

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #49

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Roz "The Diva" Mays

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**Shohreh Davoodi:** What's up y'all? This is episode number 49 of the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast, and let me start with this: All of my episodes are marked explicit, but if you don't like cursing, I suggest you just exit right on out of this episode, because today's guest is Roz The Diva and she has a lot to fucking say. Roz is a personal trainer, pole dancing instructor, and the mastermind behind Team Diva.

We talked about the assumptions people make about Roz online, how there isn't one right way to do certain exercises and movements, how to get up the confidence to start exercising, and much more. To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to [shohrehdavoodi.com/49](http://shohrehdavoodi.com/49). That's [shohrehdavoodi.com/49](http://shohrehdavoodi.com/49).

[Music plays]

Hey y'all! Welcome to the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. I'm your host, Shohreh Davoodi. I'm a certified intuitive eating counselor and a certified personal trainer. I help people improve their relationships with exercise, food, and their bodies so they can ditch diet culture for good and do what feels right for them.

Through this podcast I want to give you the tools to redefine what health and wellness mean to you by exposing myths and misconceptions, delving into all the areas of health that often get ignored, and reminding you that health and wellness are not moral obligations. Are you ready? Let's fuck some shit up.

Roz the fucking Diva, welcome to the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast.

**Roz Mays:** Ooh. You know, I thought Roz The Diva was good, but Roz The Fucking Diva, like, that's got some swag to it! I appreciate you already!

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**Shohreh:** We're taking it to a new level, you know? I think you deserve that.

**Roz:** [Laughs] Thank you!

**Shohreh:** Well, I'm so excited to have you on the podcast and to be connecting with you. You're sort of well-known for being this like larger-than-life force in the pole dancing and the fitness world. So, why don't we just first start talking about, like, who you are and some of the major milestones that have led you to what you're doing today.

**Roz:** Well, thank you. Ooh, I feel special! [laughter] I'm hailing from Brooklyn and Crown Heights specifically, whoop whoop! And I'm a pole dancing instructor and a personal trainer. So that means that I just live my life sweating. And specifically, my favorite people to sweat with are non-traditional athletes. So we're talking about people who are plus-size, people all across the gender spectrum, all across the sexual orientation spectrum. I have a little bit of experience working with clients with disabilities, and I also have a lot of experience working with clients who are working through some demons. Sometimes that is related to previous fitness things, and sometimes it's just life's general bullshit. So, basically, take all the gym misfits, throw 'em my way, and we have a good ass time [laughter].

**Shohreh:** I love that. "Gym misfits."

**Roz:** Yep, that's us [laughs].

**Shohreh:** And I wanna talk about how you got into pole in the first place, 'cause of course, when people think of a pole dancer they're thinking of usually like a very thin, toned, blonde woman, right?

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**Roz:** Yeah, so I started pole dancing now in October 2007. So we're at 12 and a half years, which is bananas. And I started doing it because it was a class at the gym, and it had the word "dance" in the title, and I have a Beyoncé complex [laughter]. I was like, oh, I love to dance. And then I was like, oh, let's see what happens with this pole.

Went to the first class, got my ass handed to me in 13 different languages. [Laughs] Couldn't lift my arms for a week. I was sore and exhausted. And I was in love from first sight. And I basically haven't stopped since. And fun and also sad fact is now we're at about two months-ish into this quarantine in New York, and this is the longest that I haven't touched a pole since I started.

**Shohreh:** I am a fellow grounded aerialist. I do trapeze.

**Roz:** Ooh Jesus!

**Shohreh:** And this is also the longest period of time that I haven't been on my apparatus in like the three years since I started. And it's like very depressing. I'm like, I just wanna go back in the air.

**Roz:** So, once you get to like my double digits in years—

**Shohreh:** Right.

**Roz:** It's not so much that I miss me pole dancing, which I do, but I miss the dance part, and I miss teaching pole more than anything else. Like the fact that 'Rona snatched all my students away? That's where she needs to kick rocks and die.

**Shohreh:** Yes!

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**Roz:** I can deal without a pole, but I need to coach somebody and tell 'em to point their damn toes and spot someone and watch them do flips and shit.

**Shohreh:** Yeah, and it's funny 'cause of course, as someone who is newer to this, the things that I'm missing are my teachers, right? My private lessons, my classes. 'Cause that's like the highlight of my time in the studio.

**Roz:** Mmhmm.

**Shohreh:** And in talking about pole too, I feel like we gotta talk about the ridiculous America's Got Talent, Howard Stern thing, 'cause not everybody knows this story 'cause it happened a little while ago now. You auditioned for the show. Howard Stern was a douchebag. And he basically said that you couldn't possibly be a good role model at your size and like why would people want to train with you, which is super fucked up.

But also, you *are* a role model to so many people who see you doing cool shit and are like, "Maybe I could do that too." And I think that's something that just goes completely over his head and a lot of people's heads 'cause I'm sure people on the internet say that to you all the fucking time.

**Roz:** So, with America's Got Talent, I ended up doing the show because I was actually recruited. Yes, there's a lot of people who, they send in submission tapes, and they go from like the ground up, like they're walk-ons, but they have a number of producers who also like scour the internet for random cool shit that people are doing. And so I was lucky, cause I happened to be one of those people.

And when someone first contacted me, I thought they were full of shit, [laughs] and I was like, whatever, yeah, right! And then, but they were persistent about it, like, no, like we want you on the show. And I was like, alright, whatever. So like can you send an audition tape? So I was like, oh,

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Jesus, fine. So I sent them some shit, and then fast forward to me renting a car, renting a pole from a friend, driving to Jersey—

**Shohreh:** Oh my god.

**Roz:** —at like 8:00 on a Sunday morning, which for me is slightly death. And setting up a pole and poling for about a thousand people in the audience. And honestly, when Howard Stern said those words to me, it wasn't hurtful, and it didn't make me sad. I am a low-key media whore, so I was thinking, "Yes, go ahead and say some wild shit, because now I'm gonna be on every talk show rebuttal. This is gonna go viral." I was like, mmhmm, mmhmm, mmhmm.

And part of the reason why, also why it didn't bother me is because at that point in my career, I already was making money being a fitness instructor. I had a following. I was established in fitness. So he's like, "You're never gonna make it," I'm like, "But I actually am?" So yeah [laughter]. So I was already established.

If that was earlier in my career, I might have felt totally different about it, but at that point I'm like, I also expected to hear that. So when he said that, I was like, it was just a matter of time, because as you had said, the internet will tell you about yourself real fucking fast. And having people tell me that I'm a dangerous role model, and I don't deserve to be doing what I'm doing, and it doesn't make sense, and I'm a walking oxymoron, that is nothing new, you know?

And you know, this is an extremely bittersweet fact, but it's never bothered me when people have mocked my weight, because nobody can say anything to me that is more hurtful than the things that I've said to myself. And so, when someone calls me like an ugly, fat pig and like, you ugly,

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dumb, bald bitch, like that's nothing compared to what I put myself through mentally.

So, and listen, I'm not championing that strategy of [laughs] self-deprecation being a good way of dealing with other people's crap, because that's a whole 'nother fight that I'm fighting [laughs]. And there's a lot of emotional damage that I've done to myself that I'm trying to undo now. But that's the truth. It's the inconvenient truth of why those words don't bother me. So if somebody comes to me, and they're like, "You dumb, ugly, bald, fat bitch," I'm like, "Is that the best you can do?"

**Shohreh:**

Yeah, and I think that's a really common experience for people where often like the biggest bully in our lives is in our own fucking heads. So even when people pile on and add to that, it's like, well, I already say this stuff to myself, so like you're not telling me anything new that I haven't already tried to convince myself. And like you said, it's obviously important to work on that and work on not having those thoughts come up, but so much of that is just ingrained into us, is socialized into us, and it's a lot of work to push back against that.

**Roz:**

Absolutely. I absolutely agree. And I think the more difficult part for me is hearing other people saying nasty comments and part of me wants to agree with them. Like the part of me that's deeply insecure and that is still kind of believing that bullshit, part of me is like, oh, I feel validated. And my theory is your insecurities, they need oxygen, and they need validation to keep going. So even though it's not a positive thing, when people validated those insecurities, there was a part of me that's like, oh, thank god, I've been saying this the whole time. Finally somebody hears what I've been saying. And so, it's very difficult for me to not give those

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insecurities more oxygen, because at least I know enough to know how damaging that is.

**Shohreh:**

And I think equally too, especially in this situation, because a lot of media did pick up that story, thankfully you had the voices on the other side, right? The more positive side of your brain, you had people saying, you know, you are a role model to me, and this is so cool, and I wish I could do this. So it wasn't just the negative bullying that was getting that oxygen, it was also the no, I wanna be doing this, and I should be doing this, and I'm helping people that was getting oxygen too.

**Roz:**

Oh, absolutely. I am extraordinarily thankful, because for every one person, I swear, before they finish typing this sentence, "you dumb, fat bitch," I have about 9,000 people ready to pounce with razor sharp claws on them. I don't have to fight any internet battles, which I don't really get them, but I don't have to fight any internet battles [laughs] because I have 9,000 soldiers right there. They're like, you just stay positive, boo, we got this.

And it's truly, no question. Any sort of negativity gets drowned out in five seconds because people are absolutely incredible. For every time I'm not sure if what I'm doing makes sense, or if some of this, you know, the unsung work and the unseen work that I do, I wonder what the fuck am I doing, you know, then somebody sends me a message and they're like, "Because of you, I actually tried to do some squats today." Or, "I was ready to quit pole because I was the only one who looked like me in regards to size in my class, but then I saw you on the internet and realized, I'm gonna go back to class" because they're not alone. They may physically be alone in their space or in their classes, but in the grander scheme, it goes so far to know that you're not the only one who is having your kind of experience, whether that's a positive or a negative experience.

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And that camaraderie that has been built over the internet, this is where the internet shines. I mean this is really, truly why the internet is absolutely phenomenal. Because I have made friends with people I have never ever met. And some of these people, they were the first to come to my aid and my rescue when quarantine happened. And when they heard that gyms in New York City were being totally shut down, without me saying anything, they automatically thought, "Oh shit! That means Roz can't teach classes, she can't work with clients, so that means her income is nonexistent. Let me just send her \$50 right now just to make sure she's okay."

And that is blowing me away, right now, is when I've had a lot of friends, some that I know, some like I said, who are literally 10,000 miles across the world, who are sending me just some pizza and Seamless money because they believe in what I'm doing, sometimes even harder than I believe in my damn self.

**Shohreh:**

And this is an important point, right? Because people tend to make the assumption that amount of followers is equal to amount of income, and that couldn't be farther from the truth.

**Roz:**

Lies! Lies! Lies! Lies! Let me just go ahead and tell you boo-boo, about the lies that I used to have and that I told myself [laughs]. I am fortunate I have almost 50,000 Instagram followers. So I look at people who have that many, if not more, and I make a whole bunch of assumptions. I'm like, wow, this person is popular, they probably have steady money, and jobs, and love, and relationships, and all these things because they've a lot of followers.

The biggest lie ever told was that followers equal money. Followers mean eyeballs. And eyeballs, yes, like the more people that know you exist, then the odds are that those people hire you goes up. So, I love having these

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followers, but there's also times, you know, in the last few months, I'm literally looking at my schedule, and that shit is empty as shit! I maybe have had like three or four clients for the week, and that's what I wanna have per day.

And there are times where I'm literally like, how do I have 2,500 people like this poster that I made and tell me, "Oh my gosh, this is the coolest thing I've ever seen," and then when I'm like, "Oh, that's so great," then when it's time to try and cash in on that love, then it doesn't exist. And that's not because people are shady or anything, it's just, it's consumer nature, it's human nature. And I had no idea.

There's also a big difference between people who follow you because they actually want your services and to learn more about it, and then also people just like seeing cool shit on the internet.

**Shohreh:** Yes!

**Roz:** So that's the trap and the cannibalism that comes with pole dancing. Is that pole is where I started. It will always be like my favorite sport. I owe my entire fitness career to pole dancing. But pole dancing isn't my entire fitness career. And I barely—and I mean barely—post any pole dancing anymore on Instagram because people will see that, and they're like, "Oh, that's so awesome and cool," but when I post personal training stuff, like I'm doing a workshop near you, come hire me to do this, and then it's crickets. It's three people who are liking this.

And again, I'm not saying this in a bitter tone or anything like against those people, because this is just straight marketing, and it's what I need to improve on, for sure. This is a Roz issue, not Roz's audience. But damn if it's not a hard problem to solve.

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**Shohreh:** It's not just a you issue either, I mean, there's algorithms at play here that definitely boost certain content. Like it makes sense that the algorithms are like, ah yes, let's put this pole dance video higher than like, oh, here's a personal training tip. The things that go viral I'm always like, this is not helpful for me, why is this [laughs] the thing that's getting all the likes?

And I think another myth that you probably get too is people see your pole work and your following, and they're like, "Oh, Roz must just freaking love herself so much, and she never has a day where she doesn't feel confident, and everything is just fucking perfect," and I'm just gonna guess that that's not the case.

**Roz:** It is not even close to the case, and also, thank you for bringing this up because this is probably the biggest point of contention that I have between me and what people assume that I am. Because I will be the first person to tell you, self-confidence and self-esteem, that is not where I excel. That's not what I have. And when I try to tell people about the things about myself that I don't like, or that I'm insecure about, that I'm struggling with, people, sometimes they don't believe me. And they're like, "Confidence? You? What? No! Like, you're fine, Roz. What are you talking about?" And I'm literally trying to tell them how I feel about something, and they won't believe me.

And that used to make me so angry, and I think that happens for a number of reasons. I think one of the reasons why that happens is because people start to create a narrative of who they hope you are. And even if that is a positive, you know, they hope that you are superwoman, they hope that you're the answer to their prayers and to their insecurities too. And so I think people, without even realizing what they're doing, they dream up an image of who they assume you are. And so when you try to tell them who

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you actually are and what you actually feel, some are resistant to that because it clashes with their dream of you.

And people are making reasonable assumptions. If you see a chick like runnin' these internet streets naked, loud, sometimes a little bit bald—though right now I need a haircut so badly—like, I can see why people assume like, “Oh Roz, she must be really confident,” because public speaking and public nudity [laughs] are like people’s two biggest fears in all of life. And so, they see me do that, and they’re like, “Oh my gosh, she’s the bravest person I know.”

But honestly, those are my comfort zones. Like, I love talking! I love it! I love it!

**Shohreh:** I couldn't tell Roz!

**Roz:** I, right? [Laughter] So public speaking, it's not a challenge that I have to talk myself up to do. And I'm not saying that because I'm amazing at it, I'm just saying, like, that is my comfort zone, is public speaking, and at this point, public nudity.

And the public nudity is more just because I'm hot. Like boob sweat is real. If anybody, anybody out there knows, I'm carrying around...what's my size now? I don't know, I think I'm like a 40G or some weird ass number that you didn't know existed. My boobs are heavy. They need a lot of air. [laughs] They need like, I like my sports bras, so they hold me in. So that's why I'm always running around without a shirt. I can do less laundry now, [laughter] because I don't have many clothes to wash.

And so again, that's my comfort zone. And for pole dancing, from a logistical point of view, cotton and fabric don't grip to the pole. You *must* use dry skin, and you can't have anything really covering your skin, not

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even lotions or oils. So it's mostly logistical why you see strippers, and pole dancers, and other aerialists half naked, because we have to be.

**Shohreh:**

Well, I wanna ask you too, 'cause you had mentioned, you know, now, thankfully you have a lot of people around you on the internet who are right there ready to defend you when people are being shitty. When you were back at the beginning of wanting to teach pole and wanting to become a trainer, and things like that, and you didn't look like the average person in this industry, and you didn't have all this following around you to boost you up, what is it that kept you going, and what is it that made you not quit?

**Roz:**

That is such a great question. So, there's a few things. Whether it was me trying to become a teacher, or just trying to get through like a really ugly rough patch of business, or when I was just flat out unemployed, it wasn't me who got me through this, this was Team Diva [laughs] who got me through this. And Team Diva, like the soldiers, the captains, the generals. First Mom, Dad, Grammy, Lindsey. Lindsey is my sister, and then obviously Mom, Dad and Grammy are Mom, Dad and Grammy. And, you know, they're the original Team Diva. They never once questioned, maybe like once for like five minutes were like, "What the hell are you doing?" but... [Laughs]

**Shohreh:**

I mean, it was just a short five minutes. It's fine, we can forgive 'em.

**Roz:**

But it really was, like, they have been so supportive since forever of all my crazy ideas, all my shows that I've done, all the workshops, all the travelling. They are the four most important people in my life.

And then after that, I think what also got me through is a lot of my teachers that I'd worked with early on in pole, and other things, but pole in

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particular, even if I wanted to think that I couldn't do something because of my size, my teachers and my other friends wouldn't let me not try. I might look at something and almost start laughing, like, bitch, I can't fucking do that. And they're like, are you done? Get on the pole. Thanks. So even if I wanted to slack off in class [laughs], that was not gonna happen.

And I think what was also, this was incredibly important, is that I felt that even if I was doing a different kind of movement that maybe wasn't as intense or wasn't just as hard, it doesn't mean that I'm working less hard than other more advanced students. And so, the value wasn't that when you just like got the trick, but it was like, no, you're gonna bust your ass just as much as everybody busts your ass. It's just gonna look a little different, but I was never expected to try less. And I wasn't allowed to not try something because of my size.

You know, of course people let me feel things, and you know, of course if I'm down they'd give me pep talks and stuff, but it wasn't an option for me just to give up before I even tried something. And that made a really profound impact on my teaching because now that's my biggest philosophy, is even if you're doing something totally different from everybody else in the class, if they're up in the clouds licking the ceiling with their butts [laughs], and you are like sweeping the floor? Bitch you better sweep a floor on beat with pointed toes! And so that's exactly how I like to teach and how I look at my students.

And I try to find every little speck and morsel of positivity that I can and success. So even if they're not able, for example, to do a full pull-up—which are really hard—maybe they're able to just engage your shoulders and squeeze those shoulders really tight. I make sure to poke them—with

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their permission—poke their shoulders, and say, “I see the love. I see the determination. Do this shit!”

And by you recognizing other people’s accomplishments, especially when they can’t recognize them in themselves, that’s everything. That is 100%, hands down, the most important thing that you can do as a trainer or as a coach.

**Shohreh:**

I love how you folded that into your own teaching philosophy, because some of my favorite videos of yours are actually ones you’ve posted where you’ve created alternate ways of doing things, whether on the pole, or in the gym, or sometimes you’re crowdsourcing ideas for how to make different climbs or movements happen for different bodies. And that’s an extremely valuable skill to have, especially because I feel like there are still so many instructors and trainers out there who think there’s only one “right way” to do things and one “right form” to have for exercises, which I think is a really limiting view.

**Roz:**

It is extremely limiting, and I think I take for granted, because I only fuck with people [laughs] who are patient and positive, I truly do forget, and I lose perspective that sometimes that’s the exception to the rule, and that’s not everybody in the fitness industry. And a lot of the clients that I work with, I’d mentioned earlier that a lot of them have some emotional trauma that they’re working through. Sometimes that emotional trauma is because their families or other people in places of leadership, they’ve used fitness as a punishment. They’ve used exercise as like either a punishment, or you’re doing this primarily to lose weight. And here is the way that I learned how to do it, so here’s the way you have to do it.

And if you have not been in a different kind of body, then you may not immediately recognize how much shit is not gonna work if you have a non-

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traditional versus traditional athletic body. And it started with pole dancing, because I had to modify a lot of things because the “rules” of pole, when these rules were being created by whoever the hell created them [laughter], they weren’t thinking about people who looked like me.

And it’s not because those people were assholes, they were just, you base shit off of what you know. If you are slender, if you are in very good shape, if you are young, if you’re an ex-gymnast, then there’s a pace of learning that comes natural to you, and there are certain movements that lend themselves easier to your body. If you don’t have experience with other kinds of bodies, sometimes you just have no idea that it’s not gonna work.

And in my case, like my boobs for example. Boobs are real in sports. Like I don’t do jumping jacks. I’m capable of it, but that shit hurts, even if I’m in a bulletproof vest [laughter] sports bra. I fuckin’ hate jumping jacks. And so I wonder if some people who aren’t walking around with two boulders attached to their chest, they might not realize that that is uncomfortable for half the people in the room. And they think if people are struggling through them, well, that’s a problem with the athlete.

And my philosophy is no, no, no, no, no—if you are struggle busing or failing through something, that’s not on you the athlete, that’s on me as a trainer not giving you the right kinds of movements that are appropriate for you. When I take the L instead of putting that on the client, I think that does so much. Because when athletes try things and they fail at them, so many times they assume it’s because I’m defective in some way, or I’m overweight, I’m too old, I’m not flexible enough. They assume that something is just inherently wrong with them.

But how about doing some shit that’s right for you instead? And this is where you can build confidence as an athlete. This is where you can focus

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on the wins and also the positive contributions you can make to the athletic community. You don't always have to be the fastest runner and the strongest person. There's so many ways to add value, and it's about finding the right way for *you* to add value.

**Shohreh:** I'm just like throwing up praise hands right now for everything you just said! Tons of trainers, coaches out there need to be thinking about coming into their sessions with clients with more curiosity, and openness, and a willingness to make changes as needed. Because I think you're right, so many people, unfortunately, put the blame on the client. And they're like, eh, well, your body can't do this, or you need to work harder, you're not strong enough, or whatever. And it's like, if they can't do it, it's on *you*. Take it onto yourself to do that. That's what a coach is. It's your job to troubleshoot, it's not the client's.

**Roz:** Yeah. You know, I like to joke with new clients, like listen, my job as a coach is to clear all the bullshit out of the way so you can electric slide to glory. If there's some big-ass boulder in the way, that's my fault, not yours. So I just wanna clear this way so your sole purpose is to groove.

**Shohreh:** Yeah, absolutely, I really love that, and I also love your use of the word "athlete." And I know in general one of your specialties is creating spaces that different bodies can feel welcome in, whether that's Black bodies, fat bodies, disabled bodies.

**Roz:** Mmhmm.

**Shohreh:** And I know there are people listening who very rightfully are afraid to do things like pole or strength training because maybe they don't have the great community that you had when you were starting, and they're really scared they're gonna make a fool of themselves, it's gonna be too hard,

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someone's gonna make fun of them. And they just don't see themselves as an athlete. So what is your advice for people who are in that situation?

**Roz:**

I think the advice for people who want to get more into sports, or movement, or whatever, the first thing is find something that you like. That is more important than anything else in the world. When I started my adult gym rathood, even a couple months before pole, I started taking hip-hop classes. Because again, I'm Beyoncé. Hey, boo. I'm ready to go on tour [laughter]. So, I just always just got to let her know 'cause sometimes she forgets. So I started with things that I liked, and that was important because to make going to the gym a habit for me and something that I didn't have to think twice about, it had to be something that I looked forward to.

So I saw a class on the schedule that were sculpting, and conditioning, and a whole bunch of other scary words, which at the time were terrifying. Now they're my favorite. But I saw those things, and if you told me, like, "Go take a Couch to 5K class. That's what you're doing to start out with," I would have fucking hated all of this. 'Cause I fucking hate running. Shout-out to cardio people, but I am a meathead through and through. Like, I'll lift the treadmill, don't put me on it [laughter].

**Shohreh:**

Oh, same!

**Roz:**

Yeah, so I think the first thing is you've gotta find something that you like doing. Because the biggest barrier that I hear from people is like, "I don't have the motivation to start. I just can't make myself do it." No, you find motivation for shit you don't like. You find motivation to do your fucking taxes [laughs]. Like, you find motivation to have a colonoscopy. [laughter] You don't need motivation to go to the bar because it's happy hour all night and somebody else is paying. Like really? That's not what you need

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motivation for. You don't need motivation for shit you wanna do. So find shit that you like doing.

And this is also key, is that it's going to take effort to find the right thing that you like doing. I think a lot of people also, they take one or two classes of something, and they're like, "I hate this," and so they swear off *all* movements. And it's like, no boo-boo, you just don't like that thing. You have to try different things to figure out what you like to do. You're not gonna know if you like it unless you actually do it.

And I don't mean that to shame people, like, "well, it's your fucking fault if you can't find it," but the thing that frustrates me with clients is I feel like I go so far out of my way, and I do everything possible to make things affordable, and accessible, and happy, and fun, and people still won't show up. And I know there's a lot of reasons why, so we don't have time to get into all of those. But when people are like, "No, it's still just not right." I will bend over backwards, and forwards, and walk across the Brooklyn Bridge [laughs] 18 times in a row with my clients, but if you don't meet me part of the way, I can't do any of those things for you.

So my rule with my clients is if you show up, I will take care of everything else. But I literally just need you to show up. After that, you good.

**Shohreh:**

Yeah, and I wanna honor too what you said about how there can be a lot of reasons why exercise is complicated for people right? Like whether there's trauma from childhood, being fat shamed, whatever it may be, and in fact, I'm gonna link in the show notes to a past episode I did, which was literally about what the fuck to do if you think you hate exercising, that kind of goes deeper—

**Roz:**

Ooh, ooh, yes!

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**Shohreh:** --into that. So I'm going to link to that in the show notes for anyone who hasn't heard that episode. But I also wanna say that one thing I have noticed is that people often confuse something being hard, or something that they're not instantly good at it, with not liking it.

**Roz:** Ooh, you better preach [claps] that [claps] good [claps] word [claps] right there! Mmm. Mmm.

**Shohreh:** It's a sermon up in here!

**Roz:** Pole dancing is the number one example. People write me almost every day, "Oh my god, Roz, I wanna try pole, but I'm gonna suck at it. Too bad I have to go get stronger before I pole dance." I wanna come through the Instagram DMs with the hand of god and pimp slap people across the face! [Laughter] Who the fuck told you...I didn't say you had to be good at stuff. I just said show up.

And for a whole lot of reasons, people assume that when they start something, that they're going to or they must be good at it, and if they don't, throw the whole thing away. Bitch, no! We didn't, nobody told you, who told you hoes you were gonna be good at this? Everyone sucks at pole, and like, probably the same thing with trapeze and other aerials.

**Shohreh:** Oh yeah!

**Roz:** It's like, you don't just suck, like you're gonna be a hot dumpster fire—

**Shohreh:** So bad at it! So fucking bad at the beginning.

**Roz:** You're gonna be so sore. You're not gonna look sexy. You're not gonna be coordinated. You're not gonna be on beat. Your feet are gonna look crazy. And you're not gonna know what the fuck is going on. And that's exactly why you keep coming back. I say those exact words to every class that I

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teach, whether it is intro or you've been with me for five years. I tell everyone, no one told you you had to be talented at this. I just told you to show up, and let's do this warm-up.

I noticed a big change in my classes, really across all levels, when I told people, "Listen, the jig is up. You're gonna suck, no matter what you do today. No matter how hard you try. So, we can suck boring, like the Titanic, or we can go out like a party boat and take tequila shots on the way down. So which would you rather do? The ship is sinking, regardless."

And when I put it like that, it takes off so much pressure off of people, and now they actually try 10 times harder, and they make progress when they know I'm not basing their success off of how hard of tricks they can do. But when they know, like, well, Roz already told us the jig is up, so we might as well go down swinging. And lo and behold, people actually rise higher and taller to the occasion than I would have ever thought.

**Shohreh:**

And let's just point out too that the suck doesn't go away, it's just the kind of suck that changes as you get better and you improve at things, whether that's pole, or it's trapeze, or you're a professional gymnast. It's not like Olympic athletes are like, "Oh, you know what? I'm so fucking good at everything now. Nothing sucks, I'm perfect." Like, the whole point of sports and athletics is that you get to see your improvements over time, and there's always something to be working on, always, no matter what it is that you could be doing better. So you have to kind of embrace the suck to really enjoy it.

**Roz:**

You really do, and you have to accept it. And I think as leaders and teachers, one thing that you can do to help your students say, no, it really is okay if you suck, is you've gotta show your own failures a lil bit.

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**Shohreh:** Yes, for sure!

**Roz:** And you've gotta show them struggle busing through stuff. I tell my clients after they suck, I'm like, you're gonna be a hot mess, you know I'm gonna be a hot mess. I can't tell you how many times I went to go demonstrate something on the pole, and I was sweaty, or I just didn't get a good grip, and I fell my ass straight to the floor. I've had students who step in and demo it instead, because quite frankly, I've got a lot of students who are a lot physically stronger than I am. And they can do 10 times more advanced moves than I could do in 18 lifetimes.

And I think when you show that kind of humanity as a leader, and when people see you surviving like a disaster [laughs], then that makes it okay for them to attempt that. And it makes it socially acceptable to try and to fail at most things. Pole is 90% failure. 90% failure, 9% sparkly, glitter booty shorts, and then 1% success.

**Shohreh:** Right, and the problem is that on Instagram pole is 90% cool tricks and success, and this is the same thing with all of aerials. Like people can't even post something without being like, oh, WIP—work in progress—or like, this is this performance and also, I fucked up this, this, and this. Like we can't just let anything sit.

I posted on Instagram, I don't know, it may have been last year or the year before now, a video of me falling off the trapeze. Like literally getting bounced the fuck off of it onto the ground. It is not a pretty video. It hurt. And I did this 'cause I was like, nobody ever posts this shit. Like if you're going to do any kind of aerials, you're gonna get bruised, you're gonna get your ass kicked, you are going to fall off. And like that's just part of it, so why do we try to glamorize it and be like, oh, it's all gonna look perfect and

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like this? Like, you're gonna spend more time on the mat than you are on the bar.

**Roz:**

A thousand million percent yes! People have got to see examples of you get back up from failing. And also with your students, there were a couple of times, like for a couple of months in a row, I'd be trying this really hard pole move, and I was like, "Guys, you gotta make me practice this for at least five minutes after class." If you are really good at cheering your students on, and if they feel that love, they are dying to do that for you. Like they have been waiting, some of them, to like repay you.

So when they see an opportunity where they can support you, oh my gosh, they jump on that. They really will come the fuck through. And that is just straight karma math [laughs]. You know, if you put that kind of support and that unconditional support and love out there to other people, they are so enthusiastic and overly ready to do the same thing for you.

And it's really fucking hard as a teacher to accept that, because we're usually teachers because we really like doing that for other people. But rarely do we actively seek out getting that for ourselves. And my students know how full of shit I really am, and so they don't ask me [laughs]. When they know I'm exhausted and tired, they're like, "Bitch sit down. Have this snack. I'm sending you home in a car 'cause you know your ass is tired." They take care of me. They're like, "Can you please sit down? Do not teach us tomorrow. Get a sub. You're exhausted." When I need that kind of positive peer pressure, they're there for me before I could even whisper the words.

**Shohreh:**

And that's what makes a good community is that the love flows in both directions, 'cause it's so true that as coaches and trainers, we're so used to

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taking care of other people and watching out for other people that we very easily don't take such great care of ourselves.

**Roz:** Hell no, we're a hot ass mess! The only difference, typically, [laughs] between a student and a coach is that coaches, we just like yelling really loud [laughs]. Just after a while, people just started listening to us yell on a regular basis, and we're like, oh my gosh, this is fun. And you get to control the playlist. So I'm like, "Oh shit! I get to yell, and groove, and twerk, and no one can tell me shit? Man, sign me up!" [Laughter]

**Shohreh:** So true!

**Roz:** That's how a lot of us ended up teaching, 'cause you're like, dude, I just wanna hear my own playlist. [laughs] And you're right. Because we're typically good at what we do, our thought isn't, you know what, how do I do this for myself? Like no, it's how can I actually, like, distract myself with my students long enough where I just ignore myself.

**Shohreh:** Mhmm. And speaking of care too, the final question of the podcast is what I ask everybody who comes on the podcast, and that is, how do you define health and wellness for yourself at this moment in your life?

**Roz:** Ah fuck my life! At this moment in my life...you know what? During quarantine moments, I have my best days when I go out for a walk. When I just see the outside world. When I sniff nasty ass New York City air. [laughs] You know, the days that are sunny are absolutely fantastic, but even the days I've gone outside when it's raining or drizzling and it's kind of cold, that for me is how I'm maintaining my emotional health during an otherwise batshit crazy time.

And it's moving and it's doing some exercises, but like, not a lot, honestly. Like every day I'm like, what do you feel like doing today? Do you feel like

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doing abs? No, but maybe I'll do some with my clients. Do I feel like going for a walk? Great, walk. But some days I just don't feel like it. I'm like, I'm actually gonna take this good nap on the couch, and that's also fine.

I would like for more people to relieve themselves of the self-imposed guilt that they put on, like, you need to go hard all day, erryday, and I'm like, no, I'm looking at longevity. I wanna do this shit in 50 years. I wanna still be able to have a shoulder and to walk around. And I realized a couple years ago, if I kill myself today, there is no tomorrow. So I'm thinking about longevity these days. Go slow and steady wins the race.

**Shohreh:**

Asking my clients to ask themselves how do you feel like moving today I think is one of the biggest things that can move somebody from seeing exercise as punishment and this like horrible thing in their lives, to exercise as something that is restorative and enjoyable. Because it's giving you a chance to really check in with yourself, to check in with your body, and see what you want.

And I also think it's so important that you mentioned that like, yeah, you don't really feel that much like moving right now, and that's okay. Those of us who are in the fitness industry, we're not like freaking pounding weights two hours a day every day. I mean, some people are, but that shit's not sustainable. Just like you said, we wanna do this for a long time, so we're listening to ourselves, and doing what we wanna do, and that might mean that we go weeks without exercising, and that's okay. And you can do that too.

**Roz:**

I've absolutely had times where my body has needed to heal. I have needed two/three weeks, at least, off of the gym, just to like reset. And if there's one silver lining that can come out of quarantine with all these

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athletes, is there's a lot of injuries that are probably getting healed at this moment [laughs] because we're actually sitting down a lot more.

And we're not gonna come out of this with the same bodies. It's just, no athlete is gonna come out of this remotely close to what they were. Everyone's going to be different. Different isn't bad, it just means literally different. So I've also been doing a lot of work to try and prepare myself when I do pick up that dumbbell. And I realize I'm probably gonna have to start with those five or 10 pound dumbbells and not the 20 pounds that my ego wants to do, and already having that fight, so that way by the time I get to the gym, I'm like mentally ready to go back to, for me, lighter weights.

**Shohreh:** Yes, and I like that you said that different isn't bad, because of course this is a very popular conversation right now, especially among aerialists, of like, oh my god, when I get back into the studio I'll have lost months and months, like what skills will I not be able to do, whatever. And I'm like, yeah, it's not gonna be the world's greatest thing, it's gonna be annoying, and also it's just a new place to be. And in this case, because everyone's in the same boat, we're all gonna be in that situation.

**Roz:** Yes!

**Shohreh:** And so we can have that unity together.

**Roz:** Oh my gosh, I'm already planning, whenever we open up, the first month of every single class I teach is going to be like introductory, level one kind of moves. Even with my more advanced, you've been doing this since forever, everybody is going to deadass basics for about a month.

**Shohreh:** Yeah, I think that's absolutely the right call, and that's where I'm gonna kind of settle back into as well. Because that's where you build from. That's

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what the basics are for, right? You can always come back to them, always get to that.

So thank you Roz so much for being here. This conversation was epic.

**Roz:** Thank you so much for having me.

**Shohreh:** Of course. How can people find you, and please tell me more about your Patreon account because I want people to go support you.

**Roz:** Yessir! Well, people can stalk me at Roz The Diva and you can Google that, that's my Instagram, that's me on Facebook, that's my website, rozthediva.com. Errybody everywhere, Roz The Diva.

And my newest project is on Patreon. And essentially it comes with pep talks each week. It also comes with exercise tutorials. It comes with some live classes via Zoom, and then a few other things sprinkled in here and there. And I'm really excited about this because, you know, the industry, we're kicking and screaming, but we're online now. And it's not the world's most awesome solution to being in person, but it's the best that we've got. And so I'm really dedicated to making this not just like another thing that you pay for and forget, like you never use.

And this Patreon project is also great because you have options at \$10, \$20 and \$30 per month, so it's at a different price point than some of my other services, which again, opens up a whole lot of possibilities. You can use these videos and these resources as an extra addendum to your in-person training, or they can absolutely be your main focus.

**Shohreh:** Can I just say that Roz The Diva pep talks is the best Patreon perk I have ever heard, and I may have to borrow this [laughter] pep talk idea when I start a Patreon 'cause that's fucking awesome.

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**Roz:** Go ahead and do it. Like, start the pep talks. I'm still learning, and I'm excited, 'cause every month, I think, gets a little bit better and a little less like, I'm doing this in the tub in my apartment [laughter]. Like every month my shit just gets a little bit cleaner, I get a little bit better at editing. I would love to have people of all abilities, especially people who are terrified of working out, this is for you!

**Shohreh:** Perfect! Alright, I will link all of that in the show notes. All of y'all who are listening, you better go follow Roz if you're not already. Check out her amazing offerings, especially her Patreon because that is a super accessible pricing if you want to get a little bit of Roz in your life, and you haven't done any in-person stuff with her.

**Roz:** You're the best! Thank you so much for having me. This was a really therapeutic [laughs] conversation for me to have. So I'm so appreciative of everybody who's out there supporting me.

**Shohreh:** Yay! And that's our show for today. I appreciate you listening to and supporting the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. If you enjoyed this episode, it would mean so much to me if you would subscribe and leave a review with your podcast provider of choice. It will really help other people who might benefit from the podcast to find it more easily.

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