

# WorkWell

A Deloitte podcast series to empower your well-being



## Elevating the human experience with Amelia Dunlop

**Jen Fisher (Jen):** Hi WorkWell listeners, I am really excited to share that my book *Work Better Together* is officially out. Conversations with WorkWell guests and feedback from listeners like you inspired this book. It's all about how to create a more human-centered workplace. And as we return to the office for many of us, this book can help you move forward into post-pandemic life with strategies and tools to strengthen your relationships and focus on your well-being. It's available now from your favorite book retailer.

In the future of work, artificial intelligence will take on the more repetitive and routine tasks. The work that will remain will be highly cognitive, creative, and intellectual, but how will we effectively do this type of work if we are burnt out, lonely, and feeling apathetic in our current workplaces? The key is a renewed focus on the qualities that make us uniquely human in elevating the human experience at work.

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. I am here with Amelia Dunlop. She is the chief experience officer at Deloitte Digital and the leader of the US Customer Service Strategy & Applied Design practice for Deloitte Consulting. She is also the author of the national bestselling book, *Elevating the Human Experience—THREE PATHS to LOVE and WORTH at WORK*. Tell us about Amelia, tell us your story, your journey, I want to hear about how you became passionate about elevating the human experience.

**Amelia Dunlop (Amelia):** Alright, let's do it. I guess I would start by saying I am currently in this awesome role around chief experience officer for Deloitte Digital. What that means is a couple of years ago, we set this aspiration to elevate the human experience and I will be totally honest with you Jen, at the time we didn't really know what that meant, but we knew that it was worth putting a lot of effort into and building toward over time, and we also knew that there was something about focus on the human that just really made sense to us. Interestingly, this was even before the pandemic. So, for me, it has definitely been a journey and it has culminated most recently in writing the book, *Elevating The Human Experience—THREE PATHS to LOVE and WORTH at WORK* and I poured so much of myself into that book personally and very happy to talk more about what that has meant in that journey and how to share it with your listeners.

**Jen:** Absolutely, we will definitely get into that, but I want you to explain to us or tell us what you mean when you talk about the human experience and elevating the human experience. I think we hear those words a lot, but what does it really mean?

**Amelia:** It's really about focusing on the fundamental human worth and investing in individuals and the teams that we get to be a part of in our organizations to nurture their growth. I think in short form, the way I think about elevating the human experience, it is that choice to make someone's experience better and typically that requires starting with empathy and then in the context of work, using some of the tools around human centered design to design experiences that make people feel just a little bit better.

**Jen:** Was there an experience that you made you want to dive more into this or get deeper into making the experience better for others, like what was that moment or were there a series of them.

**Amelia:** I am laughing, because you can't see me smiling and searching the reaches of my memory. I don't know that I would say there is a singular aha moment that said, hey this is the thing that is your passion. I would say that it is very clear to me now that my purpose is to help make the organization that I am a part of the most human professional services firm in the world and for me that feels like a really worthwhile way to spend my day. I think there are a number of different threads that I would say get me there. So, in my background, as you know, I studied sociology as an undergraduate. I have also studied theology and moral theology. I have an MBA in business and I have also been a dancer my whole life. I am trained professionally in dance. You could argue that none of those things have anything much in common, but for me they are all different aspects of fundamentally the human experience and trying to understand whether it's through research and ethnographic research, and what does it mean to be human through theology and philosophy, and how do we explore questions of meaning and purpose or just the physicality of movement and connecting to our bodies. We were never intended to spend our lives in two-dimensional squares on a screen.

**Jen:** I was going to go there next. I guess in a lot of ways, and perhaps this is just me speaking but I certainly think others feel it because I have had these conversations that some of our humanity has disappeared from the workplace not because anyone intentionally or inherently said, "oh we are going to remove humanity from the workplace." Can you talk a little bit about your view on that and what's going to get us from here to bringing that humanity back or refocusing on the human experience in the workplace?

**Amelia:** I definitely believe that fundamental enduring human need is a need for connection, and that's regardless of generation, regardless of specific social context, and to your point, there's a lot of drivers that have created what I would call a human experience debt. Technology has both enabled so many things that we love, you and I get to have this conversation remotely and technology has also made us feel a little bit less human at times and it is physically wearing on us as we all know to stare at a screen and to project our voices into a microphone in a different way than it is to be face-to-face with another human being. So, I do think that technology has both created some of the things we love, but also created some of this debt from what it means to be human. To the last part of your question, what's the way out? I do think just being much more intentional about how can I elevate the experience for an individual with all their different intersecting identities in this moment or in this phone call or in this workshop, or with this beautiful piece of technology I am creating for the world.

**Jen:** Do you ever get pushback of like wow, that's one more thing I have to think about or one more thing I have to do. I am coming to this from a place I get a lot of this too from a well-being perspective. So, how do we make this part of the core competency of the leaders of now and the future because

there is such fatigue especially of leaders, but I think everybody. So, how do we make it something that doesn't feel like it's just another thing on our to-do list that we have to do.

**Amelia:** It's a great question. There very well may be people thinking that Jen, and not telling me. But I think the response that I have gotten more is "thank you". It's gratitude or thank you because that is the type of organization I want to be a part of or that is kind of work I too want to bring out into the world, or thank you for making it discussable that this feeling that I have of disconnection I didn't really know what words to put on it. We can talk about burnout, that's one of the manifestations I think of the human experience debt, but there are also others whether it's feeling like you don't belong, feeling like lack of inclusion, and other ways in which this deficit is felt. So, I think there are a lot of people who are acknowledging that this fundamental human need to feel human and feel worthy is something we all share.

**Jen:** I am actually really glad to hear that that was your answer as opposed to more people saying, oh another thing I have to do. But I do think everybody is craving that because it has been removed from not just our work lives, but our overall lives in many ways. So, let's flip this and say how does the human experience or elevating the human experience, if you will, create greater creativity and innovation, and I know it's something you talk a lot about in the book.

**Amelia:** I think one of things that I talk about is the idea that we do have to feel worthy at work. I share some research. We investigated 6,000 folks in the United States, and it didn't surprise me that 9 out of 10 of them said that it mattered to feel worthy but about half, myself included, at times struggled to feel worthy, particularly when we show up at work. And this matters because there is something about feeling worthy that also translates into the ability to take risks, be creative, innovative, which is important for the area of work that I am in, and we all know that psychological safety is also very important for being able to produce the type of work that you can be really proud of.

**Jen:** Yeah, absolutely. So, you say that human values come down to four essential elements. Can you talk about those four elements?

**Amelia:** So, one of the things we did in terms of the research was look at the ways in which we each have values which are not necessarily good or bad, but that some of us feel more compelled around the exploring of the new, there are those of us who are feeling more protective, and safety is more important. Then on the flip side on the X axis, we talk about the idea that there are those of us who feel that there is more about the community, the tribe, so to speak, and then there are those of us who feel more compelled and a value of more personal, they are the me version of what we can accomplish. So, I think of that as the me versus we axis of values. The reason that I talk about these four cardinal values in the book is acknowledging that as humans we really can have different values, as organizations we can have dominant values in our organization for our employees, and we can also have dominant values for the people that we call customers. It's just helpful to know which values are we choosing to articulate at which point.

**Jen:** The title of your book has two words that you don't often see together, which I am sure you have heard this before, love and work. Can you tell us what that is all about?

**Amelia:** Yes.

**Jen:** Maybe I love my work, but the way you are talking about it is different.

**Amelia:** I think I am intentionally trying to be provocative and talking about love and work. And I do say that it's risky to put those two words together in the same sentence. And there's reasons why it makes me uncomfortable. There's all kinds of reasons why I think it can make us uncomfortable, but I think I wanted to be provocative and offering a different definition of love than we might immediately call to mind. And here I go back to the Greek which, Jen, they have seven words for love to our one in the English language, but they have the word eudaimonia, which really means flourishing. So I think the definition of love that I offer in the book is really about the choice that we make to extend ourselves for either our own or for another's growth or flourishing. And then I think about like okay, now if you use that as the definition of love, think about all the time where you spend an extra hour with someone in the workplace to just listen to them or you spend an extra hour with someone when you could have gone home, and you are teaching them a new skill or you are coaching them. All of these words where we could talk about care, we could talk about respect, I think it's important to talk about love in the workplace, because it is a fundamental human need.

**Jen:** And so, you refer to three paths to love and worth at work. And so, what are those three paths? Can you tell us a little bit more about each one of them?

**Amelia:** Sure. So, the first path is the path of the self, and this is the very personal journey that we walk alone to feeling loved and worthy in and of ourselves before we do anything, before we say anything, before we do any of the work that is our chosen field. And I think the path of the self for me, Jen, was really important to discover, because there's no amount of external affirmations that is ever going to make us feel as loved and worthy as we can feel in and of ourselves. And I definitely think of it as there's something about having that best friend who is your champion, your supporter, who speaks to you with kindness, and that best friend like actually lives inside your head. And it's a pretty awesome way to live, to feel like you have that champion and that supporter and that you are that person for yourself. So, I can say more about how you can go on that journey for the first path, but that is the first path that a lot of us have work to do in just how we speak to ourselves and how we are that best friend.

The second path is really the path of allyship to another. A single other person that we might find at work. They could be a colleague. They could be a boss. They could be someone who reports to us. And I think that second path is, as I said before, how we mirror back the worth to another who may or may not yet see it in themselves. And so, this is where I think about the types of allyship where we can be a friend, we can be a mentor, a sponsor, and a benefactor. And for me, it's just put much more clearly into focus the ways in which we can love a single other human being in the context of our work.

And then the third path is acknowledging that there's many, many people that we are going to cross paths with at work. And it may be very brief, it maybe twice a year, it maybe 15 minutes, it may be in a quick exchange in a kitchen someday, and this is much more about what are we doing both systemically to create spaces that people feel like they can show up with their whole selves and be authentic. And this is also about the challenge to say how can we leave a person better off, no matter how brief that exchange, and that's that third path. And I recognize, in each of those three paths, and I named and talk about these in the book, there are absolutely obstacles to going on this journey. And if they weren't, it wouldn't be hard.

**Jen:** We would all be doing it.

**Amelia:** Exactly.

**Jen:** And so, talk about some of those, like what are some of the more common obstacles to those paths or those experiences that we are going to have?

**Amelia:** So, for the individual, I think that one of the biggest obstacles is all the negative messaging and the negative programming we already have in our heads. And the fact that, I don't know about you, but the inner critic for me can be quite loud and that we tend to believe the voice in our head, even though it can be quite negative, just because our voice sounds familiar to ourselves, we believe it's true, do you know what I mean?

**Jen:** I know.

**Amelia:** So, it's like okay, that sounds familiar therefore it must be true, and I do think that there's some reprogramming and what it means to overcome that obstacle to ourself. Even I would acknowledge that talking about taking time to be kind to myself, to extend grace to myself, to love myself it still sounds weird. Like that's not a common conversation in the workplace, so I think that in and of itself feels like it can be an obstacle.

Then I would say in terms of obstacles to what does it mean to really recognize the worth in another and show them love? I talk about some of the obstacles in every way in which human connections can break down, geographic distance, miscommunication, intention or lack of intention, is that text that wasn't returned, would not return for a reason or was it missed, like there's so many different ways in which our ability to connect with another is broken. And I talk about some of the ways that we can overcome that. So there's so many different obstacles we bring, and the fact that we can be very loving to another person, but we don't know what's going on in their own path for their self. And how are they able to actually show up, which is something that I think about a lot when we bring our very personal messy selves to the workplace and we don't often acknowledge that there's that personal journey going on.

And then the obstacles and the broader community of work, where there's generational legacies of things that make it harder for certain people to show up at work. And one of the things I talk about is I think it's our job to actually dismantle and redesign the system so that people do feel worthy at work.

**Jen:** And you mentioned this a little bit earlier, but I want to dig deeper about the worthiness gap. What is the definition of that, what does it feel like, when and how do we experience it, all of those things?

**Amelia:** Sure. So, the definition of the worthiness gap, is that gap between how much it matters to us to feel worthy and how many of us struggle to feel worthy? And I think that for me it might be a better way of articulating what we talked about earlier in terms of the impostor syndrome, is it has helped give language to, in this specific situation I am feeling a worthiness gap. And it may have to do with my own talk track in my head, it may have to do with what the individual on the opposite side of the desk has just shared with me, it may have to do with the broader organizational context, but for right now I am feeling a worthiness gap. And so, I think it's just a way of expressing it and helping deconstruct the different drivers of what that might mean. And then hopefully, giving the individuals some tools to be able to close that worthiness gap.

**Jen:** What are some examples of, either in your own life or things that you've helped others with, like what can I do as an individual, what can I do as a leader or a manager of people, like take me on that journey.

**Amelia:** For sure. So, let's talk about what we can do for ourselves first and then let's talk about what we can do for others. So just to break it down a little bit. One of the things I share the story in the book, so I had just received some pretty challenging feedback. And it's kind of a question of how do you internalize it? How do you process it? And it was in speaking with good friend and dear colleague, that helped me to reframe some of this feedback, and we all get challenging feedback. And she said Amelia, in order to continue to grow professionally, you are going to need to grow personally, and grow in vulnerability. I remember feeling like, well wait a second like, I am feeling pretty vulnerable right now, so no thank you. No desire to feel more vulnerable than I do right now. But she persisted as she does and she said, to show up with kind of equal parts head and heart really unlocks your full power. And so, she gave me this exercise and she said, Amelia, I want you to write down the 30 reasons why you are lovable? And for someone who feels unworthy or for someone who struggles to feel loved that was a really hard exercise. At first, I tried to do like, well, could I get my 10-year-old daughter to do it for me or could I get someone else to, she's like, nope, I believe in you and I want you to write it. And I still have the list on the notes on my phone, but my list starts with, I am lovable because I have a warm smile. And I share this story, Jen, because knowing and being able to articulate the reasons why we are worthy before we do anything, the reasons why we are lovable actually does change how I feel like I can show up at work. That's that equal parts head and heart. That's that personal growth and professional growth. And I have also observed that I have now asked this question to many, many groups and many, many people and how quickly we jump to where I am lovable because I am a kind friend. Or I am lovable because I am a good parent. And I try to remind people that we are lovable before we do anything. And that...it's hard. It's like one of those oh, you are right, yes, you are right, it's before I am a good friend, it's before I am a good listener, it's before I do anything for anybody else. So, I feel like that's one thing I would encourage people to do is can you write down the 30 reasons why we are lovable. So, that's the first, really learning to speak to ourselves with words of kindness and love.

And then in terms of what does it mean to put this into action for others and we talked about this before, but I do think allyship is something that's so critical. And I have come to believe that we can be good leaders if we are good friends and good mentors and offering words of wisdom. But I don't think we can be great as leaders, unless we are truly investing and sponsoring others and being benefactors using our own whether it's positional power or informal power to lift other people up who may or may not have opportunities that we had. And so, I think there's a much more active discipline to allyship than I had ever thought previously, and I think it's important going forward.

**Jen:** What do you tell organizations in terms of...like how do you shift culture or mindset and behaviors to think this way?

**Amelia:** I feel like if I had the short answer to that question, I get what you are asking, it is like, well, how do we do this? And how do both at scale and I think from the perspective that I have come at it is like, I do a lot of work in customer experience and in strategy and innovation. And I think there's definitely people who do that, yeah, I got it, like we want to focus on the customer experience or the employee experience, but hey, Amelia, what you are talking about now, do you have an experience like that sounds really hard, like I want it, but that sounds really hard, how do I do it? And I think I would first acknowledge that this is a journey. I don't believe I have all the answers. I don't know that anybody else does either, but I would say to the extent that I have been walking on this path I feel like, one of the things that we need to be doing a better job of is heavier doses of empathy for what other people's lived experiences are. And I do think, I learned a lot in writing this book that you don't elevate anyone's

human experience generally or generically, but it is about acknowledging people's individual lived experience and their intersecting identities, which I can't possibly have all of them. I just don't. And so, I think part of what we can ask people to do is start to be more curious about other people's lived experiences and extend more empathy. So also, I talk about speed to empathy and how we can get faster at expressing that empathy.

And then I think very practically, Jen, there are some tools. There are some very specific things you can do in the workplace to help people feel like they can, like they belong, that they are included, and that they're free to bring their authentic whole selves to work. And I think these tools have a lot to do with what we are learning around equity-based human centered design and the techniques where we talked about words matter, inviting people into those spaces and making them feel safe.

**Jen:** And when you talk about, more empathy and speed to empathy. Give me some examples of what that looks like or what a person can do, or a leader can do, an individual can do.

**Amelia:** So, I think a lot about, for me I need to exercise speed to empathy. I could give you any random example and I sort of disguised and put in the book. But it's the person that you are dealing with at work. I would say call to mind the person that is really most annoying to you. They just make things just a little bit more challenging for you. And for me the speed to empathy is acknowledging that this person is as much, in this case, maybe a father, a son, a brother, or a spouse. This person has their own life narrative. They have their own journey. Their own pain. They too actually might be operating out of a worthiness gap. They may, without knowing it, be acting in ways that is aggressive or may seem a little bit lower empathy, but I don't know what's going on in their personal narrative. And I think speed to empathy, I might just want to be angry and shoot back a slightly snarky email.

**Jen:** Because we've all done it.

**Amelia:** Right, I hypothetically might send back a snarky email, or I could acknowledge, I have no idea what's going on in your day. Maybe I should pick up the phone and really try to understand you as a human, not just the transactional work object we were trying to accomplish together.

**Jen:** And are there...so, let's play this out, so you pick up the phone and you call this person. What does that look like? Because I feel like sometimes, we struggle, especially with people that annoy us or bother, what do I call you up and say in order to bridge that gap?

**Amelia:** The thing that I am laughing at Jen is, I have obviously written this book about it, this book holds me accountable, because I believe these things to be true. That doesn't mean I can 100% always live them. First of all,

**Jen:** Look I get that. I am the chief well-being officer, do you think every single thing I do is healthy, not a chance.

**Amelia:** Good. I just feel like I needed to make that disclaimer. Like this is something where this book holds me to account and this book challenges me every day, because people have told me that it's challenging to them. It's like yup it challenges me too. But what I would say that my go to in that situation is...so, let's say Jen you and I had one of those interactions you are like, yeah, that didn't feel great. Well, that didn't work out so well. We kind of ruffled each other's feathers. I would call you up and say, "Hey Jen, that didn't feel great. Could we have a do over?" And I have done that at least a half a

dozen times this past year, and I will tell you that it releases some of the tension. It acknowledges, like wow, like yeah, really didn't feel great, and because I value you as a person, as a human, I think we could try that one again, and I think we can do a better job. We can be a little bit gentler with each other. We can maybe explain a little bit more of what our back story was coming into that conversation that was maybe unspoken but acted out of. And it just gives some more space to redo a conversation. And the do over it's simple, because...otherwise it's like the long winded, like can we just like hash out, you said this and then I said that. No, I thought this and then you said this. It's like I don't want to do any of that. Do you know what I mean like, let's just acknowledge I was not my best self in that conversation, no and maybe you weren't either and that's actually okay. So, we are going to do this one again and try to show up with our better selves.

**Jen:** And well you mentioned psychological safety earlier, and I think that that is such an incredible way to create psychological safety with someone to pick up the phone and be like, hey, you know what I just didn't feel good. We need to do over and it makes it okay. It makes it okay that if it happens again it's okay, like we can talk through this as two adults and two professionals or two people, two humans. And that's part of being human. I love that.

**Amelia:** One of my favorite ones. I am smiling.

**Jen:** I am going using that. I have never used it before, but now I am going to be using it.

**Amelia:** I sort of smile with a bit of chagrin, because I had to use the do over like in the last two months. It's like this is not necessarily a thing that we become so good at that we never need it. So, I think the do over is helpful. I mean the other thing that I love is I have had do overs with entire teams. We are like okay, the meeting we had on Monday we are going to do that one again. We are all going to show up. It's as though this meeting is like from scratch.

**Jen:** I can think of a few of those where I needed to do over, so thank you for permission to do that Amelia, I am going to be doing that.

So are there any other, I mean, I fully enjoyed this conversation. There's so many nuggets of wisdom. Are there any other things that you want to talk about, any other practices maybe personally that leave us with some words of wisdom?

**Amelia:** No, I appreciate that. I think one of the other things that has changed for me is, and I mentioned this briefly earlier, but I am much more conscious about trying to be deliberate in playing back others worth and helping others in their own journey. Because recognizing we are all in a journey and one of the ones that I feel like I have used quite a lot recently, Jen, it's probably worth talking about is as people are trying to figure out in this great resignation or the great reevaluation whatever term you prefer, I have often thought about what does it mean to have this personal value equation for what we truly most want out of our workplaces. And the reason I say it's personal because it varies for each of us. There may be common categories. There's some amount of compensation that matters. There's some amount of type of work that matters. There is some amount of location and travel. There is some amount of benefits. There's some amount of prestige and role. But they actually do vary by individual, and they vary by life stage. So, as we move through our careers what we most need from our work and that personal value equation will shift. And I think, I wanted to share that because I feel like it can help people both articulate to the people around them, hey, this is my intention. This is what's really valuable



to me from a work perspective. And it creates a different dialogue with your mentors and your colleagues. And I think it also helps acknowledge where like if your personal value equation is not being met and you feel like you are undervalued from your role, from your, the type of opportunities you are getting. It also helps make that discussable. So, I have had lots of conversations with people very recently as they are considering shifting in role, shifting in jobs, and I would say you are worth taking the time to think through your personal value equation and trying to figure out how you are going to maximize that and being in dialogue with people in your workplace to help you on that journey.

**Jen:** I love that. And I can't think of a better way to end this discussion. So, thank you, Amelia, for spending time with us today and for giving us lots to think about and actions that we can take as well.

**Amelia:** Thanks, so much Jen. It was super fun.

**Jen:** I am so grateful Amelia could be with us today to talk about love and worth at work. Thank you to our producers, Rivet360 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.