



JUST ENOUGH: FINDING YOUR SWEET SPOT

GUEST: MARY MARGARET CALLAHAN

Colleen Pelar: [00:00:00] Welcome back to UNLEASHED (at work & home). My guest today is Mary Margaret Callahan who I have known for a few years. Now, she is the director... the national director of Pet Partners, which is a therapy animal organization. So, welcome Mary Margaret.

Mary Margaret Callahan: Thanks Colleen for having me.

Colleen Pelar: I'm so excited you could join me today. I've been sort of stalking you for this interview because it was a topic I really wanted to talk to you about. But before we dive into the topic, I would like you to tell people a little bit about Pet Partners. What is Pet Partners and why should they know?

Mary Margaret Callahan: Well, everyone should know Pet Partners because I suspect if you're listening to UNLEASHED (at work & home), you are someone who believes deeply in the power of the human-animal bond and that's sort of at the heart of what Pet Partners does. Our primary activity is our therapy animal program where we register nine different species of animals and their handlers to go and make volunteer visits [00:01:00] in facilities all across the country, and actually even all across the world; we were moving internationally as well. So, we have volunteers who go to hospitals and nursing homes; make hospice visits; do reading with children in libraries. We even have teams who are visiting at airports. So, any place where an animal can improve a human's health or wellbeing, that's where we like to find Pet Partners.

Colleen Pelar: Yes, indeed. And I love that it's nine species because we always think of dogs...

Mary Margaret Callahan: We do. And the vast majority of our teams are dogs, but you know, not everyone is a dog person and I always say that, you know different people find different animals therapeutic. So, to those therapy cats out there, I salute you. I've owned cats that for many years in my life and I have never had a cat who would love to do this, but they are out there. Believe it or not.

Colleen Pelar: Um-hmm. My cat would not love to do it, but he is very social, and he does love to be with his people. So that's pretty awesome. So, [00:02:00] on a cat aspect of that. So, the topic I wanted to talk to you about was the concept of "just enough." I feel like we're

always striving for more, more, more, and that our society really promotes that idea of whatever you have is good, but could be better. And you live on a little farm called “Just Enough Acres” and I love that name. And so, tell me a little bit about how you happened to name your land.

Mary Margaret Callahan: So, my husband and I decided that we have a daughter now who... she's just about six; she's turning six next month. What we started looking for thinking about moving out to a space where we had more space and could have more animals and things like that. It was about four years ago is when we started sort of our search in earnest. And I have, for those of you who know me, I have a little bit of a tendency to have sort of a go big or go home approach to aspects of my [00:03:00] life, where you know, like I just I feel like if I'm gonna do something, I really going to commit, I'm gonna do it big and it's not like, you know, it goes from like well – you could make Christmas cookies, or you could rent a chocolate tempering machine and take confectionery classes and make handmade truffles for all your friends. Sometimes I have trouble with my limits. And so, as we're thinking about looking for property and wanting a small farm, in my mind I was like “This property looks good...” And my husband Seth, who's a little bit long-suffering and very patient with me, he'd be like, “It's 25 acres...” and I'd be like, “It sounds perfect...” And he's like, “Maybe we scale that back a little bit...” You know, we didn't want to commit to property that became burdensome for us. We wanted it to be sort of be life-giving, and fun and exciting, and a great place to be without thinking that every time we came home, it was like, “Oh, it's just so much to [00:04:00] handle.”

So, we ended up finding a wonderful little farm and home on 3 acres. And in my mind, three acres wasn't enough. Like I had been like 5 acres, maybe 10. I just I felt like I needed space but as you look for farms, you know, you find either a great house but not quite the right property, or you find a great property, but not quite the right house. And we found this place and so much of it was really what we had been looking for. And so, Seth kind of got me thinking about this like, “No, this is it. It's just right for us. It's just enough... it's enough of what we need.” And then sort of the concept of naming our farm and we landed on “Just Enough Acres” because it is... 3 acres is enough for us. Now, would I be sad if suddenly it I woke up one day and we had 10 acres? No, I wouldn't, but 3 acres is just enough for us.

Colleen Pelar: How many living souls live on your acres? How many are you responsible for [00:05:00] feeding? Maybe that...

Mary Margaret Callahan: I have the animals I have, Colleen. Can we leave it at that? Now, we have right now, 3 dogs, and 2 cats, 8 miniature goats, 10 chickens, 2 ducks and a miniature donkey. So, it gets in the 20s somewhere. I try not to count too closely.

Colleen Pelar: No. It's better to count individual animals, I mean like by species and that sounds better.

Mary Margaret Callahan: Right. It does. And then of course, my daughter who is in kindergarten and shares much of the animal responsibility and she's a she's a deep lover of

animals. So, having her be able to be on a farm during her formative years I think has been... is a wonderful thing for her and for us.

Colleen Pelar: So, I love that. I love both that you have trouble with limits and that you found just enough. [00:06:00] So, from the idea of trying to find that spot for ourselves, what would you say are some of the things people need to think about when they're trying to decide, am I pursuing more because I need more, or am I pursuing more because of some other reason?

Mary Margaret Callahan: Yeah, I think my husband was right in that it was... it's at least for me, really important to find the balance of not just what I can do, but what I'm happy doing. Because sometimes I find myself I'll push myself because I can do more because I consider myself a capable person. But at some point, it tips over to that I'm not enjoying what I can do, and you know, I also... the juxtaposition of me having this sort of "go big or go home" mentality in parts of my life, and then also being sort of a Type A perfectionist person like... those two things are problematic [00:07:00] sometimes, because I... if it doesn't work out the way I have envisioned it to work out, I can be really self-critical, which is not life-giving at all. Right? I mean it's draining, it's exhausting, it's disappointing. And so, to try and find that just enough space for me as a place where I'm doing what I enjoy, and there's a challenge to it, and I have the opportunity to be successful. But, if something doesn't go quite right, it also doesn't feel like just a disaster, right? I'm not going to beat myself up about it. There's a part of me that was thinking like, gosh if you need lessons in humility, move to a farm because it is a constant sort of dance between doing things, and like, you know at one moment, I'm like, I am a pumpkin savant. I grew pumpkins this year, and I have beautiful, huge, amazing pumpkins for fall all over the [00:08:00] place. But then like if I don't I don't try to think too hard about the fact that like none of my onions grew and all – like there was just total disaster. Right? And so, for everything that does go well on the farm I have equal amount of stuff that just totally flops and I'm at that place where that's balanced enough. I'm getting enough wins that I don't have to beat myself up about the losses.

Colleen Pelar: I think the point about becoming self-critical when things don't go right is something that many of us can relate to. I think it's real common and I'm not sure if it's just common across the population in general or if people drawn to animals also tend toward that, because I absolutely see it, and in all the different animal care professions where people are really driven to meeting a standard that they set in their head. And that standard is golden and shiny, and what they produce is really great, but perhaps not as shiny [00:09:00] as they hoped and then they beat themselves up, that I should have done better, or should have worked harder at all of the pieces, and that's really hard. And do you think that comes from a spot of comparing ourselves to others, or just really comparing ourselves to these standards that are unrealistic?

Mary Margaret Callahan: I think part... I think some of it is unrealistic standards. I think in today's world, you don't have to spend much time on social media, or any of the other ways we sort of stay connected to people and society. And everyone's life looks shiny and

golden compared to yours. Now, you know yours and you know, the fact that there is a load of laundry in the washer that you should have dried three days ago and you're gonna have to rewash it because it smells so bad, and you don't see that about other people's, you know, golden shiny lives from a distance that you think, "God, they're doing everything great and it looks amazing, and they're making a difference in the world..." And you have no idea that they ate cereal for dinner last night. [00:10:00] And so, I think part of it is that we see the best part of other people's lives. We don't see all of it. And if we did maybe we'd have more realistic expectations of ourselves because people look at our lives and they go, "Gosh! That's amazing, what they do..." and we don't think bad about ourselves because we know about the stinky laundry. I think that's a big piece of it. And I think also, you know to your point about, do people in sort of animal care professions do this? I think there's something so like... being around animals does make me optimistic. Right? Like I want the very best for the animals that I work with, for the programs that I helped create that have to do with animals. And so, I hold myself to a very high standard because I love animals, really deeply, right? And, I want to do the best that I can by them, just like people feel the same way about their children, right?

And so, when I [00:11:00] think about you know what I did on the weekend and I go, "Gosh, I should have should have done more work with my donkey..." We're working on having his feet picked up. He was a rescue. He's got some... he's got some baggage and I was like, I did work with him for a while, but not as much as I could have. And if I had worked with him more than you know, I think in my mind that translates him to being... he's happier. He's more well-adjusted, you know and really, he's not unhappy with me. I'm unhappy with the fact that I have unrealistic expectations about how I can spend my time.

Colleen Pelar: And I always have unrealistic expectations of how long things take. So, when I'm like, oh I have never actually had the experience of thinking I should go work with my donkey because I've not had a donkey, but there are definitely all sorts of things, including working with my own dog, where I think I don't have time for that. And then the day goes by, and the next day goes by, and the next day goes by, like where did my time go, and trying to figure out what that balance [00:12:00] is. And where just enough is. Just enough time on this and that and the other thing. It's an interesting thing. And the point about seeing other people's lives, because I am a Facebook friend of yours, and I always think your farm pictures are so fun because they're so very different from my life, which is in a perfectly nice suburban community, but none of my neighbors have chickens, or ducks, or mini-goats. I mean; seriously! Mini-goats – everybody melts! So, it's a whole different world and then I look and I'm like she is killing it. So, I'm happy to know you have cereal for dinner some nights. I often have cereal for dinner.

Mary Margaret Callahan: The Breakfast of Champions and a dinner of Champions as well.

Colleen Pelar: It's easy, fills me up and I really don't care.

Mary Margaret Callahan: Right.

Colleen Pelar: It's just enough; just enough. So, from that perspective of... [00:13:00] of helping us become a little bit more realistic about what we want, and what we're going to do. What would you suggest we do?

Mary Margaret Callahan: I mean, it's hard. In my mind, you said that the first thing my mind went to was the fact that my daughter's in kindergarten. And so, we're doing all this sort of kindergarten-y stuff, right? And this idea like that... like what are the things you should ask yourself before you do something, or take an action, like in terms of like, what they're trying to train all these new little kindergartners who are in a class together. It's like, you know, is it...

is it helpful? Is it kind? Is it truthful? Like... if you can answer these questions about it, then yes, you should do that thing, and I feel like we should have like as adults – I need my own list like that, kind of a little bit. You know saying like... is this benefiting me, and is it benefiting others as well? I think sometimes we [00:14:00] do... I do things to a detriment to myself because I'm wanting to give to someone else or something else. Right? I think many of us get caught up in that and doing things for our colleagues. doing things for our spouse, for our children because we want to be giving but then we're not being thoughtful about taking care of ourselves at the same time. And for me, that's a that's a big place. I have to keep redrawing that line for myself and reminding myself - no, it is okay. Like... yes, you know the handmade Halloween costume might be a really wonderful thing, but not if it means I'm only going to sleep two and a half hours. Trying to find that balance constantly and just remind myself that it's not selfish to take care of yourself, and to make decisions that take your needs into account along with everyone else's.

Colleen Pelar: Yeah. I don't know why that's such a hard lesson to learn but it's you know taken me 50 years to learn it and I'm still working on it. So, it's clearly a hard [00:15:00] lesson to learn, but it's this whole concept of... we are really raised with the idea that it's important to help others and we buy into it. We absolutely yes, you know, I'm here for you kind of deal. But then any thought of taking care of ourselves or you know, acknowledging, "Oh, no, I actually do need to get some sleep..." seem selfish, and maybe that you're not a good person if you were to say, "No, I absolutely have to get some sleep and I'm not going to get that done..." and that's not right and it's not true and the more we put a little self-care in, the better we are able to serve others and to do all of the things that we mean to do, but we can get stuck there over and over and over and over. Everyone I talk to talks about that where they just say, "I have to, you know, establish some boundaries," and that's so uncomfortable. And I've never heard anyone say, "I'm fabulous with boundaries." Although maybe one of our listeners will share that "I'm fabulous with boundaries" and we'll all go, "You're next up on UNLEASHED (at work & home)."

Mary Margaret Callahan: [00:16:00] Reveal your secrets to us.

Colleen Pelar: ...because it's I think it's a really tough thing. But some of the challenges also come from our own internal stuff because... I'm going to tell a family story here and then I'm just going to cross my fingers and hope my sisters don't listen. So, we had a situation recently where a party was being held at one sister's house. And the other sister

was helping to organize it and sister number one was just going crazy. Just making everything perfect and sister number two was... there's a just enough level and it's good. Sister number three, that's me, was just going to show up and attend the party. So yeah, it's like, oh, there was all this backstory? Who knew? But one of the conversations that we had, sister number two, and I, was that sister number one didn't have to go that far. She didn't have to work that hard. That everyone was going [00:17:00] to have a fabulous time. Even if she had just like... slapped paper towel on the table and said here we are, there's your napkin, and your plate. Paper towel is multifunctional. And it was an interesting thing because I think it was a difficult concept to realize that the party didn't have to be perfect. The people who are coming absolutely love these sisters of mine, and I absolutely love these sisters of mine and nobody was holding her to the criteria that she was holding herself to. And it was really a tough spot because she was stressing herself out, and didn't sleep and all of those things. And we kind of do it to ourselves a little bit and knowing that we do it doesn't stop us from doing it.

Mary Margaret Callahan: And to me like I certainly resonate with that story. I mean, I think it's something we've all experienced on some level and to me like when I find myself in that spot, what I try and figure out is like, so... I [00:18:00] have established these high standards. I want it to happen this way whatever this way is but why like, how did I arrive at this is the standard, just like how did I arrive at 10 acres was the right amount of acreage? I don't know. I've never lived on a farm before like I didn't really know. But in my mind, I was just pretty sure that that was the right number and so how do we arrive at those things and what's driving us to that? Is it how we think people are going to perceive us? Is it actually something that's going to like maybe I don't know... maybe someone does have more fun at a certain type of event or an event. Like I certainly know, when I know things are organized, I'm able to sort of relax and enjoy myself more because I know that no one's going to have to remember to put toilet paper in the bathroom because I did that last night.

So, there's pieces of that too, but I don't even know why I'm driven to certain levels. I mean I have trouble [00:19:00] figuring it out for myself sometimes. I suspect we all do.

Colleen Pelar: Yeah, I think we all do. It's fascinating though that it's such a common challenge for us that we all sort of struggle with it and have that issue. Are you familiar with the psychology term satisficers and maximizers?

Mary Margaret Callahan: Yes, I believe I am. And I don't... I don't know where I fit in there. I know that I want to know...

Colleen Pelar: Well, I think I think the reality is... well first off, for anyone who isn't familiar with these terms, satisficer, which is such a funny little word is the... it's good enough kind of person. And a maximizer is the person who will keep hunting and exploring options to find the very best. And the reality is we all have areas in our life where we're satisficers and we all have areas where we're maximizers. So, like we both acknowledge that we're satisficers in terms of dinner. [00:20:00] We can totally do cereal for dinner. Satisficer. We're fed. Yay! But there are probably other areas in our lives and they'll be

different for each of us where driven to find like the very best option and explore all the pieces. But it's an interesting concept to think about because some people spend so much time trying to find the very best, or to be the very best, or define what that would be, that they never actually find a level of contentment or satisfaction with it. And that's when it becomes detrimental. Like if you want to evaluate all the criteria and buy the very best Honda, fabulous. Go for it, but then you have to be able to set that aside and move forward. And not keep evaluating the decision and say, "Well was that the right one? Should I try not have even gotten a Honda after all?" Or you know, and it's an interesting thing because on the one hand [00:21:00], satisficers come across as if they don't care but what all the research says is satisficers get really good options. They just might not get the very best, but they're not getting bad, they're not, you know, it doesn't meet criteria. They're just not getting the ideal perfect one. And so, I think that concept is an interesting one to think about from the perspective of what's enough. You know, how do we know?

Mary Margaret Callahan: It reminds me of a phrase that we use sometimes here in the office; that you know... that idea of don't let perfect be the enemy of good, right? That you can still do good things and make good choices, even if there are limitations that I don't allow you to make do it the way you think would be perfect. Yeah, and honestly in most of our lives right we have limitations around how much money, or resources, or time we can spend on any one thing, but it doesn't mean by default that it's then not good.

Colleen Pelar: Yeah, and I think that's [00:22:00] so true. You know perfect being the enemy of good and then we get stuck again, you know, I think the advice that we give to other people and the advice that we give to ourselves is so often very different and that having the ideas where you're saying like really evaluating how did I come to the standard? Why am I holding myself to this standard? Is this good enough is, you know, am I shooting for a perfect when good is out there, are all very valuable things for us to be doing, which again like you said lessons in humility where you get to wake up and learn it again. I don't necessarily just need to do that on a farm. So, from the perspective of really trying to stop and evaluate those standards of you know, where did I define the standard? Where did I come up with this idea of what it needs to be? And not letting perfect be the [00:23:00] enemy of good. How would you suggest we incorporate that? Like, how do you notice when you're getting stuck in that cycle?

Mary Margaret Callahan: For me, I can do... when I start to get to a level of self-reflection, which I feel like is too self-critical, that's when I know I'm stuck. And often times I have to remind myself like, people aren't judging me the way I judge myself. Like I think the vast majority of people who have to interact with me for work or pleasure or family or what have you think I pretty much have a pulled together life, right? I'm not a total train wreck, and...

Colleen Pelar: I would agree with that.

Mary Margaret Callahan: Well, thank you. Thank you, and I just I have to remind myself that although I think a lot of my pushing myself to do more and more is because I want

people to perceive me as effective, or successful, or insert other positive adjectives here. The vast majority [00:24:00] of time they do already. Right? But somehow, that's where I feel like I need more, like they need to think I'm more successful or a better cook, or you know, really good at training goats. I don't know. It's probably ridiculous and I have to remind myself that there's a level of ridiculousness in that. But again, you know, it's somehow, I think maybe it's what it is, it ties into sort of... sort of my self-identity, right? I think we all have things that we know, or we believe inherently, we're good at, that that define us, you know, we're moral people; we're truthful people; we're smart people. We do things that... we care about animals; we care about our family; we take care of people; we're thoughtful and so you know, what are the activities that define... sort of I have my self-perception and how I want other people to see me, but then again, it's well, yes, but that's just enough... like me making [00:25:00] sure my family eats a dinner every night – it doesn't have to be a cheese soufflé, right? There is a... there is a level of just enough there and I'm still very successful in that. But I think maybe the enemy of that is like, do we have time for that self-reflection? Right? Like, can I slow down enough in the moment to be like, dial it back Mary Margaret. What is going on here and maybe that's what I could... I could do better, right? Here I am being self-critical about me not being able to be less self-critical but there you have it. It's a cycle.

Colleen Pelar: It is a cycle. But, I think that having some triggers that tell you when you're stuck is really helpful and I think a lot of people don't... don't know when they're stuck until they're very, very, very stuck. So, the earlier we learn to recognize for ourselves, “Oh, that's one of my signs,” the better off it is [00:26:00]. Mine are I'm craving chocolate, and I have no patience to listen. So, it's like people are talking. I'm like, “Yeah, yeah, yeah! Get to the point!” I'm like, “Oh, okay. There's the moment. Okay; time to take a little break, have a little reflection, start over,” because it's never about them. It's never about what they're doing or any of the... it's about that I have spread myself too thin and it usually is self-inflicted. It's usually that I've said yes to too many things, and then I just need to live on chocolate and have people text message me, I guess. Something like that. I'm so charming. It's nice. It's nice to reveal all the secrets in podcast form, like “she's a mess” and it's true, but that's okay because we're learning to say good enough. Just enough time for the things that are important... got to make the time for that. So, I'm not [00:27:00] sure if I have another just enough question. Is there just enough question that you're thinking I should have asked you?

Mary Margaret Callahan: Hmm. No, I think you've done just enough, honestly.

Colleen Pelar: Have I done just enough? Defining our just enough level of satisfaction. Okay. Well then, I'm going to ask you one of my favorite questions. And I know you have your puppy Zeke with you there today in the office. And the question I like to ask is if Zeke could speak English and I asked him to tell me about Mary Margaret, what would Zeke say?

Mary Margaret Callahan: So, Zeke is not quite four months old yet. So, he's, everything is very new to Zeke. He's been with our family a little over two weeks now. I think that Zeke would tell you that I'm good at belly rubs and that I try to be patient when [00:28:00]

communicating new things and new expectations. It took us a long time to figure out how to go downstairs, but we worked on it, and we got there which is good because we have to go up and down stairs to get into the office. But I think that... I'd like to think all my animals actually at our farm would say that I had... that I try and sort of meet them where they are and recognize that everything is... everything's a growth curve. That's certainly true for puppies though.

Colleen Pelar: Yes. Well, that's awesome. And I think that pretty much does describe my interactions with you, where you have definitely met people where they are, and bring people along the growth curve, and you're always so positive about it, which is really nice.

Mary Margaret Callahan: Well, thanks.

Colleen Pelar: Well, thanks for coming on UNLEASHED (at work & home) today to talk about just enough, and how if we could all start figuring out what just enough is, we might be just a little bit happier. And that would be awesome. [00:29:00]

Mary Margaret Callahan: Indeed. It was a pleasure. Thank you, Colleen.

Colleen Pelar: If people want to learn a little bit more about Pet Partners, where should they go?

Mary Margaret Callahan: Visit us at PetPartners.org and this is for more than people that just have animals. If you don't have an animal currently, but you're a big believer in the human animal bond, we do have things that we do for grassroots advocacy and things like that to support good legislation that is... that supports the human animal Bond. So, visit us at PetPartners.org to learn more.

Colleen Pelar: Awesome. I will make sure to put that in the show notes as well. And so, thank you so much for listening. We enjoyed having you today on UNLEASHED (at work & home), Mary Margaret, and if anyone is interested in learning more about any of the programs that we have at UNLEASHED (at work & home) in terms of coaching or group projects, that's all available on the website ColleenPelar.com. See you next time.

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