



Errin Weisman

After an exhausting day working at my outpatient family medicine clinic, I was once again the last parent to pick up my two boys from day-care. My husband was working late, so I was on my own. We drove home and I fed and bathed my little ones entirely on autopilot. They splashed around like Shamu in their bubble bath, giggling as I slumped by the side of the tub, waiting for the day to be over. Massaging the ever-present dull headache at my temples, I remember thinking, “*This is not what my motherhood was supposed to be like.*”

Being a mom held a very special place on my checklist of a ‘successful’ life. From the moment I decided to go to medical school, I had it all planned out.

### **Diploma: Check**

A supportive spouse who loves me as I am: Check.

### **Kids: Check**

Big girl doctoring job that would save the world? On the surface, this looked like the final checkmark, but it didn’t turn out quite how I expected.

The professional track that I had worked so long and hard for had turned from a dream to what felt like a nightmare. I had become a robot, working day in and day out, while my dream of helping others and making a big impact slowly eroded. That feeling followed me home. It didn’t matter how loving my kids and husband tried to be, because I never had enough energy to be fully present. And yet, I kept holding onto this version of my life because it was what I had planned. I wanted to keep believing this was my calling, even though deep down, it wasn’t serving me or my family.

Becoming a doctor was supposed to be the pinnacle of all my hard work in school and residency. It was supposed to bring me fulfilment and all the good ‘feels.’

---

E. Weisman (✉)  
Otwell, IN, USA  
e-mail: [hello@burntouttobadass.com](mailto:hello@burntouttobadass.com)

But I was running on fumes. I'd drop the kids off at day-care, commute to work still exhausted from the day before, down several cups of coffee, walk or jog during lunch (if I even got lunch), and then do the reverse 10–12 h later. Rinse and repeat daily.

The underlying truth here: *Life changed, but my plans didn't.*

I had mastered the art of ignoring the signs and was slowly going numb to everything except for the strongest of emotions. Sunday night was the worst of it and came with feelings of dread and despair. I was frustrated with how the healthcare system tried to fold me into knots instead of just doing and paying for what was right for my patients. I was frustrated by my day-to-day office flow and the disregard I faced as a physician because I was the junior in the group. I felt completely unseen and misused.

I was not able to be an employed full-time PCP who didn't ask questions. It's just not in my DNA. But, in my mind, this was a sacrifice I had to make for my family. There was a lot holding me back from being honest with myself, not least of which was that sweet, sweet physician's paycheck and the massive debt it was paying. These were my golden handcuffs. On top of that, the guilt. We had organized our lives so I could be a fully committed physician. My husband took the more "supportive parenting" role to be more available for our children. *How dare I change my career?*

We had both made huge compromises and sacrifices to get to where we were. We had a mountain of educational loans and little mouths to feed. It was the path I had chosen. *How dare I change my mind?*

Having children changed everything for me without me really knowing. They forced me to see that the path I was on was unsustainable. And it was my children, especially my oldest son, who were my inspiration and motivation to get my ass out of the rut and pursue a job that felt right for me. I wanted them to grow up and remember, "*Mom really liked what she did.*"

I remember the evening well when my partner and I were sitting around our kitchen bar, after another torturous day, when I turned to him, voice shaking, and said, "*I'm quitting my job.*" He took it well, all things considered. After all, he wanted me to be happy, and he could see the toll it was taking on me. So, he reassured me that we would figure something out. At first, I thought I would have to quit clinical medicine altogether. I wasn't alone there: a quick Google will tell you that nearly 40% of female physicians go part-time or quit within 6 years of completing their residency. There's a reason why mothers in medicine are burning out at almost twice the rate of males and non-parents and reporting high levels of workplace discrimination related to pregnancy and motherhood. This wasn't just a 'me' problem—it's systemic.

I started brainstorming alternatives. Pharm? Leaving medicine and trying a different industry? Work the checkout line at the local store, Rural King? All possible and yet it felt like I was running away more than running towards my next professional step. Working with a coach, I started off with a simple question: *What did I really enjoy doing?* Hm. I honestly couldn't think of more than 5 things. I had been so focused on career goals and fulfilling my medical destiny that I hadn't left time

for much else, and there was no space for *enjoying* things. I just did what had to be done, whatever the cost.

So, I moved to write a different list, which I entitled, ‘What I’ll NEVER do again (unless we are homeless, eating cat food and desperate for cash)!’ Well, for one thing, I decided that I never wanted to work on an RVU-based pay system again. That led to other Nevers: I would never give over my autonomy and control of my office schedule and call calendar. I would never put myself in a place where I was minimized for being young, a woman, pregnant, or inexperienced. I would never work for an organization that didn’t value my opinion, listen to my concerns, support me as a mother, or refuse to make appropriate changes. I would never allow patients to treat me or my staff as less than. I realized my ‘Never Again’ list didn’t include anything I did as a physician. It was all the other stuff. The bureaucracy and the ‘earning your stripes’ mentality that came with working in medicine. I loved talking with patients and colleagues. I loved being able to help guide patients on their health journey. I loved working with my hands-on procedures and OMT (osteopathic manipulation techniques). I loved working with a team, and I valued being able to help people with my knowledge.

That was my eureka moment. *I didn’t have to leave medicine to be happy!*

What I did realize was that I needed to leave my practice, the full-time job I was doing. So that’s what I did. Not immediately, but with small steps and a plan. I took the things I was good at in medicine (listening to patients, having difficult conversations, empathizing) and I realized I could embrace those qualities in a new direction: coaching. I could coach myself out of this horrible place, and I could use my experience and my expertise to help others do the same. Because throughout this whole thing, I had never felt more alone, and I never wanted anyone who was going through the same thing to feel as alone as I did.

It was a slow process, entering the entrepreneur space, building an online business from scratch while having little to no internet in rural Indiana. There were certainly times I thought it wasn’t going to be okay. It’s scary to strike out on your own, to forge a new path that looks nothing like the one you planned when you were eighteen. Especially when you’re a Type-A, neurotic perfectionist.

But guess what? We were totally fine as a family. We worked it out. And I guess even if we hadn’t, it would have been okay. In the wise words of Mr. Weisman, “*There’s a doctor shortage. If things get bad, I bet you could always go back.*” Even with that fallback, making such a big career move was nerve-racking. No one teaches you how to adapt, even though we have to keep doing it time and time again. When I finally embraced this challenge to change, my life did a complete 180. And, boy, am I glad it did.

I learned that when you make big changes, you’re not only making them for you. By taking care of yourself and making money in a way that brings you energy, joy and control, you’re giving your kids a truly happy mom. Now, instead of rushing my kids to bed at night and out of bed in the morning, I cuddle with them every chance I get. Instead of blowing up at little inconveniences, I honor my capacity to practice patience, understanding, and forgiveness. I’m far from being a perfect mom. But making changes in my career allowed me to experience the joy of mothering. By

letting go of the idea of motherhood that I had so desperately clung to, *I've become the mom that I wanted to be.*

More importantly, *I've become the person I wanted to be.* And my kids see that.

No paycheck is worth as much as having my son look me in the eyes and say what he said to me the other day. *"I'm glad that you're a happy mommy now."*

I had to go through...

Cranky Mommy.

Angry Mommy.

Numb Mommy.

Too-Flippin-Tired-Please-Don't-Talk-to-Me-Right-Now Mommy.

And

Very, Very Alone Mommy.

Sometimes these mommies show up again, but now, it's in small doses. Overall, I am truly a Happy Mommy now. And I've even returned to clinical practice, but now it's on my terms—working reasonable hours for me and my needs (which for me is about three and half days a week). I don't take unfinished notes home, skip lunch, or fixate on fixing everything every day. I do good work in the midst of chaos. I help my patients and staff even if it's just 10%. I use all my vacation days to recover and refresh. And therefore, every day I arrive at the practice feeling fresh, engaged, and able to support my patients. Don't get me wrong, there are still dumpster fires that happen on a regular basis. But the difference this time around is I know that this is what happens when life is wrong. It's not because I'm at fault, didn't plan enough or am lacking.

*This is what life looks like when it's working.*

*You have done hard things in the past. You will continue to be able to handle hard.*

*Just keep going.*

So, if you've been on the cusp of something similar, I encourage you to make that change. Take a break from what is causing you to feel wretched and towards what will help make your soul happier. You don't have to know the whole plan, just the first step.

Your family will thank you later.

Errin Weisman, DO (she/they/doctor) openly speaks on her experience of professional burnout early in her family medicine career so that no person feels alone and to prove you can have a joy-filled and sustainable career. Dr. Weisman is also a champion of people in rural Southwest Indiana in her clinical practice.

She is a mother of dragons, keeper of the Amazon account, and lover of all things animals and alpacas.

Besides being sassy, she enjoys getting mud on her boots, teaching her children to forage in the woods and reading a great fantasy fiction novel.