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[#51: Dr. Jill interviews expert Paul Colaianni on Maintaining Healthy Boundaries in Relationships](#)

**Dr. Jill 00:12**

Hey everybody! I am so excited for today's show. This is Paul Colaianni, whom I'll introduce formally in just a minute. And this is hilarious because yesterday I was in bed with a 102 fever. Paul doesn't even know this. I was sicker than I've been in so long. But you guys know me. My job is to hack health, wellness, and illness. And I think I hacked it because I feel back to 100% today. Hopefully, I don't look too post-illness. But I'm so happy to be there.

**Dr. Jill 00:44**

I say that because you guys have seen me every week come on here with different incredible guests. But today's is really special. Paul is someone who didn't even know it but he helped me in a really difficult time and I want to share just a little bit of that story. And then we'll get to hear from him on the tips and things that he has on toxic relationships, how to identify if you're in one, and how to have healthy boundaries.

**Dr. Jill 01:12**

I've found that so many men and women—especially professional women in my sphere—like me, have a profession and they have things together in many realms of their lives. But then they find that in relationships, they are maybe choosing poorly or having some old trauma patterns or messages that allow them to be in a space that's really, really unhealthy. So this is the Dr. Jill Live part of me that you may or may not have ever heard, but I'm going to share very intimately and authentically with you today on some of those fronts.

**Dr. Jill 01:46**

So just a little background: You can get all of my videos on YouTube on my channel, Jill Carnahan, and you can watch these on Facebook. They'll be recorded. So feel free to check back anytime. If you have anything you want to look up on the website, it's just JillCarnahan.com.

**Dr. Jill** 02:02

So let me introduce my guest and then we'll get to talking. Paul is a behavioral and relationship coach and hosts two podcasts: *The Overwhelmed Brain* and *Love and Abuse*. Those are the two [places] where I found him. Like I said, I'll share just a little bit of my journey. He's been teaching emotional intelligence and critical decision-making for the past 10 years. He is the creator of several books and programs for those looking to overcome difficulties in their lives and relationships. He resides in Atlanta, Georgia, with his girlfriend, Asha.

**Dr. Jill** 02:34

Paul, I am just so delighted to have you on. And I can get to my bit of a story in a minute, but I'd love to start with you. Tell me: How did you get into this work? It's kind of a calling if it's anything like my life. We don't choose necessarily. But tell us a little bit about your background and how you got into this.

**Paul Colaianni** 02:54

It's great to be here. Thank you, Dr. Jill. I'm so glad that you are well now. And I think your past of recovering from all the stuff that you went through—I read your About page—and changing your diet, changing your habits, exercising, and just being healthy allows you to bounce back so quickly from a 102 fever. So I'm so glad that you bounced back.

**Paul Colaianni** 03:16

Thank you for the introduction. I got started probably about 15 years ago studying hypnosis, brain sciences, and something called neurolinguistic programming, which half the world knows and the other half doesn't.

**Dr. Jill** 03:28

I love NLP!

**Paul Colaianni** 03:31

So I started researching all that. And it all stemmed from a girlfriend who told me, "You should be a hypnotist." So one day I read about all that stuff, and then I studied for years and years. I finally decided to get certified in NLP and hypnosis and become a coach. It was just over 10 years ago. I still needed to make money. I wasn't doing coaching. So I was in the technology sector for a long time. I was working in

regular corporate-type jobs. And I could tell that people kept asking me questions, and I could help them when they asked me these questions. I would always be the guy who stayed after five [o'clock] and talked to somebody for the next two hours while we went through some personal challenges of theirs. And I decided [that] this is something that I seem to be able to help people through.

**Paul Colaianni** 04:21

So from that point on, I started transitioning from my regular nine-to-five job into more coaching, really picking things up, and really studying harder and harder to get to that point where I felt like I could be helpful. I mean, there's a whole background I could probably get into. I started hypnosis practice and I failed at that because I was so self-conscious. I moved past that and I moved through it. And when I finally got to that point where I felt like I could help others, that's when I transitioned.

**Dr. Jill** 04:51

I love it! And you're helping so many people with your podcast. Like I said, we're going to link up to those and make sure that I encourage you guys to listen and check those out because they were a game changer for me, Paul. And like I said, I don't know your personality type or any of that, but I suspect you're actually more of an introvert who's really, really intuitive, perceptive, and sensitive like I am. And we go out in the world because that's where we can actually teach, train, and help people. But it's funny because those gifts are actually more behind the scenes. We're just very usually perceptive about the environment and observational. Would you say that's true about you?

**Paul Colaianni** 05:28

I could call myself a super introvert. At the same time, I'm comfortable being an extrovert and the life of the party... I'm not really the life of the party but I like being the life of the party. I'm not usually the life of the party, but I like getting attention when people laugh and things like that. But I really feel so comfortable being introverted. I don't know if I'm even allowed to call myself sensitive or anything like that.

**Paul Colaianni** 05:54

This is how I look at introversion: When you're an introvert and when you're ready to recharge, you just need to unplug from everyone and everything. I like to sit in

nature. I like to be in nature. I like to play on my guitar. You could probably see it behind me. When I'm in that space, I feel like I'm recharging. I love the grounding feeling of taking my introverted nature wherever I want and being happy wherever I am. Happy in general, but no, not all the time. But when I need to recharge, unplug, and feel better, that's what I like to do: Go into that introverted or grounded space.

**Dr. Jill** 06:36

I love that and I get it. It's funny: For years, I thought I was an introvert. I was going to be a librarian before I was going to be a physician because I loved books. Actually, you hit the nail on the head; it's actually more of a highly sensitive trait. It's 10% of the population and those of us who are in that realm just really observe details and see patterns and people. And [there are] all these different things that we do and then we make sense of it and teach other people. I used to be what I thought was an introvert. I'm kind of like you: I can be on a stage, I can be in front of people, and I love it. It's just that recharging and it's that perceptive ability that I know that you have because you wouldn't be doing what you do without that ability to really see the nuances of human behavior and interactions.

**Paul Colaianni** 07:19

It's interesting that you say that, if you don't mind me interrupting, because I think I learned how to be more perceptive by being an introvert. I think I learned how to observe people. And maybe this works, I haven't even thought about this: I believe that the more you go through—not so much trauma but maybe trauma—when you're a child, you seem to bring yourself back into yourself. So you pull yourself in. And maybe the less you go through—you're not so introverted.

**Paul Colaianni** 07:52

This is just a total hypothesis right now, but when you're always inside, then you're observing from that inside place. I grew up asking myself: "What would I do in that situation? I wonder what they're thinking. I wonder what they think of me." [There are] all these questions that keep coming up. I think that has helped me become more perceptive. [For] a lot of people who had gone through any type of dysfunctional upbringing or an upbringing where they just wanted to be left alone because there were so many people bothering them or even hurting them, I think that helps people gain intuition and become more sensitive to the environment and people around them.

**Dr. Jill** 08:33

I could not agree more because I've seen that pattern. Say you had an abusive stepfather and every single time he comes in the door, you're cringing because you have to judge—by his eye contact or no eye contact, his mood, his actions, and the littlest nuances—if it's safe or not. And when it regards your own safety, you're going to become really observant to those clues of human behavior and action, inflection of tone and things. And when you're young and you have to do that, you become really, really good at watching people, observing behaviors and reading them.

**Paul Colaianni** 09:10

You just described my childhood exactly. The abusive, alcoholic stepfather I could not—

**Dr. Jill** 09:17

I did not know that, Paul. I didn't mean to put you on the spot at all.

**Paul Colaianni** 09:21

That's okay. I mean, it's the perfect segue into my childhood. No, but that's exactly what happened. I did not want to see him. I hoped he never came into my room. I could hear him yelling and screaming at my mom. I always tell my past with an understanding that a lot of other people's pasts are a lot worse. I never received any physical abuse. But the fear was always there, and the fear is real, and you're going through it. And yes, you're right; you just have all these thoughts about: "Let's hope this doesn't happen." And I've learned that being alone is a very safe place. So that's probably where it came from.

**Dr. Jill** 10:06

Well, thanks for sharing that, because again, as you who are listening, if you get to hear Paul's podcast like I did, it's so powerful because you are incredibly perceptive about human behavior and actually bringing that to an understanding. I have studied for my whole entire life human behavior. I love the functional medicine piece, but what I love even more is understanding why people do what they do, how to motivate people to change behaviors, and how to be in a relationship that's super healthy.

**Dr. Jill** 10:35

And I'll tell you, I will go to my story just for a moment and then I want to hear your comments. I want to talk about abuse and all that. So, let's see where to start. Well, the first thing is, I'm working on a book right now. If I write it in two sentences, it's kind of like, "Okay, I think I want to read that book," because when I was 40, my ex-husband came home around my 40th birthday and said: "I don't love you anymore. I want to be with another woman." [It was a] total shock and blew up my happy bubble. [There was] no inclination prior to that of any problem.

**Dr. Jill** 11:02

The beautiful thing about it was that I was sleepwalking in almost two decades of marriage and didn't really understand who I was or what I was in relation to this relationship so it was the best thing that ever happened to me. I was forced to all of a sudden find my own identity, say what happened here and not point fingers because I could do that—but to say what part of me either showed up or didn't show up, how I was in this relationship, and what happened. So I did the deep, deep, deep work around that.

**Dr. Jill** 11:33

But shortly after—during the separation, right before the divorce—I met a man and I was so naive. Like, I met my ex-husband at 19 and married at 21 so that's all I had known. And I'm like a happy bubble kind of person who's very naive in that sense. And this was a manipulator abuser. He was later found [to be] borderline bipolar. [Being] very, of course, loving and bringing those things, it reflected on part of me that felt like I wasn't worthy of love, not enough, and all those things because I just got out of: "Who am I? Why did this person leave me? Am I not lovable?" The bottom line is that after it became physically abusive, I filed a restraining order, which in and of itself was shocking and very different for me to set a boundary. And within two days of that restraining order, he committed suicide.

**Paul Colaianni** 12:20

Oh, I've had to deal with that too.

**Dr. Jill** 12:21

And people who know me haven't heard this part of me yet either. And if that would have been enough, that would have been a great story. In the next six months, I got involved with an ex-felon alcoholic. He became very emotionally abusive. That's

when I found some of your information, and it was so profound. I remember trying to make a decision.

**Dr. Jill 12:40**

And the thing that I want you to talk to the listeners about is the confusion that manifests in these relationships because here I am—and this is why I wanted to talk about this—I have a successful practice, I have a great presence on the internet, I love to teach, I think I bring joy and happiness and I have great friendships. My life is so beautiful, and yet, with the past, with the men that I chose to be in relationships with, it was so freaking dysfunctional. So you would think, looking at me: "Oh, Jill has it all together." But I didn't. And today I want to speak to those of you women out there who might have a lot of areas of your life together. But in this area, there's still some childhood wounding around your value, your self-worth, and your boundaries that allow you to be in stuff that's so dysfunctional.

**Dr. Jill 13:30**

I remember driving on the road after a dental appointment and I was so overwhelmed. I had to make a decision that I knew it really... I had basically broken up with this last toxic relationship. But there was still that stickiness—and we can talk about that—and it was all manipulation. I didn't understand that. I didn't know why I felt so bad about myself, which you talk about. Why did I feel so entangled? Like, why couldn't I get out of this? I knew in my head. I had written pages and pages and pages. I had done workshops. I had understood, at an analytical level, why this was bad for me. But on the emotional heart level, there was a stickiness and it was that emotional abuse component.

**Dr. Jill 14:06**

And I'm driving down the road, almost in tears, like: "I need to make a decision. What is wrong with me?" And I am like, "Maybe there's some podcast that can help me." And I'm flipping through and there are millions of podcasts out there. I don't know how it happened, except by divine intervention. I see The Overwhelmed Brain. I thought, "Well, that's very appropriate," because I'm super analytical. I'm always in my head. I can figure anything out in my head. I've got an engineering background. I do medical mysteries for a living. I love to figure things out. But at this relational level— I could cry—I couldn't figure it out. I was stuck. I was completely stuck because I was like, "What is wrong? And "Why can I know this is



not good for me and yet be so stuck?" And I listened to [it]. I don't know what episode it was, but I was glued and mesmerized because I felt like you were talking to me.

**Dr. Jill** 14:56

The two things I remember from that podcast were: Choose empowerment over fear. I think it was "Empowerment Over Fear". I think that might have been the title of the podcast. You were talking about how any choice might be really difficult at that time but if you choose empowerment over fear, even [with] the person that you're setting a boundary with, it's going to be better for both of you in the end.

**Dr. Jill** 15:17

The other thing that I heard from someone else was: Always choose expansion over contraction. So at the heart level, I knew: "Okay, that's easy. I know my choice." And I made a choice after that that totally blew apart that toxic relationship. It was the best thing I ever did. Everything changed after that.

**Dr. Jill** 15:37

And then—you're going to love this—that weekend I found your other podcast, *Love and Abuse*. I think I spent like eight hours a day for three days listening to every episode. I was like, "This is amazing!" And I wrote notes and I got your workbook. I'm this kind, conscientious [person]. I tried to make it right and to make it work. And then to realize, "Oh, this is emotional abuse"—I didn't understand that. So I want to frame that. I'd love to let you comment on some of that. But thank you. This is why it's so important for me to share what you've done for me publicly, because it was profound.

**Paul Colaianni** 16:15

Well, I'm so glad you shared that story because other people need to hear this because they're in your shoes now or they were and they still don't understand it. You probably spent a long time looking for closure. Like, what did I do wrong? What could I have done better? What should I have done? I mean, everything you mentioned is very packed. We could just go at it for hours.

**Dr. Jill** 16:38

I know, right? We have no dearth of what to talk about.



**Paul Colaianni 16:42**

I know. Well, one of the things that really stood out was [that] he was very loving. And you went past it really quick, but there's an important part there. A lot of them are loving at first—very loving. It's called love bombing or gift bombing. They're just showering you with love. And they will feel like you're a soulmate. They will feel like: This is the perfect person to me. I don't know if you went through that, but—

**Dr. Jill 17:09**

I felt like I was [being] seen for the first time. And I've been in places where I had to be "Dr. Jill" or on-stage Jill or my hair was all... And I felt like in that I could be myself so truly and be seen and loved no matter what shape or state I was in. And it was really hard to understand that.

**Paul Colaianni 17:28**

That's a great way to put it. I don't really think about it that way too often, but you're right. It's almost like they're fully non-judgmental and fully accepting, and you just feel like you could be your vulnerable self with them. And what that is is they're unlocking the secrets that you keep so they can use those against you. And you ask: How does somebody who is—I mean, you didn't say these words—happy and kind and doing everything they can to just go out there and be themselves and suddenly attract this monster, sometimes? They could be a real monster. I think what ends up happening is that a lot of our compassion, our kindness, our caring, and our supportive nature are used against us by people like that.

**Paul Colaianni 18:22**

It's just true. There are people out there in the world just like that. There are many ways to recognize them. One of them you've already mentioned is love bombing when everything is moving so quickly; you feel so good with this person. It doesn't mean it's going to be a bad thing. It just means you've got to keep your radar on. You've got to go: "Whoa, this is really moving fast! This is moving really fast! I love it. I hope it continues to move that fast. But you know what? I've got this little watchdog up here and I'm going to just keep that watchdog on guard all the time because at the first sign that something's weird"—what my girlfriend calls a glitch—[and] "at the first sign of a glitch, I need to ask myself questions about it instead of going into the benefit of the doubt mode."

**Paul Colaianni 19:13**

And you might have done that when things started happening. I'm just guessing what your relationship was like. When things started happening, you might have thought: "Well, maybe he was having a bad day. Maybe there was something I said, and it didn't come out right. Maybe I miscommunicated." All these maybes. But let's step out of that and look at what exactly happened. And like I said, there are a million things to unpack about what you said.

**Paul Colaianni 19:41**

But I really do think it's important when things start moving fast and feel really good. We have to keep our radar on and still enjoy it. You can do both. I did that for a year in this relationship I'm in now because I became so aware of my boundaries. I became so aware of what I wanted for myself in my life and what I will and won't accept, just like the relationship boundaries that you're talking about.

**Paul Colaianni 20:09**

When you are aware of what you will accept and won't accept in your life, it's always good to always have that watchdog or radar—whatever you want to call it—in the background running so that when things start happening, we can talk about those things. Then we can start questioning what's really happening here. And like you were talking about, maybe there was some naivete inside you where you tell me if you felt maybe a little gullible to this because you were just trusting.

**Dr. Jill 20:43**

Oh, it's huge, Paul! Like, I could take a... well, I did take a felon and find the good in their heart and then make excuses because I'm like: "Oh, well, they had childhood trauma. They just need love." So I'm totally that person, but then again, it got to be... And like you just said, within eight weeks he proposed—I mean, that should have been a red flag, right? And then later, the love bombing; I got—one day to my office—like 10 bouquets of flowers from Hawaii. And I was like, "Oh, this is amazing!" I'm not quite so naive anymore. But at the time, I was like, "Oh, this is lovely." It fits into Jill's Disneyland. But that's the problem, right?

**Paul Colaianni 21:22**

Well, people like that will discover a lot about you at the very beginning. They want to know all about you. "Tell me everything." And of course, that feels wonderful. You want to talk about yourself because you feel like you're being accepted. You feel like you're being listened to and understood. And it's so hard—emotional abuse is so

hard to define sometimes—because it's a mixture of everything that you want and everything you hope is real and good with a little deception or a lot of manipulation that has an agenda behind it.

**Paul Colaianni** 21:55

So I like to look at that. "Okay, is it moving too fast?" Okay, if it's moving too fast and we're falling in love really quick, [then] let's slow things down because what the emotionally abusive person—a lot of them— isn't going to like is the fact that they're not getting their way fast enough. And if it's slowing down and you're saying, "No, we're going to wait on this; no, we're not going to move in together yet; this is what I want," they're going to sense that confidence in you, knowing what you want, and it's going to be troublesome to them. And then some behaviors will start to come out. And they're like: "Ah, you just don't really love me! You say you love me, but you don't even want to move in together."

**Paul Colaianni** 22:34

"Oh, okay. You're starting to make me feel bad. You're starting to make me feel guilty." I can go down the laundry list of all those things that you'll feel. But as soon as you start feeling bad in the relationship, and they don't necessarily care that you're feeling bad—and then I go one step further, as soon as you start feeling bad about yourself in the relationship, and they don't seem to care that you feel bad about yourself—we have an issue. We have a challenge that we need to talk about and get through.

**Dr. Jill** 22:59

I loved how you said that over and over because that's the thing I would never have equated with emotional abuse. But you brought it really simply. And like I said, I think I've heard every episode of the second podcast. But it was always clear: If you feel bad about yourself in a relationship and the other person doesn't care—and maybe you can phrase it better—that's the heart of emotional abuse. It doesn't have to be specific.

**Dr. Jill** 23:22

And then the other thing you said was because I kept pushing boundaries... I knew for probably nine months that I should be out of this, so I kept pushing, pushing, pushing. I would spend less time, I would break up, [and] I would do all these things

to give distance. But I would still be in that cycle of feeling bad about myself and in that stickiness. And again, I'd love for you to kind of go over it. If someone's listening and is like, "Well, how do I know if I'm in an emotionally abusive relationship?" what would you tell them?

**Paul Colaianni 23:49**

Well, we start off there. If you're starting to feel bad in the relationship, I think that's something important to talk about. Like: "When we have a conversation, honey, I always feel like... I don't know... I just feel like I'm worthless. I feel like I'm worthless after we have these conversations." Now you're being honest and vulnerable when you say stuff like this. If you feel fear about being vulnerable with the person that you're with, there's a sign right there. You shouldn't have to have that fear.

**Paul Colaianni 24:20**

The person that you're with—the person you're sharing your life with or [spending] some time with—should be the biggest person in the world that you can trust. This should be the most trusting and safe that you feel. So when that starts to disintegrate—because it started off with trust, love, respecting [one another] and you felt all of that stuff—this is typically what happens is that you will start to feel like it's your fault because it was there before. So you start taking the blame. You start taking responsibility for all the problems in the relationship. You start feeling more and more guilty. You start feeling sad and down about yourself, and you really feel like it's your fault.

**Paul Colaianni 25:04**

The guilt is a big one. When you start feeling guilty about things that are happening, like, "I moved" his or her "food" or "I moved" his or her "beer" or whatever, "and they got so upset. They were so angry." It's like: "Whoa! That behavior doesn't justify what just happened." So you start seeing these things and you realize, "Okay, when these things happen, they're all components of something bigger."

**Paul Colaianni 25:35**

Once we see behavior that we don't like, that behavior is in there. It is part of them. We can't just throw it away and say, "Well, maybe they were having a bad day." No, no. That's part of them. So we have to understand that that's in there. Now, when

does it come out, and what is its purpose? Are they just upset and they go, "Oh, I hate when people move my beer"? That's different than saying, "I hate when you move my beer and do things that make me angry." Now they're making you feel bad instead of highlighting something that they're dealing with and that they've always dealt with in their life. It's about making it about you.

**Paul Colaianni 26:09**

So I really think it's important to learn to listen and find out if it's really about you personally, instead of something that they're dealing with. A lot of us have childhood trauma. A lot of us have been through a lot of dysfunction. And of course, we're going to have our own sob stories [and] our own victim stories, and we'll bring them into the relationship. And we want our partner to feel something for us. "Oh my God! You went through that? I'm so sorry that you went through that." That's great. We can connect and communicate. But when we use that story as a way or as a means to make you feel bad about yourself or to have power over you and take your power away, suddenly it's not what it really is supposed to be, which is: "Hey, that was a really sad story. I'm here if you need me." "Oh, thank you so much." It's not that at all. It's more of: "Hey, you know what? I'm the victim here"—this is the emotional abuser talking—"so why are you doing this to me?" And they'll just turn it around.

**Paul Colaianni 27:14**

The biggest challenge with emotional abuse is that each behavior is a tiny component of something bigger, which is why it's so hard to explain to friends and family that so and so did this. They're going to look at you and say, "Well, that doesn't sound so bad." And you're going to say, "No, it happens all the time." "Well, yes, but..." And then you'll have this conversation that won't go anywhere because they're not going to see this abusive behavior. I look at it as a drip feed. They're constantly drip-feeding you this bad behavior and this manipulation and maybe the lies and the deception. And it feels like that Chinese water torture; it's just in your head constantly. And you just can't stand it and you get to that erosion—

**Dr. Jill 28:00**

And it's subtle, and it's also mixed with the loving kindness that can come too so it's very deceptive. One thing I thought of as you were talking that was my biggest aha moment was that I was always defending myself—always, always defending

myself—especially if we had any extended time. I actually for a long time, limited our time because it would be so exhausting. It'd be like a two- or three-hour conversation where I might bring up one little thing that I wanted to talk about or get worked on through our relationship, and then it would turn into an attack on me.

**Dr. Jill** 28:32

When I learned, "Oh, wait, I don't have to defend myself," that was the first part of my freedom. Before that, I was like: "Oh, someone's attacking my character, my integrity. I have to say, 'No, I wouldn't mean to hurt you; I didn't mean...' " Like, I wanted to defend, not defend against anything evil, and just say, "No, my intention wasn't to hurt you." But then it'd go on for hours. And again, you know this so well. When I got out of that relationship, all of a sudden I had 10 times the energy back because it was so draining to have these three-hour phone calls. I was defending myself for three hours.

**Paul Colaianni** 29:06

Yes. Have you heard the episode called "The Turnaround Game: Am I Loving Abuse"?

**Dr. Jill** 29:09

I think so, yes.

**Paul Colaianni** 29:09

Exactly. The whole episode I'm talking about that, where all they do is no matter what you bring up: "Hey, when you said that"—you being the person receiving the emotional abuse—"it kind of felt disrespectful. Could you not say it so harshly next time?" "I'm being disrespectful? What about you when you did this and you caused this?" And suddenly, because you're a nice person and you don't want to be seen as a bad person, you're going to defend yourself. You're going to say: "No, no. That's not what I meant at all," and "this is what I meant." They're going to keep you busy defending yourself, and that is a powerless position.

**Dr. Jill** 29:46

Oh, it was huge! The moment I realized it—and again, that was from probably that episode—I was like, "Oh, wait!" And there's another book by Edith Eger called *The Gift*. She's a Holocaust survivor. She also talks a little bit about this. But with both of

those things, it was like, "Oh, wait, I don't have to defend myself anymore." And I would hear this. And I literally might even say: "You know what? I don't have to defend myself against that because that's not true." And, like, there's nowhere to go. And it was amazing—the power that I had when I stopped defending myself.

**Paul Colaianni 30:18**

That's wonderful. That reminds me of a quick story about my girlfriend. Even healthy relationships—I believe I have a healthy relationship—have arguments. You get mad at each other sometimes. And it can be a screaming match sometimes—thankfully, not a lot for me. But there was one time when she said, "Well, you're just being stupid"—something, like an idiot or stupid. And she was serious, and I just kind of chuckled. And she said, "Why are you laughing? I just called you stupid." I said, "Well, I guess I would be offended if I believed that." She laughed, and then we just ended the conversation.

**Paul Colaianni 30:57**

But that made me think that if you're offended, if you're hurt, then, at some deep level, you must believe some part of what they're saying about you. And we often do that because we're with somebody that we think we can trust. So we put all this trust in someone who turns out to be deceptive, manipulative, or controlling. So when they say something, we believe it. And then we take it in and we think: "Oh, that is a part of me. What? Oh, I need to fix that. I need to heal from that." So I like to understand who I am at the deepest level.

**Paul Colaianni 31:35**

If you can, before you get into a relationship, know yourself. Am I a nice person? Am I respectful? Am I kind? Am I honest? Do I have integrity? And I know myself so well, so when I get into a relationship... And you can do this while you're in a relationship: Know yourself well—because who were you before that relationship? Know yourself well enough so that when something comes your way and they say, "Well, you're just a liar," [you can say]: "No, I'm not a liar. I know myself well enough. So I don't have to defend myself."

**Paul Colaianni 32:04**

So I'm glad you brought up defending yourself because they want to keep you busy doing something—doing something that has no power. Defending yourself is doing



something [over which] you have no power. Making you feel guilty, making you feel bad—all of this stuff is a low power place. And as long as you're there, they're on top.

**Paul Colaianni** 32:25

It's sometimes called the power-over model. "I have power over you. Therefore, as long as you're in this space, then I'm ahead" or "above you." But if you rise above and say, "No, I don't believe that; I'm not going to take that behavior anymore; I won't accept that behavior anymore," then they're going to get a little scared because now their method of control, which is probably mostly a survival mechanism for them, is being taken away. They'll probably pull out some more bags of tricks to see how far they can push you and keep you down.

**Dr. Jill** 33:01

I love that. For me, it's always this journey of: What's my part in this?—because I can point fingers all day long, but I still have the power to change myself or to get out of the situation. They've said that all the roots of sadness or dysfunction come with feeling unlovable, unworthy, or helpless. This is straight from your M.E.A.N. Workbook, which will be sure to let people have a link to that as well. If they want to purchase it, it's very worth it. A great resource.

**Dr. Jill** 33:38

But you talked about confidence, stability, security, self-trust, self-love, self-compassion, and decisiveness. And I remember that—this is a funny story, but it's a huge thing—one of the game changers of getting out of that relationship was fixing my own garage. Like, how silly is that? But I felt like I'm confident in treating patients and all that [but] mechanical things—no. So to have someone in my life who could take care of fixing the garage—those kinds of mechanical things felt really good because, in those ways, I maybe felt a little helpless.

**Dr. Jill** 34:09

Then one day, I remember so specifically that my garage door was broken, and I figured out what to do. I did it myself. And it was so freaking empowering. I'm like, "I freaking fixed my own garage door!" But it was one of those things where I didn't feel helpless. And helpless was how he had kind of gotten a little bit of control over

me, because I felt like: "Oh, my gosh. What am I going to do if something breaks? I can't fix it." That's true.

**Paul Colaianni** [34:34](#)

You just mentioned that part of the workbook where I talk about becoming self-reliant in all those areas of your life, financially... I mean, there are all kinds of areas in our lives where we often have a dependency on someone else. And rightly so. When you get into a relationship, you get a house, you have kids, and wherever you go with it, you're going to have to share responsibility. So it makes sense to have these dependencies. But the problem is that when somebody becomes controlling and has power over you and now it's becoming a bad situation. If you're not reliant enough on your own or can't figure out how to do it, it's going to be very difficult. This is why, in the workbook and other places, I talk about how you need to build these levels of confidence.

**Paul Colaianni** [35:22](#)

And you mentioned one at the end: Decisiveness. There are so many people that I talk to who tell me that they just can't decide. They don't trust themselves. They don't know what to do next. And I have episodes in *The Overwhelmed Brain* on decision-making. Definitely listen to those. But when you get to the point where you just make a decision and just go for it, whether you're going to fail or not, at least you've made the decision; at least you're taking a step forward. If you fail, you get back up, dust yourself off, and say, "I'll never do that again," and then you move on to the next one. And you just keep moving forward.

**Paul Colaianni** [35:57](#)

So I really like that you brought up those levels because I think that in the book it shows a graph where if you're low in this—if you're low in confidence, [for example]—then they're above you here. This is all about self-help, going to therapy or coaching, [or] whatever you do, [such as] getting the help you need, reading the resources, and watching the resources that you need to build yourself up.

**Paul Colaianni** [36:24](#)

I like to look at it as: You want to bring the best, healthiest version of you into a relationship so if the relationship starts to go bad, you feel good enough in yourself to say whatever you need to say—even at the risk of losing the

relationship—because it's that important to you to be in that space. Because [that way], they're not going to take your power away; you already have it when you bring it in.

**Paul Colaianni 36:55**

And I think a lot of people who may be listening or watching right now are already in the relationship. They already feel powerless. They already feel like, "Well, what do I do now?" You just start. You just start working on yourself. If you fear something, then you move toward that, and you start working on what you fear. Figure out why you're afraid of it [and] what's going to happen. What's the worst-case scenario? There are all kinds of little processes I talk about, like the worst-case scenario—how much worse can it get than that? How much worse can it get than that? You try those on and then you realize: "Oh, I guess I could probably survive that. Hey, I made it through." And once you make it through, your confidence goes up.

**Dr. Jill 37:32**

Oh, that's great. Say we're talking to people who are in something like this and are like, "Well, what do I do?" I know that for me, there was a point that was really clear: Self-trust and self-love. How that played out is that if I had trusted myself from probably the very beginning of that relationship... I knew intuitively there was something not right. But I overrode that sense of trust because, like, "Oh, that must be just me thinking the worst" or "Oh, my gosh, that poor thing, he had trauma."

**Dr. Jill 38:07**

If I had trusted myself and trusted my intuition to know this was not right, I would have been out of that [situation] a lot sooner. So the self-trust and then, like you said, the self-love is... And it's funny because I come from a background of almost too much humility, where it's so horrible to say: "Oh, my gosh, I love myself." So I swung the other way. But then, in that, I lost the sense of like: "No, I'm worthy of love, respect, and kindness." And I'm going to show that too, so there's no problem with believing that I'm worthy of that because I'm going to give it.

**Dr. Jill 38:38**

In fact, one night, there was a little icon that I gravitated toward my own... And it was: "I want to be the queen of grace and truth. And I want to show up in the world

with love and compassion. And I want to give and receive the love that I want in my life." So it was this whole thing that I wrote out that really helped me to embody: I want to show up in the world this way because that's what I want to receive, but I'm going to give it just the same. And that is all about self-love.

**Paul Colaianni 39:03**

That's wonderful. It's all self-nurturing behavior. And I love that you created the philosophy, a mantra, or whatever you want to call that. It almost acts as your home base. Like, if anything ever happens, I'm going to go right back to that, and I'm going to say this and "Is this what I'm receiving in my life? Is this what I'm getting?" It reminds me of a question I ask people to ask their partners or the emotionally abusive person in their lives.

**Paul Colaianni 39:30**

Well, let me back up. There's one thing that you said that has to do with when things start going bad. Maybe there's a way to address it when it comes up. I think this does lead to my question. The question that I like to ask people is when some bad behavior happens or you're not sure about the behavior... Because you were saying you trust your instincts, you trust what's going on. If it's strange to you, it's probably something going on. So maybe you witnessed some sort of bad behavior; maybe you're experiencing it.

**Paul Colaianni 40:04**

I like to have victims of emotional abuse ask the question: "Do you realize that what you did" or "said hurt me?" I think it's a very safe opening question. "Do you realize that what you just did" or "said"—whatever it is—"hurt me?" It offers them an opportunity to have an empowered answer. It gives them an opportunity to show up as a knight in shining armor or a big jerk. When they answer it, you're going to know a lot.

**Paul Colaianni 40:40**

Most of the time, they'll probably say, "Well, no," or they'll say, "I'm not trying to hurt you." Or, "You're not getting hurt"—they're going to invalidate you right away. "You're not feeling hurt." "Well, I am, and I just wanted to know..." Just keep it on topic. Keep it on the subject. Your question has to be answered. "Do you realize that what you just said hurt me?" "Well, no." Let's just say they say no. The follow-up

question is: "Well, now that you know, will you please stop?" I think that's another safe, fair question. If they say, "Well, you're hurting me too... " They're going to try to change it and turn it around. That may be true. There's another follow-up. "You know what? That may be true. I may be hurting you as well. And I think we should talk about that. But I just want to know"—bring it back right back to the question—"now that you know, will you stop?"

**Paul Colaianni 41:36**

What you're doing is continuing to focus on what you want to know the answer to and also what they're promising their behavior is going to be from this point forward. Now, I did have somebody write to me and say, "I asked that question to my partner because he was doing some really ridiculous things." She said, "Okay, do you realize what you said hurt me?" And he said yes. And she said, "Well, why are you doing it?" And he said, "Well, because it's fun." She said, "I left the next day."

**Dr. Jill 42:10**

It tells you a lot. Wow.

**Paul Colaianni 42:12**

I was like, "Wow!"

**Dr. Jill 42:14**

It is because either way, you're going to get the truth.

**Paul Colaianni 42:18**

You do have to kind of understand that this will lead to the truth. And if you don't mind, I'm going to expand on another thing that you said about intuition and understanding—that maybe your instincts are right. They almost always are about something that's going on, because if you're in a good, healthy relationship, you're probably not going to carry around some deep emotional trigger about what they're going to say or do. But if you are carrying that around, then something's going on. So this might be a place where a lot of people are confused, like, "I don't know what's going on. There's something happening."

**Paul Colaianni 42:59**

This is why I do my show, *Love and Abuse*. This is why I do my show, *The Overwhelmed Brain*. This is why I create the workbooks and the content. You can find out all about all the signals, all the signs, and everything from what I talk about. But I really do think it comes back to learning to say, "Okay, I'm feeling something is not right here," because relationships are supposed to be fun. They're supposed to be a little bit easier than emotionally abusive relationships. You're supposed to maybe have some conflict every now and then, but it gets resolved. You actually talk about it and talk through it. It may come up again.

**Paul Colaianni** [43:38](#)

I could give you a personal story. My girlfriend and I just resolved something that happened months ago. I didn't know the anger was still in there, but it was in there—mostly in her—and then it came to me. We talked about it. And we finally reached an understanding that was based on a misunderstanding. But this is what a healthy relationship should go through. It should go through the trials and tribulations, the ups and downs, until you reach some sort of closure. But if you've got something lingering and you're carrying it around—you just don't want to talk about that subject anymore, and you don't want to bring that thing up and you hope that he or she doesn't do this—then you've got something else that's a little bit deeper.

**Paul Colaianni** [44:21](#)

And you should really consider that your instincts are right and that what you're thinking has some validity to it. So don't not trust yourself. Follow through, because either way, you're going to win. Manipulation, deception, control, emotional abuse—if any of that's going on, then you've learned something that will help you make your next decision. Or if you find out that none of that's going on—it was a complete misunderstanding from point one—you still win because now you don't have to worry about it anymore [and] you can get some closure. So I like to look at it that way. You just have to investigate inside your own relationship to understand what's happening. Be that analytical person like you are and really break things down to understand what's happening.

**Dr. Jill** [45:11](#)

I love that you're saying that. It's funny because I've learned it all my life. My marriage, the long-term relationship, wasn't bad but I was a conflict avoider. Brené

Brown says, "Clear is kind," and she talks about it as with boundaries and confrontation. And that helped me so much to reframe. When I set a boundary or say something that feels conflictual, it feels like it's unkind. But when I think about "Wait, no, no. Giving them the truth and love in a kind way is actually..." Clear is kind—that's helped me. And then Edith Eger said: You know what? If you have a relationship and you have no conflict, you don't have intimacy. I was like, "Oh, wow!" That's a big one.

**Dr. Jill** 45:49

My ex-husband and I are friends now, [and] he would probably say the same thing: We had a lot of fun, and we had no conflict. And I don't know if we had true intimacy. It wasn't a bad relationship. But I think it was on such a superficial level. We both weren't quite willing to do the work because he avoided pain and I avoided conflict. So we just had fun, and we avoided all those topics. And then, in the end, when things started to get rough we didn't even know it. We didn't know that we didn't have the depth to support the things that come in life. So now I understand in hindsight. But you're so right about that because conflict is not a bad thing—being clear with boundaries.

**Dr. Jill** 46:23

Let's talk a little bit about boundaries in the last few minutes. How do you approach [things], especially for someone like me who's terrified of being in conflict and doesn't like to have any of those difficult conversations? I've learned, so I'm much better. But tell us more about the importance of boundaries, how to approach boundaries, and a little bit about boundary work.

**Paul Colaianni** 46:41

It's probably one of my favorite subjects because, like you, [I implemented] conflict avoidance almost all my life. Most of my life. I was afraid to ask for raises. I was afraid to tell my partner that they were being mean. No matter what it was, I didn't want to make waves. I learned that from my mom, who did not want to make waves with her abusive, alcoholic husband. So I learned that it was easier to make people laugh. It was easier to get along. It was easier to just be the neutral, the balancer, and all of that stuff because it just seemed like it avoided conflict.

**Paul Colaianni** 47:19



The problem when you avoid conflict is that it builds up in the background. And every friendship that you have starts to burn out—every relationship, every job you have. This would happen to my life. Everything started to burn me out because I never spoke what was on my mind. And I remember when I first realized how much I was getting walked on and walked over. There's a point in your life where you look at your past and ask yourself: "Why am I losing all these relationships? Why do I get burned out so quickly?"

**Paul Colaianni** 47:56

So you start to break down what happened. And you go, "Well, my friend said this to me and I said: 'Well, of course I'll help you move. Oh, you've got a sleeper couch on the third floor. That sounds like fun. I'll do it with you.'" When I really want to say: "Hell no! That's a 300-pound couch." But I decided that it was important for me to start practicing 'No' [and] start practicing boundaries.

**Paul Colaianni** 48:23

I told the story on my show: I remember the first time that I practiced a boundary. It was very difficult. I had two bosses. They were talking to me about another employee. They were saying: "Oh, Mike does this," and "Mike did that." "He's not good at this," [and] "he's not good at that." And I was thinking: "Wow. Mike's not even here to defend himself." So my old self would be like, "Oh, I'd rather not say anything—whatever's going on with him." But my new self is thinking, "Okay, I've got to practice."

**Paul Colaianni** 48:51

We fear practicing or honoring ourselves because we're afraid of the consequences. So I kind of came up with a little question in my mind that said: "What would I do or say if I had no fear of the consequences? What would I do or say if I had no fear of the consequences?" So I sat in that for just a moment while they were talking, and I finally said: "You know, you guys are talking about Mike; he's not even here to defend himself. I just don't think that's fair."

**Dr. Jill** 49:15

Oh, good for you.

**Paul Colaianni** 49:16

My God! I swallowed and I just waited. I was so afraid. I was just waiting to be fired. I was just waiting for it. But this was it—this was my practice. And they both stopped. They were like: What's going on here? I interrupted their pattern. And what came out of their mouth was totally unexpected. They said: "You know what? That's exactly what we need to hear. This is exactly the kind of feedback that we need." And it just turned into a productive conversation. Shortly after that, I got a raise and a promotion. I was like: "What? All this time, I've been avoiding conflict?" But it was the very thing that led to that. So that was step one. "If I can get through it once, I can do it again." So I started practicing boundaries more and more.

**Paul Colaianni 50:06**

And just to back up a little bit, I define boundaries as what you will and won't accept in your life. So when people show up in your life, you have these boundaries. If a stranger touches you on the face, you're like, 'Whoa!' Maybe you won't accept that. I won't accept that in my life unless it's really a unique circumstance. But when that happens, you go: "Wow, I won't accept that. That's unacceptable. If you do that again, I'm out of here," "We'll have a problem," or "I'll slap you," or whatever it is. You show them that there's accountability for their behavior.

**Paul Colaianni 50:40**

I like to look at my values in my life [and ask myself]: What do I value? What will I accept? [I then] make sure that I am solid in those, so that when somebody violates one of my boundaries, I can say: "Hey, look, that's a violation." So the question that I asked myself—what would I do or say if I had absolutely no fear of the consequences?—typically will identify and define your boundaries for you. There are going to be times when you're going to be overboard and you're like, "Oh, I just punched that guy in the face." That may not be a boundary, but it's going to help you start to define what you will and won't accept in your life.

**Paul Colaianni 51:17**

So I started going forward with the idea: What would I do or say if I didn't have any fear? And I started testing that over and over again. And I'll tell you what: Every single time—this is without fail, every single time—I wanted to do my old conflict avoidant thing, [but] I instead did the one that I feared that I really wanted to do or say. And every single time it has worked out better than I could ever imagine, not only because I got to be myself and say what I wanted to say or do what I wanted to

do—within reason, in a boundary sense—but also [because] it gave me closure. I didn't have to carry it around with me. It wasn't lingering anymore.

**Paul Colaianni** 51:57

And it works in relationships too. When you are honoring yourself in a relationship, you're like: "Hey, you know what? What you just said was very disrespectful. It was very disrespectful, and I won't stand for that." That is the moment when you stand up for yourself. And you realize you're doing it at the risk of the relationship because they may say, "Oh, well, that's too bad, because that's how I am." Then you can say, "Well, [inaudible]." I know I make it sound easy. There's a lot to break down there, but we're running out of time so I just wanted to [inaudible].

**Dr. Jill** 52:27

No, this is great, great. That's kind of where our story started. I think one of the first things I heard you say—I was in this indecisive place—was the overwhelmed brain on decision-making or something like that. And I was like: "Oh, empowerment versus fear." The empowered decision might feel hard in the moment, but in the end—just what you said—it's the best. It's potentially going towards the conflict in a way that is clear and kind. So I felt like I had heard that before, but not in such a clear way, and the timing was perfect. Gosh, Paul, I knew we could talk forever. We could go on. We're going to have to have episode two.

**Dr. Jill** 53:02

That'd be great.

**Dr. Jill** 53:03

But I have really, really enjoyed talking to you. Tell us where people can find you and where they can get the M.E.A.N. Workbook because that thing has been really powerful. And like I said, I've referenced it, and I want people to have access to it if they'd like.

**Paul Colaianni** 53:16

Thank you. It's been an honor to be here and talk with you. And thank you for sharing your story, Dr. Jill. And you can reach me at The Overwhelmed Brain. Go to [TheOverwhelmedBrain.com](http://TheOverwhelmedBrain.com). That is about empowering yourself, building your self-esteem, your confidence, and all that stuff we talked about. [It is] about building who you are from the foundation up. I like to look at it as disempowerment

to empowerment. If you feel at all like you're disempowered somewhere, come over there.

**Paul Colaianni** [53:44](#)

And then LoveAndAbuse.com. LoveAndAbuse.com is where I have the other podcasts. I have two podcasts. Love and abuse is where I talk about difficult relationships, manipulation, control, and emotional abuse. We get into all kinds of subjects. It breaks down everything we talked about today and much, much more. And I think that if you're in any type of difficult relationship, that's really going to help you. She mentioned the M.E.A.N. Workbook, which is the manipulation of emotional abuse workbook that helps you understand and pinpoint the exact behaviors that you can identify in your relationship that might be seen as emotional abuse. So that can be helpful to you there. And obviously, you worked that out in yourself.

**Dr. Jill** [54:23](#)

Yes, super helpful! I put both of those links below. Both on YouTube and on Facebook, I'll include all these links, Paul. I'm so grateful for the work you do and for bringing light to help people like me and everybody listening. Thank you again for your time today!

**Paul Colaianni** [54:38](#)

Thank you.