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How to Respond with Strength to a Crisis Dr. Irena Kay

In times of universal fear and stress, such as the Covid-19 epidemic, we may rise or succumb to the challenge. While our personal histories, especially those involving trauma, may influence how we react, Irena Kay, M.D., explains that with self-understanding and kindness to ourselves, we can respond with strength to the crisis. Irena, a former OB/GYN physician and now business performance coach, also explores with Pat Iyer, your host, how trauma prevents people from escaping abusive situations and the role of nurses' self-sabotaging helper "gene." This timely podcast will help you to activate your strongest resources to see you through any crisis.

Discover

- The damaging and often unconscious effect trauma has on the brain
- Why abused spouses don't leave their abusive mates
- The heightening effect of stress on already-fractured relationships
- How to overcome the helper "gene" when a client makes unreasonable demands
- Why taking care of yourself is a prerequisite to truly helping others

Pat: Welcome to Legal Nurse Podcast. Today we're going to be speaking with a retired physician who's also a business performance coach. She's a marriage facilitator, and she developed some techniques that help you with being a high achiever and working through some of the mindset barriers that we experience when we function in that realm. I'd like to welcome Dr. Irena Kay to the show.

Welcome. Should I call you Dr. Kay?

Irena: Thank you so much, Pat, for having me. It's my pleasure to be with you all.

Pat: Thank you. I'll just call you Irena if that's okay with you.

Irena: Yes, please do.

Pat: All right.

I met Irena when we were part of an online networking program called Joint Venture Inner Circle. And when she was talking and introducing herself in that group meeting a few weeks ago, I said, "Irena, you have content that would really be useful for the legal nurse consultants who are a part of my program."

Irena was an obstetrician gynecologist before she retired. So, she is well familiar with some of the stresses associated with working in healthcare, and we've got also stresses associated with working with attorneys handling medical cases.

Dialing in on where we are right now, we're recording this during a lockdown associated with the COVID virus, and it is impacting people's businesses in many ways. What is your insight now, Irena, in terms of the impact on people who are entrepreneurs?

Irena: Well, there are always two sides of entrepreneurs. Some of them are very, very scared. They feel isolated. They're anxious. They feel like nothing is going to work anymore, and others they are saying, "You know what, this is now an opportunity because everybody is going to be online. and there are more people online than ever before. And there are more people that have time to listen to say a podcast or a Facebook Live or anything else." And then the naysayers say, "Yeah, but nobody is buying."

So, it's kind of an in-between. It's a balance between the two because both are true. When it's a desperate time, and they are desperate times because you know, as well as I do, that supplies somewhere are getting low and people are doing price gouging and all crazy kinds of stuff. You're holding on to what you have because it's very uncertain what's tomorrow. You try to balance it all out what you should do, but I think it is a great opportunity to be an entrepreneur that's working and has a service online.

Pat: And that is an interesting point because legal nurse consultants can work with attorneys anywhere in the country. We're not limited to specific geographic areas. Medical records are sent through secure email services and are downloaded as PDFs. I know that the delivery services are still working for people who are sending out paper records, but the stress and anxiety that is surrounding being in

business now can be a barrier to be able to take advantage of those opportunities.

I know that you have done a study, and you're very interested in how our minds work and how they set us up for failure or success. Can you give us some insights on how to deal with the anxiety, which I know a lot of people are feeling?

And as a footnote, alcohol sales are up. People are expressing anxiety in different ways. I saw a post on Facebook that said, "I wear my mask inside so that it will prevent me from going to the refrigerator to eat" as an example.

Irena: Wow. Yes, but very understandable too because that's what it is. That's why I was basically transitioning from retiring as a physician to going over as a performance coach and a law of attraction coach. And I am a Reiki master teacher, so the energy work and everything. I got very interested in how trauma, every kind of trauma, whether it's severe trauma or just repetitive.

Chronic stress or chronic trauma can impact our mind, in other words, our brain, because mind is not something that is just out there like in the vacuum of space or something. Mind is anchored in our brain and the way our brain works. So, I was really studying, intensively studying, neuroscience and the memory of trauma and how the experience of a lifetime even before birth, in the womb, can impact the way we react later.

And all that stuff gets amplified, I think, in a stress situation because that's when people have... maybe they have the fight reflex, maybe the freeze reflex or they have the flight reflex. You know some people just crumple. They shut down completely. The fold reflex, if you will, and that is anchored in your brain.

But the good thing that we know with brain science is that it can be influenced. Even our genetic code can be influenced by thought, by a conscious thought. I think that is a great opportunity, again, to now, when you have time, to analyze and diagnose yourself and then choose to change brain patterns that hold you back into empowering ones.

Pat: I'm fascinated. You went from delivering babies to being interested in Reiki and neuroscience. I would've thought you'd tell me when we talked earlier that you were a neurologist or a neurosurgeon or somebody who... maybe a psychologist or psychiatrist. How did you get from OB to brain patterns?

Irena: Via the martial arts, believe it or not. I retired from being a physician—that was because I immigrated to the United States in 1994 and I would've had to go through all these internships again. And you as a nurse know or your audience well knows how crazy those hours are, and I had five children, so I didn't want somebody else to raise those children.

But some of them were a little older, so I enrolled them into the martial arts. And the martial arts brought to me the Eastern philosophies. The Eastern philosophies brought me to the chakras and meridians and that kind of energy work that is also going through the nervous system. This then came full circle to, "Hey, neuroscience." I also studied trauma resolution coaching, which was then like working with people with PTSD. "How did that happen to them?"

They were like gung-ho young people going into war and coming back as a mess, and it wasn't their fault. It's just the brain was overloaded because of a situation that was so abnormal that their reaction of PTS... I hate the "D" word in there because it's not a disorder. It is just a normal reaction to an abnormal situation, and that can happen to anybody. And right now, we do have another abnormal situation at hand that's impacting us all, and people react the way they were brought up. Like I said before, it's either you're shutting down or you're anxious and stressed, or you're growing above it and know that we can rise together, and we can help each other and support each other.

But that's how it came to be beyond the martial arts. I became a martial arts instructor, so you must know a bit about that stuff.

Pat: Yes, you did. I just saw an email from one of my coaching clients just before we got on the call. She was describing how her adult children are working at home and their grandchild... her grandchild, my coaching client's grandchild, the child of her son has said to Daddy,

"You know, daddy, I don't want to go back to normal because I like having you home. This is fun."

Irena: That's beautiful. I mean, good for them that they were able to wing it that way because I know other people will have a lot of stress in their marriage when all of a sudden the people are close together when they used to be having their own agendas. One goes to work, and maybe the one stays home, or they just don't see each other that often. But when they're all together, there can be more friction, so I'm glad for her that the boy likes daddy home because mine at one point wouldn't have wanted him home.

Pat: Yeah, I have heard that divorce lawyers are busier now because of couples who have been thrown together in more proximity than they wish and realize the strains on their marriage are too severe to last.

Irena: Yep, that does not surprise me at all because there was obviously something amiss before, and now it just came to the surface a lot more. People just are not willing to hang on anymore. Yeah, it doesn't surprise me.

Pat: And you mentioned just a few minutes ago the post-traumatic stress disorder, which I know legal nurse consultants encounter in the form of medical records of people who've been through traumatic events. Could you just give us a little insight on what leads to that? And I know you referred to a military situation, but we encounter it more commonly in people, for example, who look in the car rear-view mirror, and they see somebody barreling down on them. And they may relive that experience or have nightmares or have obsessive thoughts around it. Can you tell us a little bit about how that develops, and then you mentioned being able to treat it?

Irena: The crazy thing is that what you just mentioned, that barreling down the road, and you seeing it's coming at you is something that had happened to me, and I do remember it clear as day. It was probably 25 years ago or more. I was going down the highway, and two cars came in, one from the left side and one from the right side, at high, high, high speeds. If you know that intersection on Long Island, you know what I'm talking about, the Meadowbrook Parkway intersecting with the Cross Island is a dangerous intersection.

They were going way too fast and I'm seeing them being on a collision course directly in front of me. And I was going... You know on a highway you just don't go 15 MPH. I know that I would've have been unable to hit the brakes. So, I saw myself in a car pileup in there, but they bounced off each other. One of them hit the median, and I just saw that afterwards in the rearview mirror like you mentioned or the sideview mirror. That guy was able to get control over his car, thankfully, and the other person went up the embankment and stopped there. So, nobody got hurt, and because they bounced back off, I went straight through the middle and was able to get off the next exit, where I wanted to get off anyway. I drove to where I needed to go. I was in the parking lot. I turned off the engine and started shaking like crazy.

Pat: I bet you did.

Irena: Like that was the whole reaction. It was shaking like crazy, and later I studied that stuff. If you can't shake it off that way, it will anchor itself into the body, not only in the neuropathways of the brain. Because the brain will at that moment when it sees danger, danger, danger, go on full alert and have all the resources, adrenaline and everything going into that fight reaction or flight or whatever it is that your brain does to have you survive. And sometimes you cannot now get rid of that flood of inputs. Most of them are subconscious. You don't know that the brain, the amygdala, is going off like nuts and everything inside. The limbic system is going crazy. It can anchor itself into the body.

So, if you have repetitive trauma, even you know the thousand cuts that hurt you, you cannot deal with it anymore consciously. It will anchor itself into the brain and into the body. And that's the stuff that's hard to get rid of with just the conscious mind.

Pat: I know that we talked before, when we were having our call to get ready for this, about that thousand cuts. And we related it to battered women or battered spouses and that repeated ongoing pattern, which legal nurse consultants can encounter if they're working on a criminal case or on a family law case. Can you give us some insight on the question of why women stay in those relationships, given that it's a repetitive pattern, and they know it's common, and they don't leave?

Irena: Yes, see this is the same thing whether it's battered women, so physical abuse. It also can be mental abuse. It can be emotional abuse. And if you're looking in from the outside, you wonder, "Why do these people stay in this relationship? Why can't they just go out of it you know? Why do they hang on?" And this is, again, in the brain. It got anchored at one point and it could be that even these women then marry somebody and see the red flags of this being an abuser. They grew up with an abusive parent possibly, and the brain just notices... It knows that's what is deal-able. "I know how to deal with this."

Change is always scary for the human brain because that's how we were imprinted. You know in our caveman days anything that's changed could be dangerous whether it's an enemy tribe or whether it's wild animals or nature. Speaking of which, we're under the tornado watch here now, but you never know. You never know if danger is something that's even worse or any change could be even worse than what you have already. And what they have already is something they know how to deal with even if they get downtrodden and they get battered, or they get belittled, in the end feeling like nobody anymore.

Pat: And the odds are good, Irena, that at least one person who's listening to this podcast right now is taking this to heart. This is her situation or in a minority of cases his situation. Would you have any words for that person who's listening, who says, "Irena is talking about me"?

Irena: If you think you're in such a situation where the relationship is detrimental to your life or to your well-being, there is help. Know it's not your fault. Nobody will fault you for staying there because we know that it's the brain that wants to keep you safe, but there is an alternative. The only way to go is to reach out and get help. There is help available.

Reach out to somebody. Confide in somebody and then be safe doing that. There are certain things... There are ways to go about this that can keep you and your children safe if you're in such a situation.

Pat: Thank you.

Irena: My pleasure because this is... it's something horrible, absolutely atrocious.

Pat: It is.

Irena: But look, say for example you're a battered woman. Your husband's an abuser and you, and your children, may not be safe. A good place to go would be the school. Go to somebody from the school because they will then go to the authorities, so you don't have to. So, you don't have to be the one who's the rat, the snitch, or whatever you're going to be called, and it's not so traceable. But reach out for help. It doesn't matter where. It can be online. It can be anywhere. There are groups around, people that will be able to help.

Pat: And I have also read that the amount of abuse has increased in this period of us being locked down, shut down, kept in our houses. The tensions that we alluded to before leading to a divorce attorney becoming involved can manifest themselves in more drinking, and the cycle of violence increases with drinking, as you well know.

Irena: Yeah.

Pat: So, it is a potentially dangerous environment for people right now from many perspectives.

Irena: Very true. Yes.

Pat: Let's talk about that feeling of being overwhelmed, and I know that is something that you are familiar with in the work that you do. Can you give us some tips on dealing with that? And we can feel overwhelmed even when we're not locked down in the current environment but because of the demands on us from life, from our life style, from our responsibilities, how do we handle that feeling like you just can't breathe deeply enough to get enough air in?

Irena: Yes, I know that being overwhelmed, and I'm being one of these people who just want to help everybody, right, and then put myself on the backburner, and that's when overwhelm can set in. "There's so much to do. I have so much still to do for XYZ and for life and for everything else that's intruding." The only way is to become aware of that first. Believe that you are worth it as well to be taken care of and that you have a choice to not get yourself into these situations where you're completely overwhelmed.

So, one good thing is to start by, first, you being aware of it and then making a conscious decision that you are allowed to say, "No" to certain things. And then you plan, "What is the priority to do? What

do I really have to do today?" and look at this very, very closely. "Do you really have to do this today? Do you really? Can someone else do this for you? Can you delegate or can you do it another day because tomorrow is another day?"

If there were no tomorrow, it wouldn't matter anymore, right, but first it's the awareness. Acknowledge that you're overwhelmed. Know that it is not shameful. Know that you're not lesser for it and know you're worth it to be taken care of. And if there's nobody else willing to take care of you, maybe and that was in my case, I let them not take care of me. I just said... basically said, "I'm independent. I don't need anybody. I'm the strong one. I'm looking out for everyone else. I don't need help. I don't want help," and they're taken this for granted now." So, maybe it is time to take a step back and look at yourself. Where can you be taken care of, who do you allow to take advantage of you, and don't do that anymore because there's always a way. There's a choice.

Pat: I know you're familiar with the healthcare environment, having worked as a physician. We as nurses who work with attorneys sometimes get caught up in this trap of not taking care of ourselves, of saying, "Yes" to what turn out to be unreasonable requests from our clients. They are unreasonable in the sense that they need a very fast turnaround, for example, which causes us as nurses to want to please our clients and provide the service that the attorney wants to have completed. And we end up hurting ourselves in the process, not all the time, but it happens enough that it makes me realize as somebody who worked with attorneys for 28 years that there is a very real chance of getting caught up in that trap. Do you have any insight for what happens when we're faced with that kind of request?

Irena: Yes, see you as nurses have this helper gene, for a lack of another word. You know you want to please people. You want to help everybody that you can. This is just ingrained in you, and maybe not doing that makes you feel uncomfortable. But if you take yourself out of the equation, nobody is helped at the end. And when you're saying there are requests coming down the pike that are unreasonable and you realize that, that is when you allow yourself to say, "No" to this specific client because that could become a toxic client.

And in the end, toxic clients usually are not your five-star clients and not your top clients anyway, so allow yourself to say, "No" at that point and know something better will be coming. Because right now everybody must work online too and like you mentioned right now divorces are high. There may be more... There's more abuse. There's alcohol abuse and all that kind of stuff. There will be enough work. Just trust that there will be enough work if you say, "No" to a toxic client.

Pat: That is a great point and it is so tempting when you're needy or hungry from a business perspective to say, "Yes" to clients that send up little red flags when they enter the legal nurse consultant's world. Either it's the attitude, it's the behavior, there's just something that sends up warning flags and sometimes it's extremely subtle. That is the challenge.

I'm sure when you were taking care of patients, there would be women that you would interact with that would just set off some type of a flag. Sometimes you just functioned on instinct, but you knew there was a problem.

Irena: Yes.

Pat: And we all must pay attention to those signals because of the way that we are wired. "We can help everybody. We should help everybody." That's the way that our brains talk to us, and yet we can walk into those traps that I was referring to earlier.

Irena: Yeah, that's what I called the helper gene. And you know the crazy thing is because your brain is wired that way, it's very hard to make a conscious decision that feels good because subliminally the subconscious will say, "No, no, no, that's not a good thing. You need to help this guy. You need to help this woman. You need to help. You are the helper, you know. How can you say no to somebody?"

That's your subconscious mind kind of sabotaging you. If you know it's not good, it's like the angel and devil on your shoulder. "You should do it." "No, I shouldn't. I know I shouldn't." "Intellectually, I know I shouldn't, but I must. I kind of must." That's your subconscious talking and that's the pattern. That's the brain pattern we talked about earlier that has been wired into you throughout your life

and like I said, maybe even in the womb. And that is something you can only address if you are going into work with a subconscious mind. And that's what I've been doing with that Clear Beliefs coaching we were talking about earlier, Pat.

Pat: Our time has gone by very fast. I feel like I can talk to you for hours, but I won't.

Irena: Okay.

Pat: Tell our listeners how they can find out more about you and what you might be able to offer them?

Irena: Well, like we mentioned earlier and I hope I can quickly talk about this, Pat, is that I'm saying I do have a course that is a do-it-yourself course about mindset and how you can address these patterns. These negative or limiting belief patterns that could sabotage you. And I said that I would offering your tribe. Especially, you know I feel for the nurses. I've worked with nurses. I always love nurses and I know how stressful that job is and especially now when you don't know if you're walking into a death trap. It's crazy.

I said I would offer that for a fraction of the price. And this is a course that I'm offering to you at \$37. It's an eight-week course about recognizing what patterns hold you back and discrediting these beliefs and then recreating empowering ones instead. And I gave you the link to it in the chat box. It's not that easy to spell it out.

Pat: Well, what we'll do is I'll record that link and provide that to our listeners and add that on to this audio file. And I'll also type it into the bottom of this video. This will be broadcast on our YouTube channel, so I'll make sure that the link appears below the screen like right down here you'll see the link.

Dr. Kay's course is called *Clear Your Beliefs – DIY Special*. Find ways to get rid of limited and negative or other unwanted beliefs in a fun way! Then install empowering beliefs instead. Get more information about this course by using this link: LNC.tips/clear.

Irena: That's wonderful. And you know if you want to know more about me, you can just simply go into ultimatesuccessmindset.com and just follow the links. The thing is we'll probably initially ask you to sign

up for the *7 Mind Hacks for Top Business Performers* because I'm a performance coach. But this is a little gift and if you're becoming an entrepreneur too, it's kind of helpful for you too and then you can go further from there.

Pat: Perfect. All right, and would you give the name of your website again?

Irena: Of course. Do you want me to put that into the chat as well?

Pat: Sure.

Irena: It's ultimatesuccessmindset.com.

Pat: Okay, all easy words to spell. I applaud you for that. That was a great choice.

Irena: It's a little bit long.

Pat: Ultimatesuccessmindset.com, perfect.

Irena: Yep.

Pat: Perfect. All right. Well, thank you Irena for being a part of the show. I feel your passion, your interest, your energy. And I'm so pleased that you're sharing your talents from your physician mindset, your physician background to getting involved in neuroscience and brain science. What I have taken away from this program is the importance of being aware of those obstacles that we have in our brain. That we as legal nurse consultants are wired as nurses first and foremost, which makes us vulnerable for saying, "Yes" to situations that we should say, "No" to.

We should be kind to ourselves. We should recognize that when we are undergoing an enormous amount of stress, your anxiety or feeling overwhelmed, that we need to take care of ourselves first and foremost. If we don't take care of ourselves, no one else will. And we will get through this as a country, as a culture, as a world. There is hope. There's hope at the end of the tunnel and we can't get discouraged and give into the stresses.

Irena: Very well said. Exactly, it's together. If we support each other, we can rise together. It's like a rising tide lifts all boats. Support each other

and help each other out. And I know that you're doing a huge job in this, Pat, so I thank you for that as well and thank you for having me.

Pat: Thank you and thank you for being on the show. It was terrific.

Irena: Thank you so much, I appreciate it.

Pat: And thank you to you our listener or our viewer who's watching this on our Legal Nurse Business YouTube channel. We're so pleased that you have spent some time with us these past 30 minutes or so, hearing this important information. Please be sure to take it to heart and be kind and gentle to yourself. And recognize that you're doing the best that you can, and life will get better.

Thank you so much.

Irena: So, it shall be, yes.

Get access to Dr. Kay's course, *Clear Your Beliefs*, by using this link:
LNC.tips/clear.

I've got a phenomenal resource for you just waiting on LegalNurseBusiness.com. My online training and books are designed to help you discover ways to strengthen your skills and businesses. Check them out at legalnursebusiness.com.

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