

# Bold(her)

## Burnout and Meaning

**Note to reader:** The statements and opinions expressed by guests & interviewees are theirs alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of Bank of Montreal or its affiliates.

### **Lisa Bragg:**

Instead of the push-pull of work-life balance, what if we made a harmonious relationship with work a reality? I've heard more than a few times lately, what's the point? And highly talented people taking a pause from the work world.

((Music))

Jennifer Moss, a leading workplace culture expert, is analyzing it, and she joins us with deep insights and tools from her upcoming book.

I'm Lisa Bragg, and this is Bold(h)er, helping women make their next bold move, brought to you by BMO for Women.

Jennifer, you were known as the happiness expert, then the unhappiness expert. Take us back; what does that mean to you?

### **Jennifer Moss:**

Well, I think it's all on a continuum, right? I mean, unhappiness is going to thwart our happiness. So, we have to deal with that first. And so my earlier days was as a co-founder of a tech startup called Plasticity Labs. And we really focused on the neurosciences of happiness. You know, how do we have incremental shifts in our habits? Really focusing on developing hope theory, and empathy, and resilience optimism, gratitude, empathy, mindfulness—these seven traits are really focused on improving across cultures. And when everyone is participating, including leaders, and they have strategies baked in emotional intelligence, then you have a high-performing culture. It's incredible what happens. But what we found is that there's a lot of lip service and it became toxic positivity, right? So then you have people who are being told to practice gratitude and practice empathy and resilience, but you don't necessarily have leaders modeling it. And so what we found is that there's a reason why only roughly 20 percent of the global workforce is happy and engaged at work because there's this real delta. And so the focus became, okay, what are the upstream root causes of that stress that are making it so that employees are finding it hard to be happy at work?

Why do they see this as toxic positivity instead of thinking, okay, this could be good for me? My mindset is, you know, going to be improved with happiness and emotional intelligence building. And that's where I switched to the unhappiness expert, which was, Okay, let's talk about chronic stress and burnout and let's deal with what's really happening. Unbeknownst to me, the pandemic would hit, and I'd already been writing and researching this for years. I started writing the book for Harvard Business Press before the pandemic hit, and then it hit and, it kind of changed everything—the trajectory of the book, what I was writing about, and just the rapid change I kept having to switch. And so now with this new book, I think I'm the realist expert. I'm somewhere in the Goldilocks zone where it's about how do we control the controllables? What's the locus of control? What is important to us

and our decisions about our priorities in life? What really matters? You know, But leaders, you know, what can you do to recognize that the workforce has changed? And so how do we blend emotional intelligence, but also into strategy and thinking about you know, recognizing what are the reasons why so many employees are just not feeling engaged and happy in the workplace now.

**Lisa Bragg:**

I just really appreciate how you've changed, but evolved where we know back in the day, we were the factory era, and we were all cogs in the machine. And we'd always seen any PowerPoint slides. It was PowerPoint slides, those cogs, but you've, you know, you move from happiness, unhappiness into now where you are, it's an evolution of all of the things that we're doing in the world of work. As we get more knowledge and we see how things play out and how things build. Sometimes things don't build the way you expect them to build. Now, going back to burnout though, 'cause I think that's burnout's everywhere right now. And I think with the pandemic, we realized people were burned out, but you were burned out before that. Is that right?

**Jennifer Moss:**

So in the co-founding of a startup and a tech startup as a female co-founder and as many co-founders, it's almost like, why would you even bother looking for funding? It's so difficult because you have these things stacked up against you. And we, we had funding and we amazingly, you know, lasted, we became a stay-up and we had customers and all these things. But I think that.

What I did to, to make that happen for us to move through all of the painful kind of paycheck to paycheck. Sometimes it's all about feast or famine. You get paid and then you want to grow and then you're poor again inside the company. And you're just, there's so much juggling and in that role as an entrepreneur and any entrepreneur probably gets this, that your passion can move from harmonious to obsessive. You cannot let go of the idea you're married to it. And the idea of it failing feels like, you know, that's just not possible. So you start to put yourself into more predicaments. You get yourself into more funding debt. You, you know, you take on customers that might not align with you. You know, you focus on technology for like for us when we really just wanted to be a consulting company, but we ended up in technology. I mean, you get mentor whiplash, because you don't know what you're doing. All of that led to me really feeling like I was misaligned with my values, misaligned with my skills and my work because as an entrepreneur, you also wear a million hats. You don't do the thing that you love to do anymore. And there was such a terrible power dynamic between myself and investors. You're just, it's just a really difficult thing for women to be in those rooms. And it's not made easy by the system. That just made it so that I fell out of love with work and I felt this lack of professional efficacy. I was so exhausted that I ended up just leaving. I basically told my husband one day, I think I can't come back into work. And that was really hard on business, the family, the relationship, everything. But it was the only way I was going to survive because I was getting sick. I was depressed. I was dealing with anxiety. I had, I had imposter syndrome. I felt this lack of confidence. Everything felt brain foggy. I wasn't making really good decisions. I wasn't feeling happy around my family and my friends. So I left. And and let go of my dream and all of the things that I had built for six, seven years and and rested. And then I was able to come back, but it took a long time for me to fully get to where I am today, where I've got the right balance. And that's what a lot of, I think, people go through when they experience burnout.

**Lisa Bragg:**

Falling out of love with work because you're a natural, you make things up, you're ideating, you're strategizing, you're of service to people. But when we fall out of love with work, and is that really part of where you are today is that you're seeing more and more people fall out of love with work?

**Jennifer Moss:**

I think that there are some people that love their work. And I think that's, I think that's actually a privilege. Not everyone loves their job, and it's not necessarily for you to, I did because I think, and I think that's a wonderful thing and the more people that can fall in love with their work, the better that's, I'm on a mission to get everyone to, you know, love their work. But the reality is, is that.

What we really need to be able to do is attach our instrumental kind of our instrumental values, those ways that we live out the things that really matter to us, which are called terminal values. So this idea that those big overarching things that we really want to be in our lives, like have a happy life with my family, you know, be a good parent, healthy environment, you know, to change the impact that climate change is having on our world, you know, those big, hairy, audacious goals, we want to be able to intersect them with work in some way. And so that can mean I'm going to feel very driven by a paycheck because it pays for my kids to be able to, you know, You know, go to a good school or for me to live in a place where I might not be able to afford to, and that that's a driver that that gives me a sense of connecting to those big values and those ways that I feel like I can appreciate my work. The more that we can provide that for employees and the more that we can attach all of you know, the, the real goals to what we do every day, the more we find that there's meaning in the mundane and the things that make us exhausted. Where boreout comes in and where we feel the tedium. We spend over 60 percent of our days, even in the best jobs on administrative stuff and stuff we don't love. And so we need to be able to accept that mundane. There's meaning to it if we can see that there's a bigger purpose attached to our work. And when, what we've seen lately is that people have lost that sense of attachment of their values to their greater purpose. They're not seeing that what they do matters. They don't see value in what they do. They've been told that they don't matter or they've been made to feel like no one cares about them at work. And so that then makes you feel A lot of what people are saying is like, why are we here? What's the point? There's no point. So I might as well do something else. And it's interesting because you see the rise in the number of Uber drivers and so many Uber drivers that I spoke to when I was doing my interviews for the book, people had left jobs in a law firm. They were lawyers. People were, had left jobs, you know, in, as nurses, they had left jobs as teachers, and they were driving an Uber because they needed to figure out how to get that flexibility back and take a pause because this allowed them to go and then spend six months in Costa Rica on a, you know, mission-driven value-add to their life project. And so if we don't figure that out for people the workforce, you're just going to see a lot more Uber drivers doing what they want to do and a loss of talent from our workforce.

**Lisa Bragg:**

Because this isn't something where, you know, we have this whole self-care equals taking a bath or breathing exercise. This isn't the way that's not the way out, is it? It's way deeper than that, but this glib idea of just, well, just take a bath and just put some candles around and you'll be fine and be able to go back to the work and do the, do the do every day. But what is the reality? What are some steps that we can take if we can't take six months off to go to Costa Rica?

**Jennifer Moss:**

Yeah, I think these are extreme situations, but I think in general people, when they resigned, they just paused. It wasn't even, there was some reshuffling. There was a lot of reshuffling, but people just needed a break. And we haven't ever seen that before. And a lot of it was because that the the suggestions for dealing with burnout, no one really knew what to do. I mean, it wasn't just until 2019 that the World Health Organization defined burnout as institutional stress or workplace stress left unmanaged. Everyone just thought it was their fault that they didn't work hard enough or they weren't

ambitious enough. And so if you said you were burned out, I mean, then you were, you're on your path to exiting or you were under performer. And so we have to first recognize that burnout is a real problem that it creates anxiety and depression. It can cause PTSD. It impacts our sleep, our physical and mental health. So it's a serious thing. So first label it as that, and then start to track, you know, these three big signs of burnout how exhausted you are every week. And it's, it's not like, Oh, I'm just tired, like my Fitbit said, I have a bad sleep score last night. Like it's like pure exhaustion where you feel mental fatigue. You feel like you wake up and your feet are kind of that feeling like you get when you just don't want to go to work. You start to feel like that all the time. You get that Sunday scaries where are so stressed out about going in on Monday that you actually feel physically sick. You could have insomnia or you can need to sleep more. You are taking more stimulants. You start to notice that you're drinking coffee all day long where you used to not to, or you need to take, you know, substances in the evening. We saw in the pandemic, you know, beer sales through the roof. A lot of people were. feeling like they just languishing is a great term that Adam Grant used, but they were languishing. And so that's the kind of feeling of extreme exhaustion. And then it's also this feeling of cynicism. So you start to say, ah, You use words like I a lot, you know, I'm so alone in this. I don't have any help. I mean, I'm constantly in this situation where, you know, I'm doing all this work by myself. You get pretty isolated and then you use language of permanence which is always, never, I'm always going to be like this. It's never going to change. So you don't, your brain isn't predicting that there's a way out. And then the final sort of piece is this kind of this hopelessness and feeling like you've lost your professional efficacy, which is where I hit that wall. And I thought, I'm just not good at this job. We just lose confidence. You feel like there's why, why I'm even doing this. I, I'm, I suck at it. I'm terrible. It's all or nothing. Very perfectionist thinking. And so those three signs. According to the Maslach Burnout Inventory, if you want to look at the scale and measure it, if this is happening two to three times a week, not just in these compressed workloads, because sometimes people have like accountants, for example, or teachers in June, they're going to feel like that, you know, three days a week, it's kind of over time. If you notice this for six months, that two or three times a week, you're feeling these types of feelings and it's worsening. You are about to hit the wall. And that could mean 18 months to two years of recovery. You could have issues we've seen with people 20 percent will get PTSD if they hit the wall. We have long term likelihood of repeat burnout and it could impact our lifelong earning potential. So we don't want to get there. We want to prevent it before we, we get to that point.

**Lisa Bragg:**

So definitely want to think about some prevention steps because I think this is really important. I bet a lot of people are, as they're listening to this and nodding along saying, okay, that's me. I need to track that. I say that I do that. I think that. I feel that. I better track that or, the person next to them they know that they And is part of it, because You know, we had recession, then the pandemic, and now it's always something in our way. There's always something in you, just not even the news. Well, we have to be a pay attention. There's so many things going on. It's one crisis to another. I think you called it last time a permacrisis and polycrisis when we were talking earlier about this do a pre interview. Is that why we're feeling the way we're feeling? Is that part of it?

**Jennifer Moss:**

Well, a big thing that happened, and I sort of preface this in the book in the intro, there's these big behavioral sciences shifts, and one of them is we faced our mortality, and so our priorities change when you, you know, you have an existential health threat, it makes you ask, existential questions about your life. So that's what's happened. And so we're, we're spending more time thinking about what our plans are. There was this interesting stat that just came out recently where it showed that millennials, for example, are, and, and Gen Zs, 93 percent are saying they've felt burned out in the

last year, and of Gen Zs and 87 percent of millennials but it's not like, you know, X and boomers are feeling boomer, bore burnout and all that stuff too. But of that group of millennials that said they were feeling burned out, they 60 percent of them said that they are now asking, what do I want to do with the rest of my life? More than they ever have. And so that ends up creating this mindset, which should have ended when we had the existential threat over with the pandemic, but we are in a permacrisis and you know, poly crisis is when multiple crises converge to create a whole bunch of economic stability and stability across the world. And we're sort of seeing that for sure. But then permacrisis is kind of like, we're living in this state and until we fix some of these major issues, like climate change and others, we're going to have this constant feeling of like life is short. And you imagine, you know, at work that work entire workforce constantly going, okay, here I am, this is toxic.

My boss just told me I have to answer, you know, another, my emails at 11 and have a project done by the next morning at eight, I haven't seen my friends in three weeks like I'm barely getting time to go to pee or have lunch or do any of those basic human needs. And that one like final thing that used to kind of, we could endure people are just saying no. And when you look at prevention around that, I mean, a lot of it has to be that we are looking to leaders and organizations and the institutions that are causing the stress to be able to protect us from that, because it's a good business case. But we also have to recognize that over the last few years, we have developed this toxic productivity mindset, and we have a very difficult time now, understanding what's a real urgency or a false urgency. We're constantly responding at all time. We have a hard, we have a hard time even just, for example, like clearing our inbox. We have this focus on, on like zero unread. That's like this big goal and people take pictures of it and post it on social media if our inboxes are zero unread. But the amount Lisa: mine. Not mine at all. Nope. I'm not going to subscribe to that one. I will just let it add up. I think it's just good for us to say where our boundaries

I totally agree and I love that you said that because my advice is, you know, maybe spring clean once in a while like, you know, once a year take like a day to like, check yourself out of some of those lists that you've gotten on but, but it's just so much digital communication. We're being over communicated to. We're being asked to do more. We sent 40. 6 billion more emails in one year. We increased our meetings by 252 percent just on Teams meetings alone. Zoom has 3. 3 trillion meeting minutes a year. Went from 9 million daily active users to 300 million daily active users over two months. So like, you can't, we cannot process that. Our brains cannot process that. So we have to figure out ways to create boundaries around that, you know, and because people will constantly be asking us for more. Productivity since the fifties has increased 430%. And we're still looking at like, Oh, we're not productive enough. GDP was down or our productivity is low. And meanwhile, we've added AI and I don't think we've stopped working, which we're supposed to give us more time back. So we have to kind of have a, I don't say it's a rebellion, but it's also just a protection of what matters in life. And if you want to live a long life and sustainable life and have friends and family and a relationship with your children. You're never going to say on your deathbed that I wish I sent that last email out. And I think we have to get clear around that. This, this existential threat in some way, I think has been a good reminder of where work and life should be intersecting.

**Lisa Bragg:**

So do you have some tactics? Is it, you know, we so, so often we say, let's do some self-reflection and then we don't do it. But do you have something that we can say, You know, here's what I need to do because people who are listening are high performers that I'm going to most likely say a lot of perfectionists just because I'm putting myself out there and then we're also leaders. So I know that what we put out what we do, we're also modeling it for other people. I know I'm modeling things for

my daughter that maybe I wish I wasn't Any tactics, any something that we can start today before your book comes out, that we can start to, to change our ways.

### **Jennifer Moss:**

There's so many tactics. And the reason why I say there's countless tactics is that it isn't about doing this big thing, you know, taking a week and, you know, dealing with, I love the big headlines, you know, take a week to off to I'm giving a week off to all my employees so they can come back and not be burned out. I mean, a week is not going to solve systemic problems, right? But that was kind of a thing like, yeah, it's important to take your time and your vacations and leaders should model that and they shouldn't be, you know, demonstrating that they're living sort of this toxic productivity life. But that also is tone deaf for a lot of people that really see life right now as an integration, as more of a harmonious relationship with work. And I think that's actually, you know, what I see is the healthiest people understand that. Maybe I'm going to have a couple of days where it's intense. I, you know, writing a book, there were some days where I put in 14 hour days and I fell asleep on my keyboard. Is that sustainable every, you know, every day? No. But did it, you know, maybe remind me that on Thursday at two o'clock in the afternoon, I might stop and have lunch with a co-worker or friend or maybe go and get a pedicure. I mean, these are the ways that we need to think about life, that it's about goals versus hours. And the more we can take incremental time back, it's, it's about tiny shavings of minutes off. So it's, having conversations with our team, for example, about meeting fatigue. How about we make a commitment to shortening our meetings by 5 percent and then 10 percent making sure that if you invite someone to a meeting that they are actually going to be contributing, that you don't just create these mass meetings that are overlooping everyone so people feel, feel an expectation to join. Have conversations as leaders and as teams to say, how about when we're finished we have a strict agenda. We're going to try to keep it to 20 minutes, book for a half an hour. And as soon as we're done, we're out. We can make it so that we have asynchronous meetings. So we have someone come in from 12:30 to 12:15 when they're needed and then drop off. We can have, you know we can record our meetings and have people be able to look at them and fast forward. We can have a way to scribe it. There's lots of tools that we can use now where people are able to just read through the script of a meeting. And when someone doesn't invite you to a meeting, tell them, thank you. You know, I love you for, Not inviting me to that meeting. It's not that you weren't invited to Becky's grade eight birthday party. It's not good for you. And so that kind of mentality is really important. We also have to ask people when they say I need something right now.

What is right now for me? Mean for that person, if they're a planner, it can mean right now is 72 hours, a person that is last minute, it's that moment. So then we also want to tackle the last minute people. We want to be able to proactively work with them and it might seem tedious and you're kind of annoyed that you have to, you know, handhold certain people. But if that person is a stakeholder and they're constantly asking you for things in the last minute, you know, you can't say, No to your boss. So instead have a weekly set up a weekly 15 minute where you talk to your boss saying this is what's on the plan this week. I know there's some things coming down for you. I want to make sure I can help you if there's any way like you can tell me now if this thing is due. I also have these five priorities that feel like number one to me. Can you choose what you would like to see in order of priority? So your boss is deciding, you're allowing yourself to be able to say, well, and we talked about this and okay, if that's changed, tell me. It gives you a lot more control over your time in your life. And then we also have to realize that what is that important? I call it my deathbed regret schematic in my life. This is the boundaries. Whenever we're thinking, okay, like just one more, just this extra email, or I'll read just this much more type, this much more. I'll take this extra meeting or I'll put my hand up to something that sounds like fun, but you know, at work or an ERG or those things which are voluntary.

How much can you actually contribute? When is enough enough? And I think that's what we need to decide is when is enough enough. And we are going to constantly have FOMO. We are constantly going to want to put ourselves up there. But when we're looking at time poverty, where it's at right now, we have to realize that at the end of, you know, our days, when we're lying there with our family around us and all of our friends, and there's 10, 000 people that show up at our funeral because we are good human being, That is what really, you know, I mean, I guess it doesn't matter at our funeral so much. We don't won't care at that point, but I do think that that's a life well lived. And we're not having life well lived. Moments as much as we should be right now.

**Lisa Bragg:**

You mentioned values earlier. There are a lot of values exercises out there, but a lot of people, while we don't do them or they don't really take us to a place, did you really consider values at a deep level that you can explain to us in your book?

**Jennifer Moss:**

Yeah, my first chapter is about purpose. And I put it there because I think we are in a place where we're feeling kind of lost in our purpose in a lot of ways. And we need to get that back. And it was in a conversation with. Adam Grant, I'm sure most of your listeners know who he is, but he's an organizational psychologist, a researcher. And he, he spent some time trying to understand like job crafting is what it's called, where, you know, you take these and he and other researchers, there's researchers that are very specifically focused on job crafting, but it's this idea of looking at your job in this new way, and you're still performing the same. tactics every day. You know, if you had a person that was calling themselves and this is the research that they did where they were in a hospital and they were responsible for cleaning the wing where there were people that were in a coma. And so their jobs working with patients where they weren't even, you know, necessarily communicating with them all the time. And there was this group that called themselves patient ambassadors. And there was this other group that just, if you just they described their job. It was, you know, cleaning the linen and dusting and putting, you know, new fresh flowers in when we needed to do and things like that. Like they talked about it very much prescriptive. And then the patient ambassadors talked about it doing the same things, but in a different way, they'd say we would take the linens and we would make them all fresh. And I would find out from their family, what their favorite scents would be. So I'd make sure that I'd, you know, bring in some of my oils from home, or I would, you know, I would make sure that I changed the paintings around in the room. Cause we're allowed to swap out the paintings and, you know, just in case if they notice this, and I don't know if they notice this, maybe they feel it, then they're going to heal faster. They're going to recover and they'll come back, you know, and be able to communicate with their families. They just had a different way of interpreting their job. And that is really critical because in that research study, they found that the people that were patient ambassadors had this incredible level of job satisfaction. They were self reported, you know, higher in wellbeing. They were more engaged. I mean, they were less likely to quit compared to those people who just saw their job as cleaning the hospital rooms. Like it was just plain and simple. And so when we look at this, this idea of our terminal values, which is our big overarching goals. So maybe we want to be live a life of service. Maybe we want to save the environment. Maybe we want to be the best mom we could ever be, you know whatever our big terminal goals are. In our day to day experience of work, we want to attach some sort of meaning to those big terminal values, you know, so it would be that and I use this example of this one woman in the book who was working actually in a bank, and she was for large banking firm, and she, What she did was she was working as a marketing director, but she decided and pitched to be able to work on this one special campaign, so that she could be engaged in this campaign that was sending out communication to all of their Clients about how to reduce their carbon imprint and she at our personal life, you know, is that person that

chose a bike over a car. She's that person that thrifts, you know, she's that person that does everything right when it comes to recycling and upcycling and she cares a lot about that. That's part of her terminal goal. So she's in there and she's stapling stuff. They're in the last throes of a marketing campaign where it's and it's a lot of email and digital communication. It's pretty boring. I mean, you're testing it to see if emails are going to bounce. You're doing pretty mundane things and she doesn't see it at all like that. You know, Catherine is her name. And so she's figured out a way to attach this like meaning to sending this email out and doing these super mundane administrative attacks, and she puts meaning into the mundane. And when we have a high level of boreout right now, which is boredom and like burnout. We want to attach meaning to the mundane. We want to feel like what we're doing has some sort of impact. And so we want to be able to put ourselves in positions where maybe we still are doing boring things, but that we feel connected somehow, because that's important to our terminal values. And there's lots of ways that we can attach meaning. It does not have to be that we are working on a project specifically that's connected to climate change. It could be that I just feel very proud that I make a paycheck every week so my kids can go to a good school so that I am being the best parent that I can be by making these kinds of commitments to my work and that makes me feel intrinsically motivated every day. And so instead of worrying about company mission and organization skills. Making it so that we have to recite the five values or and we have to live to the mission. Think about more around personalizing what people care about in their lives and then make them, you know, give them those connections, show them the alignment to the day to day tasks. So then they feel. Like what I do really matters and I actually enjoy it more because I don't think about the boring stuff. I only think about how it connects to doing something really special.

((MUSIC))

**Lisa Bragg:**

We're not a cog in the machine in this knowledge economy, and that's where it's that personalization, that's a beautiful way of putting it is how can you make it personal for someone so that they can be seen and be heard? And recognition matters. Like we want to have meaning to all of this. Otherwise, again, we keep saying it. What's the point? What's the point of all this? Jen, We have so many generations in the workforce right now.. how does that play out with your latest thinking?

**Jennifer Moss:**

Well, I'm a big believer. I'm actually, you know, I just headed in this one part of the manuscript that I found really interesting that I talk about the generational divide. Right. And I talk about openness and how we have to have more openness in our world right now because we're seeing real, Sort of discriminatory behavior increasing, but interesting ways around generations and way we feel about people within their age groups and they're finding that it isn't specifically chronological age it's like the concept of the generation. And so we're seeing what's called young-ism now and it's this kind of not reverse ageism. It's ageism. But we're just seeing more people looking at this group right now with hostility. They feel like they're entitled. They're lazy. And meanwhile, when you really look at, you know, the, and a lot of the interviews I found was that there's like low control, high level of economic instability, high, like right now we see in Canada, I mean, it's 12 to 24 percent unemployment rate for people that are under 25. I mean, we're just, we're seeing a lot of these impacts. And then you look at women in their like Gen X. They're the lost and forgotten generation.

They say, just leave us alone, leave us out of it. But we're finding that that because of that, they're actually getting promoted 20 to 30 percent less than millennials, because it's this idea of, you know, we got to focus on building up millennials. We got to focus on building up Gen Zs, but the lost and



forgotten generation has truly been lost and forgotten. And then you have this ton of ageism, you know, in the older workers where we're seeing so many people, especially in Canada, it's one in five turn retirement at age every day, one in four in the UK and 10, 000 a day has been the case in the U S for, for 10 years. So, I mean, we're just going to see this exodus and they're choosing early retirement because they actually feel like they're useless. They don't know when they don't won't understand technology. You see a real reduction in training and development for this group. So, yes, life across generations and life and life you know, a personalization for these groups is critical because it's really changed. And then we can get into the individualism and the personalization more when we understand that each cohort is very similar in what they want. But very different in the way that they interact with the world. And so meeting people where they're at is so critical. It's hugely important. And, you know, when I have these stories of Gen Z's where they, this is a great example of tone deafness, where this one young intern, she's 21, she's going into work every day, if she takes the bus, she loses the two pounds as the UK story. But you can imagine this every, she loses the two pounds that she would be able to have. If she wants to eat and so she walks and it takes her an hour and 15 minutes and then suddenly on her paycheck because she gets a small kind of a pittance really and she has these on her paycheck that 30 was taken off because the senior leaders want the staff to all buy into their retirement and they forced this opt in. And so she said, I can't do it and this, she, she describes this humiliation and this embarrassment having to tell them I can't afford \$30. And their reaction was like, Oh, it's only 30 bucks. Like they were so unaware of how her life actually is sharing a room with another person while she lives with this and choosing between taking a bus or eating.

We're not really spending time in the lives of others and knowing what they really need and who they are. Instead, we're creating a lot of labels and a lot of assumptions and Across the board, all of us as individuals and human beings and as leaders and organizations, we need to get that there's a lot going on with people. And those labels are in many cases, false.

**Lisa Bragg:**

So much to unpack there, Jen, and that's what your book is going to do for us. That's for sure. You know, I know you're putting the finishing touches on the manuscript when we're talking right now, which is in April of 2024, but what was your latest thinking that maybe didn't slip into the manuscript that it's like, Oh, I wish that I had that in because new research has come out. And because there is a time where it's like, you have to cut it off. Is there something that's happened this week or last few weeks that you were like that could have gotten in the book?

**Jennifer Moss:**

I'm constantly trying to add more stuff in. And I would say that a lot of what I've been seeing too, and I think it's interesting is the concept of the wellbeing programs. I don't know If anyone has seen this, this well, well being institute out of Oxford it's actually Dr. Fleming, William Fleming, who has been working in this space for a long time. And he put out this report about how well being wellness strategies and programming isn't working that even when it comes to things like resiliency they're finding these resiliency programs or even mentorship and some of this other stuff. That it's not being done well. So that was the caveat that it's not being done well. And the reason for this is that wellbeing is workload. And I kind of mentioned that in burnout, the burnout epidemic, but here it was like, it was, it was like a major moment because this group of researchers who I've worked with, Yann Emmanuel Deneuve, he was part of a group that said, like, this is what we need, well being initiatives, wellness. We spend trillions and trillions of dollars in workplace wellness programming every year.

But what they found is that it had zero impact and actually a negative impact on those they, they look specifically at women in their 40, 45, that, that career, because Gen X actually makes up 50 percent

of the global managers workforce. So they make up a lot of the managers. And so when you looked at, Women in particular, adding in resiliency training, it made them less resilient because they didn't have time to invest that they're a woman, they more likely to deal with burnout more than their male counterparts by a significant amount. They're already tackling so many other things as these volunteer roles. No one's telling them when enough is enough. And then they're adding in this, these wellbeing programs that have become mandatory because it's supposed to help their wellbeing and it's actually making them sicker. And so what we need to recognize is that you can have all of these great ideas, but if you don't solve for the root causes of problems, Burnout, like workload, like lack of fairness, like proper pay. So until actually we have women being paid the same amount as men, we're always going to have burnout. Like that is just an institutional stress. And unless we solve that, there's always going to be burnout. So unless we're going to solve for that, you know, giving me that downstream resiliency, you know you know, programming for certain groups, it feels like the opposite of helping. And the only one thing that, that was found that actually helped was altruism. So if we are just nicer and kinder, and we give of service to each other, and we put other, you know, people in our community and our lives first, and if we volunteer together, that is the one thing that they found as a program that actually improves people's sense of well being because it lifts everyone. You get everyone committed to the same focus. That's the one thing that they found really works. And so the moral of the story is just, let's all be a bit nicer.

**Lisa Bragg:**

And I think that lends me to the idea of collaboration over competition. We so many of us are working in these, you know, production based environments where it's like production production. We have to constantly produce, but then that makes us often we pit ourselves against someone. Oh, she's you know, we're against the same things. And but we're actually collaborating and there's sometimes that somebody goes up really fast, they might get the promotion, but then they come down. And so you might go up. What are your thoughts on collaboration over competition? It sounds like we are so aligned on it, but I want to know what you think of it.

**Jennifer Moss:**

I love that you talk about this and something that you really promote and being able to prop each other up and support each other brag about each other, I think is the best thing that we can be doing for for women allyship. But across the board, you find that in high production competitive environments, when it's an individual goal, production goal or measure that they actually are less likely to have the sales revenue, shareholder value, stakeholder value, all of that declines when we have this competitive piece. And you also find too that if you, you know, the most high performing teams have high collective intelligence, and that means that's perceptiveness. That's letting other people talk. That's active listening. That's promoting each other, knowing when to be quiet and when to let other people participate. And the more that you saw turn taking. In meetings across conversations at Google, they were the most likely to be one of the top 10 highest performing teams.

So you, when you look at competition, you see that people dominate, and that actually does not help organizations. It actually reduces the likelihood that they're going to do what Google does and invent the most innovative products of our generation. So if you want to be like that, you need to look at Having everyone participate and collaboration and an allyship and supporting other people to be successful. And I guess from an altruism standpoint, too, the more that we hold other people up, the more likely our well-being is going to improve. And that, that comes back because You know, when you're brought, you have like that feeling, that relational energy in your team and in your organization, the vibe that you feel with a good culture, you know it, and it feels good and you're all really working together and it makes work more enjoyable. You feel more excited. It's transformational. You do good

things like that's what we want, you know? So, So being just individually, you know, focused, actually you lose, you lose from the access to all of that good stuff.

**Lisa Bragg:**

I want to make sure we tell everyone about your books - you have several already including the Burnout Epidemic. Then what you heard a bit about on this podcast, coming in fall of 2024 is Why Are We Here? Creating a Work Culture Everyone Wants, and then in 2025, Jen has a new edition of Unlocking Happiness. Jen what else can we share?

**Jennifer Moss:**

Well, there is my LinkedIn learning course, which is about burnout for managers, how. Managers can support burnout in, in teams. But I think that for the most part, it's really just like, I'm just really excited about talking about this kind of new Goldilocks zone and, and shifting people's thinking too, we can be in burnout mode and that can be really hard and it's still very real, but we can also be hopeful And I think that there's a sense of hopelessness that comes with feeling like you're still recovering from burnout or if you're in it. But there's a lot more support. There's a lot more conversations that we're having about mental health. There's ways that we can ask, you know, for supports inside of our organizations that we weren't able to before. We can get therapeutic you know, responses to this. It's not like you're saying, I'm burned out and people are thinking that you're really, you know. Just, you know, you, you don't know what you're feeling and they won't tell you as much to take just a bath anymore, which is good. So there is a lot of hopefulness. And I think when we're in it, we forget that, but if we're feeling hopeless, we want to get access to people. And one of the best ways for us to recover is through peer support and, you know, all the other pieces aside, get there, you know, therapeutic supports, talk to your HR team, use your EAPs. But it's also just other people that have gone through it other, you know, people that have felt that going and talk to them about it and sharing is one of the best ways to kind of feel like you're not isolated. So if anyone that's listening is feeling like in that state of hopelessness or that cynicism that this is always going to be like this. Just get out of that for a minute and call that best friend at work or call that person that you know you can rely on and talk about how you're feeling and it'll make you feel less alone. And then it's about incremental, tiny, tiny steps, just getting up and making your bed if you can, once a month. I mean, it's literally like giving, letting yourself off the hook and taking incremental steps until you start to feel a bit better every day. And there's no judgment with bad days, but burnout takes some time to heal and and it needs rest. So be aware of that in your body. And if you're in that place, like I mentioned, you're feeling that way, take care of yourself, you know, put yourself first because Again, this is our deathbed regret schematic here and you really do need to see the signs and get the support that you need and realize that there's lots of other people in this boat right now too.

**Lisa Bragg:**

Thank you, Jennifer.

((MUSIC))

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