How to protect your spark in busy times with Sally Clarke

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

burnout, people, organisation, starting, leaders, pandemic, individual, life, stress, autonomy, create, self awareness, work, workplace, important, feel, increasing, social interactions, sense, shift

SPEAKERS

Murielle Machiels

I think what we're seeing here is that a lot of people are experiencing the three dimensions of burnout and pushing through, I'll just get through to the holidays, or I'll just get through to this deadline, and then things will be okay. Because the reality of really acknowledging that we're struggling, that we're not coping that it's too much, is really challenging in our society were told to keep pushing. And particularly again, those of us who are high achievers have always had high grades who would pull all nighters through university to get things done. We have these replacement demands on yourself. And we also often are quite enmeshed in that identity, that person who can just always get things done and push through. So the idea of actually conceding, you know, really being honest with ourselves, this is just not feasible for me anymore, can be quite challenging. Which is why, for many people, it does take a health scare for them to acknowledge Oh, wait, oh, wow, this is really impacting me. And I really need to do something to stop this.

I'm Murielle, co mum and educator, I used to work really hard and sacrifice the important things to me until I lost my motivation. Fast forward Fast, many failed attempts and lessons learned. And I found a way to reach great results while working less. Today, I'm obsessed with helping other leaders build meaningful lives. So each week, I'll be sharing inspiration to change your life and organisation. This is a rebel leader with a heart. Hi, Sally, nice to meet you. So could you tell us who you are?

Sure. So my name is Sally Clark. I was born in the countryside in South Australia. I was an exchange student in the Netherlands when I was 16. I did law school in Adelaide, in Australia. And I became a finance lawyer at a large European firm in my late 20s. And I very soon started working really long hours as a finance lawyer. And I felt very driven. It was a very dynamic and also very competitive environment. And before long, I was working 70 to 80 hour weeks, my health started suffering I noticed Yeah, I noticed rashes, I was having headaches, I was losing weight. And my relationships around me was suffering as well. I was very focused on pleasing the client, on meeting the expectations of my superiors and my supervisors at the law firm. And in 2010, I went to visit my brother, so my brother was living in France at the time doing a postdoc and I flew to not. And when I saw my brother in the arrivals hall of not airport, I collapsed to the ground, and I started crying. And I

couldn't stop. And looking back, I was in a really deep burnout. And at the time, I wouldn't have even used the word because it just seemed like a symbol of failure to me that I had may have burned out. So I actually was in a very privileged position, I was able to quit my work as a lawyer and I took some time I became a yoga teacher and meditation teacher and I spent a lot of time in Morocco and Portugal leading retreats, helping people find deeper breath to finding some wellness alongside of their corporate lives. And then I came to a point myself, where I got a little bit curious about what had happened to me what I've been through and why. So I started delving into some research into burnout. And, and started actually writing a book, which ended up ended up being two books. And what became very clear to me was that burnout just simply wasn't my fault. As an individual. There are causes that are much broader, that are actually cultural and systemic. So now today, I'm a burnout researcher. And I'm also co director of an organisation called human leaders, which is based in Australia. And we work with leaders and organisations to create healthy cultures to really embed well being and how we work. So that burnout really is mitigated almost becomes a redundant term.

Wow, really nice story. I think many of the listeners could relate to that themselves, or know people that have come or getting to the point where you got. And so you did a lot of research, and how would you define burnouts, then?

It's a great question. Yeah. So we're actually pretty lucky, I think at this point, because in 2019, the World Health Organisation defined burnout and they based it on a lot of the research that has been conducted over decades. So the earliest burnout research stems from the early 1970s And that's barely being refined particularly by two sort of, of the major bear out researchers, the definition they came to is that burnout is a syndrome. It's caused by it's a workplace phenomenon. So they really limited it, its realm to our workplace to our occupational realm. And it's a syndrome caused by chronic workplace stress. And we all know what stress is. So chronic means low level or ongoing. So it's a really ongoing form of stress and low level mean, it means it can be quite difficult to identify, it can kind of become quite normalised and workplace again, that really positions it as something that happens in our workplaces. So not, you know, the other forms of chronic stress, which we may experience in other realms of our lives. And they also identified three dimensions of burnout. The first is exhaustion. So really being completely, completely fried, no amount of sleep really gets you to a point where you feel rested, you wake up feeling that sense of exhaustion and dread. And the second is cynicism, or withdrawal. So it's a sense of feeling cynical about your work. And this can also spill over into other aspects of life. And for me, it really feels like this withdrawal from people from your work, particularly view, you have had some enthusiasm about what you do before you sort of start to shift, it's just thinking, who cares? What's the point and really distancing yourself from your work and your and your colleagues. And the third dimension that we use, and these are the dimensions we also use to measure burnout. The third dimension is reduced professional efficacy, which basically means that you just can't produce the amount or quality of work that you had been able to. And this was my personal experience, I really noticed that I was having to work deeper into the night to get things done, that had taken a shorter time before. And I noticed a lot in my work with clients as I coach people through burnout, and I work with a lot of leaders in this space. For those of us who are very attached to our intellectual identity, when that starts to slip, and we're not as we're not performing at the level that we once were, or perhaps we become more forgetful, we can't concentrate as hard, this really starts to almost tap into a sense of identity loss, even a little bit existential at a certain point. So it can be a really scary feeling. And I think that very naturally, then we can also sort of slip into a sense of denial, because we don't want to admit what is actually happening to us.

Yeah, and I think, I think there is a lot of that a lot of denial and even denial towards yourself, not allowing to feel what you feel like, you know, something is happening inside of you deep inside of you, but you choose to ignore it.

Exactly. I think there's a lot of self talk around, I'll just get through to the holidays, or I'll just get through to this deadline, and then things will be okay. Because the reality of really acknowledging that we're struggling, that we're not coping that it's too much, is really challenging in our society, we're told to keep pushing. And particularly again, those of us who are high achievers have always had high grades who would pull all nighters through university to get things done. We have these replacing the demands on ourself. And we also often are quite enmeshed in that identity, that person who can just always get things done and push through. So the idea of actually conceding, you know, really being honest with ourselves, this is just not feasible for me anymore, can be quite challenging. Which is why, for many people, it does take a health scare for them to acknowledge Oh, wait, oh, wow, this is really impacting me. And I really need to do something to stop this.

Yeah. Yeah. And I'm not an expert in burnout at all, but I used to be a managing director. And what I noticed is that the people burning out were often the strong people, the people holding on and being so strong that they kept going, despite all the signs.

It's interesting that you say that's really good, because I think, for me, it's a real, and thinking of them with my yoga and meditation practices, it's real tension that we have, when we're in a state of chronic stress means that we're actually stuck in a state of high alert. So our physiology responds to stress by, you know, wanting to eradicate the cause of the stress. So we we have a hormonal response. That means that we're very, very alert, we can deal with a stressor, and then our bodies are meant to return to a state of rest and restoration so that our parasympathetic nervous system kicks in and we restore to a state of balance so that we're ready for when the next stressor and edges now in burnout when we're under chronic workplace stress, that stress and never disappears. So we're constantly on edge, ready to cope with things trying to eradicate this source of stress. And at a certain point that has a really debilitating impact on, you know, our physical bodies, our physiology, and mental animals are our emotional lives and I think almost spiritual lives as well. It can become quite soul deadening.

Yeah, yeah, it's true. And so I read in your reports that burnout kept increasing in the last year. Oh, in the last years, and that's so saddening, because the statistics were already bad before the pandemic, and they only kept increasing and even now that life is back to almost normal. It's still very high. In fact, you measured 38% of the people that responded to your survey, and there were quite a lot, I think, over 2000s in 30 countries. Well, 38% are classified as in burnout, according to the definition of the World Health Organisation. That's crazy.

It's an astonishing number, isn't it? I think what we're seeing here is that a lot of people are experiencing the three dimensions of burnout and pushing through. Not everyone has a collapse moment, like I do. A lot of people reach this state where they are actually showing the levels of exhaustion, cynicism and reduced efficacy. That producer, you know, the means that they are in

burnout, but because of obligations because of whatever it is the situations that they're in, they feel unable to stop and they simply keep going. This can ultimately, you know, mean that they end up in hospital for they'll acknowledge it or acknowledge it. But I think it's we are seeing sort of an increase in burnout. The interesting thing for me here is that no, we've known burnout has been around. Even when I had my burnout back in 2010. There was a lot of information about burnout, and it was a recognised, you know, issue in the Netherlands, which is where I went through my burnout. That wasn't new then. So what's interesting to me here is we're seeing this increase. We've known burnouts there, we know it's this massive issue, it cost our economy billions of euros every year. It not only costs our economies, it costs our businesses, it costs us as individuals as a society, you know, all of us who are friends, family, parents, spouses, it impacts all of our relationships, as well. So it has this enormous tap on humanity. And yet, it's still increasing. So it's a really interesting question, then. Where are we going? What are we doing wrong? Why aren't we seeing this decrease? Why are we not prioritising actual burnout prevention in a way that will enable those numbers to drop?

Yeah. And so according to you, why is it so presents in today's society?

I think there's, there's a few reasons I'll try to keep it keep to a few. Firstly, I think one thing is this, this persisting misunderstanding about burnout, that it is caused by individual the individual situation, which is why we do see a lot of very well intentioned wellness, resilience building type interventions, very much focused on the individual. Now, I would argue, we use the metaphor of a lake, if you have a beautiful lake, and it's full of fish, and suddenly the fish start getting really sick, you know, we don't go in and, and he'll eat individual fish, we look at the water quality, we look at what's happening in that culture in that environment. And we fix that, because we know that's what's causing the issue. Burnout similarly is caused by cultural and systemic issues from outside the individual. Now, I'm not saying that there's no individual factors whatsoever. Those of us who are a little bit timid, and, you know, tend towards perfectionism, who maybe have some people pleasing tendencies. And certainly, if we're not really aware of what our own values are, and sort of strong in our own sense of self identity, this can make us a little more susceptible to burnout. Burnout is caused by a work culture, and toxic work processes that really get us to a point where we're very we're feeling we either have too much to do, and not enough time to do it, or the work that we want to do doesn't constitute enough of what to do during the day. We're just missing meaning. And I think what we've seen during the last couple of years as well is that as for some people, the shift to remote and now hybrid work has been a good one. There have been some people for whom it's been you know, really is a helpful way of saying, Wow, I have some more autonomy now about where I work, how I work, whether I'm wearing yoga pants while they work. And that's been a real sort of liberating factor for people. For others, it's been a really an extra layer of stress, I think, in the sense of having to homeschool children at the same time as trying to get through zoom meetings. So it's there hasn't been that the pandemic itself hasn't had one specific impact on the workplace. It's had multiple different impacts. And I think that it's something that a lot of leaders are struggling to really understand how to manage as we shift natural hybrid environment. How do I meet people's needs? And how do I make sure that we're still connecting as a team and having these social interactions, but also meeting people's needs in terms of their own sense of autonomy and meaning in their work?

Yeah, yeah. And in my experience, because I specialised also in empowerment in hybrid teams. And I'm a big believer of autonomy, but a my first personal experience and my own company, and then what I saw in statistics, when you increase autonomy, of course, it's better at the end for happiness,

because that's what people want. But you also increase the number of stress and burnouts because people feel now responsible, they can do something about the opportunities and threats they meet. And they feel responsible, and they don't stop anymore. So instead of working less, like so many leaders were afraid they would if they would be given more autonomy, most people work even more, can't stop anymore. And in my organisation, it leads to more stress and more burnouts.

Yeah, and that's beautiful that you share that because I think that's, it's, it's, to me, it's not really a surprising consequence, for a couple of reasons. One is, we've lost those sort of incidental moments that we had when we worked in an office environment, to let off steam a little bit to just have a back and forth with a colleague and kind of process things that were coming up, release the stress and be able to move on with our day. Often these things then kind of stay stuck inside us. And particularly when we're again, we're talking about people who are very competent, very capable, high achievers, and used to being able to not have to ask for help or reach out for help. And that can almost be sometimes a little bit of a vicious cycle. I think where we get into this, I am 100, you know, responsible for this, and I have to make it work. And I don't want to seem weak. Yeah, that sometimes it's not even a conscious thought. But we really were pretty afraid sometimes of showing ourselves as being vulnerable.

Yeah, and that's the second aspect of this hybrid work, is that because we all have, the workload has increased, and it will keep increasing. So I often say to people, it's simply not possible to do everything that is that is coming across your to do list, it's not possible anymore. But still people try. And now they can work from home. And they think Yeah, but if I go to the office, I'll lose one or two hours commute time. And then I'll not be able to concentrate as much. And so people stay home more with the intention of then I'll be able to work more, but they isolate themselves without being aware of it. And we are social beings, like you say, we need this social interaction to release pressure tension, and to just feel good. And so they start their mental health starts decreasing. And if you add the autonomy without learning to set boundaries for yourself, it's really a recipe for disaster. And that's, I think, what we now see in the statistics,

absolutely agree. Yeah, I think that's, you know, I, I test as extrovert, but I actually consider myself a little bit of an introvert, I really like to work alone and do deep work. And I think so for me, it was a very natural shift to sort of working online and just being able to block making, you know, having that autonomy was really great. But I noticed in myself, also, with age that I've learned that I do need to be in the I need to be in the company in the physical company of human beings frequently. And I think there's also you know, it's, it's these, we forget sometimes I think we are so focused on our tasks at work that we forget that we work with people, we are humans working with humans, and relationships are a huge part of how and why we work. Yes. And when we don't focus on those because we're just cranking through zoom meetings and jumping from one to the next or late for that one. You know, it's it really we are We're not getting that same sense of, I'm seeing you as a person, we're to humans, and we're doing some work, but we're also to humans. And I think that's where it's at, you know, a challenge for leaders to find meaningful incentives to draw people to the office, I don't think we should be just mandating and expecting that to be enough. And certainly not when people are coming into the office and then just having to do video call, yes, obviously, pretty disastrous. But you know, really mindfully thinking about, what can I how can I create an environment, a space in the office that people intrinsically want to come to? And there that's gonna look probably a little different for every team. And so there's no one one sort of way of achieving that. But it's something that a

really important question I think leaders need to address and organisations need to address so that they can strike that right balance, where people still retain that sense, that newfound sense of autonomy and agency over their time and energy. But while also feeling that connection with the humans that they're working with,

yeah. And that's why I say, I'm a, I'm a big fan of autonomy and of hybrid work. Yeah. But you really need to redesign your team work, to be able to do it in a in an impactful way.

I love that you use the word redesign, really, because I think that's it's a really, it's a core component of really what we're looking at when we're talking about burnout prevention. And it's having the courage to really look, step back and look at the ways that we have working, you know, so much of how we work and what we do is taken for granted, then there's so many little ways that we lose time that we create inefficiencies, and these little pebbles in our shoes, can build up to a place where people can really build up and grow to a point where people feel like I have no time left in the day to actually do the work that I need to do. So I think being you know, maybe there's an opportunity as well, maybe you're starting a new year to look at, what are the ways that we're working? How can we rethink what are some different options to talk to your team and get that buy in from people. So you're really engaging people in that procreation of some solutions, and trying things out, whether that's blocking a couple of hours in the morning for no meetings. So we get to do deep work or having a meeting free afternoon, whatever it is, it's not obviously not just limited to meetings, but really being a little bit experimental with this kind of thing to strike upon ways that we're able to optimally use our time and energy when we're working.

Yeah, yeah, exactly. And then wow, what really surprised me in your research and statistics, is the number of burnouts with young people. So a couple of years ago, burnout, it was often the people in their 30s that had young children and mortgage and they had like pressure coming from everywhere. But now, you really look and the people most affected by burnout, are the young people entering the organisations.

Yeah, it is a drastic and really saddening statistic to see, we had a leap of close to 20% year on year in burnout in the 18 to 24 age demographic. And it's, you know, it's, it's, you're exactly right, it had historically been more sort of a middle management point where you're feeling, you know, and there's still experiencing, you know, astonishing rates of burnout too. But this jump was really, you know, I think quite concerning and something, you

know, it's 48% Yeah,

4748 it's almost half. Yeah. So I think, you know, I think we can, one of the things when I've been talking to younger people about it, some have said, you know, I graduated in 2020, as dependent and Pandemic started, I didn't get to celebrate my graduation, it was all online. And my shift into work was 100% remote. I didn't meet any of my colleagues until they 2021 or even 2022. So these are people, you know, I, I think for a lot of us who are a little older, we look back and we remember the

days of the you know, how important the social aspect of starting our careers was, how important it was to connect with fellow new graduates, fellow people who were also in this really energised phase of our lives. And until Imagine having all of that experience basically stripped back from you to the point where you're sitting behind a computer, in your sweatpants, maybe your parents house because it's the pandemic, you're all of these things really taken away from you. I think that's one factor. And I think also, we maybe could have done a little better job in retrospect, it felt like a learning moment on how we onboard those people and also how we as leaders connected with them because And it's I'm not saying that's an easy thing to do, because it is, it remains, you know, I think there's there's really beautiful ways of creating a very connected hybrid work environment. But it's something where I really think we, we really need to focus on the psychological needs that that all people have in their work, that particularly those young people, and I think particularly focusing on that social connection, so whether that's, you know, I've spoken to Chief happiness officers who've done things like creating, you know, a 20 minute online video meeting with new people to just talk about random, get to know your questions, these kinds of things, which can, which can feel a little forced, perhaps, but I think we can really not be afraid of trying some of these things out and creating that sense of connection. And, and carrying that, that through, not only sort of in a hybrid work environment, but also very much focusing on the social needs that people have in their work as we've already spoken to.

Yeah, but I mean, I understand the pandemic, but I think the numbers kept increasing, even when the pandemic stopped, and we could go back to the office. So yeah, I really think that's social interactions is a huge part of why these young people are not happy. But I don't know, I get the feeling there are other other causes as well. Like, they're looking for a sense of meaning that they can't always find in organisations.

Mm. Yeah, absolutely. I mean, we, when we speak generally about sort of the needs that and I'm reluctant sometimes to use the word generations, I think sometimes we over generalise about who people are. But I think there's a very healthy, you know, desire on the part of younger people to have some, some more needs met by their work, you know, we spend most of our lives in our workplaces, we spend most of it, a lot of people spend more of their time with their colleagues than they do with their family, and sometimes even their spouse. So work is a very important component of what humans do. And I don't have a problem with that necessarily, what I think we can do is, you know, meet these meet these demands that are being made by some of some younger people, to have more meaning to have some of those basic psychological needs met, to feel a sense of fulfilment and purpose. And I think, to some extent, in the hybrid work environment, there's still not space being created to have discussions even around that. So I think things like growth opportunities, keeping people learning, feeding that curiosity and really nourishing young people will have a lot of you'll see a lot of

them having fun.

Yeah, yes. Yeah, right. Like, that's, we take work so seriously. And to a large extent, there's a big visit that that's necessary, you know, that's absolutely necessary. But we're also humans, and your laughter is such an important component of it such a connected factor as well. So finding humour and

and being able to create that as part of our sort of social tapestry. And social connective tissue is really important, too.

Yeah. No, I Yeah. I agree. And so because I believe it's a whole system that needs to change the way we're working, I think we've come at the end of a model and need to, to really redesign that model. But we're not there yet. So what can we do as an individual to prevent burning out? When we have all these demands, and all these expectations, and we have the feeling we don't have a choice? What can we do as an individual?

It's an incredibly important question. And I think that, you know, my first book, protect your spark speaks to this exact point. It's kind of the book that I would have loved to give myself when I was starting out as a lawyer. And it's, there's three components to what I think, one, the first is having self compassion. And by that I mean, believing in an intrinsic level that you have value just as you are, you are not valuable dependent on your output or your productivity, as a human being you have intrinsic value, you matter. So really believing that at a fundamental level, the next component is self knowledge. So doing the investigative work to really understand what are your values, what matters to you? What are your priorities at this time in your life, and really taking the time to flesh that out and get really clear on how these how these impacts your life and how you want your life to be and to reflect your own values. The third component is self awareness. So this means we've got this you know, this beautiful belief, this knowledge that we matter intrinsically, we know who we are as an individual. Self awareness is composed of the practices that we do On a daily or regular basis, to connect ourselves with our emotions with our body, to be really reading into the physical and emotional signals that we're getting as to whether we are living in alignment with our values or not. Now, there's a, there's a bunch of different ways we can do this, a lot of it is, you know, just looking after ourselves, looking after this incredible body that we're all given, looking after our minds, and being really mindful about what we take in in terms of information and time in terms of what we eat, the people that we spend time with. So, through having these practices of self awareness, it really helps us I think, to be as honest as we possibly can, when those red flags do start to come up, when we are starting to see signals, for example, I'm being snappy at my partner, or I'm just gonna blow up having that run off to work because I can't really be bothered those kinds of little signals that might say, Hey, what's going on here? And so I think it's like the kind of like the trifecta of self compassion, self knowledge and self awareness that can hopefully empower us to avoid burning out.

Yeah, I really, I really love that. And also, the Protect your spark, because it's, it's about that. And if you don't, if you choose not to look at it, and not to be aware of those things, it will only get worse.

It will and it's yeah, it can be snuffed out completely, and it can take years to get it back. And I don't want to scare people with that. But I do want to be truthful about you know, my own experience and that of many people that I've talked to with whom I've worked, that it is, it is your inner fire. That is what made that is such an important part of who you are. And we really need to be vigilant, I think even a little bit fears about protecting our stop.

Yeah, yeah, because it's, I think it leaves a mark for a long time, when I look at people around me that had burnouts and that are working again, it's like, I don't know, it's like, a lot of them are not

completely healed yet. Because I think they found maybe their energy back Gods back into work, but then didn't manage to change some of their habits and way of being that's probably or that can, again lead to an another burnout.

You know, I I know burnout experts who've been through two or three burnouts as burnout experts. So if you kind of consider it in that context, it's, it's a really tricky one. And part of it is when we're under chronic stress, our vision literally narrows, we become very focused on what's in front of us. And if that is meeting all my deadlines, and hitting all my targets, everything else will fall away. So it's, it's a really tough one. And I Yeah, so it really does take that, that vigilance. And and you're right, no, I think I was very lucky to be in a position to be able to quit and sort of shifted my career. I know, not everyone has that, that luxury. But, you know, starting today, by starting to integrate some of those self awareness practices, and really starting to, you know, empowering ourselves to call boundaries between, you know, ourselves and work as well as creating that healthy distance is a really it's a really important thing to do.

Yeah. Yeah. And then what can you do as an organisation because, well, I have my ideas as well. But what I see many organisations do wrong, is that they focus on the symptoms. So they have like, anti stress trainings, and massages and mindfulness at work. But they don't change the way they work or their culture. And so it's, I say, it's wasted money. Yes, it's nice, and it can help a little bit. But you won't get long lasting change by doing only that.

Yeah, and I fully agree with you as a yoga and meditation teacher, you know, through yoga and meditation, but I will tell you categorically, if not, it will not prevent burnout, it is icing on the cake. But the cake has to be creating a healthy culture, and changing the work systems and processes so that people can work effectively, and make optimal use of their time and energy together. I so as leaders, I think, you know, there's a fit that can sound like a really overwhelming thing, right, especially for in a large organisation. How on earth do I change the culture of this whole place? So we we talk about starting small, you know, starting with small, experimental ways of starting to shift the way that we interact perhaps in a team. And I think the first the first thing that we can do as leaders is to start conversations around is to empower ourselves with information and language about burnout and burnout prevention, but then start to really focus on talking with our teams about what is your workday actually like? What are the pebbles in your shoe? What is stopping you from getting your to do list done? You know why? Why is it untouched at the end of the day, and looking at those things and getting you know, this information from from abroad team. So again, we're not too focused on the individual in terms of burnout, but just getting this information going, hey, well, what if we put in place these boundaries around work, or what have we now do this as an experiment for a month and see what happens, because it's the chronic stresses that are caused by whether it's cultural issues, or these systems that are just ineffective, and often just, we don't even notice them, because they're so entrenched, starting to zoom out and see those and play around with those can be a really healthy place to start. I think another thing that leaders can do is starting to is just having the courage to talk with some vulnerability about, you know, mental health generally. Now, I think that, you know, psychological safety, we should also shared in the study that an organisation where there's a high level of engagement and belonging, and high levels of psychological safety are very highly negatively correlated with burnout. So if you are able to take this step to create a space where people feel safe to take interpersonal risks, by building trust, respect, and that people feel valued, people feel connected, this creates a really wonderful space to start to be able to also have more of those

conversations about how can we change getting honest feedback. Sometimes, this is sometimes it's perfectly feasible as a leader within a team, sometimes it's helpful to have some third party intervention to kind of get a bit more objectivity around it. And I think I love what you said earlier that I think we know burnout is kind of the endpoint of have really, really broken down system and culture. So rather than focusing on that level, we really need to pull back to where does this start? Where did things start to go wrong? When does stress become chronic? And starting to look at those kinds of factors?

Yeah, and I think also, the leaders at the top should start with their values, their self compassion, and what is important for me, because you often create a toxic culture, because you're driven by your unconscious fears, or by your ego. And so I believe that a true transformation starts within the hearts of the leaders. And then you'll find a way and you'll find a way to change the systems and to change their habits. But way too often transformation is started with KPIs like, Okay, we have so many long term illness or so many burnouts. And how can we decrease that and we focus on that KPI and then we only, yeah, puts measures in place without the really being in the culture necessary to actually change. And that is, and when you change that way, you also become more agile, and more performance as an organisation it's consequence, but it needs to start within yourself.

I could not agree more read, I think this is something that I see when a lot when I work with, whether it's sort of startup founders, or even leaders, senior leaders in large corporations, there is exactly as you've outlined, there's this kind of desire to sort of twist the dials of numbers and try and get these things so that we don't have to worry about that anymore. And when I think the most important step that we can watch, another really important step we can take as leaders is to work on ourselves, to look at our own behaviours, to look at our own beliefs about work, to know what am I do I really believe that I have intrinsic worth, how am I enmeshed with my job? Yeah, all these kinds of questions and this kind of reflection. Will I think, you know, I think senior leaders, there's a real obligation on to model what it looks like to be healthy at work, what it means like to bring well being into the workplace. And I think it actually does an incredible amount of damage when we hear senior leaders saying we care about well being we care about your mental health, but then still modelling and expecting people to behave in in toxic ways. So I think when when senior leaders have that courage, vulnerability, and and focus on it, and not just to say the words but to do the deeds that will shift us towards workplaces where a well being is simply a part of how work is and Not just a yoga class on Tuesday mornings.

Yeah, and also how you show up as a leader. If you're constantly stressed and constantly running around, and working really hard, and you're not really present for the people that matter to you, you're not inspiring, that inspires nobody, nobody thinks, wow, I'd like to follow that person and be like him. It's not inspiring when you're completely stressed out and running all the time and have no time for nobody, including your own family or yourself.

And I think, you know, I think almost everyone listening right now can probably think of one or more leaders with whom that worked who have behaved in that way. And it's, there is still I think there's still this lingering belief that we have that you in order to be a successful leader, you have to be behaving. Yeah, yeah, be really busy, be a little bit toxically overloaded? And, and it's almost as if, if you're just if you're relaxed, and you're able to connect with people, are you even doing your job?

Right, there's this disconnect. So I think when, you know, and I think we also know, have had enough experience, these days of seeing leaders who are like that, who do have the sense of reluctance that you could talk to the CEO and have a have a coffee with them, and it would be super cool. I'm not saying we have to be super cool. But we have to realise that, as leaders, we need to embody and role model, vulnerability, you know, self awareness, really do that work as on our own self leadership as a starting point, that creates an environment where people trust and respect that create psychological safety, then we can make the shift that we need to to build engagement to ensure that we've got belonging, and to, you know, ultimately, to be able to prevent burnout.

Yeah, and then to have a great impact at all levels financially, but also on the human beings, and you'll probably also have a positive impact on the planet as well, when you do it that way.

Absolutely. You know, I think, I think sometimes that when I think of myself in burnout, and some of the clients that I've worked with her in burnout, were so exhausted, that were disempowered to participate in things like climate change, debate, to engage ourselves in the social justice is issues that matter to us, we become disconnected from ourselves and from society. That's what burnout does. And it's not just undermining our organisations and our teams and our productivity. It's undermining who we are as human beings, and as a collective. So I think if we can, you know, really work to embed well being that empowers us as individuals, but also as a species.

Yeah, exactly. I completely agree. And I think that's one of the big issues of today, people are not only disconnected from their organisation and their teams, but they started disconnecting from themselves to just continue delivering and delivering and yeah,

exactly, and I'm, you know, the work of Gabor Ma Tei. Around, you know, trauma and, and physical illness, kind of, you know, what you're saying sort of makes me think of that, in the sense that, you know, when we disconnect from self, we're really unplugging from life. And, and I think burnout, to some extent is, is that sort of unplugging, it's that loss of Spark. So it's, you know, I think those of us who still still do have Spark, it's incumbent on us to really take action, and to protect our individual and our collective spark to the extent that we possibly can.

Yeah, well, thank you. So where can people find you? And I'll also put the link to your research in the show notes of the podcast.

Fantastic. Yeah. So www.we are human leaders.com. Feel welcome to reach out. Find me on LinkedIn. More than happy to answer questions in chat. As you can probably tell, I love this topic. So you're welcome. Well, it

was really nice chatting with you. I, I learned a lot and I'll definitely use some of your work in the book that I'm writing about slow leadership.

I can't wait to read it. Oh, yeah. That's such an important topic. Yeah. Thank you. Cheers. Bye.

Yeah, you finished another episode of rebel leader with a heart. If you want more, go to rebel leader with a heart.com For show notes and past episodes. If you love the show, subscribe, leave a review and share it with your friends, the more the merrier. Thanks for tuning in and have a great week. You rebel leader with a hearts