

# WorkWell

A Deloitte podcast series to empower your well-being



## Emotions in the workplace with Liz Fosslien

**Jen Fisher:** 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 is 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.

Some of us live as two people, who we are at home and who we are at work. But our work and our lives don't have to be two separate identities. The key to bringing our whole selves to work every day is tossing out the myth that emotions don't belong in the workplace. When we learn to embrace our emotions at work, we not only allow our most authentic selves to shine, we also create a more human workplace for our colleagues. 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 Liz Fosslien, she is a leading voice on emotions at work. She is the coauthor and illustrator of the Wall Street Journal bestseller, No Hard Feelings and the upcoming book, Big Feelings. Many of you, probably know her, because of her viral Instagram account, Liz and Mollie. Liz is also currently the head of communications and content at Humu. Liz, welcome to the show.

**Liz Fosslien:** Hi! I am so excited to be here! Thanks for having me.

**Jen Fisher:** Absolutely! I am really excited for this conversation. Like I said, I am a big fan of yours. I really want to just dig right in.

**Liz Fosslien:** Great!

**Jen Fisher:** So, tell us about yourself and tell us about how you became passionate about emotions, especially, in the workplace.

**Liz Fosslien:** Yes, so I am an author and speaker. My two books are No Hard Feelings and then the newest one is called Big Feelings. So, No Hard Feelings looked at emotions at work and then Big Feelings grapples, it was very pandemic inspired, grapples with some of the harder emotions that we all deal with. I am also the illustrator for both of those books. And then how I got interested in this, I way, way back context, my parents are both very stoic academic immigrants. And so, I very much was raised in

this environment where to be a professional, you don't fuss, you don't fail, and you certainly, certainly do not feel. And then I studied economics and math, like very solid quantitative fields that provide stability in life and got a job as an economic consultant after college and on paper it checked all the boxes for me, was a tall building, I put on my, nice suit every day. It was a very clearly laid out career path for me and I just really burnt out after about two years. I think the work wasn't creative. We would be waiting to get work from lawyers who would often get the work at 6:00 PM. And then I would be in the office until 2:00 AM. And that just really wore on me after a while. And so, I just had to quit. I had no idea what I was going to do next and that for me was the first time. But I really had to face like, oh! I just didn't like this job and so I started researching, maybe emotions do affect me, it was just really scary to think about what on earth was I going to do next? Because this thing that I had worked so hard towards had completely blown up in my face. And as I started doing that research, I also realized there was a lot that I could have done differently. It never ever occurred to me that I could ever go to my manager and say these are the parts of my job that I really like. Can I invest more in that? What does a career this company look like if I am focusing a bit more on the writing and making the charts? That was never something that I even knew you could do. So, I think it was really valuable for me both to assess why that might not have been the right environment for me. But also, I really think there were actions had I known to take them, that would have improved the situation for myself dramatically.

**Jen Fisher:** You coauthor, and your very popular Instagram account is Liz and Mollie and she is also your coauthor. Like I said, so tell us about Mollie, tell us, I love the story of how you met. Can you share that with us?

**Liz Fosslien:** Yes, so Mollie and I met when I was living in San Francisco in my mid 20s and had just taken a job in New York. I am originally from the Chicago area, so somehow all those stereotypes about New York had really seeped into my brain and I was so scared. It was like I am this sort of midwestern west coaster, happy, nice person and everyone just going to be mean to me, and I am scared. So, I frantically emailed all of my friends and said, can you please set me up on blind friend dates, just so I have a safety net in New York and Mollie was one of those first friend dates and I will say, actually, people in New York are great. So, that the stereotype did not bear out for me. But Mollie and I immediately bonded. We are both very proud introverts. We have very ridiculous sleep habits. We both know the best sleep mask, earplugs, white noise machines.

**Jen Fisher:** I love it. We need to talk about some of that. That is right up my alley.

**Liz Fosslien:** (Laughter) I have got lots of opinion. So, one of the core things is that we both had had these experiences very early in our careers of the job. You really wanted that you were so elated to get and then just for whatever reason didn't work out, and emotional suppression also leading to physical pain. So, for me it had been migraines. For Mollie, it was an eye twitch and then severe neck pain and so then we started at the time, I had started dabbling an illustration, Mollie was writing articles and then we decided to start working on projects together and the core of it we realized, was really emotions at work and how do you even just start to talk about those and leverage them effectively.

**Jen Fisher:** And your illustrations, I mean, is that something that I mean were you always artistic and just didn't think that it was something that you could bring to the workplace, or that you could do at work. Like how did that all like as a child were you really artistic? Or was this something that kind of developed later in life?

**Liz Fosslien:** Yeah, you kind of nailed it. I would say, as a child I was always doodling, or I went to Montessori school, so that was encouraged. Yeah, but I really had when it came to being, “professional” and having a career, I had this notion that my parents never said explicitly, but that still was begging around my brain was art is a fabulous way to be poor and unsuccessful. And I think that is this like academic immigrant mentality. At least that is with my parents, it definitely was, and so it just never occurred to me when I went to college to take an art class. It was like, I am here to take all the economics classes, all the math classes that I can, and then, go be lawyer, banker, something doctor, or something in that sphere, and it wasn't. I think when I hit this, I had to quit this job. I actually started working as a barista at Starbucks, because I needed some income and had no idea what I was doing with my life and that was where I first saw, I mean, Starbucks is so thoughtful about design and onboarding and the emotional experience of the store. And that was where I first started also drawing and I had started with data visualization because that was sort of the most natural next step from this quantitative background and you still see that in illustrations, there's lots of Venn diagrams, there's lots of charts, that's all still my familiar territory.

**Jen Fisher:** I think that a lot of that is the reason that perhaps it resonates with the audience, that it resonates with, because we can all relate to that in some ways, right?

**Liz Fosslien:** (Laughs). Yeah, totally.

**Jen Fisher:** So, let us talk about emotions. What are they and why are they important?

**Liz Fosslien:** Yeah, great question. We actually asked several emotion researchers and academic experts, and no one really had the same answer, and then that it seems there is not sort of a perfect definition of emotion. But I would describe it as a sort of psychological response to some kind of stimulus and that could be a thought, an action, and why they are important. We evolved to have emotions. They are incredibly important. They contain data, they can motivate us to act in ways serve ourselves. So, I think there is this notion that you have rationality on one end of the spectrum and emotions are on the complete opposite end of the spectrum. But if you think way back, if there was a lion charging towards you, it was really important that you felt terrified, otherwise you weren't going to move and so in the modern world, there are so many smaller stimuli that cause emotions and not all of those are helpful to us necessarily. But at the core, it's still useful to kind of reflect on what the emotion might be telling you about the situation that caused it.

**Jen Fisher:** There's this myth, right? And it is pretty pervasive and perhaps hopefully changing - that emotions don't belong at work. So, many of us have heard like check your emotions at the door, whether it's virtual these days or the actual physical door, why does that exist? Explain to us why that's wrong? Why that is not good thinking on behalf of leaders and colleagues alike.

**Liz Fosslien:** Yeah, I think it goes back to this false dichotomy that I mentioned, where emotions historically thousands of years back have been seen as you are hysterical if you have emotions. They cause you to act irrationally, and that is certainly not something we want in the business world where you are coming up with strategies and trying to plot out the next logical best step. I think it is also that for a long time at least, and sort of “professional world,” that was the domain of men. And men have traditionally also been socialized not to not have emotions, but to express certain emotions and not others. So, empathy - no, anger - more ok in some situations. And so, I think the opening up of white collar, knowledge worker jobs, in particular, to a broader group of people, which is great has also started

to change that. But it's funny about why they matter. So, my dad is a retired academic physician, very stoic, is not into emotions. And when I told him at first that I was writing this book about Emotions at Work, I remember he just looked at me and said I am so glad I am retired. Like I don't know what is going on in the world anymore. And then I remember when he first got a copy, he looked at it and then I talked to him on the phone a week later and he just couldn't wait to talk to me about this book. Because he said, this is so useful, I had a boss who was like this and I didn't know that I could manage up. Yes, I had an employee who went through this hard thing, and I didn't know what to say, and it was fascinating that he had been in all these situations we talk about, but it just never entered his mind, that emotions might be involved or that emotions could be useful. Because he was so tied to the traditional notion of no feelings in the workplace. So, I think you just can't turn off your feelings no matter what you're doing, and so given that it's actually much more valuable to learn how to work through them, leverage them than to just continue to pretend that they don't exist, and then actually not know what to do in these everyday situations like someone having a bad day, having to give feedback, being a leader people want to follow.

**Jen Fisher:** So, what are, I guess some of your, I don't want to necessarily call them like top tips, but what do you tell in your trainings and your writings like what do you teach to leaders and managers, but really just everyone right and how to kind of lean into those emotions and you mentioned earlier that they are data right? And so how do we actually use those emotions as data to tell us what's important to not only ourselves, but other people, I would imagine.

**Liz Fosslien:** Yeah, so I'll start with what we often share with leaders because we get the question a lot. I am open to bringing emotions into the workplace or talking about them more, but how do I do that effectively? And we always, Mollie and I, always say none of our work is an invitation to be a feelings firehose, so we are definitely not saying everything that is on your mind needs to start spilling out of your mouth. So, for leaders, we encourage them to practice something that we call selective vulnerability and so it's pairing a moment of openness with a path forward and you are really trying to walk this line between acknowledging what you're feeling, what others are feeling, creating space to talk about it, which all builds trust, but you don't want to overshare because that destroys trust. Let us say there is a global pandemic, and everyone has to work remotely overnight. In one scenario you come in and you say, 'okay, we're all remote now. What's the next agenda item?' That's not useful. The team, it's not a human response. They're not going to trust you. I'm sure they have tons of questions that you probably should be answering and concerns, but you also can't show up to that first meeting, bawling and saying, 'I don't know what's going to happen to the business. I didn't sleep. I have never led in this environment. I am completely at the end of my rope. I don't even know where we go from here.' That's going to completely destabilize the team and undermine your own abilities as a leader. So, selective vulnerability is this moment of openness. So, you can't say this is really hard. I didn't sleep well last night. It's new territory. I'm anxious. I'm sure you're all concerned about your families. Let's take 10 minutes just to go around and check-in. Here are resources if you need them. Here's what I'm going to do over the next three months to make sure that we're working together as a team, that the business is solid, that our relationships with clients are good. So, it's this. I have emotions. There's space to talk about them, but I also have it together enough to lead us through this because that's my job as your manager.

**Jen Fisher:** I love that, and I think one of the things that I hear most often is, if I invite emotions into the workplace or into the conversation and I don't know how to fix the person or help the person, then what

am I supposed to do? So, in other words, I guess people shy away from being vulnerable or asking questions that might elicit an emotional response that they don't know how to respond to. What do you say in those situations?

**Liz Fosslien:** I think the first is, it's a completely natural impulse that I have both at work and in my personal life that if someone comes, yeah, the fix exactly, which is someone comes you with a problem and especially if you are in any strategy business, development-type work, it's just like, 'Okay, what are we going to do? What's the matrix? What's the next step? Here we go.' Often, we undervalue just the power of listening and of being there and also of asking like, 'What one thing can I do to best support you this week.' There's research that shows if you ask, is there anything I can do to support you? It's really easy for the other person to just say, 'No, that's okay,' but by saying what one thing, you can say two things or three things, it's just about getting specific. Usually, the person can come up with one thing and then you can take action. So, I think it's a balance of not immediately rushing to problem-solving, creating space, just building that trust of you can come to me with this. Again, as a leader, saying like, 'I might not be able to do everything here because global pandemic is a great example. You can't change that.' But saying, 'Here are some options,' and then 'What one thing can I do today that would make you feel better?'

**Jen Fisher:** I love that, the specificity of it, but also the acknowledgement that...and I think it's hard sometimes for leaders to say, 'I may not be able to fix it or I might not know the answer and that's okay, but I'm still here for you and I want to help you in whatever in the ways that I can do that.' So, let's talk about, and I think this probably is more the focus of your upcoming book, which I can't wait to get, but difficult emotions or big emotions, you call them oversized feelings, explain to me what those are or some examples of those. Then, is there something different in terms of how they manifest in the workplace?

**Liz Fosslien:** So, big feelings, as we call them, are these emotions that don't necessarily go away if you're doing all of the 'steps.' So, the genesis of this book was Mollie and I had written no hard feelings about emotions at work in 2019, and then actually before the pandemic, we both went through really difficult periods at work and our personal lives. So, my father-in-law lost his 10-year battle with cancer and the last few months of that was just brutal to watch. Then, I also was having again, probably from illustrating and I do a lot of computer-heavy work, I was having carpal tunnel syndrome. So, that also affected my physical and mental health. I was journaling. I was exercising. I had a therapist. I was following all the rules and just nothing was getting better. Then, the global pandemic hit and then it really got worse and the nature of conversation that Mollie and I were having in our workshops, the tenor also changed dramatically. So, pre-pandemic, it was very much, 'I don't know how to give my manager feedback, or my manager and I have an employee who maybe overshares. What do I do?' Post-pandemic, it was suddenly, 'I have an employee who lives alone in a studio, is far away from their family. They've really started to disengage. I'm really concerned about them, not just as an employee anymore, but as a human. So, that's the difference. It is usually not as simple like, try these three things. It's more of how do you move through this, how do you get through those really hard days, and then how do you recover because it's more of a recovery process than have this one conversation and things might be better.' So, that's the focus of the new book, is really we look at things like anger, uncertain to usually anxiety caused by that, perfectionism, and then burnout is a big one too.

**Jen Fisher:** What are some of the things that you talk about, especially burnout obviously? That's a huge topic of discussion and I struggled with burnout seven years ago when no one was even talking about it. So, I didn't know what I was going through. But I also feel like there's so much conversation about it now, but how do you recognize it? Then, what are the recovery strategies or what do you talk about in your book when you talk about burnout and some of those bigger feelings?

**Liz Fosslien:** I love that you mentioned that you didn't even know what you were going through. I think that it's just so important to be able to name it because then you can, I don't know if you...searching online is the best thing, but at least you can ask for help or figure out what to do.

So, every chapter in the book, including the one on burnout, we first bust a couple common myths and then go into some strategies. With burnout, there're two big myths. The first is that there will just be a sign one day that flashes and tells you your burnt out. Usually, that's not how it works. We spoke to a burnout expert who had this line that I loved, which was, 'Burnout at first, it will tap you on the shoulder with a feather and then later it will hit you with a bus and your job is to listen when it taps you on the shoulder with a feather.' I think we're just really bad at doing that. So, one of the earliest signs, two that really resonate with me are when everything becomes too much. So, you get an email in your inbox and you just can't deal with that email or a friend texts you about dinner and you get upset with that friend because you're like, 'I have so much on my plate, how dare you text me about dinner?' This has happened to me and that's just a sign that you need a break. Then, the other one is this thing called revenge bedtime procrastination, which sounds like you are very familiar with.

For listeners, it's when you have had a packed day, you haven't had any time to yourself. You're tired. You go to bed and instead of resting and sleeping, which is probably what you need, you get on social media or you just do whatever and stay up hours past the point of really wanting to sleep. You stay up hours before you go to sleep and it's just because you need that time to yourself. You feel like it's the only time in the day that you really have to mentally decompress and that's also a sign that you haven't built enough breaks into your day. So, tips there are really it's not rocket science, but really trying to take the breaks that you can, take your vacation. If you're a manager, making that a collective practice. So, it's actually kind of hard, especially if you're a junior employee, to take a 20-minute break in the afternoon. You might feel guilty, you might not be sure if that's something that the organization really wants you to do. So, the manager setting the example, having your team put 10 minutes on their calendar, like a shared team experience, that this 10 minutes is always going to be a break every day. Then, one other thing that I've found useful is also just getting comfortable with working at 80% sometimes. I used to do this all the time, which is there's natural ebbs and flows to how much work you have. When I had a slower afternoon, instead of saying the work will come, I will get answers to those evals. I'm just going to have a cup of tea. I would start all these new projects in this frantic frenzy. Then, when the work did come suddenly, I needed to be at 150% and I was completely overwhelmed. So, I think it's also getting comfortable with this uncomfortable thing of you don't have to be 'productive all the time,' and that's actually better for your long-term success.

**Jen Fisher:** That resonates with me so much. Even now, when there's slower days and it's interesting that we define slower days by the number of emails that we get.

**Liz Fosslien:** It really is.

**Jen Fisher:** Since the number of emails that we get actually makes us less productive and the real work or the deep thinking that we need to do for real work, but on the days that I get less emails, even now, there'll be moments where I'm like, 'Wow, I wonder if everything is okay. I'm not getting hundreds of emails today like what I normally get.'

**Liz Fosslien:** Totally. I know. I don't feel completely great and well.

**Jen Fisher:** I've got to step back and be like, 'Okay, wait a minute. I'm not getting hundreds of emails today. I could actually sit and take a break or do some deep thinking or journaling or go for a walk.' I have to remind myself like, 'Hey, that's actually a really good day.'

**Liz Fosslien:** Totally. Yeah, that resonates a lot.

**Jen Fisher:** Today, it is lucky with that. Our mind plays tricks on us. A couple times you've mentioned this concept of like oversharing. Obviously, there's a really wide range of emotional expression, and some people are more comfortable expressing and sharing a lot and some don't express it all. So, is there a soft spot in between the two? What do you recommend there?

**Liz Fosslien:** Yeah, it's a great question. So, everyone sits on a spectrum and on one end of the spectrum, you have under-emoters and these are people that are more closed off. They usually have great poker faces and it's a product of how you've raised your personality, the environment that you're in. So, this is all context dependent. It can change in different situations, but again we all have this base comfort level of expressing emotions. So, that's under-emoters who tend to be more stoic. Then, on the other side you have over-emoters, and these are people they're a complete open book. You feel something, everyone knows immediately. Then, in between is even-emoters, so people who bridge the gap between those two. The best leaders, there's not a good or bad tendency, but the best leaders tend to act as even-emoters. So, for example, if you know that you are an under-emoter, and Mollie and I have an assessment for this on our website, people also usually when we explain this have a really good idea of where to sit on the spectrum. We have people who are like, 'Oh, I'm an over-emoter 100%,' but if you're under-emoter, the positive is people will often come to you to talk through a problem because you can be very cool and collected and really you won't have a strong reaction, which can be nice sometimes, but the downside is it can be hard for people to trust you initially. So, Mollie shares the story. Mollie is an under-emoter. She said, especially with client-facing work, she really had to practice meeting people for the first time and saying like, 'I'm really excited to meet you. I am excited to kick-off this project' because that was not her natural tendency, but she needed to start the relationship off on a good foot. So, that was her leaning more towards even-emoter. Over-emoters, it's really about pausing, giving yourself the time so that you don't have a reaction. You can formulate a response. The upside of being an even-emoter is you get really excited for people and that's lovely and that can be really motivational for a team. So, I think it's, and again we have a lot of resources about this online. I think other people have written about it as well, but it's understanding where you sit on the spectrum, harnessing the positives of your tendency, but then also understanding the shortcomings and how you might want to correct for those in certain situations, whether that's opening up a little more or again thinking again, do I really want to say this? Words are like toothpaste. When they're out, you can't put them back in the tube. So, just taking that split second of how do I want to show up in this moment if you're an over-emoter.

**Jen Fisher:** I think I'm going to have to look up some of those resources myself. You talked earlier too about this concept of selective vulnerability. So, how do we learn to be selectively vulnerable? Because I would imagine if you ran over-emoter or under-emoter like that, those are connected in some way, right?

**Liz Fosslien:** Yes, totally. So, selective vulnerability is sort of the perfect expression of even emotion. Yeah, and I would say learning it's about practice. It also sometimes we are just forced to learn it based on feedback. So, one of the people we interviewed was Kim Malone Scott, who wrote *Radical Candor*, amazing book on giving feedback, and she said she always saw herself as a cool, calm and collected manager until one day one of her reports came up to her and told her, just want to flag that the whole team knows what kind of day we are going to have by your mood when you walk in the door in the morning and that was startling to her. And so, what she started doing was a form of selective vulnerability. So, she would in the morning, especially, if she knew that she had been in traffic or it had just been a really hectic morning already, she walks in and say hey, it has been a morning I just need to get my coffee and sit down for a moment. It has nothing to do with you. And so again, it is this acknowledgement. It is totally fine to have a bad day. You are going to get frustrated. You are going to have hectic, especially, I think, in our wild back-to-back meeting world. It is just flagging that she went into no detail, so it wasn't oversharing. But it was a nice signal to the team, you don't need to be anxious because you perceive that you have done something wrong. But I am feeling it is just normal, but it's nothing to do with you and I will be fine in a couple minutes. So, I think that is a nice example of kind of being forced to figure something out, but again, this balance of flying the feeling without going into detail, but it provides a lot of stability and comfort for other people.

**Jen Fisher:** I mean what I also love about that is that it gives as the leader it gives permission for everybody else to do the same thing when they need a moment.

**Liz Fosslien:** Yeah, totally.

**Jen Fisher:** So, I mean, does selective vulnerability change based on the context that you are in or is it constant?

**Liz Fosslien:** Yeah, it definitely changes, so this is kind of new, I mean new maybe 5-10 years ago in the academic research. But it's this thing called an emotional culture, so a cognitive culture is normally what we talk about company culture, so that is be innovative, deliver exceptional customer experiences. Emotional culture is formed by the small gestures and behaviors. So, it is not verbal, it is very implicit, and like a very traditional bank, will have inevitably a different emotional culture than a big tech company with like a ball pit in the lobby. So, two very different things and then there can even be different emotional cultures within the same organization. So, the classic example that academics point to is a hospital. So, you have nurses and doctors when they are with patients, they are going to act in one way, but then if they are in the break room together, goofing off or blowing off steam, that's a very different emotional culture. And so, what selective vulnerability means? And this is where it gets a little hard to give advice, because it's this kind of moving hard to pin down thing. It's really, you know what vulnerability is going to land while it is going to resonate with people while still preserving that stability and psychological safety in that particular environment, and that might even look different if you are a manager with one report to the other. If one report, like isn't very emotionally expressive, you might share a little less than with another one. So, yes, it's definitely kind of sensing what is the environment you are in. It is also unfortunately some of this is based on your identity and how people are going to



respond to you because of that. Ideally, we are in an environment where that doesn't have to be a factor. But sometimes it is and so just to kind of be honest about there might be something that you need to think about as well.

**Jen Fisher:** So, all of this, I mean, as I think about it requires a lot of self-awareness, right? And kind of knowing who you are and being able to recognize your own feelings and being able to walk into a room or a meeting and sense what is going on in that moment. So, is there any guidance that you have on kind of how we develop that self-awareness in order to be able to be more tuned into these types of things?

**Liz Fosslien:** Yeah, I think some of it starts with just identifying I think journaling in some sense can be useful. If you take a week and just write down here, where the moments when I felt really stressed here, where situations when I didn't know what to say. So, it's useful also to start to understand, most of us tend to have patterns, so I really go through a slump in the afternoon, and I have noticed that during that time I will show up to meetings and just become like a gender robot. Where I'm tired, I just want to get off the video call, and so because I know that because I have identified that within myself, I actually take time before the meeting, take a deep breath and say, we are going to start off with a personal question, we are going to bond, it's going to feel bad at first, but I actually really enjoy that once we get into it.

And then you can also ask for feedback on this from a trusted colleague. So, keyword 'being trusted' but peer or maybe your manager, you can say hey, I am really working on selective vulnerability, I am working on creating space for my people to come to me with problems. Can I run a couple scenarios by you? Can you watch me in meetings and give me feedback? So, it is kind of both looking inward and then also looking outward for a couple of mentors who you think do this really well and asking them to help you learn and grow in that way.

**Jen Fisher:** I love that in particular, I mean identifying those that we think do it really well and asking for their help.

**Liz Fosslien:** Yeah.

**Jen Fisher:** So, you mentioned stress and we have all been experiencing an unusual and perhaps extraordinary amount of stress over the last couple of years. So, how does stress impact our emotions?

**Liz Fosslien:** Yeah, so when we are in a heightened state of emotion, which stress definitely puts us into, we tend to have outside reactions to everything. So, when you are very anxious, that is when a small comment, a small email might feel worse to you than it would if you were not in this anxious state. And there is also lots of research that shows when we are in this, especially with stress heightened stressful state, we perform less. We tend to take depending kind of on your personality, you might take more risky options, you might make the less risky choice. So, it can really skew your behavior in ways that you might not want it to. So, it's extremely detrimental, and I think in the modern world, we also, this comes from a book called Burnout, which I highly recommend, and the author says in the modern world, we never have time to complete the stress cycle. So, back in the day, you would run away from a predator and if you got away, you would just feel elated. You could sit down, and you would complete the stress cycle and all the cortisol and the bad stress hormones would kind of dissipate within your body. But then nowadays, you have the email, then you go to the video call, then you go to the in-person coffee,

then you go to the messaging platform, then you go to like social media and it's just this constant barrage and so we are just in this constant state of stress which is really detrimental.

**Jen Fisher:** Obvious things to do about that are to create breaks in your day away from the screen, perhaps get out in nature. I guess what are some of your favorites to kind of complete or break that constant cycle of stress?

**Liz Fosslien:** I think one is, which has come up a lot in conversations, is the after-work ritual. So, Cal Newport, who is an author, he wrote, *Deep Work*, also great book. He is I think an engineer by training and so he has a very technical ritual at the end of the day, which is to close his computer, his laptop, and say schedule shutdown complete and that is his termination phrase and to him that signals work is over, it's now time to transition into my home life. And that is one way of kind of stopping the stress cycle, is just to really physically close the thing that is pinging you all the time. Interesting research around rituals also shows that even people who don't believe in the power of rituals when they are forced to do them, they feel better. So, even if you think what I am saying is baloney, just try it. You know it might work and then the other one, so I have, like our company's internal messaging platform on my phone, the app. And I will delete it every night at 7:00 PM and on weekends I delete it and then I reinstall it in the morning, which is maybe extreme, but it is the only way that I won't check it obsessively.

**Jen Fisher:** So, you do it, you do what you have to do. Yeah, and I love Cal Newport's work. I don't know if you have read his more recent book, *A World Without Email*, but that was very enlightening to me and probably reflects some of the comments I made earlier about being stressed when I am not getting enough emails, right?

**Liz Fosslien:** Yeah, totally.

**Jen Fisher:** So, last question for you. We have talked a lot about kind of, team leaders and what leaders can do, but what about if you are a team member and you are struggling emotionally at work or you think that one of your colleagues might be struggling emotionally? Is there something that you can do or say to others but also, I mean respecting boundaries, knowing that people have different comfort levels with these things, like what do we do as colleagues?

**Liz Fosslien:** Yeah, I think this is where it comes down to really understanding the emotional culture of your organization. So, if it is very open, people are comfortable talking about emotions, then I think it probably it is a little more straightforward. Just saying, hey, just wanted to check in with you, if there is anything I can do, let me know, I think often just asking someone to grab coffee, checking in with them at the beginning of the meeting, it is about intentionally creating space for them to share a little more, and to show that you are interested in their well-being and in starting those conversations.

When it comes to talking to your manager, I think that is again, if you are in this open environment, often you can just bring something like that to your manager and say I am really going through this hard time or hear something I am struggling with. Can you help me do XYZ? I think it's always useful to come with an ask because it makes it a little easier for them to help you. In more closed off emotional cultures, I would come with the need. So, if you find that you are really anxious, let us say about a looming deadline, instead of going to your manager and saying I feel so much stress about this deadline, I just, I feel completely overwhelmed. I would recommend what is the need? So, maybe you need to figure out your priorities. You need to scale down the scope of a project and go into the manager and

saying, hey, I listed my priorities for this week. Here is everything I am working on. Can you help me make sure that I am spending the most time on the most important projects? And usually, they might not even know the full extent of all the things on your plate. And then that will just be a really, really, useful conversation. And because you are addressing the underlying need, you will actually feel better emotionally afterwards, even though you never really talked about emotions.

**Jen Fisher:** I love that strategy. Asking for help and asking for someone to help you prioritize things. Liz thank you so much for this conversation filled with so many good actions and so much wisdom. I think people are going to get a lot out of it, so thank you for your time today.

**Liz Fosslien:** Yeah, thanks so much for having me, it is always fun for sharing and commiserating over email.

**Jen Fisher:** Absolutely and thank you for the work that you do, your books are amazing. Some of the favorite on my bookshelf, I can't wait to get the new ones.

**Liz Fosslien:** Amazing, thanks so much.

**Jen Fisher:** I am so grateful Liz could be with us today to talk about emotions at work. Thank you to our producers, Revit360 and our listeners. You can find the WorkWell podcast series on Deloitte.com or you can visit various pod catchers 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 Jenn Fischer or on Twitter @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.