

## Ep #299: When Your Dream Career Isn't Your Final Chapter with Jo Zakany



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Lindsay Dotzlaf**

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Lindsay Dotzlaf: Hey, this is Lindsay Dotzlaf and you are listening to Mastering Coaching Skills, episode 299.

To really compete in the coaching industry, you have to be great at coaching. That's why every week, I will be answering your questions, sharing my stories, and offering tips and advice so you can be the best at what you do. Let's get to work.

Hey coach, I'm so happy you are here today. I have something really fun for you. Today, I'm having a conversation with my amazing client and friend and colleague, Jo Zakany, and she shares so much fun and goodness with you. I can't even wait for you to listen to this episode. We talk all about why she is so passionate about the work she does, a little bit about her background as a classical musician for the Cleveland Orchestra, and how she decided to leave that career and become a full-time coach, and a little bit about how she actually did it recently. All the things she had to work through and think through and that we coached on and all of it. This is loaded with so much goodness for you.

We also even talk about what it's like starting a podcast and what have been her favorite things and her least favorite parts and all of it. So, this is a must-listen. I can't wait for you to hear everything she shares. And as a quick side note, before we get started, I just want you to know that I do recognize I still owe you a part two for episode 296. If you are a regular listener and you're like, "Wait, didn't you say there was a part two coming?" Yes, there is. I promise you this time for real. That will be happening next week due to some scheduling situations. We had to rearrange some things. So, I hope you love this conversation with Jo and I will be back next week for episode 300.

Hello, I am so happy you're here today. I've been waiting for so long to have this conversation with you. First, tell everybody who you are and what you do.

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Jo Zakany: Well, thank you, LD. My name is Jo Zakany, and I am a violist and a coach for classical musicians.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: I love it. So you, you've been my client for a while in different forms. You've been in groups, you've recently been a one-on-one client. So I just for the listener, we should probably let them know like I know you pretty well, we know each other pretty well. And you have been on quite the journey over the last, well, year at least, but much longer than that, of course, as well.

And so I think today we were kind of chatting a little bit before the, before I hit record and I was like, I just see this episode being like a full journey, first a little bit on your like earlier life because it's very interesting. Just for the listener might think it's interesting. Then on your career, then on the recent transition you've made from your career into coaching full-time and kind of checking in on where you are now. Plus you've started a podcast. You just have a lot going on and so much value to add. So I'm very excited.

Jo Zakany: Oh yeah, I've been busy. Well, thank you. I'm excited to chat with you.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: Okay, so first question, how did you get into coaching? Let's just start there.

Jo Zakany: Oof. I feel like that's always like the heaviest answer, but I love it because it came actually from me being curious about it as a profession first, not necessarily me being coached. I was looking at the time for a way to support others in my field. I had already gotten, okay, so let's back up. I'm a violist and I also got my yoga certification. And I'm sort of a seeker and I like to explore different ways and self-development and all those kinds of things.

And I was speaking with my therapist at the time about ways of, I'd found the body to be such a supportive way of helping people and helping myself as a performer. I was like, how can I study the mental side of it? And she kind of suggested coaching. And so, you know, cue me Googling like

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mindfulness coaching certifications and I loved the concept of being an equal partnership with someone else. And then once I found a coach, shout out to Cindy. She was the one who helped us get connected eventually.

Lindsay Dotzla: Cindy Warren, who's been on the podcast before people might know who that is. So yes, she was your one-on-one coach, I think a while ago.

Jo Zakany: She was my one-on-one coach and helped me, she had a whole side gig part of her coaching and I reached out to her and was coached by her and how to bring my company now called MindfulOpus coaching to life. And getting coached was also just the final sort of that impactful moment where I thought this is a really interesting way to be in service to people. So, yeah, I loved it so much that now it's what I do full-time.

Lindsay Dotzla: I love it. Okay. So this that was like a big question because I think you've had a kind of a long journey into becoming a coach if you, even before you knew that coaching was where you were going to land. And we're going to talk about you transitioning from full-time in your career to full-time coaching. So, but to do that, I think we have to kind of set it all up. So we're going to go like way back to first of all, you're not just a violinist. You are a very accomplished, amazing musician. And I'll brag on you because I know you won't, but literally when you told me first you're in the Cle-, you were in the Cleveland Orchestra, which...

Jo Zakany: Yep, for 20 years. Yep.

Lindsay Dotzla: Amazing.

Jo Zakany: Won my job when I was 21. It's considered one of the bigger orchestras in the country. Some say it's one of the top in the world. And yeah, it was a really incredible 20 years. And it has a lot to do with sort of where I am now. And you're right, coaching is more than just the moment itself because I sort of like to call myself a little bit of that test case on how to not do things.

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And I think a lot of my curiosity both in like how to tend to my mind and my body came from how I was being with myself within not only just the professional aspect of working full-time in a very high-level professional orchestra, but just the field itself can be very mentally and physically taxing. And so I guess in that sense, yeah, it is sort of a bigger, longer journey for sure than just the orchestra itself. But yeah, that was my full-time career for 20 years up until very, very recently.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: And through coaching you, I've learned so much about the orchestra. I would have had no idea. I mean, I guess I could have guessed maybe that it was super competitive and like just all the things that we have talked about through our coaching. But I think it's a big deal that you started at 21, right? Like is that young?

Jo Zakany: Yeah, it's considered young. I basically was fresh out of school or just graduating. I think I was in the middle of a five-year master's degree. And so and I went to school in Cleveland at the Cleveland Institute of Music. And there was an audition, like I like to say down the street from where I was studying. And I had not won a job at that level at that age. I was sort of in the beginning-ish stage of preparing for auditions. And I had a lot of guidance, but I truly had no, no idea what I was doing in terms of anything other than just playing the instrument. Like that's all I thought about 24 hours a day. And I practiced eight hours a day. I started to get injured.

A doctor told me just ice. So that's what I did. And I did that for an entire month leading up to the audition, just ice, play, ice, play, and ended up, I remember being in the finals for this audition, and my arms just started giving out and were screaming at me. And I just remember incredible pain down both my arms. And I just remember thinking like, please hold on a little bit longer. Like a little bit longer. And so I won this job and promptly said, "Thank you very much. I can't play." So it was a little bit of a humbling moment to get this very prestigious job that many people would want and a lot of people went for, and then literally have to start from scratch, which I did.

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I worked with a homeopathic doctor who put me on a regimen of supplements and literally dunking my arms in buckets of ice water three times a day for 20 minutes for three months. So, yeah, that's what I had to do before I even started. And I started, I was still 21, still injured, but past the what that sort of like recovery point where you can still play and keep recouping while still being injured. Found an incredible massage therapist who also helped me and found yoga a couple of years later and that really changed my life.

So, I don't know how we landed there, but you were asking a little bit about being 21 and I was a young buck and really did some things. I have to take ownership over what I did wrong. I also think I could have been guided more holistically, but that just wasn't a thing in the early 2000s, outing myself there on how old I actually am and I'm proud.

But you know, I'm seeing it talked about more in today's world. Like the idea of well-being as a classical musician, that's sort of like the forefront of the work that I do now. And I'm seeing it more normalized, but I'm very happy to be one of the loud voices in the room saying you don't have to give up your humanity for your artistry. And actually, when you do that, there's a physical and a mental backlash eventually.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: Yeah. And I am, I'm guessing, you can correct me if this isn't true, but I think just from some of the things that you've told me, it sounds like the way you get there at 21 winning this incredible job is that like music was everything. You were practicing constantly, you were like everything was just for music. Is that the case?

Jo Zakany: Yep.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: And I think you came from a very musical family. So it was like your whole kind of upbringing was that.

Jo Zakany: Yes, I come from music on both sides. My dad and mom are both musicians. My dad is a violinist, my mother is a violist. And there's music also just on both sides, you know, we would gather at Christmas and

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my grandmother would play and sing and my grandfather would sing and my mom and all her sisters have beautiful voices. So like classical music was the norm for me. I didn't think about doing anything else. And even in my very specific upbringing, so it's a little random, but I grew up in Monte Carlo in the South of France, in Europe. That's where I was born and raised. My dad was the concert master of the Monte Carlo Philharmonic, which is like the first violin for those who maybe don't know.

And like I said, my mom was a violist and they had a traveling duo called Duo Patterson. So they traveled, they were soloists all through my upbringing. And so I just heard music all the time. I didn't hear anything about injuries or anything growing up, although now in retrospect, I'm like, oh, there was some, there was some aches and pains going on. And not only in my immediate world, but very specifically in Monaco and in France, but very specifically in Monaco, there's a very strong pro classical music class. So my ear was tested to see if it was musically inclined when I was five, going into first grade.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: Okay, pause. What does that mean? What do you mean your ear was tested?

Jo Zakany: I can't exactly remember, but because it's such a small country, they kind of like test your ear training to see if you have any sort of musical gifts. And if you do, you're put in what's called the classe musicale or the musical class. So in addition to your regular schooling from first grade onwards, you are in the musical class. So you learn theory and there's ear training and rhythm class and so there's all these fun videos of me being a child like playing the xylophone and silly things like that. But truly from like my childhood onwards, music was a part of it.

And I learned early on and I've had to do a lot of unlearning about auditioning. I started auditioning when I was essentially six. What that means is I would get up at six years old and do my little piano because I played piano first and viola a couple of years later, and you basically have an exam. So you walk up on stage and you play your little like do-si-do

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whatever to no applause. You know, you're six. Think about this, like a six-year-old gets up there and does their thing, does a silent bow, walks off, and then they bring all the kids back on. And in front of everybody, they say who got the first prize, who got the second prize, who got the third prize, and then who doesn't advance to the next grade.

So I have really and look, all of this meant with so much love, like I'm grateful because it was such an intense environment and I think some of my toughness, I can really accredit to that. But I can also see the detriment of having been put under that level of pressure without any talk about mindset or your intrinsic value. A lot of the things that I now work on with clients where it's like, you are you no matter what happens on stage, that was not my journey. So for a long time that was not my journey. But yeah, so that's where I was for most of my childhood. So yes, music was a huge, huge part of my life and I'm very grateful that I have such a supportive family. They were celebrating my next chapter with me on my last day. So it's been a journey for all of us. But yeah.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: That part makes me so happy to hear because I do feel like, I'm guessing for some other humans in your exact same scenario, that might not be the case and they would be fully not supportive of the shift and totally think you're, I don't know, making crazy decisions. Probably writing letters to me, who knows.

Jo Zakany: Well, I mean, I've witnessed people sort of like because I've had this identity as a musician to all my fellow musicians too, and it was a real exercise in not giving a, you know what, to even go down this path. And I had to work a lot with do I care if people think I'm crazy that I'm doing this? Because I often did get looks of like, you're a what now? You're doing a what now? Coach? And I'd be like, yes. And again, thank you for those early coaching sessions. And then just being in the field with you and fellow coaches and just being like, yes, I'm not crazy. This is something I'm passionate about.

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And it's easier to put yourself in that position of potentially being judged when what you're doing is something you care not only deeply about, but it is so in line with your values. Like I was willing to make a fool of myself in someone else's eyes because I knew that if I could just reach one other person, like I felt like I was by myself in this well-being world of like, anyone else suffering with burnout? Anyone else tired of being injured? Anyone else tired of sacrificing their humanity for this? And if I just had one person say yes, it was worth it.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: Okay, before we, I just want to rewind for one second because you told me something crazy right before we hopped on here that we just have to touch on because I was like, wait, what? Save this for the recording.

Jo Zakany: You're so funny.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: Tell me, what did you tell me about your family?

Jo Zakany: Well, we were talking...

Lindsay Dotzlaf: This is just fascinating, so people just need to know. It has nothing to do with what we're going to talk about moving forward, but we have to throw it in.

Jo Zakany: Well, because I was telling you about my upbringing in Monte Carlo and my parents are American, so it's like, how did we end up there? And long story short, my dad went for a one-year contract, which turned into 20 because his friend who became his friend there, Princess Grace Kelly, asked him to stay. And as he likes to say, you don't say no to a princess. So I think in a world of non-Americans, like my parents and Grace, Princess Grace had a very special relationship. Like she would go over to their house and eat some nice oranges that they had on the property and just walk and apparently she was a really, really lovely lady. She passed before I was born, unfortunately.

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Lindsay Dotzlaf: Okay, that was going to be my next question because I didn't know the dates. I knew she's not, obviously no longer around. So you did not meet her, but your parents have stories.

Jo Zakany: No, I did not.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: That's amazing.

Jo Zakany: They have stories and you know, they stayed in touch with the royal family. I was invited to some really cool princess birthday parties growing up. So they were very, very kind to me and my family. So, yeah, random tidbit.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: Very different from the princess parties my kids were invited to when they were little, I'm thinking. It was like Disney princesses or something. Okay, we just had to throw that in because I think that's fascinating.

So, let's talk a little bit about maybe just like the when you were in the orchestra, the culture of it itself and some of those things that really like, I would say by the way you describe it, kind of next level had you thinking about well-being and like, how do I make sure everyone here is okay and like the culture of it all and just all of that, which I think people might find interesting and relatable in a way possibly.

I'm sure most of my musicians are not listeners and certainly not listeners or are not musicians and certainly not musicians like you are. Some of them might play instruments or whatever, but I didn't know about any of this. So just for some context, I think this will help them understand the, what we're going to get to after. But what is like the, I don't know, like the culture, orchestra culture? What's it like?

Jo Zakany: Well, I think...

Lindsay Dotzlaf: Or at least where you were. Maybe you can't speak to it all.

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Jo Zakany: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: Encompassing, I'm not sure.

Jo Zakany: Well, it's interesting though because I do have a front row seat to other cultures because of the work I do. So I've actually had the honor and privilege of working with orchestra musicians and chamber musicians and soloists, but really orchestra musicians not only across the country but across the pond in Europe at this point. So that's also been a form of connection where I go, oh, it's not just me, but then I also go, wait, it's different there. So it's been fascinating to sort of have a front row seat into how different places do different things.

There's two points. There's like orchestra culture and then there's just the classical music culture as a whole. And I think where I can say that there's some hurdles within the orchestra world at large is just how to balance your work and your life. Like how to find that sort of sweet spot of keeping your own creative mind going because a lot of us go into the orchestra world having been individuals, having been arguably some of the best at what we do. And we go into the field of orchestra loving the rep most of us. I still to this day, my favorite pieces to listen to are symphonic works and there's something just incredible about playing some of these works.

We were, my husband and I, side quest here. We were watching a show yesterday and this piece came on and I was like, oh, I love this piece. Like I used to play it. And so I love the artistry behind symphonic works. And the challenge within it can really become like how do you do this day in and day out? And I think that responsibility falls on both you as the musician but also to the institutions to really make sure that they're touching the pulse of what their musicians are going through. I like to say we are mini athletes and we need to be treated as such.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: That's exactly what I was just thinking. This is like being a professional athlete.

Jo Zakany: Yeah.

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Lindsay Dotzlaf: An athlete like at the highest level.

Jo Zakany: Yeah, for sure. And you would not have like your top athletes do a particular, I mean, I'm now I'm like way out of my scope because I'm going to start naming things. Like you wouldn't do this hard basketball game after this hard basketball game. But there would be a certain level of awareness on the longevity of athletes' bodies and planning the schedule accordingly.

And sometimes I think there's a naivety when programs are being implemented that doesn't honor that as much as it could. So that's within the orchestral world, something I've seen probably across the board that needs to change. Some do it better than others. There's an orchestra overseas, for example, that their orchestra doesn't work weekends, which blows my mind. I've never heard of an orchestra outside of that one not working weekends.

And also they travel with a masseuse and a personal trainer on tour, which are two things that I have wanted desperately to have happen in my former job. So that culture is really like if that could be a priority of just really listening to musicians health and well-being and building the infrastructure around that, I think that could have a positive impact. The musical culture at large has a hierarchical problem. Like it just is. There's a lot of attention still to composers who are the most famous, who happen to be some of my favorites of all time, Beethoven, Bach, Mozart, and they are also white men.

And so there has been that hierarchy for centuries. And the shift I'm seeing is how to honor the changes of the times in a way of supporting diversity, of keeping an open mind on what leadership looks like and changing that not only from programming but also from the artists that you hire that you feature and that's something that I want to just keep having a conversation about and having I want to be part of seeing that change for the better.

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Lindsay Dotzlaf: Mmmhmm. And so okay, knowing kind of all of these things that you were going through in the orchestra and over the 20 years. So between that, like your experience and then the things because you've worked with at this point now many clients, what are like the main, give me like the top maybe three things that you are consistently like in this world coaching your clients on?

Jo Zakany: The first thing that comes to mind is aiming for excellence, not perfection. I myself am a recovering perfectionist. I don't think I've had one client not teeter in the perfectionistic world. And I've done a lot of research myself. I've again, test case, a lot of my problems came from being a perfectionist.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: And how would you describe the difference just for the listener? Like to you, what's the difference between perfection and excellence?

Jo Zakany: So excellence is a wide open experiment and perfection is an unattainable goal. Excellence is rooted in curiosity, perfection is rooted in shame. Excellence has your inner coach cheering you on, perfection has your inner critic. And it just goes back and forth sort of between the two. There's burnout in perfectionism, there's sustainable work in excellence. And the main thing actually is, and this is what I take my clients through is you get to decide what the bar is. I'm not saying lower it to something. I can't do that. I have very high standards for myself.

So I have them actually sort of like give themselves a grade out of a hundred. So I'll say like, think of your most favorite performance, what would you give that a grade out of a hundred? So usually it's between like the 80s and mid 90s. And I'll say, okay, so that is your, that's your bar. And in the excellence category, it gets a green check mark. And in perfectionism, it gets a red X. So you still get to decide what your level is, but you're not being unrealistic with yourself because I see a lot of performance and I think this is much wider than just being a musician on stage. I think perfectionism is something we all can recognize in ourselves.

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Lindsay Dotzlaf: For sure. I was listening thinking we could replace this with entrepreneurs, like so many people that I work with, right? It's like very similar. So, yes, keep going.

Jo Zakany: For sure. Yeah, well, in excellence, you already because you're not grading yourself at a 100%, you're leaving a buffer for errors. And one of my favorite sentences that I heard early on in the entrepreneurial world was done is better than perfect. And I was like, what? How do you do that? And now I get how you do that. And that's also so freeing on stage when especially if you're in a competitive arena, like a competition or you're trying to get a job or trying to get into a school or there's some sort of outcome.

If you're aiming for perfection, you and you make one tiny mistake that may not even be audible out there, you're going to trip wire and you're just going to like fall down like fall down the stairs mentally and make more mistakes. So just normalizing that. So yeah, excellence over perfection is probably the number one thing I see. The other thing I see a lot is detaching your intrinsic value from your work. A lot of us, myself included, grew up where music was like a praise show. Like my love, I felt love when I felt praised, which feels icky to say out loud, but that's how it was. Like I would get a thumbs up, you know, first prize, you're loved, good.

And if I performed badly, it felt like I'm not lovable. So detaching your care for the craft from your intrinsic wholeness has been one of my joys in helping the people I work with because your art shines and you are actually happier as a person when you don't have your value be so linked to your performance. And one of the things I love to do is taking people through like a well-being wheel where I tell them music gets to be one part of your life, not your entire life. And those are probably the two or three top things is just like working from a more holistic place. Where are you obsessing over music eight hours a day like I was versus having a hard cap, landing in excellence, not perfection, and then going about the rest of your day and having a good old time.

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Lindsay Dotzlafl: Mmmhmm. I love it. I feel like in all of those things you just said, we could replace the word music with business and we could be having the exact same conversation. So I'm guessing a lot of the listeners really relate to they're probably shaking their heads along with you as you're saying this. At what point did you decide, like at what point in your journey after you found coaching, did you decide, I want to do this full-time? Not like actually set the date and make the decision, but when did you really think like, this could be a real thing?

Jo Zakany: Yeah. So I would say a couple of years ago, I started to look for, and I just talked about this on my recent podcast, like what were the clear yeses and the polite nos in my life. Because the first couple of years of having my business, I launched it in 2022, I genuinely enjoyed having what I call like a plus sign by my name. I was an artist plus. I was more than just a violist with the Cleveland Orchestra. I was more than just a violist. I was a Yogi, I was a coach, and having that multi-pronged identity actually really served me on stage because I wasn't as attached to my worth. I was thriving more, I felt more comfortable in my skin.

And then at one point, I started adding more and more things. I discovered things I like I like to write. So I added a newsletter, and I now love to podcast, so I added a podcast. So, within the last year, my schedule actually got too busy and I had to start asking myself some of those questions. But I would say over the last couple of years, I was sort of being pulled more and more towards this decision, but truly it wasn't until, I mean, you helped me make this decision. I hired you and that's what I would say to anyone. If you're really could I've gotten there on my own? Yes, but I think everyone deserves support.

And I knew in that moment that if I was going to make this change, I was going to need professional help and guidance. So you really helped me kind of land in the decision of it all. But intuition and gut is something that we've coached on first, but it's something I've also just wrestled with how to identify. And when I started listening to those cues, I would think of it as like, what makes me feel light? What makes me feel like I have wind under

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my wings and what makes me feel heavy? Like what makes it feel like I have not shackles on my feet, but like just that heaviness. Like what makes me bounce up and what makes me feel heavy?

And I think that was a way of tapping into an intuition and I didn't overthink it in the sense of if it happened, I was like, is this a decision? But I did just sort of start to listen to it more and more and more. And then in the actual decision process, I knew there were certain things I had to have figured out even just from an identity perspective. I knew that in order to make this decision, I would have to feel confident enough in myself as a coach and a business owner to at least proceed. I knew a certain dollar amount that I wanted to have in my bank account. I knew roughly the number of clients I wanted to be at in the transition of it or even just like when I made the decision, what was my client hour cap.

So there were just certain benchmarks that helped me make that decision. It was still a really hard decision. I mean, should we tell them that you were on the call with me when I sent that email? Is that too personal? Like I needed a hand holding. Like I just even though I'd done all this work, I was like, here we go, you know?

And I felt so confident in the decision because I had thought about it from every angle and I knew that no matter what, it was worth it for me to take a chance on this thing that did have momentum. I wasn't just starting it from scratch. I'd been doing it for four years. I had a lot of clear yeses, polite nos, and so that's sort of where I ended up making the decision was just a lot of witnessing those moments, but it's been a journey. So...

Lindsay Dotzlaf: As we came into recording this podcast, one of the things I told you that I just want to note for the listeners because I think this is so important. One of the things I told you is that I loved the way you approached, I'm, this is real. I want to go all in. I want to, my work is really important. I want to work with a lot more clients. I want to be a full-time coach.

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Because a lot of my clients, I've coached on this so many times around like, I really want to do coaching full-time. I want to leave my career or my job or my, you know, leave something, like whatever it is that's, might be taking up time. And maybe where a lot of the money, the support in your life is coming from and switch to coaching. But often even when I ask sometimes like, oh, how long have you been, how long has this been like a plan? I know you can't see me, I'm doing air quotes, how long has this been a plan? People will tell me like, oh, two years or, you know, and I'm like, okay, what is the actual plan?

And I always get this kind of like deer in headlights. What do you mean? Because oftentimes people leave it in this very abstract area of like, someday I'm going to be a full-time coach, but you, first of all, you'd already done a lot of the work. You already, I started asking a lot of questions. You knew a lot of the answers and those answers that you didn't know, it was like you still seemed, first, you were fully prepared to just figure out the answers and have the answers and make the answers and all the things.

And it was just really fun for me as the coach and then you just did it, which is like a whole other piece of it, right? It's like it's one thing to make a plan, then it's a whole other thing to like actually make it all come to life. And okay, if we rewind to the I want to say evening. Was it evening? It was in the winter maybe. So it was it was dark early. So it was like not evening like it would be now, not like 10:00 but maybe dinner time. I stayed on after a call. You were like, I kind of want to do it now. Can you just describe for the listener maybe like, how did you feel in that moment as you were maybe writing the email?

Jo Zakany: No, it's such a good question. And one of the things that you helped me figure out was a timeline. And I cared so much about when it happened. Like we, we obsessed, we, meaning I obsessed and you held space because I was like, is there the right time? Like it's like I had to leave perfectly. I think I was very much in that mindset of like, even my exit has to be like so no one can say I've quote done it wrong, which is hilarious because now looking back on it, I'm like, boy, did I way overthink that one.

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But I think you kind of helped me land on the timeline that actually was right for me.

And that timeline was I don't think it was that much sooner than I was thinking about doing it anyway, but it was at least a couple weeks, which is why I needed help. I was like, I know this is the right time. This is the, this is what feels right. I don't want this hanging over my head, blah, blah, blah. But it felt like I left my body. Like I pressed send and I left my body. It's funny because I think I was so sure that it would feel somehow like grounding, like, ha, I've done it. And instead it was like, oh my god, I've done it. And I just left. And I'm very, very lucky. I have an amazing coach. I also have an amazing husband who himself has been through career transitions. He was not surprised by my reaction. I was the only one in the room, I think who was surprised between the three of us because he was there too.

Lindsay Dotzlaif: It was exactly, it went exactly as I expected. My experience of it was like you blacked out. Like you were just like not there for a second. And I was like, okay, we're just going to everybody's going to take a deep breath. We're going to be okay.

Jo Zakany: Yeah, yeah. And I think that's part of what I want to normalize for not only like anyone wanting to leave, but there's something specifically in my field where it's like there's this trajectory and it's you're a classical musician and you graduate school and you're going to teach or you're going to do music. And I had someone come on my podcast and talk about those two lanes. And of course, there's more. There's chamber, there's soloists, but there's really these narrow lanes and it's almost like if you decide to do something else, you're seen as weird. I'm just going to be really blunt.

And I think that's why I cared so much about the how because I didn't want to quote look weird. And now it's funny because I mean, unless people are just being really nice, but I think most of them really get it. Like the people that I thought wouldn't get it are they're like, yeah, I listened to your podcast

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and you're really good at this, which is very nice. I'm not saying it like I have a big head, but just like hearing those kinds of things like, oh, okay, thank you for seeing that I can be more than just this one thing. And I will say actually, it's timely we're doing this podcast today because today is the first day that I've played my instrument since leaving. I have some concerts coming up. Yeah and...

Lindsay Dotzlaf: Today as we're recording.

Jo Zakany: Today as we're recording, not as it's released. Yeah, like today. Yeah, the audience can't see but I've had a hand injury which has been part of, I cut myself. But also I just took a lot of time off and...

Lindsay Dotzlaf: Yes, you had your last day and then immediately like sliced your hand open, which I mean, are we happy, I guess that it didn't happen while you were supposed to be playing? Like that's...

Jo Zakany: No, it happened the month before. And I played with this giant shard in my hand. Anyway, it doesn't matter. It was just ridiculous. It was a whole thing. But today was the first day I was playing again and I have been so in this coaching world and loving it and business building and I feel like my next chapter is the integration of being more than just a coach now and like letting my artistry still very much be a part of me and there's going to be a lot of healing and evolution, I think in that, like getting to do some of these artistic projects without the structure that I've had for 20 plus years.

So it's really interesting to be talking about this with you now because I think people are afraid, at least in my field that if they do something else, it'll rattle their musical identity. And I mean, the first couple minutes were pretty weird playing again, but by the end of it, I was like, oh, this feels kind of interesting. I kind of like this. So I just encourage anyone at all times to explore with curiosity. I mean, that's always, you've taught me that. I know that's a big buzzword in coaching and in our world, but it is so true. Like the more you can just take the pressure off of something.

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And I wanted to go back one thing you said about my timeline. I actually, I don't even know if you know this, had sort of tentatively sketched out leaving a year earlier. Just like in my journal, just sort of like because again, I was getting really busy. I was like, how do I do this? And I think had I not let myself day dream kind of the year prior, I wouldn't have been able to pull the trigger when it was actually right. And sometimes we make a decision and there's like this pressure like if I put it in my calendar, then it has to happen. And I put it in my calendar. I was just a year off.

And it took some more evolution and you know, some saying no to certain auditions and things sort of were working out differently. But I just want to point that out too that, just let yourself sort of flirt with a decision, but don't just live it in your head. Like put it on paper, put it in the calendar, and let it guide you towards what's actually right. Because the timing will be right and you will know when it's right, but you won't know if you don't at least write in your journal, when do I want to leave?

Lindsay Dotzlaf: Okay, this is amazing. Let's give, I want to hear tips for people that are in a similar situation to what you were in some form. There were very specific things that were like amazing and not amazing about you shifting from your, from classical music to being a coach. I think you were able to have a little bit longer of a runway because you could say like I'm quit in June or whatever and you got you told them I think in December. So, is that okay for me to say?

Jo Zakany: Yeah, of course.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: So there was this runway, which not everybody gets. So besides that piece, besides like get a job that lets you quit six months, give yourself those six months. But what else? So you just gave one amazing tip. Do you have any other tips if someone is listening and they're like, I just so wish I could do this.

Jo Zakany: I mean, this is something I tell my clients too. It's like just let yourself and I think this comes from Glennon Doyle, if you, if people have

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read *Untamed*, that book actually changed my life in the pandemic. That was where I sort of started to come into my own skin and allow myself to be a little bit more of an individual because I was very much more of a rule follower.

But let it be 2D before it becomes 3D. Don't be afraid to write it out. Don't be afraid to make a mood board of it. And if it doesn't happen, so what? It's going to lead to something else. When I day dreamed about MindfulOpus, and this is what I tell my clients to and they're like, what? I thought it was going to be a brick and mortar yoga and viola studio.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: So specific.

Jo Zakany: Very early on when I was, so specific. And I drew it and I like drew, you know, what the door entrance. Like I kind of had like an idea of where it would look. And I'm so glad that I didn't block myself once that wasn't what it was and go, well, now I can't be anything. You, as far as what your exit looks like, what your next chapter looks like, you have to let yourself day dream and let that process lead you.

So I will share a tool that I heard on, from Martha Beck, which is when you're trying to decide something, pretend you're at the very top of a diving board and you're looking down into a pool. The thing that you're wanting to dive into, is it crystal clear blue waters and you're just afraid of the jump? Or is it like toxic muck and you're like, no, I just don't want to do that. And I think keeping that in mind without having to jump either way. Like no one's diving at the moment, but just keep looking at your situation and going, is it that there's like a crystal clear blue water and I'm afraid of a change? Or, you know, like where can I make something work?

I called it square peg round hole for a long time because there was a lot about my job that I wanted to make work so desperately. It's a not only a prestigious gig, but I have some of my best friends there. There's a lot of comfort. And once I realized that I was doing this square peg round hole where it was just like this is just not the right fit for the life I want to develop

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for myself, the things that really light me up, that became sort of another clue. Those would be sort of like that's kind of where I would start. And just trusting that sort of intuition piece, like really listening to your body. Like it's not it's honestly not going to fail you.

And I think there's a difference between listening to your intuition and listening to a very old, not helpful belief. And learning to distinguish between those two is sort of what also helped me start to just come into my own and go, okay, this just isn't working. And I don't know, I'm very much like a you have one wild precious life, what do you want to do with it kind of personality. And once I realized square peg round hole wasn't going to work, once I sort of followed the crystal clear blue waters and just realized I was afraid, I can work with fear. That's fine, especially if it's something that aligns.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: Mmmhmm. I want to add one thing which just because I, this was something I watched you do or that you were willing to do that I think set you up for so much, I don't know, success. That sounds cheesy. But whatever, set you up for like maybe a little more smoothly making this transition is that you really dove into the money piece and asked yourself like, okay, even though it was uncomfortable and that's always money conversations for you, I think are uncomfortable and there was a lot of coaching around money, but we just looked at like you didn't just do it and jump.

You didn't even though maybe the pool was crystal clear, you didn't just dive with no plan. It was, even though it still felt uncomfortable thinking I'm not going to have this regular money coming in, you took a lot of care to prepare for like, okay, what do we need to live on? What money do we currently have? How can I, as I know this is coming, set more money aside than I usually would?

Like you just made so many decisions along the way that were so smart that I think some people get so freaked out about the money piece that they just don't even look at it and then they dive because it's just like I can speak

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from a, I didn't play music, I was a swimmer. So like standing on that diving board, specifically a high dive, which I hated so much and it terrified me, but they like made us do it at certain points. So you just jump.

Jo Zakany: Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: Like you just do it, right? And I think that's sometimes what I watch people do and then they're in the water and they're like, oh my God, I have no plan.

Jo Zakany: Yeah.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: And then the pressure becomes, I must build the business fast, immediately, oh my gosh. And there's just so much pressure because of course you have to support yourself. You have to eat, you have to have shelter, you have to, right? Like you do have needs, not you, but everybody, right? So I was just really, honestly like really proud just watching that like even though I know it was uncomfortable, but it was like, okay, but here are the numbers and we like went through them multiple times like, okay, I think this can work. Am I crazy? Like can this work? And that can be really uncomfortable. So I just wanted to say...

Jo Zakany: Yeah.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: Like acknowledge you for being open to doing that work and also just acknowledge the listeners that might be like, oh my gosh, but that part's so scary.

Jo Zakany: Yeah, well, I think I'm just a slow burn kind of person in general. I mean, I sat with the idea of a business for over two years before I launched it. I sat with the idea of a podcast for over two years before I launched it. I sat with leaving my job. So maybe there's a two in there. Like I do things in twos. I don't know. But I've learned to really like that about myself because even though I still had that leave my body experience where I felt like I was jumping into a pool when I hit send, I very much trust the process and I like giving myself a long runway to think about things.

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Not to the point where it's like past the expiration day, like at some point you do have to just make the decision and don't wait for it to feel comfortable because it's always going to feel uncomfortable. That was one of the earlier lessons in entrepreneurship. I was like, dang it, now it's always going to feel a little uncomfortable. And it's interesting you talk about the money piece because I mean, maybe across many fields, but in my field is something that is very much not talked about.

And there's almost like an act of, you know, you're supposed to do things for free because it's in service of the art and I mean, I think there's been a lot of work and I'm seeing that changing a little bit in the industry, but that is still a cultural thing. So I really had to do a lot of work on just facing what money is that it's not a bad thing. It's not a good thing. It just is a thing.

And I will say as like a sort of bonus universe moment, the official month that I decided to leave between you and me, like I hadn't made the announcement yet, but I was like, this is the month. I had my most, I mean, lucrative month, but also just I equating with that, I served the most amount of people.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: In your coaching practice.

Jo Zakany: In my coaching practice. Yes, in my coaching practice. Like I did workshops and I just sort of was flooded with serving a lot of people.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: But I think immediately when we knew like this is the thing, it was like, okay, what's the plan? What's the threshold of how many clients you can have while still working? What's the smartest way to position those offers to like bring in certain amounts of money? What's like we just really, I mean, we were, you with some of my support, but you were so strategic about it. And okay, I can add in, like you do workshops at some colleges and you don't just coach one-on-one, you do some of these other fun things and it was like, how can we maximize that without you burning out, without you...

Jo Zakany: Yes.

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Lindsay Dotzlaf: You definitely had a tendency to like, I could do more, more, more and I was like, hold on. Come back.

Jo Zakany: I wanted to ramp up so bad. I wanted to just be like, now I've told people I'm leaving and you know, like you said, I had a long runway. I gave people six months and...

Lindsay Dotzlaf: I had to keep reminding you like, wait, no, no, you're still working full-time.

Jo Zakany: Like no you're not supposed to have 20 clients. Yeah.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: Yes. Your brain kept offering like, okay, I've technically quit, so I should be, just have all of these clients have all of, I should probably have a membership. I should probably, it was all of these different things and it was like, hold on. How about let's have some breath? How about that?

Jo Zakany: And again, I like being that incubator. Like I'm in this phase now where I get random adrenaline rushes where it's like I want to do everything at the moment, but I think because I'm comfortable sitting, like I'm comfortable with this business taking a while. You know, I'm very lucky. It's doing well, but I also don't want to put the pressure on it to be like where it needs to be. Like if it takes two years or 10 years or whatever, like I get to do this thing I love. I've planned for it. I've, you know, crossed the Ts and dotted the Is and now it's just going to come down to my grit. Like I'm the only one who can say no to me at this point. And that, that is a new place to be and I like it.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: That's fun.

Jo Zakany: That's fun.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: Okay, the other thing you did that was so smart is that once you made the decision and you kind of set out the timeline, with maybe a little bit of my urging, but also just because you wanted to, you

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planned vacation, you planned time off, you planned some breathing room. Even though maybe for, maybe you and for a lot of people like the first thing might be like, okay, now game on, I have to work, wake up the next day and just like have my last day, then wake up the next day and start running. I really didn't want you to do that and I'm so glad that you didn't. And I'm curious how you feel about that now that it's been, how long has it been since you had your last day? About?

Jo Zakany: So, I think we're at the six weeks, around six weeks. And it's interesting because by nature, again, go back to my France days, I grew up with, you know, walking to the local boulangerie and seeing the doors closed. So, meaning like they would take the summer off. And I wanted to do that for myself and my business. And actually the orchestra world does allow for a good amount of, at least my world did. I can't speak for everyone. We had a good amount of like in between seasons time off. But I wanted that and yet it was like two parts of me, the part that wanted that and then the part of me that just wanted to be like, let's go all into it.

So I was very grateful that my wiser self with your guidance was reminding me of my values because I am a well-being coach. Like I go by being a performance and a well-being coach and I want to lead by example in my own life of harnessing this sort of like the stillness, letting things be a slow burn, and letting myself actually have time off. And like what did that look like? And then it also allowed me to be really excited to have busy days. Like I have a really like nice little schedule this week. I'm like, oh, there's clients every day and I got things I got to do.

And because I think I'd given myself when am I fully off or when am I even partially off. Like I'm off 90% and I have one client, which is what I did just for support. It really helps. So it's just not being run by the machine so to speak. I'm really glad I did that. And I think that's still going to be my work as an entrepreneur. I mean, figuring out when I'm off, but again, I think that's sort of innately in me. So I'm just going to have to remember that that I like working in seasons.

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Lindsay Dotzlaf: Mmmhmm. Yes, I tend to do that as well. And I think it's kind of nice. I feel, I mean, actually just now I've really started to a little more kind of purposefully schedule it that way where it's like I have a lighter schedule, then I have a heavier schedule. I just really like that. I think actually a lot of humans do kind of have that cyclical like busier times, not less busy times, you know, whatever. Plus if you have kids or family vacations or anything like that's like also kind of controls your schedule or that you like to control your schedule around, it can be nice to have that.

Okay, I mean, I feel like we could keep talking for another three hours, but I do want to, the time always goes so fast during these fun interviews for me. But I definitely want to get in your podcast because that is something also that is a big shift that you made over, I mean, it feels like we've just started coaching on it not that long ago, but you're about to start season three. So how long ago did you start your podcast?

Jo Zakany: Yeah. I believe it launched end of September, early October. I don't know the exact date of 2025. So it'll be almost a year. And yes, it was incubating for two years. I had a what, why, how, who I want on, and it still took me two years. And I'm really glad it did. And I love it. I was reflecting on this a little bit before we started. I've loved the forum of podcasting. It's sort of how I, when I was commuting, half hour-ish to work, I just automatically would put on a podcast. I put on your podcast. I've listened to literally every episode.

And it's just a format that I really like. And I've realized that part of what I enjoy as a human and as a creative is having a voice. Now, I'm actually pretty introverted, so it's not like I'm looking to be like the, you know, center of the show or anything, but I like having a creative outlet where I can speak freely, whether that's in my art, whether that's in my writing, whether that's in a conversation with a good friend or apparently now on a podcast.

And when I set out to do it, it was sort of, again, can I connect with even one person? Like if there's one person that what I'm talking about, this excellence over perfection thing or you get to tend to your life more

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holistically, if that helps even one person, it's worth it. And it's just been such a blast. I've gotten a lot of positive feedback from all of our fellow Opus creators.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: Yes.

Jo Zakany: That's what I call them. Our little community of fellow Opus creators. And yeah, it's sort of like a wide net of people and I'm just so touched anytime I get a message or anything, you know, I've I think there's a certain amount of me being able to be open that helps people see themselves maybe or just maybe some trust building, but I just want to connect with all the people and feel myself less alone and then that actually sort of gives back in that sense too. So it's been, it's been wild and wonderful. I've really enjoyed it.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: What has been your favorite, maybe you've already said it, but what is your favorite part about podcasting?

Jo Zakany: Yeah, I think it is that sort of bravery and just saying the thing. I've always been sort of like that truth teller. I'm the person in my family and for better or worse and you can ask my husband for better or worse, I just if there's like a truth, I'm like, what is the truth? Like I just got to get like a dog with a bone where I'm like, say the thing. So I really have enjoyed being able to say the thing. And when I'm doing that in my art, I feel the most free. I have felt stifled artistically for a long time, if I'm really honest. And part of my work is to sort of just come back to myself and really be able to speak freely.

And I think podcasting and writing actually, but I think specifically the format of podcasting has given me that sort of freedom to just speak. And the other thing I really like about it is once you do it and it's out in the world, it's no longer yours. You don't really know where it goes, what it's doing, what it's not doing. Like I feel like I don't really hold any responsibility once it's out, which is very much like music. You do your best to just sort of interpret

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or play the piece and then once it's out there, it hits the audience how it hits. And there's something very, very enjoyable about that.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: What has been the most surprising thing about podcasting? Interpret that however you will.

Jo Zakany: Well, I think it's just an overall lesson that I'm having to learn over and over and over again, which is just things are harder than you think they will be. Like I'm someone who will be like, okay, I'll do I'll give myself an hour. And I do this in my practicing with my instrument too. It's like, oh, I'll get this done in an hour. And I'm like five bars in, right? Like things just always take longer than you think they do. You've taught me, I'm in the learning. That is just like my mantra these days. I'm in the learning of figuring out how long things take.

And I also, I think because I'm a musician and I use my ears in such a very specific way, I'm very particular about sound and how I like that to be. So there's just been a little bit of a learning journey in that too and like communicating that and even just me learning how do I like it? Like what do I want it to sound like? What is the construction of the show and like taking as much ownership over the process as I can and also getting better at communicating what that is.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: Mmmhmm. Okay, so I was going to ask my last question about podcasting was going to be, what have you found to be the most challenging part? Did you already answer that or do you have another answer?

Jo Zakany: Yeah. No, I mean, I I really think it's just again, it's podcasting and anything that you're kind of newish at, it's like, where can I get better at articulating what I like, what I need, not apologizing for it, and also just cutting yourself some slack when you don't know what you don't know. And I think one thing I'm still learning in general, even though I trusted my gut to do this big exit, is what is my gut? What is and this is podcast, but this is also business building. Like what is the right move? And I'm the one that

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gets to decide that. I'm very much like a pool the room. I grew up that way. Like the teachers tell you what to do, everyone's always telling you what to do. And another thing from *Untamed*, I feel like this is sponsored by untamed. Just kidding. She said, she said like stop asking for directions to places you've never been.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: Not really Glennon don't sue me or whatever.

Jo Zakany: No, just kidding. Just kidding. But that was something in her book that she said, and I'm like, okay, I need to do this for my podcast for my business. It was like stop asking for directions. Ask for guidance. Find a coach. Lindsay Dotzlof is amazing. Like you do this so well in that you help me figure out truly what my path is, but then when I don't know you fill in the gaps because you're such an expert and you're, your wealth of knowledge is just like top notch. I've never really met someone who can actually fill in the gaps the way you do across all parts of not only my business but my life because you've been an incredible life coach through this as well. So yeah.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: Wow, thank you for that.

Jo Zakany: You are welcome. Finding your own path, but also like and but not pooling the room. So in terms of podcasting, I think that was a lot of it. Like just finding my own path through it. Yeah.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: Mmmhmm. I think as a coach in general, it's an interesting learning curve to learn like the when to ask for support versus when to trust yourself, when to, you know, maybe hire a coach or hire a contractor or hire someone to help you with something versus learning to do the thing on your own or be the expert on your own. I feel like that's kind of always a balancing act for myself and for most coaches, I think.

Jo Zakany: Yeah. Yeah, and I think that's true and it's a lesson that I'm going to be learning over and over and over again.

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Lindsay Dotzlaf: As we all are, perfect. Okay, so you said, I'm just going to put you on the spot. You didn't know this question was coming, but you said that everything comes in twos. You like plan for a long time, then you do the thing, which I completely relate to, by the way, and listeners are probably laughing because for sure they've heard me say almost the exact same words. So like, what are you going to be doing in two years?

Jo Zakany: Ooh, that's so fun. Well, it's funny, when I think of two for my business, I start to sweat. But when I think of 10, I'm like, ooh, I have the longest runway. So I'm almost thinking of it more as like I'm giving this thing like 10 years to feel just how I want it to. But what I hope for myself, not only in this business, but in life is to look at success differently. And I've been doing that. I think that's how I've landed where I am is that success actually gets to look less about an accolade or a title or a job specifically and it gets to look like am I finding more moments of joy in my day? Am I finding more freedom? And what does freedom actually look like in my life?

It doesn't have to mean working, whatever, four days a week and being on a yacht. Although bless you if that's what you want, you know, but it gets to be like I almost I'm looking at it as like the more busy and in service I am, the happier I will be. So that's all I hope for in two years is that I'm connecting with more and more fellow Opus creators and building a community, being part of community is very, very important to me and I think especially with the world that I'm in, just connecting more and more with people who want to do things a bit differently. So if I can still be doing that in two years, I will be a very happy lady.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: I want to give you a huge shout out and tell people even if they aren't musicians of any kind, your podcast is incredible. The name of it is...

Jo Zakany: Thank you. MindfulOpus. One word. MindfulOpus.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: If like me, someone isn't quite sure what Opus means because I had to ask you at one point, I mean, I kind of thought I knew, but

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what is it? What is Opus? Where did that name come from? We'll end there.

Jo Zakany: Yeah, so in the classical music world, the way that composers keep track of their compositions is by this thing called opus. So there's like opus one, opus two, opus three. So you can have like symphony number six, but it's opus, whatever, 20. So I loved and again, I was just sort of like doodling, again, that two-year doodling where I was just journaling things. But I loved the idea of getting to create your own life one work at a time, like that you weren't defined by one thing, that you could sort of reinvent yourself one opus at a time is something my listeners probably hear me say.

And if you did it mindfully, you could really have a certain level of autonomy over the creation of your life, which I think is something that a lot of musicians in particular don't feel like they have. And I wanted to show that you can do it and that your opus doesn't have to be music related. Like I feel like my life was a series of opuses. It was a violist and then it was a Yogi and a Buddhist and a mindfulness geek and a coach and psychology and wifey and like mama to my dogs and cats. Like I just I think it's that's where it came from. That was a very long version, but it was the idea of like creating your life one mindful work at a time.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: I love it. Okay, I think that's the perfect place to end. So, tell everybody if they want to come find you, where should they do that? Definitely your podcast, MindfulOpus, one word. Where else?

Jo Zakany: Come find me at MindfulOpus. I'm on Apple, Spotify and I have videos on YouTube, which is fun. And come to Instagram, shoot me a DM, say hello, also MindfulOpus. If you we want to go to my website, [mindfulopus.com](http://mindfulopus.com), and that's it.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: Perfect. We will link all of those in the show notes so they can find you. You did make it easy on them though with the MindfulOpus. I feel like every time I'm on a podcast and I'm like Lindsay Dotzlof and then I

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have to spell my name. I mean, I make it simple by just making everything my name, but the spelling of my name is very hard. So as yours kind of is too, so it's probably good.

Jo Zakany: If I can just end on something really funny, my personal trainer for a long time thought it was "Mind Fulopus." And she was like, what is a fulopus? Like she didn't, so shoutout Theresa if you're listening. It's not fulopus, it's MindfulOpus.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: Incredible. I'm never going to forget that. That's really funny.

Jo Zakany: Isn't that funny? I laughed so hard and I was holding really heavy weights so I got a good workout.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: That's hilarious. Well, thank you. This has been amazing. Thank you so, so, so much for being here today. And I can't wait to see you.

Jo Zakany: Thank you. Thanks for having me.

Lindsay Dotzlaf: Bye.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *Mastering Coaching Skills*. If you want to learn more about my work, come visit me at [lindsaydotzlafcoaching.com](http://lindsaydotzlafcoaching.com). That's Lindsay with an A, D-O-T-Z-L-A-F.com. See you next week.