MICHAEL:** Yeah. So relationships are the building blocks of any truth club and truth network and Peloton and the whole thing. But yeah, they’re messy, right? But if we can get better at conversation—because in healthy conversation, they help build better relationships and better Pelotons—so if we spend a little bit more time focusing in on how to have a better conversation, we can build better relationships. But even then, there’s no secret formula. They’re messy, they’re hard, they’re exhilarating, and they’re frustrating, and they’re all that in between. But the more time we spend on that stuff, the better off that we are over the long haul.

**RUTH:** So true. So can you talk a little bit about the role that fear has played in your own life or in your corporate life, in your business life, starting your own business? What is something that has really scared you since you’ve been moving through all of this stuff, and how did you move past that fear?

**MICHAEL:** Well, I'll give you one that I think will resonate with a lot of your listeners. It was when I first started my business. And so here I've gone from the leader of 1,000 people to now it's just me, and I'm the product. And so early on, I got a few one-on-one coaching clients, and then I had an opportunity to get a big corporate deal. It was a high five-figure deal. It wasn't six figures, but it was a pretty big deal early on. And I put together the whole proposal, and I knew the president of the company, so that helped. But I was putting the whole SOW together, and it was ten o'clock at night, Ruth, on a Thursday. I remember it very vividly. And I looked at my computer, and I was checking the proposal, and I looked at the price, and I was like, "Ah, it's too much. It's too much. I don't deserve—she's going to react to this. She's going to turn me down. She's going to say, 'Who are you to charge this?'" I got in my own head. And I sat in this very chair that I'm talking to you today, and I looked at my computer for half an hour, just looking. And my wife was like, "Are you going to come to bed?" I go, "No, I'm doing some work." And I was just going back and forth, to-ing and fro-ing. And then eventually I just got too tired because all that energy was just making me exhausted. And I was like, "Well, screw it." And I just hit the send button, and I put out the proposal.

And I woke up the next day at six o'clock, and I checked my email right away, and there was no response. And I was like, "Yep, see? Yeah. She's reacting to it." Keep in mind, I sent it at 10:30, it's now 6:00 a.m., she was sleeping, I was sleeping, and I was like, "Yeah, she—nope. I totally goofed up. This is not going to work." All the different gremlin talk. And then two hours later, she emailed me back, says, "This sounds great. Let's do it. When can we start?"

And then at that point in time, I continued the whole process of beating myself up. I was like, "Ah, I should have charged more." Right? I was like, "There was no negotiation." I was like, "Oh, you're so stupid."

**RUTH:** That is basically the life cycle of an entrepreneur, over and over and over again, in one little experience. I mean, that is every day, every day of my life, I feel like. Exactly.

**MICHAEL:** And so, there was, obviously, I had a lot of fear. There's a lot riding on this because I left a pretty cozy corporate gig, right? I had a lot of perks, and now I'm providing for family. Now my daughters are now going to college, so there's the college costs. And so there was a lot of fear. But you know what? In \_\_\_\_\_ (49:16) your spirit, right, is that I was courageous. And so despite the fear, I moved forward anyway. The whole definition of what courage is all about. And I did it, and the first time I did it was rough. The second time I did it was less rough, and then I just got better at it over time.

**RUTH:** That's amazing. So as a business coach and consultant, what's the most

common mistake you see business owners make, and what advice would you give somebody who's just starting out in their own business?

**MICHAEL:** So, it goes back to some of the themes that we've talked about today, making it all about yourself. In the second year of my business, I decided to hire a business coach just to help me take my business to the next level. I wanted a different set of eyes, and I was frustrated because this one big client on the West Coast wasn't really coming to the spot in the buying process that I wanted him to be. And I shared this with her, and I was all like, "I can't believe this." And she was like, "Well, how are you making this about yourself?" And I was like, "What are you talking about? I'm not making this... I let those days go in my corporate days." And she's like, "You're making it about you." And I was like, "Really?" And I said, "Well, here's one—I'll give you one." And as I drove home, which was about a 45-minute drive, I came up with nine others.

And I see this happening—it happens to me sometimes, even to this day, like, "I try to be really intentional about it, but I still have my moments," and I see it in a lot of entrepreneurs when we make the product about us. And then, our clients don't feel heard, they don't feel seen, and then they don't buy. We don't create the trust that's so needed as an entrepreneur to our customers, to our clients.

So my big advice is don't make it about yourself, and get really clear in terms of who you want to try to help. I know when we start off, we want to try to help everybody because we want any type of business. So we're like, we'll take all comers. If you've got money, I'm your guy.

**RUTH:** I will make it happen for you.

**MICHAEL:** I'll make it happen. You're not my ideal customer, but you know what, baby needs a new pair of shoes, so I'm going to make it happen. But I really do think, don't make it about yourself, and get really clear on who you want to try to serve. That clarity will serve you so well over the long haul.

**RUTH:** So true. That is amazing advice, both those pieces of just not making it about you and getting clear about who you're serving. If you can do those two things as a business owner, that's pretty much it, right there. And that's like Business School 101, right there.

**MICHAEL:** Yeah, but it's hard, right?

**RUTH:** It's hard. Simple, but hard. Yes.

**MICHAEL:** Yeah. And I know a lot of people love to like, "Hey, it's easy." I go, "It is hard," because when you start your own business, you want to be

successful right away. And we're not patient, because we want the money right away because we have bills to pay. It's really practical because sometimes we don't have a nest egg saved up, like a little cushion. So we've got to move now. So we're looking for a lot of hacks. And then we lose the basic principles of human connection and making it about other people.

**RUTH:** So, so true. And then when that self-doubt comes in, because as an entrepreneur, you're filled with self-doubt pretty much every single day, if the automatic response is to also start making it about yourself because of your self-doubt, you start thinking, what is everybody thinking of me? And it's this weird cycle. But as soon as you start making it about other people, what that does, too, is it increases your confidence because then you realize it's not about how I'm being perceived; it's about what I'm putting out there into the world, and it's about how I'm helping other people. So it's kind of a downward spiral, or it can be a really positive spiral, the other way, too. It's very, very good advice.

**MICHAEL:** Absolutely. Yeah. And then you can also get caught up in the comparison-itis thing again, where you start comparing yourself to what some of the icons of self-development do, like Marie, and Louis and Seth. And we're like, "Wow, they did it that way." Or Gary V. And they're like, "Oh, I'll just do what they do." And it's like, but they're them, and you're not, and you're comparing your beginning to their middle or to their end, and that's just quicksand for an entrepreneur. You're like, "Oh, yeah, Seth is quirky. He has funky glasses. I'll have glasses." Or Gary drops a whole bunch of f bombs. I'll be that tough guy. And you know that shtick, which is great for Gary and great for Seth, those are already taken. So we have to find it's sort of in the spirit of you do and find out who you are and show up with alignment and hopefully very authentically.

**RUTH:** Yes. Gosh, they're just dropping the truth bombs left and right. So how do you practice self-care? And this question actually came in Mindset Matters. Do you have any daily routines or practices that help keep your mindset in the right place?

**MICHAEL:** Yes. So first thing in the morning, so, one, I do not wake up with my phone, because so many people wake up with their phone. The phone's in the other room. It's actually downstairs because so many people wake up with a phone, and the first thing they do is check email.

**RUTH:** That is true. I don't check email, but I do sometimes check Instagram, I'll be honest.

**MICHAEL:** Yes. So, that is one big invitation. So I tend to work with corporate people. So that's one big invitation to get into everything I've missed. And now you're on the hamster wheel, and you really haven't even woken up yet.

The sand's still in your eyes. So, one, I leave the phone downstairs. First thing in the morning, 20 ounces of water, because hydration matters, and we haven't had anything to drink, hopefully for six to eight hours, if we're getting enough sleep. Then, I spend just five minutes to setting the intentions for the day. What are the big priorities that I have going on? How do I want to show up for those in my life? And then I go downstairs and spend some time doing some stretching, some core work, and some meditation for about 10 minutes, using one of the mindfulness apps. And then, I check my phone.

**RUTH:** Ah. It's not super long. What is that, 20 minutes?

**MICHAEL:** No. Yeah, 15, 20 minutes. And I try to do that every day. Now, some days I'm not able to do it, but 97% of the days, I can do that. And it's a great way to sort of fire up the mind and fire up the body and start building the whole mind-body connection because the mind-body connection is real. And then I can get into my work.

So this morning, I did it a little bit differently. The day is beautiful here in New Jersey, so I woke up a little bit earlier, and I got my bike ride on. So then, I came home and I had my breakfast, and then I was ready to really get into my office and start working the day.

**RUTH:** That's amazing. I love that.

So what are you working on now, as we are wrapping up, what are you working on now that has you really fired up?

**MICHAEL:** So, this is the thing that's got me fired up. Last week we were in Morocco for a family vacation to visit my oldest, who is there for a study-abroad program. And so come July 11th, 2019, which is the 18th anniversary of my last bad day, from that moment to July 11th, 2020, I want to help a million people have their last bad day.

**RUTH:** Wow! That's a big goal.

**MICHAEL:** It's a big goal. And I've worked on a whole bunch of different things. So this is going to come forward, here in a few months. But I'm excited about it. I believe I've lived that day for a reason. And what I'm not talking about with this is, again, not unicorns and rainbows and a Pollyanna-ish way of looking at the world. But it's more about declaring that day, that day where you're like, okay, this is the last day. I think, like, you know, my past, like moving from this day forward, I'm going to think abundantly with intentionality, with generosity, with empathy, with courage, with gratitude, and I'm going to own my life, and I have voice in my own life.

So it doesn't mean you have to get hit by an SUV, it doesn't necessarily



mean you have to have a diagnosis of cancer, or something horrific happens to you, but it's more about a day where you declare, moving forward, I'm going to live differently because I can live differently. I can live mindfully. I can nurture my mind, I can nurture my body, and I can be there for the people in my life, the people in my Peloton.

**RUTH:** That's incredible. That's a goal. I love it.

**MICHAEL:** That's a big goal. So that's one of the big, hairy—

**RUTH:** I love big goals. I am all about those big goals, so I can fully get behind that.

**MICHAEL:** Yeah. And so, you know this, too, Ruth. If I fall short and I only help 437,000, that is still like—

**RUTH:** Still kind of amazing, yeah.

**MICHAEL:** It's still pretty awesomesauce, and so it's only upside. This is the fifth year of my business, and I grew into this moment, so it's the moments in between the moments. And I feel like with my book and just my experience that I can now offer this to people to help them, but also give them a platform to share about their last bad day, because I think there's so many wonderful people who are not high profile, but they have these amazing stories of resilience, and I want to give them voice. I want other people to hear about them so they can inspire their—

**RUTH:** There's nothing like stories.

**MICHAEL:** —and all that. So, yeah, I'm totally pumped about this.

**RUTH:** Oh, that's exciting. Well, I'm excited for you.

So, final question. What is the best piece of advice that you've ever received, and why?

**MICHAEL:** So, I referenced it earlier, and I learned this when I was first starting my cycling life. A cycling coach told me, "Michael, you go where your eyes go," meaning that if you want to steer your bike, you've got to point your eyes in that direction. And so when we think abundantly, we go towards abundance. When we think of being scared, we can let fear rule the day. So if we want to shift our perspective, we can point our lives, our careers, our bicycle, if you will, in the direction where we want to go. And we have choice in that. And so he told me that, you go where your eyes go.

He also told me—this is part, I guess, part B or part two—keep pedaling. So, if you want to get past your obstacles, steer your bike away from the

obstacles, point your eyes in that direction. And as you're doing that, remember to keep pedaling because if you stop pedaling, the obstacles are going to win. So I would say, that's advice 1A and 1B.

**RUTH:** Everything you ever needed to know, you learned on a bicycle.

**MICHAEL:** You better believe it, and in kindergarten, as they say, right?

**RUTH:** Exactly. And where can we find you online, Michael?

**MICHAEL:** The best place is michaelobrienshift.com, and from there you can find me on LinkedIn and Instagram and YouTube and all that jazz.

**RUTH:** All the other places, too. Well, thank you so much for joining us today. This was amazing, and we wish you all the best.

**MICHAEL:** Bye, Ruth. Thank you.

Okay, guys, so don't forget that if you would like all the show notes for this episode, along with all the links to everything we talked about, you can find it all at [doitscared.com/episode63](https://doitscared.com/episode63). Once again, get all the show notes and links on our website at [doitscared.com/episode63](https://doitscared.com/episode63).

And then while you're there, on the website at [doitscared.com](https://doitscared.com), don't forget to take the assessment. Guys, I can't even tell you. It is so, so insightful and so essential to really digging deep into where fear might be manifesting in your life. I highly, highly recommend upgrading to the premium assessment that's going to give you everything you need to know about your top three archetypes and how they interact together as well as your overall fear score. It's just really, really valuable information. So you can get all of that at [doitscared.com](https://doitscared.com). There is a free version as well, so you can start there and see what you think, and then upgrade to the premium version to get all the info. But highly recommended. Go get it at [doitscared.com](https://doitscared.com).

And then, before we go, I just want to say, as always, that I love hearing from you. So if you have any questions about what we talked about today, or any other topics that you would like to see addressed on the Do It Scared podcast, any other guests that you would like to see interviewed, please feel free to reach out either via email or just by messaging me on Instagram.

And that about does it for this episode of the Do It Scared with Ruth Soukup podcast. Thank you so much for joining me today. And if you liked what you heard, please leave a review on iTunes, or you can also share this episode on your Insta story and tag me just to let me know. If I repost your story, we will send you a "Do It Scared" T-shirt just for fun. And then, be sure to subscribe either on iTunes, or wherever you like to listen, to be notified of new episodes.

And speaking of upcoming episodes, be sure to join me next week as we continue

our “summer of courage stories” by talking with blogger, author, and my good friend Lauren Greutman about facing your demons head on, overcoming addiction, and picking up the pieces when life doesn’t go exactly the way you thought it would. Her story, guys, is so compelling and definitely one that you will not want to miss. And I will catch you then.