

"Adversity can fuel growth—if you choose to make it so. Todd Palmer lives this belief, and in *Traumapreneur*, he shows the rest of us how to do the same."

—**BRIAN SCUDAMORE**, Founder & CEO, 1-800-GOT-JUNK? |
Dragon on CBC's *Dragons' Den*

TRAUMA**PRENEUR**

Why Success Won't Make You Happy
(**and What Will**)



THE GOLD IS IN THE CRACKS

TODD PALMER

TRAUMAPRENEUR

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INTRODUCTION

THE ENTREPRENEUR'S PARADOX: SUCCESS AND SUFFERING

The world celebrates entrepreneurs as modern-day heroes. We see their gleaming success stories plastered across magazine covers, social media feeds, Shark Tank, and conference keynotes. The narrative is seductive and consistent: A brilliant individual with unshakable confidence battles against all odds, fueled by pure grit and uncompromising vision, to build something extraordinary. Sleep is optional. Sacrifice is mandatory. Struggle is glorified.

But there's a shadow story that rarely makes the highlight reel.

Behind closed doors, in quiet moments between meetings and in the early morning hours when sleep won't come, entrepreneurs are suffering—often silently and alone. I've witnessed it countless times in my nearly ten years of working with business leaders. I experienced it countless times as the CEO of Diversified Industrial Staffing for twenty-four years. The same driven individual who confidently pitches investors might be experiencing crippling anxiety attacks in the bathroom five minutes later. The founder celebrated for their “work ethic” may be using eighty-hour weeks to avoid going home to a loveless marriage. The CEO known for tough decisions might be self-medicating with alcohol just to quiet their racing thoughts at night.

This is the entrepreneur's paradox: appearing successful while suffering inside.

Dr. Michael A. Freeman's groundbreaking research revealed that entrepreneurs are twice as likely to suffer from depression, three times more likely to struggle with substance abuse, and ten times more likely to experience bipolar disorder than the general population.

Dr. Charmain Jackman, a psychologist who has worked extensively with high-achieving professionals, explains that what we're seeing in these statistics isn't weakness—it's the cost of carrying trauma while maintaining a performance mask. When we experience trauma, particularly in childhood, we often fuse it with our identity. We feel bad, guilty, unworthy. And then we build elaborate defenses to make sure no one sees those parts of us. But those defenses consume an enormous amount of energy. The higher you climb, the more energy it takes to maintain the split between who you appear to be and who you fear you really are. Eventually, something breaks—the business, the body, the marriage, or the mind.

This book exists to bridge a critical gap: connecting what we know about trauma's impact on human behavior with the very real pressures of entrepreneurial leadership. When those worlds collide, the result can be both remarkable and destructive. This understanding isn't just helpful, it's essential—because too many leaders are quietly watching their wellbeing deteriorate while their businesses appear to thrive.

Dr. Jan Everhart Newman, a psychologist specializing in high-achieving professionals and entrepreneurs, confirms this gap is real. "In my clinical practice with high-achieving professionals, many of whom are entrepreneurs, complex PTSD is the most common presentation I see. The research on this distinction in entrepreneurial populations is still emerging, but it's a critical area we need to understand better."

WHO AM I?

I never set out to become a business coach whose expertise centers on the connection between trauma and entrepreneurship. Hell, for most of my career, I wouldn't have even recognized the connection.

In 1997, at age twenty-nine, I launched Diversified Industrial Staffing with nothing but a market gap I'd spotted, a business plan, and a friend willing to invest \$15,000 in my vision. Within seventy-two days, we were profitable. The business was growing, and on paper I was living the entrepreneurial dream.

But nine years later, I was staring bankruptcy in the face.

By 2006, my company had accumulated \$600,000 in debt, and Detroit was feeling the impending economic doom before the rest of the country. The 2008 recession was swelling offshore like a tsunami, and I was standing on the beach wondering how the hell I'd gotten there. I was failing spectacularly. And I was terrified. What I didn't understand then—what would take years of introspection, research, and coaching to recognize—was that my approach to business was deeply influenced by early trauma. It shaped not only how I led but what I was desperately trying to prove about my value as a human being.

When I was five years old, my father died suddenly at age forty-five from a heart attack. In an instant, the foundation of my world was gone. My mother returned to work. My older brother, Greg, earned an athletic scholarship and moved from Michigan to Kentucky. My older sister, Donna, got married and relocated to Arizona.

Within ninety days, my entire family dynamic shattered.

At age five, my brain wasn't developed enough to process these complex realities rationally. Instead, I internalized a simple story: I was abandoned. And if I was abandoned, the only logical conclusion my young mind could draw was that I must be unlovable. The people I loved left. Love was conditional, unpredictable, and fleeting.

Psychologist Dr. Ashlee Greer, who develops mindset programs for trauma-surviving entrepreneurs, calls this the creation of an “attachment template”—when significant loss or trauma happens in early childhood, it doesn’t just affect that moment. It creates a blueprint for how we understand safety, love, and relationships for the rest of our lives. That five-year-old’s conclusion—“I’m unlovable, I can only rely on myself”—became the operating system for every relationship and every business decision I’d make for the next four decades.

So I made a subconscious decision—one that would shape my personal and professional life for decades to come: The only person I can truly rely on is me.

This survival mechanism became a core driver of my entrepreneurial success. But what I failed to realize was that this very strength was also my greatest weakness.

Self-reliance triggered my imposter syndrome of having to be all things, to all people, all of the time. It also kept me isolated. It made me resist delegation, struggle with trust, and fear vulnerability in both my business and personal relationships. Asking for help felt like weakness. Needing others meant setting myself up to be abandoned all over again. My desperate need for control made sense—as a child, I’d felt powerless. But that same control, meant to protect me, led to micromanagement that stifled my team’s potential and my company’s growth.

Dr. Julie Lopez, a human systems expert and peak performance coach, explains that this is how trauma operates at the nervous system level. When you experience significant threat or loss early in life, your nervous system develops adaptations designed to prevent that pain from happening again. My father’s death created hypervigilance around loss and abandonment. My nervous system wanted to keep me safe. My brain developed a threat-detection system that saw dependence on others as dangerous. That system served me well in some ways—it made me resourceful, resilient, and able to solve problems independently. But in business, it made collaboration feel

threatening, delegation feel risky, and partnership feel like setting myself up for inevitable betrayal.

The same drive that allowed me to launch a successful company kept me from asking for help when I needed it most. The independence that helped me spot market opportunities made me resistant to advice that might have prevented the financial crisis.

It took an experienced coach with financial expertise to break through my resistance. He helped me see what I couldn't admit: I would never succeed at Diversified Industrial Staffing alone. I needed to delegate critical responsibilities with accountability. Trust others with parts of my business. Admit I didn't have all the answers. Face the fear of abandonment by making necessary staffing cuts. I had to learn the "trust, but verify" methodology.

The turnaround didn't happen overnight, but it did happen. Diversified Staffing eventually became a six-time Inc. 5000 honoree, recognized as one of America's fastest-growing companies. More importantly, I began recognizing the patterns that had brought me to the brink of disaster—patterns rooted in childhood experiences that had nothing to do with business strategy and everything to do with trauma response.

This realization launched me on a research journey that fundamentally changed how I understood entrepreneurship. I hired a second coach, Dr. Danny Friedland, to help me understand how my brain worked and how my old thoughts impacted my current reality. I began noticing similar patterns in other successful business owners—the hypervigilance masked as "attention to detail," the workaholism celebrated as "hustle," the difficulty trusting others disguised as "high standards."

I started asking different questions. Instead of "What's your growth strategy?" I asked, "What keeps you up at night?" Rather than asking "How did you decide to start your business?" I inquired, "What were you trying to move toward or away from when you became an entrepreneur?"

The answers were strikingly consistent, and rarely appeared in the success stories these same individuals shared publicly. I devoured the scientific literature on trauma's effects on the brain and behavior. I collaborated with trauma specialists and organizational psychologists. Over twenty-three years as a member of Entrepreneurs Organization (EO), I've worked among hundreds of entrepreneurs across industries, company sizes, and backgrounds, analyzing the patterns between early experiences and leadership styles.

The data is undeniable. Studies consistently show strong correlations between childhood adversity and achievement orientation (Yu et al., 2022; Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2017). Many of the traits we celebrate in successful entrepreneurs—resilience, risk tolerance, pattern recognition, crisis management skills—were often developed as creative adaptations to adverse experiences.

You'll meet some of these entrepreneurs throughout this book. Their stories aren't just narratives. They're maps showing how our earliest wounds become our business strategies, how childhood adaptations become leadership styles, and how healing those wounds can transform not just our companies but our legacies.

This book represents what I wish I'd had when I was staring down \$600,000 in debt, unable to see how my past was influencing my present. It's the conversation too many entrepreneurs need but aren't having.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The financial implications are widespread. Research suggests that unaddressed trauma responses can significantly impact business performance through impaired decision-making, higher turnover, and reduced innovation capacity.

Dr. Lopez points out that when your decision-making is clouded by trauma responses rather than strategic clarity, you're making million-dollar

decisions using emotional data from decades ago. Your five-year-old's fear of abandonment is choosing which partnerships to pursue. Your ten-year-old's need for control is determining your hiring strategy. Your teenage survivor's hypervigilance is shaping your risk assessment.

Beyond business metrics, your trauma becomes embedded in your organizational DNA, your relationships, your health, and your family. Research shows that individuals with childhood adversity demonstrate accelerated cellular aging through telomere shortening, a biological marker associated with chronic stress (Ridout et al., 2018).

The good news? Addressing these patterns doesn't require abandoning your drive and determination. You don't need to choose between business performance and personal wholeness.

The entrepreneurs who do this work report remarkable results: revenue increases, cost reductions, market expansions. They also report closer family relationships and greater marital satisfaction. But the most compelling transformation isn't measured in revenue growth or cost reduction. It's the shift from running a business that drains you to leading one that energizes you.

WHY THIS BOOK EXISTS

My purpose in writing this book is threefold:

First, to normalize the conversation around trauma's influence on entrepreneurial behavior, removing shame and creating space for honest reflection.

Second, to provide a pragmatic framework for recognizing, understanding, and transforming trauma responses that may be limiting your business growth and personal fulfillment.

Third, to offer evidence-based tools that work within the constraints of a busy entrepreneur's life—because theoretical solutions that require hours of daily practice aren't realistic for most business leaders.

A NOTE ON THE EXPERT VOICES IN THIS BOOK

Throughout these pages, you'll encounter insights from an exceptional group of clinicians—among them Dr. Charmain Jackman, Dr. Ashlee Greer, Dr. Julie Lopez, and Dr. Jan Everhart Newman. Their words appear not as citations pulled from existing literature but as original contributions developed through extended collaboration on this project.

Each of these psychologists was interviewed specifically for this book, in conversations centered on the intersection of trauma, entrepreneurship, and leadership. I shared the core concepts and the HEAL framework with them directly, and their responses were shaped in dialogue with this material, which is why their voices sometimes speak to the framework explicitly. They were responding to it, in real time, as collaborators.

Their contributions represent original intellectual work, and I am deeply grateful for the trust, rigor, and generosity they brought to this partnership. Where their insights are cited throughout the book, the quotes reflect these direct conversations rather than published sources.

IS THIS BOOK FOR YOU?

If you've ever found yourself achieving impressive business results while feeling persistently empty, working relentlessly but struggling to celebrate successes, making decisions from fear rather than strategic clarity, struggling to trust others enough to delegate effectively, or noticing patterns in your leadership that mirror difficult experiences from your past—then yes, this book was written with you in mind.

You may be among the estimated 75% of entrepreneurs whose drive and challenges are influenced by earlier trauma, whether you've previously recognized it or not.

This doesn't mean something is wrong with you. Many of the qualities that make you an effective entrepreneur likely developed as creative adapta-

tions to challenging circumstances. The problem isn't your trauma history—it's that certain responses that once protected you might now be limiting your potential, happiness, and impact.

WHAT'S AHEAD: THE HEAL FRAMEWORK

The journey ahead is structured around a practical methodology I call the HEAL framework:

HURT	Identifying the wounds and formative experiences that shaped your entrepreneurial approach.
EXPLORE	Understanding how those experiences show up in your business decisions and leadership patterns.
ADAPT	Creating new patterns that preserve your strengths while releasing limitations.
LEAD	Embodying transformation through intentional leadership that ripples beyond you.

Each component builds on the previous one. You can't explore what you haven't identified. You can't adapt what you haven't understood. And you can't lead from wholeness while operating from unexamined wounds.

Part One, Hurt, opens with the foundational work of recognition. You'll explore the science of adverse childhood experiences and their measurable impact on adult behavior, examine your own formative experiences through a series of structured reflections, and meet entrepreneurs whose early wounds became the engines—and the anchors—of their professional lives. The goal isn't to dwell in pain but to bring what has operated in the shadows into the light, where it can be understood and ultimately transformed.

Part Two, Explore, builds the critical bridge between your personal history and your business present. Here you'll learn to identify the specific ways trauma responses manifest in leadership—in how you hire and fire, delegate and micromanage, take risks and avoid them, build teams and remain isolated within them. Case studies drawn from real entrepreneurs reveal the patterns in concrete, recognizable detail. By the end of this section, the behaviors that once seemed like fixed personality traits will begin to look like what they actually are: adaptive responses still running on outdated programming.

Part Three, Adapt, is where insight becomes action. Drawing on current research in neuroscience, attachment theory, and executive performance, this section offers practical tools for interrupting old patterns and building new ones. You'll develop a personalized Adaptation Plan—a working document that travels with you through the rest of the book and beyond—and learn evidence-based techniques for regulating your nervous system, rebuilding trust, and making decisions from strategic clarity rather than emotional residue.

Part Four, Lead, takes everything you've built and extends it outward. This final section is about legacy, how the internal work you've done ripples through your organization, your relationships, and the next generation of leaders you influence. You'll explore what it means to build a trauma-informed culture—not as a therapeutic exercise but as a competitive advantage—and develop a personal leadership manifesto that reflects who you are becoming, not just who you've been.

This framework doesn't require you to abandon your drive or spend years in therapy. It works within the reality of your life—building awareness during existing activities, implementing practices that take minutes, not hours, and creating sustainable change through small, consistent actions.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT

Healing is about trajectory, not perfection. You're not measuring whether you're triggered—you're human, of course you'll be triggered. You're measuring how fast you recover, how much awareness you have during activation, how much choice you maintain about your response.

Within the first thirty days of implementing the HEAL framework, most entrepreneurs report increased awareness of when they're operating from trauma responses rather than strategic clarity. By ninety days, you'll likely notice significant changes in how you approach key business decisions and family interactions. At the six-month mark, many experience measurable improvements in business metrics that previously seemed unrelated to psychological factors. The most profound transformations typically emerge within twelve to eighteen months as new neural pathways strengthen and old patterns fade.

These changes manifest not just in business performance but in overall life satisfaction, physical health improvements, and relationship quality.

HOW TO APPROACH THIS JOURNEY

Set a clear intention for your reading experience. Recognize that intellectual understanding alone won't create transformation. Every chapter includes a "Try This" section with practical exercises—please do try these, even if they initially feel uncomfortable. Discomfort is where growth occurs.

Consider reading with implementation partners: trusted colleagues, a coach, advisors, or fellow entrepreneurs who can provide accountability and perspective such as a forum or mastermind group.

Finally, approach this material with compassion for yourself and the adaptations you've developed. The patterns we'll identify weren't chosen consciously—they emerged as creative responses to challenging circumstances.

Acknowledging both their value and their limitations creates space for evolution without self-judgment.

This journey isn't about fixing what's broken in you. It's about integrating what's been disconnected. It's about bringing conscious choice to areas previously governed by automatic responses. It's about expanding your capacity to lead from wholeness rather than woundedness.

TRY THIS

YOUR ENTREPRENEURIAL TRAUMA INVENTORY

Before diving into the rest of the book, take twenty minutes to complete this foundational exercise.

STEP 1: RECOGNIZE YOUR PATTERNS (TEN MINUTES)

Read through these questions and write down your honest answers:

Control Patterns

- Do you struggle to delegate important tasks, even when you're overwhelmed?
- Does it feel physically uncomfortable to let others make decisions without your input?

Achievement Patterns

- Is your self-worth tightly connected to your business performance?

PART ONE

HURT

1

THE SECRET PAIN BEHIND THE HUSTLE: THE TRAUMA-ENTREPRENEURSHIP CONNECTION

From the outside, Emily looked unstoppable.

Back Office Betties was serving law firms across the country. She was pitching major publications, showing up at conferences as if she owned the room, answering client emails at 2 a.m. Her LinkedIn profile told a story of relentless growth and unwavering confidence. The business had gone from an idea to a real company, and she was at the center of it all.

On the inside, she was running on fear and fumes.

The hypervigilance that made her business successful was the same survival skill that had kept her alive as a child. Growing up, Emily learned to scan constantly for danger, read people's moods, anticipate rejection, and stay one step ahead. When you're abused by people who should protect you, when your parents scrutinize your weight and grades instead of seeing you, when you're kicked out at thirteen—you learn one lesson fast:

No one is coming.

“‘No one is coming’ became my badge of honor,” Emily explains. That belief drove everything. If something was going to happen, it was on her. So

she worked all night, micromanaged every detail, and made sure clients never saw a crack in the facade.

That obsession with control built trust. Clients knew she would deliver. The business grew. But as soon as it grew beyond what she could personally oversee, her strength became her downfall.

“I assumed everyone could and should operate like me—fast, decisive, juggling twenty things at once,” she says. One day, a team member finally said in exasperation: “Emily, I am not you! I can’t do twenty things at once!”

Her superpower of speed and vision was creating chaos for others. What made her feel safe was making everyone else feel unsafe. To her team, she was an ideas machine constantly pivoting, demanding, chasing new visions. They called it whiplash.

Dr. Jackman explains that this is one of the most common patterns she sees: The survival strategy that once protected you becomes the leadership style that limits you. When you grow up in chaos or danger, your nervous system learns to operate at a pace that feels normal to you but is unsustainable for others. That hypervigilance, that constant scanning, that need to control every variable—it kept you alive as a child. But as a leader, it creates exactly the kind of chaos and unpredictability you’re trying to prevent. You’re not choosing to be this way. Your nervous system is still protecting the child who learned that survival depended on staying one step ahead.

Growth flatlined because everything bottlenecked at Emily’s desk. There were Christmas mornings with no presents under the tree; times they almost lost the car and the house. Her husband asked her to close the business and go back to a regular job. Those were her “almost lost everything” years.

The woman who appeared so confident on LinkedIn was terrified someone would finally see the truth: She was exhausted, scared, and barely holding on.

The turning point came with a psychometric assessment that gave Emily permission to see herself clearly—not just the shiny parts, but the messy parts too. When she finally promoted Katelyn, who had inverse strengths to hers, everything shifted. Emily could stay in vision and strategy while Katelyn brought plans to life. They created a visionary-integrator relationship.

But the harder work wasn't delegating tasks. It was being fully seen.

"I worried that if people saw the real me—flawed, messy, sometimes insecure—they wouldn't want me," Emily admits. "Trusting people wasn't just about letting go of control in business. It was about letting go of the fear that if I stopped being so tough, people would finally see how scared I really was—and leave."

Once she had the right team in place, something unexpected happened: depression. "I had built my entire identity on being indispensable," she explains. "Who was I if they didn't need me?"

That identity crisis became a pivot point. Emily leaned into purpose—volunteering with Inmates to Entrepreneurs, guest lecturing at universities, speaking about emotional health and self-acceptance. The business that once consumed her now employs over one hundred people with revenue over \$5M annually, made the Inc. 5000 in 2025, and boasts some of the lowest turnover in an industry known for churn.

"The traits that kept you alive as a child will destroy you as an entrepreneur if you don't transform them," Emily reflects. "They're not flaws—they're survival strategies. But survival strategies that worked at eight years old don't work when you're trying to scale a business at thirty-eight."

YOU'RE NOT ALONE

Emily is far from alone in this experience. The World Mental Health Survey found that 70.4% of respondents globally experienced one or more traumas in their lifetime (Benjet et al., 2016). Approximately 75% of entrepreneurs

show clear evidence of significant adversity in their developmental histories. This figure emerges consistently across multiple studies and my own research with over two hundred founders across various industries.

That relentless drive you see in successful founders? It's often fueled by early messages that they're never quite enough. That uncanny ability to spot opportunities others miss? It frequently developed as they scanned environments for potential threats. The comfort with risk that separates entrepreneurs from the crowd? It usually has roots in a childhood where stability was never guaranteed, making the uncertain landscape of business feel strangely familiar.

Before we go further, let's clarify what "trauma" actually means in the entrepreneurial context. We're not just talking about dramatic, life-threatening events that meet clinical definitions of PTSD—although those certainly qualify.

Clinical trauma involves experiences that overwhelm our capacity to cope, triggering survival responses and creating lasting neurobiological changes. But perceived trauma—experiences that might not meet clinical thresholds yet profoundly impact development—plays an equally significant role. The parents who withheld approval unless you achieved perfection. The teacher who humiliated you publicly. The financial instability that made every month a question of basic security.

Trauma isn't defined by the objective severity of what happened, but by how your nervous system responded to it. A child who experiences their parents' divorce may develop trauma responses not because divorce is inherently traumatic, but because their particular nervous system, at that particular developmental stage, with those particular support systems (or lack thereof), experienced it as overwhelming. Two children can go through identical experiences and have completely different neurobiological responses. This is why entrepreneurs often minimize their own histories—"other people had it worse"—while demonstrating clear trauma-influ-

enced patterns in their leadership. Your nervous system doesn't compare notes with others. It just responds to what it experienced as threatening.

Trauma also varies in timing and duration. Acute trauma occurs as a single intense event—a car accident, the sudden loss of a parent, a violent encounter. Chronic trauma unfolds over extended periods—growing up with an alcoholic parent, facing persistent bullying throughout school, enduring years of financial instability. Both create distinct adaptations that can later manifest as entrepreneurial strengths.

Perhaps most importantly, trauma's impact exists regardless of whether you consciously recognize it. Many successful entrepreneurs deny any significant adversity in their backgrounds, yet demonstrate behavioral patterns clearly shaped by early challenges. The unrecognized nature of trauma often makes its influence more powerful, operating below the threshold of awareness where it can't be examined or modified.

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE CONNECTION

The statistical evidence is compelling. Emmy Werner's groundbreaking longitudinal study followed children from difficult circumstances over forty years, finding that those who thrived despite adversity often channeled their adaptive responses into entrepreneurial ventures. They didn't succeed despite their challenges—they succeeded, in part, because of how those challenges shaped them.

A 2019 study in *Small Business Economics* examined 242 entrepreneurs in the US and found that 72% were affected by mental health differences.

This pattern holds across remarkably diverse cultural contexts—from North America to East Asia to emerging markets in Africa. The adaptive responses that lead to entrepreneurial thinking remain consistent regardless of the specific type of adversity experienced.

WHY TRAUMA CREATES ENTREPRENEURIAL CAPACITY

What explains this persistent connection? The answer lies in how trauma literally reshapes the brain and nervous system in ways that can enhance certain entrepreneurial capabilities.

When you experience something overwhelming, your brain's threat detection systems become more sensitive and responsive. This heightened awareness, originally developed to keep you safe, translates into an uncanny ability to spot potential problems and opportunities in business contexts. The entrepreneur who somehow "senses" market shifts before competitors may be utilizing threat detection systems fine-tuned by earlier adversity.

Dr. Lopez explains that this is happening at the neurobiological level. When your nervous system is shaped by early threat or instability, your amygdala—the brain's threat detection center—literally becomes more sensitive. You're processing environmental cues faster than others, noticing subtle shifts in tone, reading micro-expressions, detecting patterns that others miss. In a dangerous childhood environment, this hypervigilance kept you safe. In business, it becomes pattern recognition, market sensing, and the ability to "read the room" in negotiations. What's important to understand: you're not making conscious decisions to scan for threats. Your nervous system is doing it automatically, constantly, at enormous energetic cost. That's why so many entrepreneurs with trauma histories are exhausted even when their businesses are thriving.

The stress response adaptations that occur through trauma exposure can create higher stress tolerance—the capacity to function effectively under pressures that overwhelm others. While this can create health challenges long-term, it often manifests initially as an ability to maintain clarity during crises.

Perhaps most significantly, adversity develops neural pathways associated with resilience—the ability to adapt to challenges and recover from

setbacks. This creates the neurobiological foundation for the resilience entrepreneurs need to navigate inevitable business failures.

I've witnessed this repeatedly in my work with founders during business crises. Those with significant trauma histories often demonstrate remarkable clarity and decision-making capacity amid chaos that paralyzes their peers. Their nervous systems have, in essence, been trained for crisis through earlier experiences.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

If you've experienced significant adversity and become an entrepreneur, these experiences are likely connected—whether you've recognized it or not. Understanding this connection provides powerful insight into both your entrepreneurial strengths and your potential blind spots.

This understanding starts with honest reflection. Consider how specific challenges in your background might have shaped your entrepreneurial tendencies: The financial instability that made you hypervigilant about cash flow. The critical parent who inadvertently trained you to anticipate and address problems before others notice them. The early responsibilities that developed your self-reliance and decision-making capacity. The unstable home environment that made risk feel normal rather than threatening. The experience of being overlooked or underestimated that fueled your drive to prove yourself.

Dr. Jackman emphasizes that this recognition isn't about assigning blame or wallowing in past difficulties. It's about separating the trauma from your identity. For too long, you've probably carried the belief that something is wrong with you—that your hypervigilance, your control needs, your difficulty trusting others are character flaws. But they're not. They're adaptations. Your nervous system did exactly what it was supposed to do to keep you "safe" in an unsafe environment. The problem isn't that these adaptations developed. The problem is that they're still running the

show in situations where they're no longer necessary. Recognition without shame—that's where transformation begins.

These connections aren't about assigning blame or wallowing in past difficulties. They're about recognizing the origins of your unique entrepreneurial profile—the specific combination of strengths and limitations that influence how you build and lead your business.

THE PATH FORWARD

The very experiences that caused you pain likely contributed to capacities that differentiate you as an entrepreneur. Your challenges and your capabilities aren't separate stories—they're intimately connected chapters in the same narrative.

In the next chapter, we'll explore how trauma transforms into specific entrepreneurial traits—the double-edged adaptations that both fuel your success and potentially limit your growth. Once you can name these patterns, you can begin to consciously choose which serve you and which need to evolve.

For now, just notice. Where do you see the connection between your early experiences and your entrepreneurial approach? What beliefs formed in childhood still drive your business decisions today? What survival strategies that once protected you might now be constraining your potential?

The first step toward leading from wholeness is recognizing how your wounds became your work.

TRY THIS**THE TWO-TIMELINE EXERCISE**

Grab a piece of paper or open a document on your computer. You're going to create two timelines that will reveal the connection between your past and your present.

TIMELINE 1: YOUR EARLY LIFE (AGE 0–18)

Draw a horizontal line across the top of the page. Mark significant events:

- Losses (deaths, divorces, people leaving)
- Moves or major transitions
- Family dynamics and changes
- Moments you felt unsafe, unseen, or alone
- Times you had to grow up fast or take on adult responsibilities

TIMELINE 2: YOUR ENTREPRENEURIAL JOURNEY

Draw a second horizontal line below the first. Mark key moments:

- Why you started your business (what were you moving toward or away from?)
- Your biggest wins and losses
- Patterns in how you lead and make decisions
- Recurring challenges with teams, partners, or clients

NOW LOOK AT BOTH TIMELINES TOGETHER.

Where do the patterns match? What childhood adaptations are you still using in your business today? What worked then but might be limiting you now?

Write down 2–3 specific connections you notice. Don't overthink it—just notice what emerges.

This exercise isn't about dwelling on the past. It's about understanding how the past is still showing up in your present, so you can make more conscious choices about your future.