

WorkWell

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Redefining how we think about self-care with Dr. Pooja Lakshmin

Jen Fisher: Hi WorkWell listeners. I'm 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.

Self-care is a popular term, but what is it really? We often think of things like bubble baths and massages, and while those are nice and relaxing activities, they aren't going to help you address prolonged stress that you may experience in your life. Real self-care is hard work. It's about making difficult choices. How can we change our mindset around self-care to ensure that we're actually taking care of ourselves and not just following for the latest wellness fads. This is the WorkWell podcast series. Hi, I'm Jen Fisher, and I'm so pleased to be here with you today to talk about all things well-being. I'm here with Dr. Pooja Lakshmin. She's a board-certified psychiatrist, a clinical assistant professor at George Washington University School of Medicine, and the founder and CEO of Gemma, a one stop shop for evidence-based women's mental health education. She has spent thousands of hours taking care of women struggling with burnout, despair, depression, and anxiety in her clinical practice. Pooja is the author of the book, *Real Self-Care, A Transformative Program for Redefining Wellness (Crystals, Cleanses, and Bubble Baths Not Included)*. Pooja, welcome to the show.

Dr. Pooja Lakshmin: Jen, I'm so excited to be here. Thank you for having me.

Jen Fisher: So how did you become passionate about what you do and about self-care and what it really is?

Dr. Pooja Lakshmin: Yeah, you know, this is a story that like most, I think like the most important stories it's a professional one, and it's also a personal one. So I'm a psychiatrist. I specialize in women's mental health. I take care of patients, all women, people who identify as women, mostly moms, but not all moms. And I founded my company, Gemma, which is a women's mental health education platform. And I'm 39. Now almost 40, I'll be 40 in December, but about a decade ago, I went really, really deep into the Woo, Woo Wellness world and it's actually one of the reasons why the subtitle of *Real Self-Care* is *crystals, cleanses and bubble baths not included*. Because I was one of those people that was really burnt out and also had at that time in my late 20s, I had constructed my life based on what I thought I was supposed to do. Like what I thought a good life and a successful woman was supposed to look like I had, went to the Ivy League schools, became a doctor, got married, checked all the boxes that like a good Indian girl. My

parents are South Asian, they are immigrants. I think a good Indian girl was supposed to do. And at the end of checking all these boxes, I was kind of like “OK, well now let me try and figure out how to be happy? And of course that didn't work because I didn't know what my values were. I didn't really know who I was or what was important to me, and so I ended up just kind of blowing everything up, leaving my marriage, moving into this wellness commune in San Francisco and then dropping out of my residency program and I spent two years, really immersed in the wellness world, focused on like spirituality and meditation and this group also how to focus on women's sexuality. So is it a very exploratory time and after those two years, I found myself really heartbroken, like kind of realizing, you can't outsource this type of thing. There's no one wellness practice. There's no guru. There's no meal plan kit. There's no secret workout, right? It actually is the really hard work of making tough choices in your own life and that was like 2013/2014. And then I came back to medicine, finished my training, joined the faculty at George Washington University, started writing for the *New York Times*, doing some work on social media, and that led to writing my book. I would say it kind of became clear to me, maybe I would say like five or six years ago when my patients started coming in and they were like, you know, “Doctor Lakshman, I'm stressed out and burnt out. I'm not eating well. I'm not sleeping well and I feel like it's my fault because, you know, I have this meditation app that I know it's supposed to be using or I know it's supposed to go to yoga. But I just can't find the time.” And I found myself basically screaming to everybody like this isn't your fault, like it's not about cramming wellness into our already over scheduled completely hectic lives, like we actually have to completely redefine the way that we think about self-care.

Jen Fisher: So let's talk about that. So me, I personally I love taking bubble baths as part of my overall self-care plan, right? And so it's not that those things on the surface or bad, in themselves, but what you talk about in your book is our own value side. It's not the activity, but it's the value and the decisions and the other people that we have to engage with and coordinate within our lives to kind of make self-care happen.

Dr. Pooja Lakshmin: You know, and I love that you mentioned that you like bubble baths. Because I also love spa stuff, I also love getting massages. So, it's not that they're bad or wrong and I'm not trying to demonize those things.

Jen Fisher: Absolutely.

Dr. Pooja Lakshmin: It's more like, the metaphor is that if you're burnt out, if you're in that place where you feel like you're drowning, the bubble bath is a life raft, right? That somebody can throw you, but the real self-care, that internal work that is your swim to shore plan, and that takes strategy, that is different for everybody, right? And it's not something that you can just buy off the shelf, it's actually something that you have to create. Looking at your own your own life, your own priorities, your own values and so real self-care is actually it's an internal process. It's a verb. It's not a noun, and those four principles that I outline in the book. And I'll just kind of run through them really quickly, principle one boundaries, principle two, self-compassion, principle three, this is the hard one, values, identifying them and then actually executing on your values and then four, power, remembering that this is actually power. This is how Audrey Lord said that self-care is self-preservation. And I think I quote her three times in the book. I think the frame here is that we're living in a system that we're 30 million Americans don't have health insurance. So there's all this systemic inequity and we're sort of constantly swimming upstream. And so the concept here is that real self-care lives in your choices. And when you are able to make choices that are aligned

with what matters most to you, then that is how we actually get to a place of more people having access to well-being.

Jen Fisher: Yeah, I mean, I love that, and I hear you when you say that the values is the hardest part, but I don't know I mean I kind of think that boundaries and self-compassion are pretty hard too.

Dr. Pooja Lakshmin: You're right, Jen, actually, fully it is. It's all hard. It is and that's the other thing you know with writing a book like this and I think even thinking about your book, *Work Better Together*, it's like we're both kind of saying, like, "oh, like, this isn't a quick fix. This is something that you have to invest in," and, but I think that's a hopeful message actually, because it's about change, right? Changing ourselves, changing the way that we think about our well-being, changing the way that we think about what's possible. And that's always gonna be long term work.

Jen Fisher: And I think it's also always ongoing work, right? This place that you arrive at and kind of say, "OK, well, I'm here. And what's next?"

Dr. Pooja Lakshmin: Right, right, because it's actually care work, right? And we know about how that care work, that's the emotional labor, and unseen. It's ongoing. It's never something that you can just check off and say, "OK, now we can just coast. So with real self-care, it is like, "OK, let me turn that care work internal, like I deserve it," and you know my patient population is women and so in particular, especially for women who are employed outside of the home and might be caretakers whether that's with kids or whether that's other family members. The idea of being able to give yourself that attention and give yourself that emotional labor for yourself, that's it's kind of radical, right?

Jen Fisher: Yeah, and do so without feeling guilty.

Dr. Pooja Lakshmin: Yes, yes. Well, and I think that fits in with boundaries. Because, you know, principle one is boundaries and I will say for folks, you're probably a little bit rolling your eyes because you really can't like scroll anything without seeing a therapist say something about boundaries. So like I recognize everybody is talking about boundaries and the reason is because they are so hard and like if you were to learn one mental health skill and really master it, boundaries is the one that's going to be the most high yield. Because it's the backbone of so many other coping skills when it comes to mental health and well-being and emotional health. And the way that I think about boundaries is actually a little bit different. So I tell the story in *Real Self-Care*, it was when I first started on the faculty at George Washington University, this was back in 2016, my mentor, she took me out for lunch and she's the director of our Women's Mental Health Clinic. She gave me a piece of advice that was really surprising. She said, "Pooja, you don't need to answer your phone. You can just let it go to voicemail, listen to what they want and then decide." And that was, like, really surprising to me because I just finished psychiatry residency. I've gone through medical school and in those days, you know, you have like pagers where you would get paged and like you have like a response like answer right away. So I was like "what I do not want to answer my phone?" and then it was like, an "Aha", because I was like Oh, your boundary is in the pause. You pause, and then you decide and you can say 'yes', you can say 'no' or you can negotiate. And so sometimes it would be like oh, it's the front desk and they have some insurance paperwork for me to fill out. And I can say, "oh, come around at the end of the day after I'm done," sometimes it's a patient who I know this patient, if she doesn't have a day of her ADHD medication like she literally might get into a car crash or lose her job. "OK, I'm going to put that refill in." So I get to decide and you know the no isn't always available or accessible for everybody, and the 'no' very much, it has costs and consequences, right? So, you don't

always have access to no, but you do always have access to that pause. And you can think and then decide how you want to act.

Jen Fisher: Yeah, I think that's so powerful, especially when I think about my world that is consumed by e-mail.

Dr. Pooja Lakshmin: Yes, yes, yes.

Jen Fisher: And especially an e-mail that either hits you in the wrong moment or something that is said triggers you or and this auto, you know, this feeling that we need to reply right away to get our point out or to show that we're on it. I mean, I talk a lot about the, "You don't have to reply to me just to tell me that you're on it. I'm just going to assume that." I think about that just in the world of e-mail that I live in and how like I don't have to, like it's OK to take that pause and say, "OK, does this need to be responded to right away, or can I respond to it tomorrow or later when I have, you know, I can take a beat and take a breath."

Dr. Pooja Lakshmin: Right. And I think it's actually a skill that you have to learn. And the thing that often comes up when you're learning, especially, in the context of talking about real self-care is you feel guilty when you take that pause like you feel like, "Oh my gosh, am I letting somebody on the other side down?" And so part of the work with boundaries is understanding that just because you feel guilty, it doesn't mean that you've made the wrong choice. I talk about guilt, it's sort of like a faulty check engine light, like on your car dash, like you taking the car to get serviced, everything's checked out, everything's fine. But then there's this blinking light that goes off and it doesn't actually give you any meaningful information. And when you make all of your decisions in order to avoid feeling guilty, then you end up getting so far away from yourself and that's the trap I think with boundaries is that you have to really get clear on the facts that like the guilt will be there because that's a conditioned response based on the environment we live in, based on all of the different systems of oppression that are working around us. So you're exerting agency when you say, "OK, I can just turn the volume down on the guilt. I don't need to take it as you know, I need to drop everything and respond right away or jump. I can just let it be there and I can still stay consistent with how I take that pause and then decide."

Jen Fisher: How did we get to this place where we're getting self-care so wrong and then also talk to me, I mean like we've touched on it a little bit, but like what damage is that doing to us?

Dr. Pooja Lakshmin: Yeah. You know, as I was researching for the book, I dug into the history of self-care. And it's interesting because self-care as a concept actually has two different lineages. So, one lineage is actually the medical establishment. So in the 1950s and 60s, psychiatrists actually started to use the term self-care to refer to choices that patients were on locked psychiatric units could make for themselves around like exercise or what they were eating or the clothes that they wore and so it was kind of like this term that was used for even if you are in an environment where so much is decided for you, you still have some agency over your day-to-day and then pretty soon after that the nursing profession started using the term in their literature to talk about compassion, fatigue, for medical professionals and then along the same sort of parallel path, folks like Audrey Road and Bell Hooks, Black Queer thinkers started to use self-care in the context of the civil rights movement, and in particular for marginalized groups for oppressed groups, the way that self-care, again was self-preservation and kind of similar to Gloria Steinem, talking about how the personnel is political, when you take the time to think deeply about your choices and how you spend your time and your energy that actually is a powerful political act, especially

for Black people in America, Queer people in America, any group that is marginalized. So that's where things came up.

And then fast forward to where we are now, which is the world of social media where you know, self-care peaked in searches on election night in the United States back in 2016. And since then, if you scroll any app, you'll just see pictures of whatever sort of aspirational image, whether it's like somebody sitting in a little Zen pose or whether it's like a green turmeric latte or, there's any number that the essential oils, which become commodified and as a psychiatrist myself, as a clinician, I link that to the fact that in America in particular, we really don't actually have a mental health infrastructure. It's so hard to find a therapist. It's so hard to get in with the psychiatrists, let alone find a provider of color or somebody who has similar lived experiences, just really this gap. And that's been the case even prior to the pandemic. But of course it got much worse over the pandemic. So it's much easier to scroll your phone and if you're kind of constantly seeing images of like, here's this juice cleanse, here's this perfectly beige branded vitamin pack, let me just click, buy on that versus talk to my insurance company and try and figure out how to find a therapist. So I say this with compassion. Like it's like, it's really hard. And I'm in therapy. I've been in therapy for years and I am fortunate because I have access to those resources and I also know how hard it is to find the right person, so I think there's a link there. The second question that you asked like what is so harmful about it? I think I mentioned that earlier in the conversation of because it puts the onus of change on the individual. It's we feel like we're bombarded with all these solutions. Like whether it's the yoga or the meditation or whatever it is, and not that those are wrong or bad because we do know meditation, there's actual evidence for these different interventions.

Jen Fisher: Right.

Dr. Pooja Lakshmin: Yeah, the problem is that when you're just adding something else and you don't understand the reasons why when you haven't done that internal work of the boundaries, the compassion, the values, then it's just another thing on your To Do List and then you feel bad because you never get to it or if you do manage to incorporate it for a week or two, life gets busy, things change, you have a baby, whatever somebody gets sick, and then you fall off and then you beat yourself up. So instead I think the path to real self-care is to understanding that all these different life rafts, they are great. We need those life rafts and you actually have to do this internal inquiry process to understand which life raft do you really need, why, and also know that there's going to be different solutions for different seasons of your life and not beating yourself up when you're moving through transitions and then the thing that used to work for you, you don't have time anymore.

Jen Fisher: Yeah, yeah, I think, you know, in your book and these aren't your words. This is probably me paraphrasing, you know, it's so much less about the activity that you're doing. So it's less about yoga or getting to the gym or whatever it is that you're picking to do. And so much more about that internal work and then you talk about how it's the conversation with your spouse or partner or your family that maybe you're missing out on doing or not doing because you're choosing to do this other thing that is good for you, but also kind of aligns with the value set of what you're trying to achieve or accomplish. And there was something about that just kind of hit me at my core because I guess I've been doing it for a while, maybe, but I'm pretty diligent about my exercise, anybody that knows me or follows me, you know I exercise and I say I exercise and it's true primarily for my mental health because I live with anxiety. And so when I go for a period of time without exercising, my anxiety is through the roof. When I exercise, that's one of my primary ways of managing it. But I'm very diligent about like, "OK, this is my exercise schedule

for the week. And I tell my husband and my team knows and what is very cool about something like that and recognizing that for yourself and taking those steps and setting those boundaries and is that it gives everybody else permission to do the same thing if they're struggling with how to do that or what that might look like in the workplace or just in life in general.

Dr. Pooja Lakshmin: Absolutely. And it's funny that you mentioned that because I've been sort of living this myself as my book came out and going on a book tour and promoting the book, which as you know, is a whole gauntlet in itself. And it's a part one of the decisions that I made is that in June and July, I'm going to take Fridays off. And I was so worried about making that decision. And once I started mentioning it about requests that were coming in and saying, actually, you know, I can't do Friday because I'll be off for those months, for Fridays in the summer. And everyone's like, "Wow! like, that's so great of you. Thank you. Thank you for modeling. Thank you for showing me that it's OK to do that." And I think that sometimes we forget that when you actually practice this. It gives everybody else permission and it's different for everybody, like one person might have their runs or their yoga, it's to each their own and part of the practice of real self-care is understanding that whatever it is, then you need to be able to put those boundaries in place and give yourself the compassion to have that time.

Jen Fisher: Yeah, absolutely. So how do we know if our self-care practices are actually helping us. How do we make sure that we're kind of like not getting caught up in the fads of faux-self-care.

Dr. Pooja Lakshmin: Yeah, that's a great question. I created this quiz in the book. It's called the Real Self-Care Thermometer. It was actually really fun to write. It was like one of those Cosmo quizzes from like the 1990s or the 2000s and it's basically a checklist of how accessible boundary setting is to you. Everything keeps coming back to boundaries, so when you're doing like, when your real self-care is robust and internally based as opposed to externally based, you'll know because you will be able to set boundaries. You'll be clear on your yes and your no. You won't spend hours and hours feeling conflicted. You'll feel like you understand what your priorities are and can execute on that. When your self-care is more of the faux type like more externally focused as opposed to internally focused, you'll notice that when somebody asks you to do something, you'll be irritable or angry, feel like you can't say no, but you really want to say no. They'll be this kind of like resentment that's hanging around all over the place. I talked about that in the book. It's like this martyr mode where you're giving and you're giving and you're giving, the other thing that happens when you're in that faux self-care cycle is that sometimes you can be using the wellness practices almost as like a report card for yourself. Where you get really caught up in the performance of it, the competition of it, not to say that competition is bad, no, like we all need that motivator. But when it becomes really rigid, where you can't, you're down with a cold, you have the flu and you're still trying to force yourself on the treadmill. It's like you feel this internal sense of shame in regard to your wellness practices. That's another kind of little red flag, like, really kind of getting a little bit obsessive about it.

Jen Fisher: So you know, and you are right. Boundary setting keeps coming up and we kind of have talked about how hard it is to do. Can you share tips on what are some best practices around setting boundaries? What is good boundary setting actually look like?

Dr. Pooja Lakshmin: I think of this in terms of two different lanes. So on an operational level, boundaries are about communicating. So the best practices are very similar to what we see in terms of being a good communicator, being clear, being direct, sort of stating what works for you, what's possible, what's not possible. The other thing is for example, if you get an inbound request to join a new project, another form of setting boundaries is asking questions before you immediately say yes. So you get an incoming for a

new project and again, especially in corporate environments where I noticed in the consulting that I do is that a lot of times these requests would be things that you want to do. Because if you're in a work environment like this, you usually are somebody who is really highly motivated and engaged and talented and valued. You'll get that incoming and the response might immediately sort of be like "oh yes, yes," but instead a pause might be to say "OK, when does this start? What do you anticipate would be the hour or the weekly time commitment? When will the meetings be?" Just kind of allowing yourself to dig a little bit deeper into what this actually looks like before immediately jumping to yes and being clear with those questions. The other kind of piece of this is really trying your best not to ask for permission, right? Because I think sometimes when we're setting boundaries, especially for women, we get worried about whether we're going to be seen as not a team player, not helpful. And so I think it's clear, especially over e-mail, which so much of our work is over e-mail, really kind of clearly delineating what you can help with and then being clear about what you're not able to take on and to soften it you can also offer something of like "oh, have you thought about reaching out to so and so." Or "I know this other person is definitely looking for new opportunities." So that's one way to kind of still indicate that you're a team player that you want to be able to help, but you're also mindful of your bandwidth.

The other lane here is the, you know, we talked a little bit about guilt, but sort of like how do you allow yourself to take these steps? I think for myself as I look in the consulting work that I've done with Gemma, also my company, I really feel sense of respect for folks who are direct about what they can do and what they can't do. And I think that when you remember that when you think back like, "oh, you know, I worked with so and so and they actually were very clear in their communication. And I really appreciated that they were a straight shooter around what their limits were." That helps me because then I remember like, "Oh, actually that's a skill that's respected. It's not something that people look down upon, actually it's something that's really highly valued." The last bit that I would recommend to is also having a larger strategy for yourself. So I have a little rule that I need to say no to at least every week, I need to say no to at least three things. That's my minimum. And it's a successful week when I've said no to at least three things. If I haven't, that means that something's going on and I need to go back and start looking at my boundaries work. Am I letting guilt lead? Am I worried? Am I trying to be too competitive for all this stuff. So, keeping track of your no's, especially if you're somebody who is a people pleaser, is a little bit worried about the guilt, keeping track of when you have said no, when you have negotiated, when you have asked questions, and making a little kind of list for yourself, even on your notes app on your phone. To say that, like, actually like the world doesn't fall apart, like people still keep coming to you to ask you for things, that also can help with the anxiety.

Jen Fisher: I love that. I actually.. and if you can't do that for yourself, an accountability partner is great. I had a colleague for a period of time that we had a conversation and I was just overwhelmed. I had said yes to way too many things and she was like, "I'm going to send you an e-mail every single Friday and ask you what you said no to this week," and we did that for several months until I kind of got to a place like and at first I was like, "oh, I didn't say no to anything." But then, like as time went on, I was like, "OK, she's going to send me this e-mail, and I'm going to have to actually tell her what I said no to." And so getting if you can't do it for yourself, getting somebody to hold you accountable on that is always great. So all of these, these are great tips and strategies. Are there things outside of what you just talked about or just specific role modeling that leaders can do to help their people both understand and practice better self-care?

Dr. Pooja Lakshmin: I think the place that leaders can really embody real self-care is around the values piece. So, I think values is a little bit of a tricky subject because we see that word come up all the time. Value is an adjective or an adverb. It's not a noun, and so typically when I ask people about values with my patients, or folks a Gemma, you always get kind of like a stock responsible like, "Well I value my family" and it's like, "OK, great. Well, everybody values their family." Like, that's not helpful. Like a value needs to be the 'how' or the 'why'. It's an adjective. It's an adverb. So, as a leader, if you're managing a team, if you're working as colleagues with folks, I think it's really clear, it's really helpful to spend time thinking about what are the values of each person that reports to you. Like, what do you notice that they really light up about? Is there somebody in your team who really is a creative person and they love when they have ownership of specific aspect of a project and can really sort of run with it and be creative, put different things together or maybe it's somebody who really is, has like the lightness to their personality, is silly, is humorous, finding a way to sort of pull that out and bring that into your meetings with them. Somebody else who maybe you notice is a little bit more introverted and perhaps really values more of that authentic connection or sort of like the more focused attention, maybe that's type of person that when you have new projects for them or new tasks, it makes sense to take the time to schedule a one-on-one to really kind of give them that focused attention. This is, you know, you can't really make a specific playbook for this, because everybody's values are unique and especially in a workplace setting where everybody's asked to move so quickly and there's so many deadlines and so many requests and tasks, the thing that shines through for a leader is if you actually do spend the time thinking about your team, thinking about each individual as a human and paying attention to what has them light up and then focusing in that way. The other thing that I would say on the other side of leadership, but also folks who are just coming in, is every year when you have your reviews putting real self-care into your review plans, like thinking about your doing your performance review with your boss or your manager, but what are your internal goals for your well-being, for your wellness? Aligned with your values and then also aligned with your ambitions for your career and that could be a separate process. Maybe you do that with an accountability partner or with your coach. And this works actually just up and down the whole ladder too, because especially as you move up in an organization, you're learning that skill of having to manage other people, which is a very hard thing. And so in your real self-care plan, even when you move up, you're kind of thinking about, "OK, maybe for me something that is really important is knowing that the folks that I've mentored or that I've coached end up in places that really align with their values and they're proud of the projects that they're working on or responsibilities that they're given." So I think there's a way to actually incorporate this as a little bit of a routine and that's one of the things that I've been working on a little bit in some of my consulting work with different organizations because certainly, I come from a healthcare environment, there's a lot of room for improvement that we could say on that side.

Jen Fisher: We all have room for improvement, but yes, as I was listening to you, it kind of struck me, "what about within our own families?" because there's differences in terms of how committed we are to our own self-care, or even how committed we are to somebody else in our family being committed to their own self-care. So what is.... and that's probably a little bit of a different animal when you're in a family versus in a corporate or work situation. So what does that look like when you're trying to maybe encourage loved ones to make self-care a priority or get loved ones on board with you making self-care a priority?

Dr. Pooja Lakshmin: I think like so much change work, this is an investment, so I think you have to take the long view, but it's gonna be a marathon, not a sprint. Your action steps in the beginning are kind of

like seeds, Seeds of having a new conversation. So maybe one thing is you're taking some of these exercises from real self-care and doing it with members of your family, whether that's your partner, maybe you have teenage kids, this work could be accessible for them instead of getting curious around, "OK, like, what does this look like for you? What comes up for you?" in the work of kind of supporting family members, one thing that's not different actually than the workplace is like you can't be heavy-handed, right? It doesn't work when you just like, tell somebody else like, "hey, you should do this because that's gonna be good for you." Usually the response is sort of like, "yeah. Ok. Thanks." So you want to kind of be more of like a thought partner, a conversation partner, help them get curious, coming from a place of, "hey, let's maybe work on this together. Let's think about this together" and it will take time depending on where that person is. I think one of the nice things for folks who have children that are in that preteen or teen space, this is something that if you put the seeds in early, it can be part of an ongoing conversation that they're having as they're in school and going off to college and launching into the world. For those of us who come to this work a little bit later in life, we might be more stubborn, so it might take a little bit longer and that's OK. Again, the way to bring about sustainable change is actually consistency. It's not about making some sort of big dramatic leap. It's more about like, "OK, let's take some time. Let's listen to the audio book together. Let's come together once a month and have a little conversation about this and making it fun too." And then the question of like what if you're in a family situation where you don't feel like your self-care is supported? Many of my patients feel this way. What I talk about in the book is that, especially for women, it's so easy to get to kind of ping pong between selfless, we put selfless on this pedestal and then be so afraid of being called selfish. That's the worst thing that a woman could be called. And the reality is like the way forward is that there's a middle path of good enough. And the solution isn't like oh you're always going to be able to, like, have every one of your preferences accounted for. You're always gonna be able to make it to yoga, like, every time that you want to, like no that's not realistic, but what I'm saying is well, let's just at least put ourselves on the tee, right? Maybe like one time out of five, you're able to get what you want, or have your preferences taken into account. So many of my patients say that they feel like they're managing their family, but they're not actually part of their family. And so this concept of like, well no I'm part of the team too, right? And it is a team, right? So that brings in sort of like this flexibility. So I think again where Jenny mentioned like the accountability partner, the coaches, I think you can bring this to your relationships as sort of like hey, this is something I want to work on together, I want to think about this together and understanding that it's not like a hard and fast like this is going to change right away, but more giving yourself the permission to take a three month, a six month, a nine month approach.

Jen Fisher: Yeah, I love that. I love that and I probably need to revisit some of that in my family life too. So one final question or maybe it's kind of like a two-fer, but like how did writing this book change you and kind of any of your personal practices on self-care or your family practices like did the book inspire changes or did changes in your life inspire the book?

Dr. Pooja Lakshmin: That's a great question. You know, I think it's both. Definitely changes in my life inspired the book in an ongoing way and then writing the book and the success of the book and being out in the world with the book has definitely impacted how I've thought about my own self-care and well-being. Writing a book, launching a book is a very stressful thing, a hugely stressful thing. And I was really, really pushing myself and there were definitely weeks where by the end of that week, I was like, I am a shell of a human. Like I'm absolutely a shell of a human right now. And I had to say to myself, this isn't – one like I wrote a book called *Real Self-Care*. That's not great, right? So let me pull back here and so part

of that was saying OK, I'm taking Fridays off in June, July, I letting myself go a little bit slower for the summer and coming back to my values, which is that self-expression is something that's really important to me and so even as I've been talking about the book and doing interviews, acknowledging that I was definitely teetering on burnout, launching the book and that it impacted my mental health and I've had to reset and then normalizing that because in every different transition in life, whether it's a professional one or a personal one, even in the good changes, maybe especially in the good changes, you're going to have to reset. Because there's all these new roles that come and new responsibilities. And so you come back to the real self-care practice, you come back to the compass, right? You come back to your values and the good news is that every time you go through that process, you build the muscle so it's easier each time. It doesn't take as long, you have sort of the muscle memory and you're able to then redirect. So yeah, like all things I think it's another learning curve and I'm excited to kind of keep going with it and see how things continue to evolve.

Jen Fisher: Well, it's been really fun to watch the book and all the things that you've done around the book and the impact that you're having. I know that the book impacted me and the beginning I kind of promised a little glimmer into how you and I got connected and perhaps it's a really good use for social media because I found out about your book and then I followed you on social media and you replied back almost right away and you were like, "Oh my goodness. I also have your book sitting on my dining room, or my living room table, and I think we were kind of fast friends." And so I'm so honored that you spent the time with me and with our listeners. I think it's going to be really impactful to many who listen to this podcast on a regular basis. So thank you for your time today Pooja.

Dr. Pooja Lakshmin: Thank you so much for having me, Jen. It's been such a pleasure.

Jen Fisher: I'm so grateful Pooja could be with us today to talk about real self-care. 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'd 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're 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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