

Podcast Episode #011

## A Revolutionary Recipe for Expanding Your Vitality with Special Guest Joyce O'Brien

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**Announcer:** Welcome to the Liftoff Project with Coach Pamela.

**Pamela:** Hi and welcome to the LiftOff Project. I'm Pamela Mitchell, your host and your coach, and this is the podcast devoted to helping you meld your professional self and your personal self into an enhanced version of your best self. My goal is to help you take control of your work and your life, feel more relaxed and confident, and experience the satisfaction and fulfillment of a sustainable, successful life. Today we are talking about a revolutionary recipe for expanding your vitality with special guest Joyce O'Brien. Joyce is the author of a really amazing memoir called Choose to Live, which is the story of her really, truly miraculous journey.

In their early 30's, Joyce's husband, Kevin, was paralyzed after a brain hemorrhage and both Joyce and Kevin were diagnosed with late stage cancers. I know. Crazy, right? Fearing leaving their baby girl an orphan, Joyce, an executive vice president on Wall Street at that time, left her successful career to begin her healing journey. She's now a popular speaker and mentor to burned out, rundown executives and entrepreneurs. She helps them create breakthroughs to true vitality so they can live their most purpose-driven and fulfilling lives. Just as a personal note, Joyce is who I called when my mom had her cancer diagnosis, because I knew Joyce would help her transcend the mindset of survival and really guide her on her journey to use this diagnosis as a catalyst to thrive.

Joyce's mission is to help everyone live with vitality. We all love that. I know I need more vitality. I'm thrilled to welcome her here today. Let's get this show started.

**Pamela:** Welcome, Joyce. I am so thrilled to have you here today.



**Joyce:** Thank you, Pamela, I am too. This is very exciting.

**Pamela:** Yeah, I'm so excited too. You wrote a very powerful book called *Choose to Live*. I read your book when I saw you on stage about five years ago. It was so incredible. Then, when I was preparing for this interview, I decided to pull it out, just kind of page through it again, and I ended up staying up all night again reading it. It was just as compelling the second time around. I know, crazy. I'm looking at the clock; it's 2am. I'm like, "Oh, my God. She sucked me right back into her story again."

**Joyce:** I get that a lot!

**Pamela:** I bet you do!

**Joyce:** People tell me that a lot!

**Pamela:** I bet they do because it is an incredible story. I know. I love it.

**Joyce:** I started giving people a warning sign that said, "Listen, it's an amazing book," and I'm being humble about that because that's what people tell me, "but be careful! Just don't start it when you don't have a little bit of time."

**Pamela:** That's right. That's right because I kept thinking, "I need to go to bed. I need to go to bed." I know.

**Joyce:** People say that. "I went through the night," or "I read it on a plane ride."

**Pamela:** Yeah, you figure the first time? Yeah, but the second time?

**Joyce:** That's wonderful!

**Pamela:** All right, so we have to tell everybody that's listening today why this is so incredible. I'm going to give a little bit of a summary, but then I'm going to let you really tell it.

**Joyce:** Okay.

**Pamela:** Your story is how you were a hard-driving Wall Street executive who, at age 33, with an eight month-old baby, was diagnosed with stage 2 breast cancer. Then, after going through that, you received another diagnosis at age 35 of stage 4 cancer and you were told that nothing could be done to save your life. Immediately prior to your diagnosis, your husband had a brain hemorrhage at age what? 33? Then in the midst of your cancer treatment he was diagnosed with stage 3 malignant melanoma and given a 20 to 30% chance of survival. Here we are, how many years later? What? Like 15 is it?



**Joyce:** Yeah, 15 years later.

**Pamela:** On this call and you are both cancer free.

**Joyce:** Yeah, he's walking and our lives are just completely transformed.

**Pamela:** Yeah, so take us back just for a moment to that time in your life where you were on this path and then you just got hit with a whole bunch of craziness.

**Joyce:** Yeah, it sure was. Yeah, I was down on Wall Street and I was running a \$2.5 billion hedge-fund business and it just, gosh, it was just like my life was so completely different than it is right now. I was successful. I was working hard - a ridiculous amount of hours, like 120 hours a week. I was living life on the edge, to the fullest, but not necessarily in a healthy way. It was a pretty crazy time. I had just had a baby when I was diagnosed the first time. The doctors had thought that she had spina bifida and wanted us to abort, so in the midst of all this other stuff, that was going on too. My company was being sold, so it just couldn't have been ... Like I say, it would make a good movie.

**Pamela:** Exactly. As a movie, if you saw all of that you'd think, "No."

**Joyce:** Yeah, but how did we turn it around, right? It went from this insanity of living this life where I knew I was out of balance. I mean, I was the epitome of a burnt-out, run-down executive who was feeling like something was missing and I knew then that something had to change because when this all happened in a five year period of time, I was only 35 years old. Only 35 when all of this had happened and I'm faced with a diagnosis of stage 4 cancer and told nothing could be done to save me. I realized, "Wow, something's really got to change because I know I'm not meant to die."

I could use a lot of the same tools that I had used as an executive, and we were very entrepreneurial at that point in time even though I was the executive of a firm, we were entrepreneurial in the way that we handled things, so I was this entrepreneur and executive at the same time. I knew that something drastic had to change. I just got down on my knees and said, "God, you have to show me the way."

By using a lot of the same tools that had made me be successful in my career, I was able then to completely transform my life, my health, and my family's health to create something that was getting by. But something was missing, I was feeling lousy, and I didn't just have stage 4 cancer, I had chronic fatigue, and sinus problems, and headaches, and IBS, and depression, and aches and pains. I mean, my stress level was through the roof. All those things, to now, 15 years later, feeling younger than I did then, better, happier, more fulfilled. All of us, our kids are happy and well adjusted. It's just



amazing to me that I was missing all of that by being so focused on just my career, or career and a little bit of family time and just so out of balance.

**Pamela:** Right, well, there is so much in what you just said, but what I want to pull out is the idea of this switch that you made from what I would call survival mode, in a way that we didn't really even understand that we're in survival mode, like we're just sort of powering through, and we're rushing to work, and we're rushing home, and we're just trying to hit all those goals that we have, but it's really just about getting through. That switch from the survival to the idea of, first of all, choosing to live, which is the power of your book title, but also thriving and that that mind shift had to happen for you first. Tell me about why that shift got made and how you did that.

**Joyce:** You know? It was interesting. On part of this journey I had gone to a clinic. It was a holistic clinic in Switzerland. The doctor there asked me a very, very powerful question. He said, "It's five minutes until midnight, what are you going to do?" I thought, "It's five minutes until midnight, I'm already exhausted. I'm going to bed. What else do you do at five minutes until midnight?"

**Pamela:** Right. Exactly. Hello?

**Joyce:** He said, "No, there's five minutes left of your life." Frankly, that's pretty much what I was faced with. I mean, I had very little time. I said, "I don't know. I really don't know." I didn't have any understanding of what I really wanted to do with my life, but there was one thing that was clear, which was that I hadn't left a legacy. I felt like I hadn't made a difference. There was a big driving force there. I also had a little baby, she was only three years old at the time, and a husband who was likely going to die as well. I just thought, "There's got to be more. I know that we're all on this planet for a purpose and a reason and I don't believe it was for me to solely just make a lot of people money down on Wall Street. There had to be more."

That was the switch. My mindset was, "I can do anything." I grew up believing that, and I believe that so many executives and entrepreneurs believe the same thing. It's like you have a dream and then you make it happen, whatever that dream is, or whatever your goal is.

It shifts, then, into a different place of suddenly being faced with a death sentence. You can actually look at everything from a clear space and say, "What is it that I really do want in my life, and what do I need to do to get that?" Of course, living was the first thing, and then shortly after, I started reversing everything. I mean, it wasn't just reversing the stage 4 cancer. Within 30 days the chronic fatigue, sinus problems, headaches, migraines, all that stuff was gone. I had more energy and felt better than I



had in my entire life, and I was reversing stage 4 cancer to ultimately become cancer free, and that was in 18 months, which was unheard of.

I knew that if I could create, and work on building a \$2.5 billion business, I could do anything, and anybody can, and that's the way I feel. The mindset was, "Now it's time for me to actually put everything else into action and just start believing that I can do this, and choosing to live, and as you said, the name of my book is *Choose to Live* for that reason. It's the very first thing we all have to do, not just if we're faced with a scary diagnosis or some kind of a health issue.

**Pamela:** Right.

**Joyce:** The choice is, every single day, to wake up in the morning and say, "I choose to live," whatever that life looks like, vibrant, healthy, loving, all of those things. It's a choice to begin that journey.

**Pamela:** Right. I love that. I so love that. This idea of waking up every morning and choosing to live, so we do that. As entrepreneurs, I'm a former executive who basically traveled 75% of my time, all around the world. I had a life not where I lived, but on planes and in hotel rooms, so I know all of that and then, of course, the whole entrepreneurial sprint. We wake up in the morning and I want to choose to live. I definitely do, but all of a sudden I just get hit with a bunch of stuff, so talk to us about how we use those very talents that we have as executives, as entrepreneurs, to actually implement something that would help us have a more vibrant life.

**Joyce:** Yeah, so I think, you know, the first thing, there's a couple of little things to do right when you wake up in the morning, and this takes no more than a minute, which is to just go immediately into gratitude. Put a smile on your face. Be in gratitude for what you do have. If there's things in your life that you really don't want to have in your life, it's a time to look at it and say, "What do I want to do about that instead of allowing that to drive me?" You either run the day or the day runs you. Right?

**Pamela:** Right, that's right. Yes, exactly.

**Joyce:** For me, what was always so important was starting the day with the things that were the highest priority, which were my health. If I waited until the end of the day, most of the time it didn't get done, so grounding for a few minutes and just being really present in your body, breathing in your body. Now, these are very, very simple things. Of course, I have an entire program about how to completely transform your health, but this is really about just a little step, that first step. Juicing then, you know, following it by either juicing or making a smoothie. Having a good source of protein, which is possibly vegetable protein powder, making smoothies in the morning.



These are all great ways to be able to start your day, because when you start your day that way, the rest of your day runs in a whole different way because you've taken care of yourself. You are choosing to live by saying, "Today I'm going to make this day the best day that it can possibly be," and do your best then to release the things, the things that you know are holding you back, and looking at them and saying, "What am I willing to settle for? Why am I doing this? These things that are hitting me throughout the day, how is it that they are actually running me instead of me choosing to live my life and run my day that way that I want to?"

I believe that there's an answer to everything, Pamela. There's an answer and a solution to everything, and I'm very intuitive so I really help people to get to that very, very quickly, but we have our own intuition to be able to connect with that and say, "What am I really settling with? Where am I not in integrity with my soul and what my soul is really asking for?"

**Pamela:** Oh, wow. You know? You talk about health. You talk about what our soul is looking for. These are two different levels within us, so what would you say are the core components of living a vibrant life?

**Joyce:** Yeah, that's a great question. When I began on this journey it started physical, and so I did a great job on the physical side. Then, all of a sudden, all of these other things started falling into place. What I discovered is that what we need to do in order to be able to create a vibrant, healthy life full of vitality is to be able to look at our life with a five prong approach. It's almost like five petals of a flower. What happens when a flower is not getting the nutrients and the water and the sun that it needs? It wilts just like us.

There are five petals of this flower. It's physical, environment, mindset, emotional, and spiritual. When we can get to the root causes at each of those different levels and remove the root causes of what is depleting us and not giving us our nutrients and nutrition and vitality at each of those different levels, all of a sudden this flower becomes this blossoming, fulfilled, happy, joyful you.

**Pamela:** Yes. I want to blossom! That's for sure. I love those core components because they're the foundation and if any one of those areas isn't healthy or not getting the nutrients it needs the whole flower starts to wilt.

**Joyce:** Yeah. Yeah. And the thing is that there are so many aspects to that that nobody is talking about, and that's what I love about what I do. They are not talking about this whole five prong approach and these things that I discovered on this journey, it was fascinating to me. I'm like, "Why doesn't everybody know this?"



**Pamela:** Tell us one or two of those things that you discovered that people don't generally know.

**Joyce:** Yeah, okay. One of them, I would say on the physical side, right?

**Pamela:** Mm hm.

**Joyce:** We are putting all these things into our body. It's nice to hear that we're supposed to eat our vegetables. Our parents said that, but it's so much more than that. Health is so much more than that. There are things that have contributed to our flower being depleted. They could be things like heavy metals, food intolerance, food addiction for example. It could be things like sugar, which feeds cancer and depletes the immune system. All these things that create inflammation. It could be toxicity levels in our body. There's so many things. It could be thyroid. It could be adrenal. There's all these key components of things and we just need to be able to look at the body from a whole perspective.

The other is environment. Who are we surrounding ourselves with? What is it that we're doing every single day that is actually harming us? How much of our day are we spending doing what we love as opposed to doing what we're good at? Our excellence, which is what we're good at, versus our blessing. How much of our day are we doing that? If we're doing our blessing it's going to fill us up that much more. The people we surround ourselves with, we know when they're not healthy. How is it that we become the person that we most want to be around? Right?

**Pamela:** Right.

**Joyce:** Releasing all of these self-imposed beliefs that we have that have been holding us back or having us show up in a way that is not the highest vibration of ourselves. From a spiritual perspective, an emotional perspective, getting to the root causes of why we even have these beliefs. It's getting real deep; they can go all the way back to childhood. They can be something as recent as three months ago. These are the things that ultimately start depleting the body. It's amazing when you start looking at all of them. All of a sudden the body starts shifting.

**Pamela:** Wow. Wow. So if I were to encapsulate what you just said, what it's really about is looking for sources that deplete us in each of these core areas, and the coming up with a plan to turn around those sources of depletion and in fact, have them be shifted into sources that give us energy and vitality.

**Joyce:** That is such a perfect explanation. When I'm working with clients, whether they're entrepreneurs or whether they're dealing with cancer, one thing that they will say is that



their lives drastically changed for the better because it's not about the diagnoses or the illness, it is about all these other areas suddenly blossoming in your life. When that happens you start to heal.

**Pamela:** Wow. Wow, wow, wow, wow, wow. Wow. This is so powerful. There's one thing that I want to go back to in what you said earlier, which was that you put the things for your health first because if you don't start your day doing those things, then in the end, they don't get done. What I thought about that was that waking up and spending your day, the first part of your day, on the things that you say are the most important to you is so critical. I want to kind of come back to that and ask you about that because it seems to me the power of your story is that our health is the foundation for all these other things we want. What do you think?

**Joyce:** Yeah. Exactly. A big part of this is, "What's the conversation in the tape that's playing in our head?" When we don't take care of ourselves and we keep saying, "I really need to take care of myself. I'm hurting myself. I need to exercise and I'm not exercising," or, "I want to eat better and then I don't eat better." What we're doing is we're beating ourselves up. What we're also doing is, in a way, being out of integrity with ourselves. When we're out of integrity with ourselves we are depleted. It's the tape that keeps playing in our head, so when we say X and do X, and our body knows it, it responds in such gratitude. It is absolutely amazing. When we start doing what we say we want to do for ourselves, and make ourselves a priority, the truth of the matter is no one else can do that for us. Only we can. It's so important for us to be in integrity with ourselves. When we start handling these things on the physical level, the other things start to fall into place.

**Pamela:** Basically, it's about building integrity and integrity not in sort of the typical way of moral integrity, but integrity meaning the wholeness of our body on every level?

**Joyce:** Yes, and also from the moral integrity standpoint, it just makes us feel good. It's just about being in integrity period.

**Pamela:** Right.

**Joyce:** When we're in integrity with ourselves we have tremendous growth, tremendous growth, and our body just starts to reward us, our emotions start to reward us, our relationships start to reward us, our career, everything starts to reward us.

Because our lives, believe it or not, become easier. When we take out all of these components that are holding us down, or making our life harder, or creating stress in our lives, and all of a sudden they start dissipating, our lives get easier. It is so much easier



to manifest what we want. We feel better. We're happy. Our relationships are better. Everything just starts falling into place. It's amazing.

**Pamela:** Oh, my gosh. You are such a fountain of information and wise, spiritual advice. I love that you work on all levels with people. I feel like I could just talk to you forever. I am mindful though. We have to be respectful of the podcast listeners, right? But if you were to leave us with one core takeaway that our listeners could use to make an immediate shift in their lives where they would feel that unlock of power that you're talking about, what would be your one tip?

**Joyce:** To pay attention to the tape that's playing in your head and changing whatever thoughts might not be empowering to ones that are empowering. Wherever you're not in integrity, make sure you're in integrity with yourself. Just start. If you're not already doing some things, know that there is an answer to everything. If you have not been able to get an answer so far, then just keep going. That's one of the gifts that I have gotten through this whole process: my own ability to uncover this with other people. Never accept that things have to be that way that they are. There's always an answer.

**Pamela:** Ah. That is truly the power of your story, as we sit here 15 years later, because you did not accept the answer that you were told back when you got your diagnosis.

**Joyce:** Yes. That's right.

When I was told, "I'm sorry, there is nothing we can do to save you," I just said, "Oh, no, no. That's your opinion. What happens from here is between me and my higher power."

**Pamela:** Right. That's right. Exactly. Yeah, just because you don't have the answer doesn't mean the answer doesn't exist.

**Joyce:** Right, and I believe that there is an answer to everything.

**Pamela:** Wonderful. Thank you so much, Joyce, for appearing on the show today

**Joyce:** Oh, thank you, Pamela, this has been so much fun. I just love it.

**Pamela:** Yes, it has been awesome. We'll have to have you back in the future for sure.

**Joyce:** Thank you. Thank you.

**Pamela:** I love talking to Joyce, because I swear, every time she says something to me, gems fall out of her mouth that totally rearrange my mindsets. I was thrilled to have that conversation with her and I hope you guys enjoyed it. If you want to know more about Joyce's work, you can actually reach out to her for a free vitality breakthrough session,



where she will do a vitality evaluation and help you come up with a plan of action. You can visit her at [joyceobrien.com/breakthrough](http://joyceobrien.com/breakthrough) for more information.

That's it for this week's segment of The LiftOff Project. Be sure to visit our website [theliftoffproject.com/podcast](http://theliftoffproject.com/podcast), where you can download a transcript of today's episode and see all that great information that Joyce had for us today. If you have a question for an upcoming segment of Ask Coach Pamela, go to [theliftoffproject.com/question](http://theliftoffproject.com/question) and leave me a voice mail. If I answer your question in a future episode, I will send you a free deck of reinvention cards as a gift, so yeah, get on over there. Leave me a voice mail. Ask me a question. I'm happy to answer it.

You can also connect with me on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram @TheCoachPamela, and if you enjoyed today's episode, please leave a review for us on iTunes. Your feedback truly does make a difference. Today's Lift Off inspiration comes from Mother Theresa, the queen of inspiration herself. What she says is, "Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin." Let's begin today to add more vitality to our lives. Thank you for listening and remember, why settle for good when great is waiting? Take one small step this week to lift your life. Bye for now.

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