

GYCP Ep. 172 - Michelle Funder on the Power of Speaking Out and Leading Osteopathy Australia

[INTRO MUSIC]

This is the Grow Your Clinic podcast from Clinic Mastery. We help progressive health professionals to lead inspired teams, transform client experiences, and build clinics for good. Now, it's time to grow your clinic.

JACK: Welcome back to another episode of Grow Your Clinic Podcast. My name is Jack O'Brien, I'm your host. And first, really appreciative of you sharing your time with us today. We have another clinic owner joining us and a guest on the podcast. I can't wait to get into her story. You are going to absolutely love it. We have Michelle Funder on the podcast today.

Michelle, how are you?

MICHELLE: Good. Thanks Jack. How are you?

JACK: I am fantastic. Things are crazy but I am well. How are you?

MICHELLE: Yes, you know, it's um, it's a day-by-day rollercoaster. I certainly felt at the start of this... I felt like I was in shock for a couple of days, wasn't really coming into the reality of what was happening in the world. And I've gone through all the stages, almost like a grieving process. And then, I'm going strong and awesome, 'we're gonna get through this.' And then tougher times thinking, "Ugh, this - this is not great. I'm feeling down." So, I think, yeah, everyone's probably resonating with that at the moment.

JACK: Yeah. And for those of listening, perhaps after the fact we're in the middle of COVID-19 challenges, it's the end of March 2020. And it feels like the world may implode it at any given moment.

So yes, this is this is gonna be really pertinent episode listeners. Michelle has an extensive background. She's the founding director of Beyond Osteopathy in multi-locations in Melbourne. And she plays a few different roles in the Beyond worlds. She is the president of Osteopathy Australia and has played all sorts of different roles in the allied health space across our country. So, there's so many leadership principles that we can learn from Michelle. And yeah, I'm really excited for where this might go. But Michelle, before we do that I've got a couple of icebreaker questions for you. Are you ready to go?

MICHELE: I am.

JACK: Here we go. Number one, what are you reading or learning right now.

MICHELLE: Right now? I'm probably not reading anything because I'm passing out, because I'm exhausted. But beside my bed is Bill Bryson's *The Body: A Guide for Occupants*. So yeah, that's kind of a little bit light-hearted. Someone gave that to me as a birthday present. So, trying to, you know, switch the brain off, although that's been hard recently, and have a few little pages of that. So, it's a nice way of looking at *The Body*.

JACK: Love it. Number two, who inspires you?

MICHELLE: Well, who inspires me? I would say it's my family and friends. To be honest, my parents, definitely. My mother was probably my - she's my strongest inspiration. She was born with congenitally displaced hips. Growing up, so, she had quite a severe limp, and growing up, I never really noticed it because when you got with a parent that has a sort of disability, whatever that may be, it's not really different to you. But she had four children. She played tennis. She swung every Peter pub for the last 30 years. She's a gun golfer. And when she finally got her hips replaced, the surgeons just couldn't believe how her life had been. And really, you know, when I look at the way that she's approached her life, you know, she just was so inspirational and nothing gets her down. And she just is a little go-getter. So, my little mum, she's about five foot - one, five foot - one and a half. So, she's a champ. Yeah definitely, I'm inspired by my dear friends and family.

JACK: So good. So good. So, what do you want to be growing up?

MICHELLE: Do you know what I wanted to be was a park ranger down at Wilsons Promontory.

JACK: Really?

MICHELLE: Yeah, I just wanted to be in nature.

JACK: Yeah.

MICHELLE: And you know, with the animals, seeing the wildlife, I have often thought if I stopped being an osteopath, I might become a botanist because, you know, I can just talk to the plants...

JACK: And Wilson Promontory is a beautiful part of the world to chat with the plants, no doubt! Number four, what's a motto that you live by?

MICHELLE: My motto is probably Move Through Life which is the motto we actually have at Beyond. And that is, you know, both in a physical and mental space. I think, you know, physically, it's important to move that is part of me and my person like I'm an active person, and I need that to feel good. But also, at a mental level, you know, when you're facing challenges, I often feel, you know, you have two options. And for you to move through life, you've got to take the right option to get you through. So yeah, that's probably how I I roll.

JACK: So good. Okay. So, let's dive into your story, your journey of it, from the little girl who wanted to talk to trees and (inaudible) a park ranger through to now someone who wears multiple hats across different organizations. Connect the dots for us.

MICHELLE: Okay. So, I am number three of four children. I've got an older sister, older brother, a little bit of a space, then myself, and my younger sister. Probably from a young age, I took on a funny little mothering role, so just a very much look after my younger sister. So, I've always had this weird, sort of I don't know, responsibility about myself. When I reflect from a young age, I always loved sport, really into sports. And you know, I did basketball, little athletic, certainly wasn't into the ballerina stuff or gymnastics. It was wasn't that tag. But I remember distinctly, you know, winning the state championships for by 100 little Athletics relay. That's (inaudible) or something and we've got these gold medals. And I just really remember the pride that my family, especially my father, hav shown when I had and achieved in this space. And when I really, I do a lot of deep diving back into my life, and try to put all the dots together. And I think from there, I probably developed the sense of wanting to achieve to make people feel proud. So, I think in a way that shaped me. So, through my schooling, fairly studious, I rowed at a really high level. So, after school, I rowed in Melbourne University Boat Club, represented Victoria and Australia. So while everyone was that Uni going on pub crawls, I was on training couple of times day finishing my Osteopathy degree. During that time, actually did my masters on schoolgirl rowing injury. Just because in my head, I had thought that in practice, I sort of already had that business now so that they were the kind of clients. I wanted to say what am I going to offer them. So, I thought I haven't I do research into that client group and that might set me up to success going forward. I retired from rowing when I finished my degree and thought I haven't been overseas. I think if I start practicing Melbourne, I might not leave because, you know, you get your client list. So I thought, "You know what? I might go and try my hash overseas." So, the funny story, I was down in Torquay doing some observations with an osteopath, a girl called Bronwyn, and she said, "What do you want to do next year?" I said, "I'm thinking maybe of going on seas. I've got an Irish passport, so maybe try and get a job in Ireland." And she said, "Ohh, why don't you go and work for my old boss? I used to work for this guy called Phil Jeffers in Wexford. I'll send you his details. Yeah, just tell him you know me." So, she wrote his name down and I emailed her back after the session as you do as a Uni student. And I never got a return from her and... returned email. So, I ended up just googling his name. And on about the tenth page of Google, I found a phone number, and I rang, and I said... he answered the phone strangely, and I was like, "Oh, hi, Phil! I'm a really good friend of Bronwyn's. Just wondering if you need an osteopath." And she was like, "Yeah, we do." You know. "What do you know about visas?" And I said, "I've got an Irish passport. I know I don't need one." And so, he's like, "Great! Come and work from Christmas." And I was like, "Okay well, where is this?" Then, "Oh, we're in Wexford." And so, I sort of hung up and googled Wexford. I was like, "Oh my god, I've just accepted this job on the other side of the world." And that was it really. And it was the best thing I've ever done. And I ended up moving there in the March after I'd graduated. And you know, it's a small country town. You know, I grew up in

Melbourne. (Inaudible) is a tiny coastal town and it was just brilliant. I lived there for two years and that's where I started my career, made some dear friends, had a lot of crack as they say over in Ireland. Then I came back to Melbourne. And I actually had a few interviews with different osteopaths. And I worked really hard in Ireland. So, I was seeing about 50 or 60 clients. And I, when I was back here in Melbourne, I just didn't really connect with any of the clinics. I wasn't sure if I wanted to work that hard in... right. I had these interviews. So, I actually ended up going and doing a year at the TAC, I was a rehab coordinator. And after about a week, I was like, "Yep, this is not for me." I was, you know, (inaudible). My team was dealing with clients that had soft tissue injuries of greater than 20 years. And my job was to ring, you know, up nana who had had survivor whiplash and the TAC was still playing panadol and tried to get her off. Oh my gosh. Anyway, it wasn't for me. And I... in that role, I did move to some different teams but I knew that I miss private practice and wanted to do something different. So, I sort of spent a bit of time looking into setting up a clinic. And you know, long story short, I ended up buying our clinic in Hawthorn off a bloke who, you know, used the clinic as a house, and use to work there two days a week. So I ended up just buying sort of the patiently stuff him. I was 26, sat in my clinic in Hawthorn. It was a wild roller coaster of a year. And then I ran into my dear business partner, Shane, in a supermarket. It was a very very funny day. I think I just had a spray tan. I was in shorts and a t-shirt looking very orange. And I slowed him down an aisle, oh my god, there's Shane. I haven't seen him since Uni. I better, you know, duck down the other aisle and obviously ran smack bang into him. And anyway, we started chatting. And we were like, "Right, let's join our clinics and buy another one." Then, 10 years, 11 years on, here we are. So, that's uhm, that's sort of how I got to where I am now. Those years of being in business of, yeah, being a roller coaster, learned so much. Yeah it's a - it's a fun story.

JACK: Yeah, that's amazing. I probably should have asked at the top. For those who aren't familiar, osteopathy is uh... is somewhat of a unique profession or maybe unknown. What is the 10-second pitch of what is an osteopath?

MICHELLE: An osteopath, we are musculoskeletal manual therapists. Generally, we look at the body and a more holistic manner. So, when you have symptoms, we're trying to get to the cause of the problem, and then prescribe exercise, the treatment, and basically help get you to your health goals.

JACK: Awesome. I'm sure they'll be listeners who might not be familiar or might be in different states. So, that's that's really useful. So, can you paint us a picture then now of we're Beyond Osteo is that from that chance meeting in the supermarket with Shane Bennett? So now, what does move look like?

MICHELLE: Yeah. So, when we first had their clinics, they all had different names. That was Hawthorne Osteopathy, Chapel Street Osteopathy. Over time, we rebranded it to just being called Beyond because we wanted to have an allied health clinic. So, we currently have osteopathy, physiotherapy, exercise, physiology, Maya therapy, and podiatry plus clinical pilates.

So, we wanted to create a brand that wasn't service specific. And that was kind of your one-stop-shop for anyone that was wanting to work on their health goals in a musculoskeletal space.

So, we did that a couple of years ago. We started our Blackburn Clinic with another friend from university who was in the same year as Shane and I. Since then, we've really evolved. So we've got a different structure. We've got a team of 40 but all employees. We've got a group of four shareholders. And we have a board that meets regularly. Business has really moved in a way that's centered on helping our clients move through life but also our team and really making sure that we're team focused and creating career levels for them. So, we're pretty passionate about that knowing in allied health, often you leave Uni, go work for someone. And then from, there it's either run a business, there's not a lot of options. So, (inaudible) sort of sat down and developed these pathways, so the team can become mentors and get paid for that. So they mentor all the more junior staff. They can have flexible working arrangements. They can become a clinic manager and director or they can buy into the business and be a shareholder. So, we're sort of trying to create a space where Allied Health has a little bit more (inaudible) directory because not everyone just wants to do the hands-on treat client stuff and we're just hoping to be able to give people those options.

JACK: Love it. Yeah. And listeners, we we've had Shane Benette on the podcast in a [previous episodes](#), so you can flip back through the archives, and learn more about the Beyond story specifically. Michelle, I'm interested. How does one end up being the president of a professional association? You're the - you're the president of the Osteopathy Australia, how do you fall into that sort of role?

MICHELLE: Yes, it was interesting. So, two years ago, 2018 or would have been 2017, I decided to apply to be a director on the board of Osteopathy Australia. And that really came off the back of, you know, as a small fairly unknown profession. You know, we do meet a lot of challenges as a result of that, whether that's you know professional health insurers, not recognising things, just the general public, not knowing who we are. Often, people say, "Oh osteopaths, bones." And you think, "Oh gosh, this is - this is not good." So, I sort of was like, "all right, I need to not, you know, I need to be proactive here. I feel like there's something I can give to the organization." So, it's a voluntary role. So I applied for that. And I was lucky enough to get voted onto the board. And then halfway through last year, the president Bill Adamson who is absolutely a terrific chap, he decided that he wouldn't run again. And he sort of tapped me on the shoulder and said, "You know, I think you'd be good at this." And I thought, "Oh my gosh, oh my gosh! What am i doing?" So I mean, I thought it was lovely. And it played into my ego for about 10 minutes. And I thought, "Well, I feel really special and important." Hold on. This isn't about ego. I need to have really clear idea as to what the responsibilities and the roles are. And really, you know, if I'm gonna do this role, I want to be effective at it. So, I ended up going and chatting to all the external board members and just asking them about getting some advice really around what they thought a good president is, and and where we can be better as an association and really as a board how we can be more effective. And so, when the nominations

came around, I popped my hand up and had to deliver a 10-minute little speech. And you know, I was lucky enough to, you know, for the board to decide that I could do the job. And so, it's a two-year term that I started in 2020, at the start of this year, and it's been an interesting time obviously with all the things happening in the world the association. You know, this is it's time to shine to really make sure that we're supporting our members and providing them with all the information and resources we can to help them.

JACK: I think, it's... it's absolutely unreal, you know. As a - as a female in leadership of a prominent professional association body, what's that been like from that within (inaudible) perspective?

MICHELLE: Yeah. It's really interesting. I think being in health, we're not exposed to a lot of, you know, the things that... say, my sister who's a - she's a banker with Macquarie, and she, you know, she is one of two women on a team of a hundred. So she's exposed to different challenges that we are in allied health. You know, dear Shane at Beyond, this - the only man in the leadership team and there's a whole heap of women. So, you know, it is funny. But in the board setting, what's really interesting is when we call for nominations, there's always a much higher percentage of men that put their hands up. I was bit shocked too that. Maybe I'm a bit naive as to realizing that maybe there are a lot of women out there that lack the confidence to think that they can be good at these types of things. So, it was interesting in my pitch when I was doing my nominations for the speech to become president. I was asked some really interesting questions. I'm currently a single parent with the two-year-old and obviously running businesses. And you know, one of the questions was "how do you think you'll fit this into your life?" My answer was, you know, give a busy person a job and they'll get it done that... You know there are some preconceived ideas about your ability, and you know, we can go into that whole thing of can you have it all the family, the career, and all this stuff. That's obviously a pretty interesting topic and something that's been spoken about a lot. But you know, I suppose, I just say to all the women out there, put your hands up give it a go, and you know, we need you, we need the voice of women in allied health because we do make up a larger proportion of the profession.

JACK: So on that then, if I can press a little deeper, you say your advice is to you know put your hand up and have a go, what are some really practical things that those women in allied health, clinic owners or health professionals can do?

MICHELLE: What they can do? I think it's about having confidence to not doubt yourself. So, you know, whether that's doing a course like the Australian Institute of Company Directors or joining the Institute of the Australian Institute of Management, so making sure you're networking with other women in those positions and from different sectors. I think that's where I learned so much is when you're talking to women in leadership in other areas that's been, you know, terrific because your eyes are opened a little bit more. So, I'd say definitely, look at where you're networking because that will give you more confidence. Make sure you're on LinkedIn that you're connecting with people that way. And put your hand up for something that you feel

uncomfortable with. We, a couple of my team that I mentor, I'm always pushing them. They're these wonderful brilliant women. And you know, well I'm always pushing them to do stuff, you know, and they're just, "oh! I'm so uncomfortable doing this." I'm like, "Just think about it for 24 hours. You're gonna be great." So, maybe you need to find a mentor to sort of push you a little bit into that uncomfortable space because I think it is just about the self-doubt and really making that, you know, turning that on niche really because I think we all can suffer from that. But, yeah, a mentor and, you know, working...

JACK: That's right! Love it. And I know that it's our, you know, inside our [Clinic Mastery Business Academy](#), we've got a number of female mentors. And this is huge opportunity for clinic owners to have that input both as a parent, and mum, clinic owner, and all the different ways that women can contribute and shine. And like you said, speaking of which, stepping out and doing something different, putting your hand up, I know you've played a role in some national advisory type groups regarding um CDM EPC, that type of stuff. So can you talk us through that experience?

MICHELLE: Yeah, that was an amazing experience. So, the government decided to reviewed Medicare which was a massive thing. It hadn't been done in 20 years. And there was a specific Allied Health reference group that was... one of the goals was to review the current chronic disease management programs. So I was called up on the first meeting. I wasn't there. No one was representing Osteopathy. And actually, the chiropractor of rang our association and said, "you better nominate someone to get into this group." And so, I was... I think my daughter was maybe eight weeks old. And I was at home but I was like, "I can do this, let me get out there, oh you know, I'll throw my weight around and make sure osteopathy has a voice." So, it was interesting. So, a couple of meetings in Melbourne flew up to Canberra, you know, took the breast pump with me and we work together as an allied health team to review things. So what we put forward was really, obviously, we all know we only get five consults a calendar year and there's not many people, that would not want to ask for obviously a few more treatments for those clients that are on those programs, knowing that they've got those chronic conditions. Plus also it's, you know, five consults, you know, for all of us. So if you've got that client with diabetes who needs, you know... and hip pain and they've got to see the EP, the podiatrist, and the physio, or osteo. That's not a lot of care, you know, four five consults between everyone. So, we work together to really provide evidence around increasing the consults. Also, my part was about, it sounds so silly, but providing evidence is why you need an initial appointment because as we all know, people around chronic disease consult is just, you know, there are five of them, they're the same length, the same billing amount. So, it doesn't really reflect normal practice. So yeah, we all collaborated and worked on little projects together to provide the evidence to submit that to the Health Minister and that's being reviewed at the moment, and we wait. We actually have no idea what's going to happen now with everything that's going on.

JACK: Oh, they're moving of the telehealth item. Who knows? Maybe, we might see some progress.

MICHELEE: I know, and listening to us when you think about it if allied health is closed down or we see more closes, you do wonder about the cost of health in six months time. So for those people that, you know, need the hip replacements and, you know, they're, yeah, I just just wonder if the flow-on effect of allied health is shut down. But anyway that's probably another podcast.

JACK: Maybe, yeah. Let's flew back to the Osteopathy Australia type stuff, and where do you see Osteopathy going? And how can people... what's the benefit to be involved in an association? That's probably two questions.

MICHELLE: Great. So, the benefits of being involved obviously, very biased, I think if you're an osteopath, you should be a member of the Association. And that... the honesty is not a lot of people know what the Association does. I didn't, and not a long time. You pay your fee. It gives you a reduced insurance amount and that's terrific. So, we have a relationship with the insurer and we can help, you know, get a subsidy through that. But the work on that sort of advocacy and the policy is just phenomenal especially osteopaths because we need to stay relevant in Australia. And that's what the Association does. They are meeting with the health ministers with all the other allied health practitioner associations, lobbying for our rights to make sure private health medicare and our consumers are looked after. So, I think if you are an osteopath, it's it's just vital that you do support that. And the Association, there's only eight staff, you know, in our Sydney office. So it's tiny compared to some of the bigger organizations. They do an amazing job. But what also is amazing is the number of osteopaths that actually volunteered. So, we've got lots of committees, clinical practice groups.

So the ability for people to give back to this profession, I think, is really unique. I think it probably happens in a lot of allied health but that's, you know, we really hang our hats on those people and what they bring. And it's... it is really nice. I've really enjoyed the feeling of volunteering my time and giving back to the profession because it has given me a career. And I remember hearing an osteopath, who was retiring, talked about how, you know, through the ups and downs of their life, she still always had her career, her clients. And that always kept her steady. And I was like, "Ah! I think that's really a lovely way of thinking about things." So, that's what I think the benefits of the Association is - where are we heading as an association.

So, we've got a pretty massive strategic plan and it's our job as the board to kind of prioritize where we're headed. And Osteopathy does face challenges and that's what we're there for to make sure that we can combat them as well as we can. The challenge is we are a small profession. So there's two and a half thousand of us and there are 1500 students enrolled. But most of those students are enrolled in Melbourne based universities. So, some we've got a size issue. We need more osteopaths but we probably need them in the rest of Australia as well.

So definitely like we listen to our members, we talk to them, we survey, we try and make sure that what their concerns are our top priority. So, you know, we're working hard at this education committee looking at, you know, how we can get the forms of education in different states. Now

that sounds easy. It's incredibly complicated. And so, it's about providing realistic timelines to the membership about, you know, how we can actually go about that. We're also, you know, it's all about supporting as well the members - so, providing our ongoing continuing professional development. We've upgraded our website, delivering an amazing amount of free content to help people get their CPD. And I think, that's going to be really massive given what's gonna, you know, be the financial hit that we all probably take in these current times. But also, you know, providing support to our university students because most of them are members as well - so as they graduate and also you know helping businesses as well. So, it's really, it's a supportive thing but we're also really working on those strategic things for the profession as a whole when we look at it as an allied health service in Australia.

JACK: Unreal. I loved it. I'm excited. Makes me wanna join, though I'm physio.

MICHELLE: Do it!

JACK: Oh, so good. Michelle, thank you so much for sharing your insights as the clinic owner, you know, boards, you know, the presidents, the roles you played with government. It's absolutely inspiring and especially as a - as a female leadership. Thank you so much from the bottom of our hearts.

MICHELLE: Oh, thanks for inviting me, Jack. Really have enjoyed our talk today.

JACK: It's been a lot of fun. If people want to maybe get in touch with you or check out your clinic or Osteopathy Australia, what are some options for people to go and check it and take next steps?

MICHELLE: Yeah. So, more than happy for anyone to send me a message on LinkedIn, just [Michelle Funder](#). Or you can check out our website for the clinics, which is [movebeyond.com.au](#). And if you want to learn a bit more about Osteopathy in particular, the Osteopathy australia website is ace. It's got to find an osteo function. So, if you want to even try and have an osteo session and look up somewhere local, I definitely encourage you to give us osteo a go, which was one of our slogans, I think last year and our Osteo Awareness Week.

So, yeah. Thanks very much, Jack.

JACK: Love it. Our pleasure!

Listeners, we'll make sure we link all those links up over at [clinicmastery.com/podcast](#) for the show notes for this episode. So you can check that out. We are super grateful to have Michelle Funder on the podcast. And we can't wait to bring you another episode of Grow Your Clinic again really soon. Bye for now.

Thanks for tuning in to the Grow Your Clinic podcast. To find out more about past episodes or how we can help you head, to www.clinicmastery.com/podcast and please remember to rate and review us on your podcast player of choice. See you on the next episode!

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