

# WorkWell

A Deloitte podcast series to empower your well-being



## Understanding emotional agility

**Jen Fisher (Jen):** Hey this is Jen. Before we get started with today's show, I have a quick ask of you. We are two seasons into our WorkWell podcast series and I want to hear from you if the show has helped you in any way. Please take a couple of minutes to rate and review the show. Let us know what you think, let us know what's helped you, let us know what you want more of, what you want less of, but just take a couple of minutes to do that, it would mean a ton to me and it will help us get better and better in the future. I really do want to hear from you.

Life throws us many twists and turns, big and small, you can plan and prepare but that doesn't guarantee that there won't be a curveball that knocks you off your feet. And when it does, how do you feel, how do you respond? The answers to these questions depend on your emotions and how you navigate them. Overcoming adversity calls for emotional strength and adaptiveness to change. It requires us to face our thoughts and feelings, get curious about them, use them as data, connect back to our values, and to move on. To thrive in this uncertain world, we could all use a little more emotional agility. The good news is, it's a skill we can all learn and cultivate.

This is the WorkWell podcast series. Hi, I am Jen Fisher, Chief well-being officer for Deloitte, and I am so pleased to be here with you today to talk about all things well-being.

**Susan David (Susan):** *When you say to yourself, I love you, I will be there for you, and you are saying that to yourself, it enables you to put your hand up for a task that is scary. It enables you to not have all the answers with your team, and that is one of the most powerful ways you can be in the world.*

**Jen:** I am here with Dr. Susan David, an award-winning Harvard Medical School psychologist and author of the Wall Street Journal best-selling book *Emotional Agility—Get Unstuck, Embrace Change, and Thrive In Work and Life*.

**Jen:** I want to start by just having you tell me about emotions, why do we have them and what are they for?

**Susan:** Well, that's a really interesting question. Emotions have a lot of bad press, they are often seen as being weak, irrational, in organizations they are seen as being these soft skills. Actually, it's the opposite. Our emotions have evolved to basically help us, and they help us in two primary ways. The first is that our emotions help us to communicate with other people, to ask for help, to get support or to let people know what our needs are, but of course our emotions have also evolved to help us communicate with ourselves. So, often we feel tough emotions when things are butting up against our values or when we feel a sense of dissonance or when we are not being seen. If you look from an evolutionary perspective, we know that there is this communicative purpose of emotions and this is true today as well in our organizations and in how we love and live and come to our relationships. These are fundamental ways that we can or aspects of ourselves that we can use to calibrate ourselves and to bring ourselves forward most effectively.

**Jen:** So you touched on something there that I think has been kind of long ingrained in our lives and our culture certainly in the workplace, but there is a myth that positive emotions are obviously good emotions and difficult emotions are bad and we should avoid them. Is this true and is it even possible to avoid difficult emotions?

**Susan:** Well, I think there could be nothing further than the truth. Good emotions and good emotion are about joy and happiness and the bad emotions are somehow about anger or anxiety, frustration, they should be pushed aside. This is one of the largest misunderstandings of emotions and really this has real cost. It has cost to the individual because when people see their emotions as good or bad, what they start then doing is engaging and hustling with their emotions. I shouldn't feel that, that's a bad emotion, I should be grateful for my experience, and this in the longer term is actually associated with lower levels of well-being, high levels of mental distress, and also feeling stuck and being stuck because if you are in a situation where for instance you are feeling bored in the workplace and you said to yourself I shouldn't feel that at least I have got a job, I should be grateful then what is that doing? It's not allowing you to actually recognize that you need greater levels of growth and learning at work, and so then you are not going towards that thing that's important, that value. So, you are actually then not able to be agile and to be fruitful and to bring the best of yourself forward.

So, it's a really, really damaging view of emotions for individuals. When we look at the workplace, this similar principle is operating. So, if we think about organizations that say things like we want people to be innovative or we want people to be collaborative, there is no innovation that is possible without potential failure and without the difficult emotions that come with potential failure. There is no true collaboration that takes place without conflict or dissenting views and the emotions that come with that. So, for all of those organizations and leaders and teams that say we want these outcomes, we want whether it's collaboration or agility or creativity, what those organizations need to be doing is then opening themselves up to the reality that those often tough emotions are part and parcel of being effective in an organizational setting. Jen, if we can expand this a little bit further, when we think about the powerful change that happens in the world, in society that doesn't come about because everyone is positive, that comes about because people say hey that's unjust, hey I feel angry at how I am being treated. And so these emotions, like anger, that are often seen again as being negative are actually truly the catalyst for some of the most powerful changes that we can have in society. So, the capacity to be capacious and courageous enough to go towards those difficult emotions is often what brings us to better ways of being in the world.

**Jen:** So, I guess how did we get here, I mean especially in the workplace.

**Susan:** So, I am going to give you two answers to these questions and they are like me connecting with a nerd part of myself. One, actually is a gendered response and this is if you look historically and I am talking over educational systems of many hundreds of years. What you often had is situations where formal education was open to males and what was able in those times to be taught formally with a math and the sciences, what then happened is these emotions, the things that feel softer were actually relegated out of formal institutional learning and therefore very often formal workplaces. So, what you will end up having is this really interesting dichotomy where organizations become associated with goals and outcomes and science and logic, and emotions get sidelined. Another aspect to this actually comes about in psychology. If you think about the process of psychology and learning of psychology, often we have had this idea that well there is Freud and Freud is the subconscious, it's very difficult to understand, it very difficult to measure. So, in psychology you have these waves, if you like, where let's turn our backs on everything that's difficult to measure. So, in psychology you find a move towards behaviorism, and behaviorism is if we tap this thing twice and the dog wags its tail, then we have measured that and so there is this whole systematization of psychology that becomes focused around what's easily measurable.

Now, why does this matter in organizations is because what we have in organization is actually fairly toxic organizational structures that then become focused on what can we measure, what output, what goals, it's really the industrial mechanization of human endeavors that is literally bound up to the industrial revolution and what that does is it segments out of the workplace the beautiful messy humanity, the gorgeousness of a difficult conversation where we both come to the table and it's tough, but we get something out of it and we move forward. So, I really believe that for organizations and for us as people to be in systems that are resilient and capacious, we need to actually make way for these difficult emotions and to understand the real importance of these difficult emotions in the workplace and beyond because truly when you look at the future world of work, these aspects of humanity that actually differentiate us from what can be automated are the currency of now and in the future, and are critical to our own well-being.

**Jen:** I would say that they are no longer the soft skills, perhaps I don't think they ever were, but they are essential skills.

**Susan:** They are essential, mission-critical skills.

**Jen:** Absolutely. So what about our inner chatter, talk to me about that in relation to our emotions and the impact it has on how we show up.

**Susan:** One of the things that I explore in my work on emotional agility is this idea that inner chatter is actually normal. Difficult emotions, emotions like threat, stress, or frustration is normal. Again, these emotions evolve to help us to survive and thrive in the world. So, for instance, if you are experiencing a sense of frustration or I am exhausted or feeling anxious right now, it may be completely normal in a context that is threatening, in a context in which for instance there is a lot of illness and uncertainty around. So, the existence of these difficult thoughts, emotions, and even the stories that we have about ourselves, who we are, what we are, these are actually normal. When I am lying in bed and

I am able to say that noise is the washing machine and I don't need to pay attention to it, but this other noise is my child crying and I need to pay attention to it because this child is part of my story. What you can start seeing is that as human beings, we are constantly needing to make sense of the world and we often do that through our thoughts, our emotions, our stories, and our inner chatter. So, this is normal. We have around 16,000 spoken thoughts every single day and many more course through our minds, am I good enough, is this okay, am going to stuff it up, all of this is normal.

So, what then comes into play is when we have these thoughts, emotions, and stories, they are normal by definition but what we know is we can start getting hooked into them, we can start letting them call the shots and in emotional agility what I describe is this is idea of being hooked. If suddenly, you are not having a thought, I am not good enough, you are not having a thought of I am being undermined in this meeting, what is starting to happen is the thought is starting to own you, it is starting to drive your responses. I am being undermined in the meeting, there is no point in me contributing. So, I am just going to shut up. So, now what you are doing is you are not just having a thought, you are literally being owned by the thought and that now becomes a marker of emotional in-agility. So, what I talk about in my work is how we can really be compassionate and curious and accepting in a very gentle way with our thoughts, emotions, and our stories and we also and there is a really important end there, we also want to recognize that they are data, they are not directives, they don't get to call the shots, we as human beings get to call the shots. Our values, our intention, our wisdom, who we want to be in that meeting, who we want to be in our careers, and this is a really important capacity that we can develop as human beings.

**Jen:** So let's dig into that a little bit more because you keep talking about emotional agility and of course that is your book. So, what is it and how does it better help us understand our emotions.

**Susan:** Emotional agility is I think is one of the most critical skills that we can have as human beings. Again, it is every aspect of how we love, live, how we parent, how we lead is ultimately driven by how we deal with ourselves, our inner world. So, what is emotional agility? Let me give you a short answer and then let me give you a longer answer. The short answer is that emotional agility is basically the capacity to be healthy with ourselves, to be healthy with our thoughts, our emotions, and the stories that we have. The longer answer is that there are core components to emotional agility that are really critical to this capacity to be healthy. The first is the ability to show up to our emotions with a level of gentle acceptance and compassion, and this really circles back to the beginning of our conversation, this idea that there aren't good and bad emotions. So, if you start hustling with yourself and start only have positive emotions or see your emotions as positive or only think good thoughts, then what you start doing is you start hustling with yourself, you start trying to push aside difficult thoughts or difficult emotions. Number one, it doesn't work. When we try to push aside these difficult emotions, there is actually an amplification effect and listeners will have known and experienced this amplification effect. You said yourself, I am really upset with my colleague, I am just not going to say anything, I am just going to push aside this difficult experience and then you are in a meeting and you're snarky and let the person know how you feel because you have got the amplification of this emotion.

**Jen:** We have all been there.

**Susan:** We have all been there, we have all been there in a meeting, we have all been there at the Thanksgiving table, we have all been there. So, the first part of emotional agility is really the ability to be able and compassionate and kind in the way we show up to our difficult emotions. So, that instead of hustling with them or pushing them aside, we just accept them, this is what I feel right now. I am in a situation in which I need to be compassionate with the fact that I am bored or I am anxious or I am feeling undermined and I can be in that space in a way that is making room for that difficult experience. So, that's a showing up part. A second part of it is about bringing a level of curiosity and mindfulness to the emotion again so the emotion doesn't own you or the story doesn't own you. So, what does that look like? It's about noticing your thoughts, your emotions and stories for what they are, they are thoughts, they are emotions, they are stories, they are not fact, and I can go into a couple of strategies later if that's helpful. Another part of emotional agility is about asking yourself who do I want to be in this moment, what are my values so that I can actually bring myself forward and not be hooked by this difficult experience. So, the short answer is that emotional agility is about being healthy with ourselves. The longer answer is that emotional agility is the ability to be with ourselves in ways that are curious, compassionate, and courageous so that we can move forward in the direction of our values, in how we bring ourselves to the world, and this is just again a critical capacity for all of us.

**Jen:** So, it sounds like emotional agility is a skill that we can develop or at least get better at and so there must be strategies in order to do that.

**Susan:** Yeah, there absolutely are. So, I will give you just a couple and you can tell me if you want more, but a strategy for instance in showing up to our difficult emotions, really important is bringing self-compassion to our experience. Now in organizations, self-compassion is often associated with these myths, "if I am kind to myself, it means I am not being honest, I am being weak, or I am being lazy, or I am not cutting it, or I am letting myself off the hook." But actually self-compassion is one of the most powerful ways we can be in the world and rather than it being associated with those poor outcomes, self-compassion is actually associated with greater levels of honesty and resilience and motivation. Let me just give you an example of why this is and I will draw on something that all of us have seen outside of the workplace. Imagine you go to a restaurant and you have got a little child, crawling 12 months, 18 months, tooling around the restaurant, and your eating and your child goes and wanders off. What the child does is it gleefully wanders off but then looks back and sees you and says to themselves, my caregiver, my parent, my mother, my father is there, I am safe and so the child takes two or three more steps, giggle, giggle, giggle turns back, looks, sees the parents still there, giggle, giggle, giggle, and wanders off again. What is really going on here? What is happening is the child has a secure attachment. The child has the knowledge that they are safe and it is the safety that then allows the child to learn and to take risks and to explore.

Now, that analogy is one we can apply to self-compassion. Self-compassion, when you are kind to yourself, when you say to yourself, I love you, I will be there for you, and you saying that to yourself? What does it enable you to do? It enables you to put your hand up for a task that is scary. It enables you to take a risk in using your voice at work. It enables you to not have all the answers with your team because you know that you will be there for you and that is one of the most powerful ways you can be in the world. So, how do we get more self-compassionate? We get self-compassionate by recognizing that we are human and we are in unprecedented times and I know that word is overused but it is true and that we are doing the best we can, with who we are, with what we have got, and with the

resources that we have right now, and reminding ourselves of that reality is really, really important. When you are going into a difficult meeting, when you are going on to call and you are struggling and you are in your head of exhaustion, putting your hand onto your heart and reminding yourself that you exist and that you are human is really powerful. This is a skill that we teach physicians when they are going into a conversation with a patient or to give bad news, this ability to ground yourself in your humanity is really critical. So, that's compassion with the self. It's compassion with difficult thoughts, emotions, and stories that may come up. That's one practical strategy.

Another way we can be self-compassionate with ourselves is when we are beating ourselves up to imagine the inner child that is there in all of us, the child that needs fun, the child that needs to be seen, and to play and to have joy and to just ask ourselves what does the child in me need right now. The child might need rest, the child might need to have a picnic on the floor and to just ride around with another child in one's life and tickle and be, and this is really important. So, those are strategies around showing up for our difficult emotions with gentle acceptance, but stepping out is when we recognize that our emotions don't need to call the shots, our thoughts don't need to call the shots. Again, these are data, not directives. So, stepping out is one of the most powerful strategies that we need in the workplace. Anytime you are putting yourself into your clients' shoes, anytime you are saying this is how I feel but what does this person in front of me need right now, or what does the situation calling on, what you are doing is you're starting to engage in the capacity to step out. So, let me give you an example of what this is, imagine you are really upset and really angry because your telephone bill is wrong yet again and you finally have gotten hold of another human being and you are going to give that person a piece of your mind. You are angry, you are outraged, and you get this person on the phone and as you start talking to them, there is that little voice that goes off inside your head that says if you tell this person exactly how you feel right now, they will conveniently lose your file.

This is not a productive way to be right now. So, what is this. All of us as human beings have this capacity to both feel and be immersed in our emotions and in our stories and in our thoughts but also to helicopter above that. In other words step out of those thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Note, we are not ignoring them, we are not pushing them aside, we are not engaging in forced or false positivity, rather what we are doing is we are bringing to bear a different part of ourselves, a meta view, this observer view. So, we can do the same when we are in difficult situations in the workplace. I can feel really stuck, really stuck. I don't know what to do with my team or in my job, I feel stuck, and one of the most remarkable experiences that I have had as a psychologist is saying to someone you feel really stuck, what do you think you should do right now, and the person of course says, how would I know, I am stuck, by definition, I don't have the answers, that's why I am asking you for some solution. Then you say to the person, okay let's bring someone imaginary into the room. Let's bring a mentor, one of the wisest people you know, maybe someone who really cares for you and loves you, and let's imagine having a conversation with a person about what it is that they recommend for you right now. Remarkably, this individual start saying, they recommend that I have a tough conversation or they recommend that I just lay my cards on the table with the team and tell the team I don't have the answers and suddenly they have got all of these solutions.

Now, what are you doing? Of course, you haven't literally brought another person into the room, but we are engaging with the wise part of ourselves, the part of ourselves that is in our heads, in our strategy and our logic, strategy and logic we don't often engage with but is really powerful. So, one way when we are feeling stuck, when we are in difficult emotions

or thoughts, when we are saying things to ourselves like I would love to do this, but I am just not creative or people are not going to hear me is to engage another part of ourselves to ask ourselves if someone really wise were watching me right now, what would they be recommending, what would they be suggesting? So that's one strategy. Another strategy is when we are really stuck, when we are experiencing difficulty, and this is really powerful is listen to my language, I am sad, I am angry, I am stressed, I am frustrated, I am being undermined. When you use language that says I am, I am stressed, what you are basically doing is you are defining yourself, you are defining yourself by your emotion, you are defining yourself by your story. But you aren't your emotion, you are you, you are wise, you have courage. I want to draw on what I think is one of the most profoundly beautiful and powerful ideas in history and it's the sentiment of Viktor Frankl. Viktor Frankl who survived the Nazi death camps, who described this idea that between stimulus and response there is a space, and in that space is our power to choose, and it's in that choice that lies our growth and freedom.

**Jen:** That is my favorite quotes of all times.

**Susan:** When we are hooked, there is no space between stimulus and response. Being undermined, I am going to shut down. I am not good enough for this, so I am not going to apply for it. There is no space between stimulus and response. When we show up to our difficult emotions, but when we start engaging in the stepping out, what you are doing in effect is creating the space. So, the example that I gave already of the wise person is an example of stepping out. Another which is what I am leaning on here as a strategy is try not to define yourself by your emotion. When you say I am sad, you are basically saying all of me, 100% of me, there is no space for anything else is sad or angry or being undermined. So, what can we do instead? Instead, what we can do and this is actually a mindfulness technique is we can stop noticing our thoughts, our emotions, and our stories for what they are. They are thoughts, emotions, and stories, they are not fact. So I am noticing the thought that I am being undermined, I am noticing that I am feeling angry right now, I am noticing that I am not good enough story and there is no point in even trying. This sounds like a linguistic trick and it is, but it's really powerful because what you are doing is linguistically starting to create space between you and the emotion. One last one, and I am at risk of really rambling, but I am hoping it's helpful here is emotion granularity. Emotion granularity is one of the most powerful ideas I believe psychologically. It's associated with long-term well-being in children, in the workplace, in adults, and so on.

It's this that often when we are experiencing difficult emotions, we use very big umbrella labels to describe what we are feeling. We will say I am stressed, I am stressed, and everyone at work is stressed and I am stressed and I am stressed every day. But can I invite a different way of thinking about stress. If you go beneath the umbrella, I am stressed could be I am exhausted, I am depleted, I am not being seen, I am feeling overwhelmed, I am frustrated, and I need help. When I say that something is stressed, it doesn't actually allow us to discern the cause of the stress or even to think about what we need to do in relation to it. However, when we set ourselves this thing that I am calling stress, what are two other options, what are two other emotion words that I can use to label this experience? What you start seeing is when you say depleted, actually this thing I am calling stress is depletion or exhaustion, immediately what starts happening is you start recognizing what I need to do is self-care, what I need to do is take time for myself. When you start labeling this thing that I am calling stress is I am in the wrong job or I am in the wrong career, immediately what it starts doing is helping you to say what do I need to do, what small changes can I make to expand my capacity, my skill set. Do I need to get my

resume together? Who do I need to connect with? So, emotion granularity is one of the most powerful ways that we can start moving beyond feeling stuck in an emotion into being able to step out of the emotion so that we can bring other parts of ourselves forward.

**Jen:** That's one I can attest to that it works and I learned that from you and I use it all the time. So, I highly recommend that to the listeners. You know I am going to ask you this because we are talking about emotions and emotional agility at work, is there a way we can measure our emotional agility?

**Susan:** So, I have got a quiz actually, which is a free online quiz. Around 180 thousand people have taken that quiz to date and that gives you a free 10-page report and it literally goes through these ideas of showing up, stepping out, but other aspects that we haven't yet really touched on but also really important is how our emotions can signal our values and what we care about. So, we can measure emotional agility. I think in the workplace at large, emotional agility and its measurements in organizational settings is really going to be intersecting with ideas around wellness and sustainability and psychological safety and really whether organizations are truly creating workplaces that are able to be resilient. One of the things that I have been noticing so much lately is organizations talking about we need to be resilient, we need to be resilient, and in fact, I read a recent article that was all about organizational resilience. I was astounded that humans and people were not mentioned in the article about how you can get organizational resilience, it was all about adaptability, knowing the competition, and the fact is organizational resilience is not something that gets written into a job description or strategy, organizational resilience is dependent on organizations paying attention to the mental health and emotional agility of their people. So, I think the question of measurement in organizations is really going to be driving those kinds of topics.

**Jen:** So, then along those lines and you have talked a little bit about this, are there things that leaders and managers of people should be thinking about, should be doing to better support their people in addressing mental and emotional health and well-being.

**Susan:** Yeah absolutely and I think that there are two aspects to this. The first is these emotional agility skills. If you are on a call for instance and you are bound into this idea that actually if people are upset then they'll be negative and we want to be all positive and we are pivoting and we are only being positive here and we are looking for opportunity, then what you are doing is you are actually engaging in denial of people's reality and you actually are suppressing their emotion and you also are suppressing the capacity for people to actually be able to come to the conversation in a way that is authentic and whole and real and this doesn't create resilience, this doesn't create agility. What creates agility instead in that context is recognizing that when someone is concerned for instance about how a product might be being delivered to a particular client, that that concern is not borne out of negativity, that concern actually might be borne out of a value that the person has, a value of quality, a value of care, a value of sustainability for the organization. So, the first thing that I would say is leaders really powerfully need to connect with this idea that there aren't good and bad emotions but rather that emotions are signals that are really helpful. I want to just have a little caveat here which is to say when I talk about emotions or data, again I want to highlight emotions are data, they are not directives. Like I can show up to my son's frustration with his baby sister, I can be empathetic, I can be kind, I can see it for what it is. It doesn't mean that I am endorsing his idea that he gets to give away to the first stranger that he sees in a shopping mall.



We own our emotions, they don't own us. So, what I am not talking about here is everyone should just express how they feel and people can act with impunity, no, it's rather how do you create a space that allows people to feel seen and that they are valid and that there is a voice that's being given to them. So, that's one. A second thing that's really helpful is for leaders to help their teams with emotion granularity. When you are saying to a team, "Oh, how's everyone today, everyone is all good, okay, fine let's move on to our agenda," that's not actually emotion granularity. Emotion granularity is taking a little bit of time to actually understand where people are at. The third thing that I would say is a very important part of emotional agility is this idea that our most difficult emotions actually signal something profoundly important for us as human beings and that is our values. I have never met someone who is depressed, who isn't concerned about how do I better participate. I have never met someone who is anxious socially, who isn't concerned at some level about how do I better show up in the world. Someone who is bored, the value that that might be pointing to is growth and learning. A guilty parent, the value might be I am with my children 24/7 right now, but I am missing presence and connection with them. So, really important part of emotional agility is not just that emotions help us to, it doesn't work if we suppress our difficult emotions, it's actually that our emotions surface something that is so precious and that is they signal our values.

So for all of us listening but also for leaders, if you are experiencing something difficult right now and you imagine writing that difficult emotion on a piece of paper and then you imagine turning that piece of paper over, I am not going to ask you to write what's positive, no, what I am rather going to ask you to think about is on the other side of the piece of paper what is the value that is being signaled, loneliness is often signaling yearning and connection. The idea that social distancing doesn't mean emotional distancing and that you need more meaningful connection. These are just examples. So if you can on the other side of the piece of paper surface a value, then you starting to say again between stimulus and response there is a space and in that space is our power to choose and in that choice lies our growth and freedom, and what is it that's in that space, what is it that we are choosing, we are choosing to move towards our values, we are choosing to make small changes that connect with those values. So, for leaders understanding that what your people are feeling signals their values. What that allows leaders to do is to be liberated from the idea that they have got to have all the answers and be unidimensional cheerleaders and instead what the leaders are able to do is to come into the space and say I don't have all the answers, I don't have all the answers, but here's the invitation. What are we feeling right now and we get to ask ourselves then one of the most powerful questions, which is even in the midst of this challenge, who do we choose to be, how do we come to our teams, how do we want to interact. In the work that I have done in professional services firms and beyond, when I have looked at what are the most powerful drivers not just of team cohesion and teaming but also of engagement, culture, revenues, its leaders who are able to create the shared sense of values, who do we want to be.

**Jen:** Yeah, I think that's so incredibly valuable because I think one of the things that I hear most often is if I ask someone how they are doing or feeling and they express a difficult emotion, I don't know how to fix it, and what you are saying is you don't need to know how to fix it and you don't need to know all the answers.

**Susan:** You don't need to fix emotion. In fact, again, if we draw on parenting, we know that when parents rush in to try fix emotions, what does that teach children, it teaches children that those emotions are to be feared, it teaches children that again that there are good and

bad emotions, it doesn't equip the child to learn that emotions pass, that emotions are teachers. So, a leader doesn't need to rush into fix emotions, rather the leader is showing up to the emotions. I often use this language, which I speak about in my TED talk. It's so beautiful, in South Africa where I come from, there is this word Sawubona and Sawubona is a Zulu greeting, you hear it on the streets every day and it basically means hello. It's like Sawubona, Sawubona hello, but what does Sawubona really mean when you literally translate it is I see you. So, what are leaders doing really, leaders are giving their people a Sawubona, I see you, I see you, and by seeing you, I am helping you to be, helping to recognize that what you feel is real and then the leader is also liberated from having to fix because fixing actually is unhelpful. It's actually unhelpful, rather what is that emotion signaling about what the person cares about and then what are some small changes that the person can be making that bring us towards those values. So, what you can see is even in that context, you not trying to fix the emotions, you are trying to turn towards values.

**Jen:** Yeah, so powerful. So, I am going to bring us to a close and I have one last thing for you. So, I have so many quotes, favorite quotes from you in my journal of life, but the one that always gets me is this one, life's beauty is inseparable from its fragility and to me this seems especially relevant right now during the middle of a global pandemic during, social injustice, and all of the things going on in our world and our society, can you talk about what this means?

**Susan:** Yes, so I will give you a little bit of history about that idea of life's beauty is inseparable from its fragility. When I was little, I went through a period where I was very scared of death. At around the age of five years old, children become aware of their own mortality, and I remember finding my way into my parents bed and saying to my father promise me you will never die, promise me you will never die, and my father could have done what this narrative in society is right now and every time you go on social media, which is just think positive, just be positive. My father could have buffeted me up with forced or false positive. Don't worry, I am around, everything is fine, you don't need to worry about that now, but he didn't, he didn't. He comforted me with soft pats and kisses, but he never lied, and he said to me, it's normal to be scared, it's normal to be scared, we all die. It's normal to be scared. Now, why I connect this with the fragility of life is because when we only focus on the positive or when we only try to go to a solution and when we try to push difficult emotions and difficult experiences away, what we engage in with is denial. Life's beauty is inseparable from its fragility, like we are young until we are not. We walk down the street, we're sexy, we own the world and then one day we walk down the street and we realize no one is noticing us.

We in projects and with clients where things are going well and then they are not, we nag our children and then one day the child is no longer in the house making his or her way in the world, and I actually think that when we only try to engage with the so-called positive, actually what it does is, it undermines our resilience because we are only then being in some false denial idea as opposed to the world as it is. When I have been thinking about wisdom, what is wisdom? Wisdom is really the ability for human beings to have capaciousness and I am going to use a word that isn't a word but what I am going to call bothness. What do I mean by bothness? I can simultaneously be actually fairly happy in quarantine and be really sad, that is possible for us as human beings, we are capacious. I can simultaneously be really angry with someone at work and I can choose to keep contributing to the project not because I am being walked all over but because contribution is my value. So, this idea of life's beauty is inseparable from its fragility is really bound up into this sense that as human beings if we stop trying to force out what feels uncomfortable

and instead start to open ourselves up to it, that actually while it feels really fearful and it takes courage, what it ultimately does is it makes for us being more resilient and more grounded and more wise and more seated in the world as it is.

**Jen:** What a great note to end on, thank you so much Susan. This is such an incredible conversation. I know our listeners are going to get so much out of this. So thank you again.

**Susan:** Thank you for inviting me and I am so happy that we finally made it happen.

**Jen:** Me too.

**Jen:** I am so grateful Susan could be with us today to teach us about how we can all build our emotional agility. Thank you to our producers and our listeners. You can find the WorkWell podcast series on Deloitte.com or you can visit various podcatchers using the keyword WorkWell, all one word, to hear more. And if you like the show, don't forget to subscribe so you get all of our future episodes. If you have a topic you would like to hear on the WorkWell podcast series or maybe a story you would like to share, please reach out to me on LinkedIn. My profile is under the name Jen Fisher or on Twitter at jenfish23. We are always open to your recommendations and feedback and, of course, if you like what you hear, please share, post, and like this podcast. Thank you and be well.

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