

Candice Schutter: 0:13

Welcome back to The Deeper Pulse and the 'cult'ure series where we're doing our best to answer the question, what puts the cult in culture?

Today we're gonna be diving into another two-part conversation, but before we go there, I just wanna give you a quick heads up that this week over on Patreon, Monica Welty, friend of the podcast joins me once again for another deconstruction of dogma, as she and I talk scope of practice as it relates specifically to holistic fitness.

This particular bonus episode was inspired by a text thread between Monica and I on the heels of a couple of episodes of another podcast, We Can Do Hard Things where Glennon Doyle speaks about her journey towards embodiment. Long story short, listening to the content, Monica and I began to experience all the feels, including our arrogance around the topic. And it really helped open our eyes to how wellness culture had deeply indoctrinated a belief inside of each of us that we had access to the answers. It's a really honest conversation where we are healing out loud, and if you wanna check it out, head on over to patreon.com/thedeeperpulse where you can gain access to all the extras and help to keep this podcast ad free.

Okay, now on to today's episode.

As always, the stories and opinions shared here are based on personal experience and are not intended to malign any individual, group, or organization.

If you're a regular listener of the pod, you know that the 'cult'ure series launched with my own personal story and a peek behind the curtain of the new age wellness company where I once worked in the inner circle. It's a still operational international mind body fitness company that my guests and I refer to as the Org. Circle back to episode 33 if you wanna learn more.

Anyhow, in the second level of Org training, there are three specific words that, as trainees, we are explicitly directed to strike from our vocabulary. First and foremost in the training environment, and implicitly everywhere else from that day forward.

Now these are regular, everyday words that inadvertently eek out from time to time in any given conversation. And so early on in our training, when that would invariably happen, we'd be immediately called out by our mentors, our trainers, and eventually our peers.

Now, I did not take offense to this at the time. I was grateful for these pointed redirections. Because I believed, and I think most of us believed, that this micromanaging of our expression, that it was in our own best interest.

Nonetheless the learning curve was a bit clumsy, and I'd regularly catch myself and others struggling to communicate without stepping upon one or more of these lexical

landmines. The real mind fuck of it is every time I was unable to level up and meet the expectations of my mentors, it served as further proof that I needed exactly what it is they were selling me.

Tracy Stamper and I did a three part deep dive into Org language over on Patreon a few months ago, if you wanna check it out. But I'm circling back to this particular point here, because I just recently was speaking with a former Org teacher who informed me that, in his training environment, whenever one of these outlawed words was spoken in front of their fellow trainees, the entire room was trained to collectively call out this person so that the person who had stepped out of bounds could backpedal and offer a cancel that reframe, right fucking quick.

So by now you're probably wondering what on earth are these clearly offensive words? Well, you might be surprised.

First up on the list. Hard.

To say that something was hard was totally unacceptable. It was to miss the point. It was a distraction from the rise to the top. It was to whine, complain, or overlook the infinite power of self and the practice. There was no room for self-limiting statements, especially in Org trainings where we didn't dare speak to the very real challenges we each experienced during those long 12 hour training days.

Hard or easy, you do the thing. No questions asked. And it makes perfect sense if you look at, well, Steve Hassan's BITE model, for example, or just social conditioning in general. If it's inappropriate or it's simply taboo to name aloud that something is hard or difficult, well, it's far more likely that I'm gonna continue and carry on doing the thing, doggedly and without question.

Second in the, don't you dare say it lineup. Because.

Bridging two thoughts with the word because meant that you were speaking outside of previously agreed upon bounds of impeccability, which had been hammered into us in training number one. Because meant that you were rambling on unnecessarily, taking up too much space with personal stories and self-centered justifications.

Now, I used to work as a group trainer myself, so I totally get it that it's important to minimize distraction and weed out extraneous shares that can eat up valuable time. But it's important to note that this loaded language and these rules of engagement, it was not only something that was adhered to in the training environment. Those of us who were in the inner circle at least, we followed these guidelines in all of our subsequent interpersonal interactions because of our belief that the Org practice was, as we'd been taught, a way of life.

And the if it's not yet obvious trouble with this, is that when we're taught to not intellectually elaborate on our own thoughts. When we're discouraged from examining aloud why we feel the way that we do, whether or not we want to engage in this or that, we are in time slowly disconnected from our own sense of agency, from our ability to think critically and express ourselves freely.

At least that's how it played out for me.

The third word that was outlawed was perhaps the most loaded. Try.

In the Org, we don't try a thing, we do it. And it was as plain and simple as that.

I've always wondered if this particular omission was inspired by the movie *The Empire Strikes Back* and the words of Yoda. As young Luke Skywalker struggles to connect to the force for the first time, Yoda says to him, "Do or do not. There is no try." It's a simple and remarkably effective redirection. Soon enough, Luke is cured of his self-doubt and is suddenly able to lift a sunken X-wing plane from the depths of a swamp using only the power of his mind. Presto, and game on. A quick mindset shift, and he's ready to kick some intergalactic ass.

Now I haven't done my research on this, but I'm pretty sure it's no coincidence that Jedi Mind training and New Age Literalism have a whole hell of a lot in common.

But for now, I'll say that the movies ain't real life. And when Yoda says there is no try, am I meant to accept those words as gospel? Not, so, thinks I.

Now, of course, I can be a metaphysical buzz kill these days. I'm not a cynic. I've just developed a sort of allergy to all-or-none thought terminating cliches of this sort. Even so I guess I will say that the purpose of the teaching is not entirely lost on me. Luke was mired in self-doubt and hesitation. He lacked hope and belief in his ability to use the force. And just like Thomas the train, all he needed was a little, 'I think I can' shift in mindset and suddenly his objective was within reach.

Yeah, okay. As a former coach, I will concede that a shift from a fixed to growth mindset can be a total game changer in some instances.

And once again, never always.

And at the Org trainings, the word try was simply a no go. There was never any mention of Star Wars, Little Engines That Could, or even the benefits of cognitive behavior therapy. Strip away the new age dogma, and it's not at all hard to see that in this instance, the policing of language was, and is, an exercise in compliance.

By definition, to try is to make an attempt at something. We can try with a sense of resignation or we can give it our all. Try as we may or try with all our might, trying is a real deal thing, y'all.

But imagine if Nike's slogan was, just try it. It doesn't quite land the same, does it? The truth is trying isn't as salesy or sexy as doing. And money makers have sort of hijacked mindset training as a profiteering ideology that insists we must continually and always be up-leveling. And that if and when we try and fail at something, which I can say with certainty is an experience that all of us will have at some point in time, well then said failure, well, that's on us.

This is at the heart of cultic sales funnel mass marketing, where the solution to any problem involves another product or an investment in next level self-development.

Back in episode 41, I offer a breakdown of multi-level marketing. What it is, what makes it culty, and why there are so many undeniable red flags. In that same episode, I sat down with former doTERRA rep and health coach, Jamie Smith, who shared about her experiences in the world of MLM. She shared about the four years she spent trying to make a senseless business model make sense for her family. She walked away from MLM understandably disenchanted. And a few years later after learning more about anti-MLM advocacy, she began sharing her story publicly.

Today we're gonna be digging even deeper into the world of multi-level marketing. Peeling back the curtain through a conversation with former MLM coach, Jennifer Rajala.

When Jennifer was pregnant with her second child, she left behind a career in social work to join the world of MLM. After a few years of high-minded hustle, she finally became a top tier earner. And she was offered white Mercedes status as an Arbonne rep. But despite her continual hard work, and the literal street cred, life as a successful MLM'er didn't pan out as promised. And so, Jennifer doubled down, expanding into the world of MLM coaching. She was eventually invited to join the 100K Inner Circle at Rank Makers, a culty collective of network marketing entrepreneurs who follow the daily drop guidance of MLM Power Coach, Ray Higdon.

Now, it will help you to know going into this conversation that, from what I've seen, the vast majority of money earned in the coaching industry is made by so-called business coaches. People who are coaching other coaches, wanna be influencers, personal growth helpers, or in this case MLM distributors to build professional credibility and supposedly passive streams of income. These high earning, online consultants make bank teaching their customers how to employ the same predatory sales practices that they themselves engage in.

Build a personal brand. Power your life and your business. Be among the top earners who have figured out how to leverage their talents to earn six figures while changing

lives. It all sounds pretty fucking compelling on the surface. I fell for it more than once while working as a coach myself.

But in reality, this industry of helpers is more like a hyper capitalistic money machine that leverages people's insecurities to feed a select few at the tippy top. It's really not hard to see how the worlds of MLM and coaching have a whole hell of a lot in common.

This episode features the first half of my conversation with Jennifer. Today she's gonna share with you how she got involved in MLM and in coaching, and why since leaving, she's become such a vocal activist.

I think this conversation speaks for itself and so here's part one of my chat with Jennifer Rajala.

Hey, you made it.

Jennifer Rajala: 13:12

I apologize for the technical difficulties. Literally right when I logged in, it's like spinning wheels. I'm like, oh my gosh.

Candice Schutter: 13:22

Oh, of course, of course.

Jennifer Rajala: 13:25

Well, hey, it's 1111 my time, so maybe that's a sign.

Candice Schutter: 13:29

It, it's auspicious. We'll go with that. We'll let our, our cult personas kick in and, and ride that wave like, it was meant to be!

Jennifer Rajala: 13:38

Yes, Absolutely.

Candice Schutter: 13:40

That's perfect. I'm really excited to be talking to you again. I had such a nice experience in our first Zoom conversation where we talked a bit and you shared a little bit about your story, which is quite a story, right?

Jennifer Rajala: 13:54

Yeah, there, there are definitely a lot of moving parts. And it's taken me the better part of a year to even be able to put language to a lot of it. Which I know is pretty, it's fairly common and so I just, I appreciate just you having me here to be able to share. And I'm, I'm gonna go ahead and appreciate myself for actually having the language to say it and speak it cuz it's been. It's been a little bit and it, I may struggle a little bit parts too, so.

Candice Schutter: 14:32

Well, and that's really the purpose of this series, you know. There's lots of ways to explore these dynamics through the sharing of stories. And for me, I've just was thinking about this actually walking on the trail today. I was listening to the Conspirituality podcast, which I love. And I was thinking about how each of these

platforms is so unique and different and how we're not here to lay out something we've investigated and figured out and we're gonna report it to people. That's not what we're doing. This is self-expression in real time. Cult recovery in real time. The sharing of stories in order to find that language. That's what I'm hoping that it is for each guest that comes on, is finding even more language by sharing these insights and how they overlap in all these different, these different arenas. Um, and one of the things that I love about what you're doing on your Instagram, which I'm of course gonna link to, is that you have been really striking a balance in the posts that I've seen, where you're sharing your personal story and also really how you are finding language through the cultiverse and recovery communities and all of this, and sort of weaving it together in a way that I think is really impactful. So I just wanna to ask you, before we dive into the story, what's that been about for you? Like when did you start speaking out on social media and what's that process been like for you?

Jennifer Rajala: 15:56

Yeah, so I have one of those unique experiences where there was this sense of urgency. And I know a lot of people who have left these sorts of groups and high control environments and situations, there's always the advice that is, you know, heal first and then speak out later. And while I do, I do stand by that and feel like that is fantastic advice. I felt a sense of urgency that, maybe it was unhealthy. Maybe it wasn't there. Maybe it was like a perceived sense of urgency. But the leader in one of the groups that I was a part of was going down this hyper religious path. And there's nothing inherently wrong with religion, but using it, it was mystical manipulation, if you will. And there was a lot of uncertainty about how far this was gonna go. And so there were other people speaking out about it. And so I chose to speak out as soon as I left. And I, I will admit, like looking back, there was a lot of, you know, hindsight is 2020, which everybody says, and it's so cliché, but it's so true. And, looking back, there was a lot of rage, a lot of rage coming out. And after being in an environment where feelings like overwhelm, anger, sadness, loneliness, frustration were demonized, and it meant that you weren't working enough on yourself. And it meant that you weren't vibrating at enough of a frequency to attract success to you. That all of those things sort of came spewing out of me. And I make jokes, but it's really true. We have a subgroup of us that have been speaking out. And like one of us, we call a cheetah. I'm the volcano. Because we've kind of given ourselves these little like, superhero names, if you will. Because that's how we are healing through this. Like this woman who we call a cheetah, she's just like quick and fast and she just can create a ton of content. And for me, I feel like I stay dormant for a little while, and then I kind of like erupt with creativity. And so that's, that. It's been healing too, to have people to heal alongside of, but there was this sense of urgency when I left for sure. I also was trying to figure out an escape plan before I left because, with my story I was involved in a multi-level marketing company and then a multi-level marketing coaching group simultaneously. Eight years with my MLM and three years with the coaching group. And I didn't want to just up and leave, because financially that was not very responsible for my family. However, there were a lot of things beginning to happen where I just knew I had to get out. So I was questioning before I actually got the opportunity to leave. And as far as creating content and speaking out, I was beginning to say things like, Hey, here's what to look

for when hiring a good coach. Things that were kind of under the radar and like towing the line, where people who were still involved with the group might still see it as being on their side, you know?

Candice Schutter: 19:52

Mm-hmm.

Jennifer Rajala: 19:52

But it wasn't really until my last meeting with the person that I call the savior. Which I did recently write a story on the igotout website, igotout.Org, and it was featured just last week. So I wrote that and I referred to him as the savior because he's recently come out claiming to be a prophet and having this deeper connection with God. And you know, how those sorts of things hap uh, you know, evolve. And so when I had my last meeting with him, and I was ex-communicated like a lot of people are. And I, I will share deeper into that. That was when I was like, okay, enough towing the line. I've gotta. I'm, I'm gotta jump in. And, um, get, get the message out there.

Candice Schutter: 20:45

Mm-hmm. So let's talk about, kind of, how your journey into this MLM coaching world began. Before we start with that initial hook and how you got involved in MLM, is there anything about your background that feels pertinent to this conversation? Like who you are? How you were brought up. Because if you've listened to the series, you know, I sort of joke, tongue in cheek, but also I'm dead serious when I say the first cult is the family. Um, because in a way, the first cult is the family in terms of what we learn about the family system within which we existed and how it, it impacts the way that we show up in group culture. Is there anything you wanna share about your upbringing or how you were brought up, or even events leading up to your first interaction with MLM that feels relevant?

Jennifer Rajala: 21:39

Yeah, absolutely. And I came across your culture series and your podcast when I was doing a lot of this deconstructing and I was searching for everything Janja Lalich, by the way, and I came across your episode with her and that was so helpful for me. But to answer your question, so I did not grow up with any kind of religion or religious upbringing at all. And so when the term cult ever came up, I thought, oh, I can never get sucked into that because I'm not religious. My knowledge of it was that it was based upon some new age religion, and that was not me. However, I did grow up with a father who still to this day works way too hard and overworks himself, has difficulty asking for help. I was the first person in my family to go to college and get a degree, and there was this sense of like, my parents really wanting me to be successful. And, you know, don't work as hard, don't work as hard as I have. Like, you don't wanna be put in this situation where you have to work as hard as me, but still work hard. And also we didn't have a lot of money growing up. I'm the oldest of four sisters and we, my parents have done amazing. And, we made it and we were comfortable. But we didn't, you know, take family vacations or anything like that. And I think there was a sense of like, I want to have that lavish lifestyle that I didn't get to grow up with. Or I wanna have more than just enough. I think more than anything, the belief of not having enough or being enough is really the catalyst that is entrenched throughout this whole thing. And that really roped me in to multi-level marketing. And my dad also did own

his own business, and so I saw value in that. And so there were, there's a lot of things. I have thought about this. But it really wasn't until I realized, oh wow, cults don't have to be religious, that I was open to realizing, uh, oh my gosh, I'm in a cult.

Candice Schutter: 24:16

Right. Yeah. Yeah. Which I, I think is part of why this episode feels so important. You know, I did a wonderful episode with Jamie Smith on MLM, which I'm really proud of the conversation we had. She brought so much wisdom into this series. And this is sort of like zooming out a bit more like this larger culture around, you know, you can speak to the MLM experience, but the MLM coaching world is a whole other animal. And when I, and when I say that as somebody who's worked as a coach for a very long time. There's also that overlap on the Venn diagram between like there's the MLM circle. Then there's the MLM coaching circle. And then there's coaching in general. And so much of what you share, MLM aside, is 100% spot on with what I experienced in coaching circles that had nothing to do with MLM. And that, I grew up really similarly in that there was always just enough. And I just really resonate with what you just said and just wanna repeat it, cause I think it's so important. This, this thread of like not enoughness. Not having enough and not being enough, being at the core of what the hook .Is in many of these cultures and how we get so entangled. We're just thinking about sustaining ourselves and then being able to be validated socially. Right. There's, there's that.

Jennifer Rajala: 25:43

Exactly. And when I became a mom, those feelings were amplified and they were ripe for the picking. And that is, again, why I believe I was then in a, in an even more vulnerable place to be recruited into multi-level marketing. Because when I was recruited, I had just found out that I was pregnant with our second child. And a friend from college reached out to me in a Facebook message. And today that would've raised a ton of red flags. But this was back in 2014. Getting a Facebook message, trying to get recruited into a multi-level marketing company was not as prevalent as it is today. And people weren't posting all over about it. It was a very, social media was very new. In fact, in the early stages of my MLM, we were discouraged from sharing online a little bit. Because this was a people business and we wanted to be out creating relationships. And that couldn't be done online. It wasn't quite understood yet. And so I had a baby at home and I was pregnant with our second child. And as a mom, everywhere you look, you're not doing enough. You're not being enough. And so I was looking for community. I was looking to do right by my family. And all of that just again, made me extra vulnerable. And so when a friend reached out to me, I loved reconnecting with her. And she sent me some samples of some skincare, and she was affiliated with the company Arbonne. And I loved how it made my skin feel. I was a stressed out social worker at the time. I was doing child abuse and neglect investigations on call every other weekend. Burned out. And I barely had time for my family, let alone like any sort of social life. So on top of that, I really liked connecting with a friend from college. It was like nostalgic, too. And I, I did love the skincare. And I remember telling her, I really love this and I would love to buy some. And then without going down that whole rabbit hole real quick, I mean, before I knew it, I was on what's called in the industry a third party validation call. Which is where they have their upline

come on and sort of validate the credentials of the industry and validate multi-level marketing and say, Hey, look at me and look what I'm doing. And specifically the woman I spoke to in that third party validation call, she was a former Wall Street executive who had two kids of her own. She claimed to be very smart and savvy financially. And that this was like the business of the future. So I went from, in just like a week, from someone who just wanted to buy a skincare set to completely, and this is a term we used in Arbonne, Arbonnizing my home. Which means taking everything that you use, your makeup, your skincare, your hair care, body care, baby care, everything you use, you now wanna switch over to Arbonne because you wanna become a product of the product. And that's what I did. Because then I was also told, you're gonna wanna move quickly in this business. Because you just found out you're pregnant. And what if you could have money rolling in while you're on maternity leave? Like, who wouldn't want that? I mean, maternity leave in this country is, it's, it's nonexistent. And so I'm like, wow, to have money coming in. That, that makes sense. Okay, tell me what I need to do and I'll do it. And I don't know if this is a personality type or a personality flaw, but I'm also like, tell me what to do and I'll do it. You need me to do this, I'll do it. And I have now learned that maybe I should take some time and realize like, is this the best thing for me to do? But I, I got caught up. And what happened is, at my very first event that I did. So it was just like a little facial in-home spa event. Again, much before the wave of social media. And I had somebody at that event who wanted to sign up as a distributor with me. And she was like, wow, this seems so fun. I've never heard of Arbonne. Let's do this together. And I actually had some red flags get raised at that event, and I was like, wait, if she's selling this and I'm selling this, how does that work? I didn't know. I, at this point, I was still under the guise that I was selling product. But then when she wanted to join, I got so love bombed, Candice. It was like, wow, look at Jennifer. She's this small town social worker. She's pregnant. She has another baby at home. And she's already recruited her first person. And because this friend of mine, it was just the two of us, it was like fun. We were doing events together. My business was doubling. I caught the bug for recruiting. And I became obsessed with my MLM. And there was a saying in Arbonne. "First, you're in Arbonne, and then Arbonne is in you."

Candice Schutter: 32:01

Oh, the catchphrases?

Jennifer Rajala: 32:02

And I mean, that's just it. I went all in, as we say, which is like a good thing, right? It's, you know, shut the back door.

Candice Schutter: 32:13

Yeah. That's what they ask you to do. That's what they ask you to do, right? Are you in? Are you in? Are you out? Are you all in?

Jennifer Rajala: 32:18

And if your business isn't working. Like say you plateau or you're not making as much money, it's because you're not all in. You're not committed enough.

Candice Schutter: 32:28

Exactly. Which did eventually happen, right? You went on, you quit your job, you went all in and you built considerably, right? I remember you saying you built and built and

built to a certain point, and then there was a plateau moment. Bring us to that moment, because that's kind of a turning point in your story in terms of the next phase.

Jennifer Rajala: 32:48

Absolutely. So I, within six months I had reached like the middle of the compensation plan. So I was fed this idea that like, if you could do this in six months working your stressful job, pregnant, you know, another baby at home, imagine what you could do if you like, if you went all in. But I was already all in, so I don't know how, I didn't see it. Yeah.

Candice Schutter: 33:15

There's always more. More all in.

Jennifer Rajala: 33:16

The gets pulled back again. Right? And so it was like, if you were doing this full-time. So that was a big reason why I quit my job. I'm like, I can do this from home raising these babies. And

Candice Schutter: 33:30

Yeah. That's huge. That's so important that we emphasize that. That is such a huge piece of the hook for mothers or parents who are parenting at home. It's such a huge, huge piece of this and why it's so compelling.

Jennifer Rajala: 33:44

It really is. And I was excited to be working from home. And at that time I was making just a couple thousand dollars a month. It hadn't replaced my social work income yet. But I was like, this is only gonna continue to grow, you know, I mean, why wouldn't it? Everyone else is telling me that. And, it really felt like it was progressing. And I got stuck at that level for four and a half years. I went to all the events. I recruited and people left and you know, all the things. It's not a sustainable business model. And I, I do really wanna make it clear cause people are like, well it sounds like you were successful with it. Sounds like it does work. Well, there are a couple factors like I already mentioned. One of them being I got in before the wave of social media. Another one being, I was the very first person in my area to start selling it. So like the reason I went so quickly is even if people knew about Arbonne, it was rediscovered. It was like, wow, look at this and this. And it kind of, I got a lot, a lot of quick success that did not last. And other thing is my husband has a really good job and he was kind of able to support some of the investments we needed to make in the beginning.

Candice Schutter: 35:02

Yeah.

Jennifer Rajala: 35:02

And I was on maternity leave, so there was a block of time where, looking back I so regret this. And a big reason why I speak out is so other moms don't waste time like I did, waste those precious moments. But I was on my phone breastfeeding, trying to recruit people. Because I was told, don't stop. You want this so you can quit your job. And I missed out on those moments because I was on my phone. But those are factors that led to my perceived success. I mean it's, it's like quicksand and it's like a house of cards. It does not last. But, so I'm stuck at a level for four and a half years, and because of the indoctrination in multi-level marketing, it's my fault. It's nobody else's fault. It's not the business model, it's me. What thoughts am I thinking? And a big thing

was, I was told by other leaders within the company, you know, you just don't have the passion or the belief. Belief got thrown around a lot in Arbonne. And I actually never really glommed onto that because, again, I don't know if it was like I didn't have the religious upbringing or whatever it was. But I was like, I just need the strategy. I wasn't like, give me the secret mindset unlock. I actually was like, give me the secret strategy. I was more of a strategizer. And like, the tell me what to do and I'll do it. Don't tell me how to think. Which is so funny looking back because of then what it devolved into. But because I was stuck, I thought it was me. I actually ended up getting invited to an industry event, which is called Go Pro Recruiting Mastery with Eric Worre. I was invited as like a special VIP guest by somebody in this other MLM coaching group. And again, I felt so seen. And at that event, because this wasn't an Arbonne event, this was an industry event, I'm like, I need a coach. A coach is what is going to get me out of this. And then it was like, I also felt like my vision has expanded now. I don't wanna just impact people with Arbonne. I wanna impact the whole industry of network marketing. And it felt like things just upleveled. It felt like expansion. And there was a coach speaking on stage with his wife Ray and Jessica Higdon. And they ran the group. Rank Makers, which has since rebranded to Faith Over Fear, but it is the same group. And Rank Makers was pitched as this different breed of network marketers. They were the people that were gonna do, they were doing it right. And they were gonna teach you exactly what to do every single day in your network marketing business to achieve success. And I think you probably know where I'm going with this, but it felt like a sign.

Candice Schutter: 38:10

You're right. Right. You were, you were searching and behold. The answer appeared.

Jennifer Rajala: 38:15

Oh my gosh, yes.

Candice Schutter: 38:16

Yeah.

Jennifer Rajala: 38:18

So I'm like, I'm gonna sign up for Rank Makers. And I did. And what I loved, and I, and I will say, loved. What I, or admired or worshiped about Ray and Jessica was, they were funny. That was a really big thing looking back, was they had a sense of humor. And I was really used to, in Arbonne, a little bit of uptightness, i, I will say. And I felt sort of boxed in a little bit. And I thought that like, Ray's really funny, and I wanna have fun. I wanna make this business fun. And I was excited about that. And the other thing that hooked me about Rank Makers was, he said, I go live. He does a live video every single day telling you exactly what you need to do every day. So again, I'm like, tell me what to what I need to do and I'll do it. And he did. He told you what you needed to do every single day, and you did it. And you were promised if you do it, you will have success. And within 30 days of being in the group and following what he did, I actually had the biggest personal month in sales that I'd had in a while. And the reason for that looking back, I think is because I had been really focused on recruiting. And so just for that month, I focused a little bit more on my customers. And so I just brought in a little bit more sales. But to me, I'm like, it's working.

Candice Schutter: 39:56

Confirmation bias.

Jennifer Rajala: 39:57

Yeah.

Candice Schutter: 39:57

Confirmation bias.

Jennifer Rajala: 39:59

It's working. And not only that, it's all because of him, and it's all because of this group. And so I posted that in the group. Because you're encouraged like a lot of these groups to share your story and share your success stories. Yes.

Candice Schutter: 40:18

I was like, let's be clear.

Jennifer Rajala: 40:20

Exactly. And I'm a good student. And that's why we get preyed upon, like they, these groups want type A personalities, great students, hard workers.

Candice Schutter: 40:32

Overachievers. Yep.

Jennifer Rajala: 40:34

Yes. People that wanna do good and help others.

Candice Schutter: 40:38

Mm-hmm.

Jennifer Rajala: 40:39

Exactly. And so I did that. And like the next day I was contacted by a salesperson that totally fed into my ego. I mean, I'm just gonna be real. Like, they were like, wow, you are a huge standout in the group. We see you posting. We see your success story. We even see you showing up for the live videos every day. And I mean, there's tons of people at this point, there were about, 12,000, 13,000 people in the group. Not all of them would tune in to the live at once, of course. But, I'm like, what me? I'm a standout. Like, and they were like, we think that you would be a great fit for our inner circle coaching program. It was a \$5,000 investment. And they said, you know, you'd get assigned your own personal coach to take a look at your business. And it would really, you know, we help people get to six figures and beyond. And as you know, in a lot of these business coaching groups, and especially in MLM, the six figure income is like the pinnacle.

Candice Schutter: 41:55

I remember that. It's true in all the coaching groups too. MLM aside.

Jennifer Rajala: 41:59

Mm.

Candice Schutter: 41:59

If you can get to those numbers. That's the social proof. Like all the coaches who are coaching coaches, that's what they're posting about, is those marks. So yeah, I know that world well.

Jennifer Rajala: 42:08

And this group is called the 100 K Inner Circle. So it's from the very beginning, it's sold to you that should you join this group, you will be a six figure earner. And so I joined. It was a \$5,000 investment. I had never, I had never paid anything like that before. Well, let's be real. I had paid that much so far in Arbonne, but, but I had.

Candice Schutter: 42:42

But it was incremental, adding up.

Jennifer Rajala: 42:44

I had never, I had never invested that much at one time, in especially in a coach. This was not something that I'd ever done. This felt really big. Again, it felt like an up level. Like when you're stepping out of your comfort zone.

Candice Schutter: 43:00

Mm-hmm.

Jennifer Rajala: 43:00

And people are like, well, didn't you have a bad feeling? Didn't stepping out of your comfort zone feel uncomfortable? Well, it did, but it felt like new and exciting. I unlocked the next level again. I was in that group. I was assigned a coach. And looking back, I realized I just learned more manipulative sales tactics and scripts and ways to connect with people that by that point, my tolerance had, what I was able to tolerate had changed so much that I did not even see it. It was the age old, like frogs in the boiling pot. Yeah. Where the, the temperature was slowly getting turned up, and I didn't realize that, like I needed to jump out at that point. But, I used all the tools. I bought his tools and his books and everything for my team. Because there's another thing within multi-level marketing that I don't think gets talked about enough. And that is like you as a leader, the pressure to keep your team around. And actually Ray used to say, he still says it, but he'd say keep them around the campfire because sooner or later they're going to catch a spark. And what that means is keep them close to the group so you can indoctrinate them further. I didn't get that at the time, but as a leader there is a real pressure that if your team, if you have an attrition problem, you were told you actually have a team culture problem. And you as a leader, you're making it so those people want to leave. So you were told buy them gifts and swag and books and.

Candice Schutter: 45:03

Love bomb.

Jennifer Rajala: 45:05

Yes. Love bomb them. So I would buy all of his stuff, you know, for my team. And we all then got into like his, the Ray universe.

Candice Schutter: 45:27

Well, I think it's important to highlight how you're being trained to mimic the leader. You're being trained to be an offshoot of it, and in the name of your own individualized success. So it's a super, it's a mind fuck. Because there's this sense of autonomy and purpose. And I'm treading this path of my own. Yet you're doing it according to the map that someone else has created. And you're just becoming a face of that brand in the name of empower. Like I think that's one of the things that in wellness spaces, that's so deeply, and I've said this before, but I just feel like I have to keep saying it again, like that's so deeply the moral injury that we suffer when we come to terms with all of this, coming out of it is really understanding that what we thought we were doing, which was becoming more personally empowered and autonomous. The exact opposite was happening. It's such a painful thing to reckon with, you know? So I hear you saying like, I didn't realize when he said keep them around the campfire, what he was saying. And of course we have to have, you know, compassion for ourselves and

say like, of course you didn't, because he didn't directly say what he was doing. It was a manipulation. And so you just parroted that and you imitated that. And I really appreciate you speaking to that piece. Cause I think it's really important to talk about how when we're in an insular environment, we're also taught how to keep it insular and how to keep people close in the way that the leader's keeping us close.

Jennifer Rajala: 47:06

And he, at this point, I'm not even like one of his coaches yet. But he consumed all of his followers time. And the way he did that was he would go live every single day. It was at 7:45 in the morning my time. So Pacific Time, that's 5:45 in the morning. And people were getting up to, so they're starting their day with him. And he prided himself. He would say the reason why I was a top earner in my multi-level marketing company, which - come to find out when I left, it's actually because he knew the owner of one of the companies. He was placed near the top of the pyramid and he got in early.

Candice Schutter: 47:47

Mm-hmm.

Jennifer Rajala: 47:48

But, um, he'd say, the reason why I was a top earner in my MLM is because I was so consistent, and I did a video every single day. And so he would go live in his Rank Maker group. Then he'd like, go live on his personal page. Then he'd go live in this, in maybe the inner circle coaching group. And so you were like expected to follow him. And he would pitch the next thing. And so, I'm not kidding you, Candice, there were days where like I would just have him in my head all freaking day.

Candice Schutter: 48:21

Oh yeah.

Jennifer Rajala: 48:22

And not even realizing it, you know? So like when you say you're mimicking him, you're parroting him, like he's literally like the tape is his voice is running in the back of your head.

Candice Schutter: 48:33

Well, that's the thing, you can't not. Yeah. It's not a character flaw. It's not a weakness that we're doing it. It's by design.

Jennifer Rajala: 48:40

Exactly. And so, I, I worked with my coach, who I still love and respect. She's actually since got out. And I, I'm so grateful. And, and she taught me some really great things. And in fact, one of the early red flags for me was she did some really great trainings, but they did not sell or pitch his courses and his tools. They were like her kind of doing it their own way. And there was a moment when I first became a coach where we were asked to take down her trainings, because he wanted them to be replaced with things that promoted his journals and his tracking notebooks and, you know, his things. And I remember like, but that training gives a lot of value to people. I mean, they're in a pyramid scheme. So, but, you know, perceived value. They're very valuable trainings. And that was actually an early red flag. So, but in working with her, my third month within Inner Circle, Arbonne has their global training conference, which is their yearly conference where they release all the new products. And in Arbonne you are often encouraged to invest in four different sets of product. Just stick with me here. So you

had to invest in all the new products because you wanted to be a product of the product. But in Arbonne there was actually a message that you wanted to do it times four. It was your table that you were building. If you wanted to have a strong table to your business. So it was like four was then like made into like, well that's why you need four sets. You need one for yourself. One to give as gifts to like daycare providers and friends. And one to use at presentations. And then one as a backup in case things sell out. I'm not kidding you. So when all these new products came out. And this was like Arbonne had just done a rebrand. And a lot of the products were like really hyped up. Myself and my team ended up buying like anywhere from two to four new sets. And Arbonne actually offered like extra free stuff if you bought at least two. I'm just sharing all of this so people understand like the manipulation that actually comes from the companies. I think sometimes people blame leaders.

Candice Schutter: 51:05

Yes.

Jennifer Rajala: 51:06

Or people within, but it's actually directly from the companies. Like they offered free shipping if you bought at least two. They offered like a free water bottle. You got access to another unlock of products if you bought at least two. So they're actually promoting that you buy more than you need.

Candice Schutter: 51:23

Yeah. It's endless, an endless series of hooks. Just like the next, then the next, well, if you do that, then you get access to this deal. But if you do that deal, then you get access to this deal, right? It's like a endless chain of. And, and also I think it's important to underscore the rebranding piece. And again, we see this not only in MLM, but in wellness culture in general. If you can repackage the same product in a different way, then you can create buzz within people who are passionate about said product, even if the product hasn't really changed. If you're packaging it in any way, like the. For example, the first level of training at the Org, the mind body fitness company I was a part of has probably been rebranded and resold to the same people, like a half a dozen to a dozen times. Like maybe I'm exaggerating, but they've experienced it, they've audited it. And then it's like, oh, well we're gonna make it brand new again. So that you'll buy it again. And in MLM you're dealing with a product. All you have to do is slap a new label on it, create a new story around it, you know? So I think it's also important to emphasize that on not only are you being encouraged to buy more, you're being encouraged to buy the next new thing.

Jennifer Rajala: 52:34

Yeah. You are times four.

Candice Schutter: 52:37

Times four.

Jennifer Rajala: 52:39

Yeah. So, So, my team did that. And our volume in sales triples.

Candice Schutter: 52:46

Mm-hmm.

Jennifer Rajala: 52:47

And after four and a half years, this is the perfect storm.

Candice Schutter: 52:51

Yeah.

Jennifer Rajala: 52:52

I earned the coveted white Mercedes after working for it for now, we're going on, like, four and a half years. And so what do I do? I don't attribute it to my own hard work because all the success, when you're in these high control groups, the success is always because of your mentors, the people before you, the company, the products, the coaches. It's never because of you. Every, everything bad in your life is because of you. So actually I'm like, oh my gosh, inner circle coaching finally was the unlock that I needed to earn the coveted white Mercedes. Because from the moment I joined, also the white Mercedes in Arbonne was pitched as like, if you get to that level, it is social proof. People will be knocking down your door to join your business. You will, uh, have a business that works for you. So you won't, if you just work up until that Mercedes like, then you'll have that residual income, financial freedom, time freedom. And so I thought this is it. Like I did it. I reached the top of the pyramid. And I attributed it all to inner circle. And I told my coach, who my, again, I still respect and she has since left. And she told her boss and before I knew it, I was, Hey, can you share that success story like on Ray's page? So I was interviewed on Ray's public page to share the story. And I attributed it all to Rank Makers, Ray's coaching inner circle. Like I didn't even have time to celebrate it myself. And I was asked to become a coach. Wow, we really love your story. Again, it's that validation and you can say it's playing on ego, whatever. Like we all wanna feel loved, appreciated, like a sense of belonging. And so they prey on all of those things. And I also really wanted to make an impact and help people. That is a big reason why people want to continue in their MLM, because they believe that their products are helping with people's health. They believe that like, if they can just help the single mom bring in an extra \$500 a month, like how much it would help. And that alone is true. A single mom bringing in an extra \$500 a month would be helpful. Except what gets sacrificed to do that. And often if it's done. It's not sustainable. 99.7% of people in multi-level marketing lose money. That is not an opinion. That is a stat. And I know stats often don't work for people who are still in, but it is legit. And most people, they will sign up thinking that they've said yes to a business opportunity. But once the indoctrination starts, success changes. And here's what I mean by that. You sign up with the intention to make money because you believe it's a business. Businesses need to be profitable. But over time with your indoctrination, you begin to accept lower things as success. Meaning, you believe you're successful just if you watch the live video that day. You believe you're successful if you show up to the team call. You believe you're being successful. If you purchase the new products. You believe you're being successful if you prospect or reach out to 50 people on your friends list. All of a sudden that means, oh, it's working. No, no, no. Making money means it's working. Profit means it's working. You are doing a lot of working. The business model is not working.

Candice Schutter: 57:00

Yeah.

Jennifer Rajala: 57:01

And that's what tends to happen. You accept less for yourself. And that's what slowly and very insidiously began to happen is I became a coach then, and I am building Arbonne. I get the Mercedes and newsflash, nobody was knocking down my door when I committed to the three year lease on my Mercedes to join. In fact, I think it ostracized me even more in my relationships.

Candice Schutter: 57:33

Sure. Well, so when you say that you got the Mercedes, but then you had a three year lease. Maybe clarify for us what it means to get the white Mercedes. You weren't like gifted a Mercedes with no car payments. Like what does that even mean? Share it with us.

Jennifer Rajala: 57:48

No, that's a, that's a good question. And I get asked that probably more than almost any other question. No, it is not a free white Mercedes. And here are the stipulations. So my team was doing \$40,000 in sales a month.

Candice Schutter: 58:06

Wow.

Jennifer Rajala: 58:07

40,000. And you have to maintain that in order to get the full car payment, which is \$800 US a month towards a Mercedes. Now, if you dip below that, say you do, and my numbers may be a little bit off. This is all online. You could look and verify my information. So if my numbers are a little off, I apologize. But from what I remember, if you do 30,000, it's a \$200 payment. 35,000, it's a \$400 payment. 40,000, it's an \$800 payment.

Candice Schutter: 58:43

So I'm understanding this clearly. You're just getting \$800 a month. You're not getting a Mercedes. You're basically saying you're getting \$800 a month, but they're framing it in this way because the money's supposed to go towards a car payment on a white Mercedes, that you've somehow won a Mercedes. And, and, um, it's confusing.

Jennifer Rajala: 59:03

And that is, that is the smoke and mirrors deception, mind fuckery of multi-level marketing. Absolutely. You go to the dealership. It's through your credit report. It's in your name. If you don't hit those numbers or those quotas, you are still responsible for that payment. And let me tell you what, like inflation, like, you know how much cars cost. That payment in Arbonne has not changed.

Candice Schutter: 59:34

Right.

Jennifer Rajala: 59:35

It hasn't gone up. They still are giving just \$800 despite Mercedes being more and more expensive. And cars in general.

Candice Schutter: 59:44

So you're just buying into the image more. Like, I'm going to now be an Arbonne representative who drives a white Mercedes, which is basically projecting this image of success. And if I drive this Mercedes, then it makes the company look even more, it makes me as an upline look even more successful. So it's really about that image. Rather than some big jackpot that you won. I'm really glad I asked this question

because I think a lot of listeners probably are gonna presume what I've presumed, which is so naive that I would even have this thought initially knowing what I know about MLM, but like, oh, you got a Mercedes, that's amazing. But that's not what happened.

Jennifer Rajala: 1:00:22

Nope, not at all. And it especially isn't what happened because after the allure of those new products wore off, we were no longer doing 40,000 in sales a month.

Candice Schutter: 1:00:35

So you have a lease on a Mercedes now and you're not making those numbers.

Jennifer Rajala: 1:00:38

For three years. For three years. And I also wanna point out too, is people ask me, well, why didn't you just take the \$800 a month? That was not an option. Arbonne will only pay out \$800 a month, or the 200 or 400 depending on what your numbers are, if you give them proof that you have a white Mercedes in your name. And you know why they do that, Candice. They wanna lock you in to the business for three more years. They got three more years outta me.

Candice Schutter: 1:01:10

Well, and they want you to be a driving billboard for the company. Like, look at this person driving a Mercedes who's affiliated with our company. That's social proof. People don't ask questions. Is your car paid off? How'd you, you know, people don't care. They see you driving that. You show up to an event where you're gonna recruit people in a white Mercedes, that sends a message.

Jennifer Rajala: 1:01:31

Yeah.

Candice Schutter: 1:01:32

Yeah. It's clever. I mean, I gotta give it to 'em. Like it's, it's diabolically clever.

Jennifer Rajala: 1:01:38

Oh, there's so much more. They also encourage you to throw yourself a Benz Bash. And this is really, really encouraged because it's a recruitment tool. You invite people to your Benz Bash. You bring your Mercedes. It's just like a party. It's like a wedding. It's like, it's like a wedding to your white Mercedes. I'm not kidding you. And Arbonne, they tell you, oh, we'll send you a thousand dollars in product for you to raffle off. Which they do, but everything else is out of pocket. And it's supposedly a recruitment tool. So they're, there's just so many moving parts here. But anyway, so I now become a coach for the Higdon Group Inner Circle. I've got my Mercedes. Like I am on cloud nine. I feel like I am at a high that will never come down. But like to skip ahead, it comes crashing down.

Candice Schutter: 1:02:33

yeah. Mm-hmm.

Jennifer Rajala: 1:02:34

It comes crashing down hard.

Candice Schutter: 1:02:46

Jennifer's story has so many twists and turns, and we're only halfway through, so we're gonna be back next week for part two of our conversation where she shares how her eyes were finally opened. Here's a quick peek at next week's convo.

Jennifer Rajala: 1:03:04

And when I saw him deflate in that moment. Like, and I know not everybody gets this moment with the people who have exploited them or abused them or controlled them. He lost his power to me. I'm like, this is all a facade. He is the most insecure person I have ever known.

Candice Schutter: 1:03:36

Thanks for tuning in, and I hope to see you back here next week. And if you haven't yet, please consider taking a moment to rate and review the podcast on your favorite streaming app. Until next time. Ciao.