

WorkWell

A Deloitte podcast series to empower your well-being



Reigniting your sense of aliveness with Sara Ross

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.

Our relationship with work is complicated. On one hand, we want to be successful and do well at our job. On the other hand, we want to live a full and energized life. Is it possible to do both or can we only be successful at work if we sacrifice our well-being?

This is the WorkWell podcast series. Hi, I am Jen Fisher, Chief Well-being Officer for Deloitte, and I am so pleased to be with you today to talk about all things well-being. I am here with Sara Ross. Sara is an international keynote speaker and the founder and Chief Vitality Officer at the leadership research firm she founded called BrainAmped. She is also the author of the book *Dear Work: Something Has to Change*. Sara is on a mission to help organizations and their leaders reignite a sense of aliveness in both their work and at home. She and her company do this by using brain science-based strategies to teach people how to amplify their emotional intelligence, resilience, and well-being. Sara, welcome to the show.

Sara Ross (Sara): Thank you for having me.

Jen: Absolutely. I want to start, you say you are on a mission to help organizations and their leaders reignite a sense of aliveness in both their work and at home. So first of all, I am onboard with their mission, but it's also a big mission. So, tell me a little bit more, tell me how you became passionate about this, what's your story?

Sara: I keep trying different ways of where I want to start this, but I think the reason I use this word of aliveness. A part of it is this sense of vitality, it is this energy that we have. I think what I really was focused on helping people manage their energy in a really skillful way so that they could stand out as being great leaders, cultivating the best in their people, lifting people up, and that was my mission, and that's what I was really focused on, and then COVID hit. When COVID hit, I saw a lot of really great, great leaders; leaders that I had been studying about what makes them great at what they do, who are still doing great work, but there was such a high cost to them. What ended up happening is as I would talk to people, I would hear again and again, people being like if I just wasn't so stressed, if I could just be less

tired and less exhausted. As a result, I was watching people do things where, for example, they would feel that the only way to kind of keep working was to pull back. I think this is a huge part of this quiet quitting movement that we see where it feels like there is like this binary choice of either all in-all day-every day to the point of exhaustion or to pull back and to pull away from that extra effort and to pull away from some of these opportunities to move forward in their role or I think even worse, we have seen it so clearly, great people who are so committed to what they do, who really do love their industries but are making the choice to not just leave their roles, not just leave companies, but leave those industries entirely. Because I spend a lot of time working with people who have made some of these decisions, we are also seeing a lot of people feeling a sense of regret. So, this is a long way of saying that what's fascinating is when we focus on feeling less, that's kind of the benchmark that we end up with and most people don't want to just feel less exhausted. Most people when I ask them, they are tired of feeling tired. So, if we are going to really think about what are the strategies, what are the policies, what are the structures we put in place, we have to be really focused on where the direction of our actions are taking us and I think this direction back to activating this aliveness factor is really about activating the entire person, that whole person having access to everything that makes somebody feel this sense of aliveness, and that is doing important, meaningful work, but that's also what makes them who they are outside of work. I just really feel like focusing on where we want to go needs to be really clear.

Jen: The big aha there for me was that the answer of wanting to feel less tired doesn't actually equal or automatically equal feeling more alive, it's just feeling less tired.

Sara: I have been trying to explain that this way. I remember when I was learning to drive and my dad was teaching me how to drive and the very first time that I had to go on a highway, we had to go through a construction zone. If you have ever done that right, like there are the concrete barriers and there is this single lane, and when we are just learning to drive, you are constantly like, I couldn't help but focus on not hitting those barriers and my dad said to me something that has proven to be important in so many ways. He said don't look at what you don't want to hit, look at where you want to go, and it turns out from quite literally a physiological, psychological, and most notable and neurological perspective, it's called target fixation. When we look at the things that we don't want to hit or we are trying to avoid, we are naturally designed to go towards those, which is the exact same reason why there are rules to move over a lane when you see a car on the side of the road because our natural instinct is to drive towards the things that we pay attention to. So, I do really fundamentally believe that if we are looking at trying to change the way people are thinking about work in general and living a life that is fulfilling to them, we have to be really specific at where we are putting that focus so that our actions can genuinely follow through on where we want to go versus where we don't want to be.

Jen: I love that, it's such a powerful mindset shift, especially now. You are absolutely right, people everywhere, I want to feel less tired, I want to feel less stressed instead of I want to feel more alive, I want to feel more engaged, I want to feel more focused, I want to feel happier, whatever it is, we tend to and maybe that's human nature too, we kind of tend to focus more on the negative and that's certainly my human nature, probably not everybody's.

Sara: But it is, quite literally, it is our human tendency. Our brain is designed to have this little bit of a negativity bias, it is actually wired. It's wired in a way that it wants us to stay safe, it wants us to stay comfortable. We are designed to go towards things that are effortless and immediately rewarding like

that is very, very natural for us, but it is also not often the things that fulfill us most from an energy perspective. So as much as we are, it's a natural design to worry and want the safest, easiest, most comfortable route. Our brain is also designed to genuinely thrive and be at its best when we step into those challenges. So, even though it's human nature and we have to work with our humanness, I fundamentally believe it also is amazing that we have the opportunity to choose our mindset, the opportunity to choose our focus and make those shifts where we know they will be in most service of what we care the most about.

Jen: You said something also that that I want to dig a little bit deeper into that as you were working with different leaders in different organizations during the height of the pandemic and COVID, this really started to become much more of like a front seat issue. You and I both agree that this is probably bubbling up under the surface for many, many years and we just learned like we do as humans, how to kind of keep it just under the surface with different coping mechanisms, whether they were healthy or not, we could probably debate that. But what was it about the pandemic or that you were seeing that really blew the top off of this and made it either okay for people to talk about it or it just became too much that we had to do something differently?

Sara: There are so many different factors, there is no doubt about it. When our mortality is in our face, when there is a sense of fear, when we are suddenly forced to do things that we didn't even think we were capable of, like individually we didn't know if we could manage mentally and emotionally, but then from a workplace perspective, like working in ways that we thought we couldn't, people, sheltering, and place and working from home, doing many of these different things. It is also our human nature to have a forced reflection and all of a sudden we took away many of the things that although many people, including myself, I am the queen of cycling through, being really committed to kind of living this full life and working in a way that's fulfilling me, and then I get sucked into the cycle of kind of consuming overwork. But with that being said, all of a sudden, we had all of these things that we could do if we wanted to. Many of us weren't taking advantage of them, like even just being able to take vacations, leave our house, work out in a gym with other people, go to a restaurant, or even just simply genuinely walk down the street and be in the same places as other people. When that was taken away, I think there is no way for human nature not to pay attention to those things. We are loss averse. We may not take action on the things when they are available to us, but take them away and people really recognize it. It became so clear that looking at work as the thing that was going to give us fulfillment just wasn't possible. Like I say at the beginning of my book, *Dear Work: Something Has to Change*. I say at the beginning, we sometimes treat work as if it's a person that we are in a relationship with, we are waiting for it to love us back and give us validation and tell us we can take breaks and all of those things when all we had was kind of that for many of us, it became really clear that it just was not enough. While we have often talked about overworking, I think that feeling of under-living is just we became clear for people that we don't have all the time in the world, we don't always have the opportunities to do these things. So, we have to think about life, not just work.

Jen: What I felt that in the rear-view mirror, I should know all of these things, and maybe I do. What I found during the pandemic, especially related to work because I was one of those people that was fortunate enough to be able to work from home was that I was using work and overwork as a coping mechanism because there is always more work to do, there are always more emails to send, there are always more emails to read, that's the way e-mail works. While in the beginning I think it gave me a sense of comfort, 3-4 months into it, I was like, man, why am I so tired, why am I so cranky, why am I so

this, why am I so, and I and I kind of had to step back and take that reflection and say, okay working and overworking isn't actually a good coping mechanism. But I love how you describe it as, we weren't living, we were working, but we certainly weren't living.

Sara: In that whole piece, there was so much around, and I actually love the languishing language because I do believe it is a very good description of what many people were experiencing and still are experiencing. To me, I say like when we are in that survival zone and that is different than survival mode. Survival mode is when we are truly in that state of utter crisis and trying to make things work, but when we get into this place where we are making sacrifices and trade-offs and we are overriding the things that we know would be best for us, that's where we get that feeling of just feeling stuck and that is why this sense of aliveness I think fundamentally matters. It can feel big, you started out saying this. It can feel big when you are just trying to kind of like I just want to get my head above water, so let's do that, but then do you do you stay there or do you want something else. I think one of the last things that the pandemic did for me, and it kind of threw some real self-reflection work is it made me afraid to set goals and think about the future a little bit. I had all these things where I then feel a sense of disappointment. It's like okay, but at least the holidays and I will be with my family again, and I am like an ultimate homebody. I love lots of change in my professional life, but I am a true-blue home body. I like my traditions, I like the same things to happen, and even just looking forward to that and that not being a possibility, it just felt like this sense of disappointment. So, I went into protecting myself by not planning for things and just being like just get through. The reality is when we consistently stay in a mode of something, we get really used to that mode and we stop even recognizing that we have lowered the bar and I think that has happened for many people. I am seeing people still in that. A still in crisis mode, though crisis has passed, but B in this state of languishing, and I think they have forgotten that it's okay to want more. So, I want to help people work in ways that are really fulfilling, but I also believe this second part of like what we do to ignite that sense of aliveness outside of work, our connections and movement, and having downtime and exploring the world like those are really important things that we need to think about in a larger picture if this is what we are going to aim for.

Jen: Absolutely, and the fact that in some way, shape, or form, your work can and should help fuel this sense of aliveness. People say this to me all the time, well, of course, you have meaning and purpose in your job, you are the Chief Well-being Officer, I do X,Y, or Z, which leads to a really meaningful and fruitful conversation because yes, there is a lot of meaning and purpose in my job, no denying that. But I also recognize that not every job has that, but every job for the most part, you connect with other human beings and that can bring a sense of meaning and purpose, and if not, your job could be just simply to fuel what matters to you outside of your working hours. Does it give you the ability to do the things and spend time with people and fund those things that bring you that sense of aliveness. I think that it's important to talk about or to think about work in that way. When we talk about mindset shifts, I think putting work into that bigger picture, it allows me a sense of aliveness. If it's not directly in the work that I do, then it's with people that I work with or because it affords me certain things outside of my time at work.

Sara: I sometimes think that when we talk about purpose and meaning, it can feel very, very daunting. I think for many people it's like, well, I don't know what that is and from doing this kind of work and looking at what are people that have this sense of aliveness in their work, which is where I started, and it turns out it has as much to do with how they work as it does to what they do outside of work, which should not be surprising at all.

Jen: And I want to get into that.

Sara: A lot of it is just work better and then I was like, oh darn it, here are all these pieces that I know and I have already experienced similar to you like I should know, but then to really see how that comes together. So, this kind of sense of aliveness, when I am talking about, I am talking about there is so much that's a feeling that's generated, but it really comes down to this core energy piece and I talk about how we generate vitality is when our energy, that mental, emotional, physical, when our energy is directed towards the things that matter to us in a way that's healthy for us. Often we talk about doing meaningful work, but then we forget that in a way that is healthy for us and the things that matter to us, it doesn't have to be that your work is life changing. It could be that what matters to you is you work in a way that brings the best out of other people. You work in a way that when you walk back in the door, the people who deserve the best of you still get the best of you. The thing about this aliveness factor, this vitality quotient, the other thing I really came to understand is that it is personal. There are consistent things that are human nature for us to do, but at the end of the day, what makes us feel most like us, what makes us feel at our best, energized, alive, connected, grounded, like that's personal. It's really easy to look around and think, well, that person's doing that well. Jen is the Chief Well-Being Officer, if I had a job like that then, but at the same time then it takes away this personal aspect. I have never spoken to anybody, when I ask the question what is something where you just felt the most like you, you felt most alive, every single person has examples. I am blown away by the diversity of those answers sometimes, but we all can recognize that those things are there. So, it's personal, but it's intentional. It is something we have to choose to do regardless of circumstances. We can't outsource our sense of aliveness to somebody else and in fact, I think one of the mistakes we make is waiting for our circumstances or waiting for other people to create the environments for us to feel that way. It really does take intentional effort and work and self-awareness and doing things that in the moment may not be the thing you want to do, but knowing that the outcome of that is going to create an experience that matters to you. I think the last piece that's important to remember is similarly to what you just said, Jen, about being a Chief Well-Being Officer and having lots of conversation and there are lots of beautiful things, I get to study and talk about and do the things I love the most, like I am doing it right now. I get to do things I absolutely love, but anybody who works, there is a whole other part of it that we don't work, but the reality is it's dynamic, it ebbs and it flows. Even if you have every self-care practice in place and you have the job that you love and family dynamics are just amazing, it is a dynamic ebbing and flowing of an experience. I think the last piece is just for people to recognize, it's a process, it's a way of living our life, it's a way of approaching our life and sometimes we are going to feel it in the most beautiful way and other times we are just genuinely not going to. Again, I go back to when we focus on where we want to be, our actions will keep taking us back there. We just have to honor the ebbs and flows of life as well.

Jen: I love that. I want to hone in specifically on work and specifically on the title of your book, which I absolutely love, *Dear Work: Something Has to Change*. So, let's talk about it, let's talk about what is it about work that has to change and why, and also whose responsibility is it.

Sara: Well, I know.

Jen: There's a loaded question for you.

Sara: This could be the rest of our conversation here. There is the tactical and then there is the philosophical, but I will say this, the book really did come from. It opens with a letter and I will say that is

the cleaned up version of the letter. It might not have been quite as nicely put and there might have been a couple of additional words that my publisher wouldn't publish for a good reason but that really was a letter of just feeling frustrated. Not even just with work, with myself, with this kind of as I already mentioned, this kind of cycling of I want to do something I care about, but I don't want to feel consumed by it, I don't want to trade in my life for it, and I keep getting caught in the cycle. So, the title of *Dear Work* really was for us to start thinking about our relationship to work. At the very end, I can give the conclusion away, the conclusion is work itself doesn't change. Again, if we recognize it, if we are waiting for it to love us back, it doesn't love us back. Work is not going to change for us, we need to change and then we need to work together to change the way work is structured, change the way when you work others work, and where work has a placement in our lives. I think that that really matters because I am sure you have found this in many of the conversations I am having panel discussions at various conferences. There is a little bit of a responsibility diffusion that's occurring where it's like we keep talking about this entity of work that needs to change and then being like well, those people need to do it, and if just our leaders would do this. If the C-suite is involved, which is all necessary and important and true, but we all individually do have a contribution to how work works, and cultures are made up of people. Some of those have more influence and power to change things than others, but I think it really is important to come from a place. This book started as a book about four leaders and then, via COVID and many conversations, this became a work about the personal work of work, and I think we have to each individually do some of that personal work to recognize what we are contributing to. Is it the things that we say are most important or other ways we are sometimes working contributing to the problems that we are complaining about and I think when we can recognize that we each have an opportunity to contribute to a solution and that we can contribute to the experiences other people are having at work, I think that's a really great first step, but it's a nuanced answer because with all the work that you have been so beautifully bringing out into the open and many other people are doing, this idea of feeling exhausted and burnout and our well-being is not an individual problem, it also requires structural changes, but those structural changes come from people who have the energy and the capacity to do them, that have the ability to stay connected to that big picture, who have the capacity to stay in those really difficult roles and fight for some of those things, and make choices and push things forward that not everyone is always going to answer or appreciate. I think it is the role of everyone, but I think that when you have got an environment, a world that is burnt out, it is very unfair to expect exhausted people to be full of energy and drive. If we don't do this personal work, then it becomes very hard to make these really big policy, structural, organizational, societal changes that we are aiming to make.

Jen: What you said is we all have a role to play. So, I think what I am definitely seeing, experiencing, feeling in my work is that we need to move away from this place of continuing to point fingers and place blame, and we need to come together as human beings, all of us having different roles, whether we are in the C-Suite or not. You are right, we all have a role to play in how we show up, how we engage, and I also think that oftentimes people have a lot more influence and agency than they tend to believe they do and so they get stuck there. I don't have the ability to change that, and I am like well, what do you have the ability to change and focus on that because we all have the ability to change something, whether it's within ourselves or within our own teams or with just two other people that we work with regularly.

Sara: I am going to just say that was beautifully summarized. That's exactly what I meant to say.

Jen: You did say that, and I was just summarizing it.

Sara: In fact it really is and I used the language of this managing and cultivating this sense of aliveness is intentional but it really comes from this sense of agency and the reality is when we feel powerless, we can mistake the sense of powerlessness for exhaustion. But when we feel a sense of empowerment, even if our environment isn't creating it for us, when we find that that sense of personal agency, it is amazing the energy we can draw from that we didn't even realize was there. I will just add to this. If we are going to make these changes like I believe we have to learn. We need to learn better about how to manage ourselves and our energy and the practices we put in place to take breaks and do things that refuel us and reinvigorate us, it's so important, but this is why this kind of bucket for me is really important. We also do need to build new skills. We need to be open to learn and be open to feedback, we need to have people who are not only just getting their work done or recognizing how they are getting their work done, like we need to keep emphasizing the need to build leadership skills that fall under the category of emotional intelligence, like how we do our work, how we make people feel doing our work, and those are skills that in combination, in parallel do need to continue to be built and to be prioritized because it's really hard to feel like you matter and that you are doing work that matters when you work for a leader who is not a very good leader. The nuanced part of that is I used to say my title should be a Monster Hunter because I spent a lot of time doing executive coaching and leadership coaching, and I did debriefed in or I would work with one group and they are like this was really great, we really needed this, but you know who really needs this, those monsters in the corner over there. I would always get so worried and I wouldn't be able to sleep the night before, and I would be going to meet this group of leaders or working with this particular major monster, and then I would get in there and I can tell you genuinely, I have met very few monsters, I might have one, that's a whole another story. But I would say almost always, I met people trying their best who are feeling really exhausted, knowing they could do better, but feeling like they didn't have the capacity or time or support to do it.

Jen: Beyond I guess time, capacity, support because I agree with that and that is a huge barrier for people right now, myself included, but also I just think it's a different skillset that we are not being taught. I want to get into like what are some of these tactical skills that people can start to do today in their life, in their work, to see if that changes how they feel, their sense of vitality, their sense of aliveness across the board. Whether they are a leader of people or not, this is something that is accessible to every single one of us.

Sara: When I work with people, we are just about done through the writing of the book and the researching for the book. We kind of had these interview questions and assessments and surveys that we were having different people take. We are almost done putting it together, so it can be like this accessible kind of aliveness indicator assessment that somebody can take, but it is different for everyone. This is nothing new. When somebody will come to me and they are like I feel consumed by what I do. I don't want to not do it, but I don't want to keep doing it this way. There are like three buckets we can look at. We can look at peoples' beliefs and their mindsets about work and about success in particular, like what they believe is necessary in order to be successful. We can look at how people are working with the stress that they are experiencing. But I almost find that sometimes the lowest hanging fruit is to look at what people are doing outside of work to just kind of what can you do that is not dependent on your circumstances, that is not dependent on your work structures, it is not even dependent on the leader that you work for. What might be some of those things, and this will be nothing new because this is the WorkWell podcast and I have had the opportunity to listen to so many of your guests, and I have heard you say this Jen. One of the first questions, I will ask a leader, the top

three I ask right away is do you take breaks in the day? Do you regularly get 7-1/2 plus hours of sleep? Do you have an end to your work day? I have found there is movement, there are many other things that really matter, but those three tend to be the easiest places for people to be able to do something immediately. Breaks in the day, the reality is so many people are like I push through so that when I am at home I can just relax. Then Dr. Phillip, and he said, how's that working for you? Almost none of us and then we try to go to sleep and it is like I want to get good sleep but my brain just turn off and it makes sense, but what we have to do is we have to work with our humanness and our brain works by what we do consistently. So, if we never take breaks and we consistently try to push through and then we just expect that our brain will be able to shut off because now it's time to go to sleep or now we want to have some free time, truthfully, our brain doesn't work that way. It does what it does consistently. So, we have to teach ourselves to just be able to disconnect, to give that permission to ourselves, and then reengage. The end of the workday is I am biased because it's something that I put in place about five years ago and outside of sleep which I changed for me about a decade ago, it is I am beyond committed to my sleep, it can be a little bit extreme at times of not wanting to move my bedtime or wind down routine, but truly, even though the work is not done and it is never done, do you have a time when you commit to ending your workday. Of course, that's going to change sometimes, but that I think is something for people. But even if you can do it, start once a week, twice a week, but this into just know that you can stop working, you have to stop working at some point, can help give people a little bit of that power and agency back that we were talking about.

Jen: I would reinforce, so powerful, but I would reinforce it. If you are a leader, how critical that is because if you never stop working, then the people that work for you don't believe they can ever stop working and it just creates a vicious cycle of not good things.

Sara: Probably the thing I am seeing the most right now, one of the suggestions I keep making to any organization I am working with when they are talking about how do we build this culture where well-being in our people actually matter and they tell me all the things that they are doing. I am optimistic to see so many things being done. Are we doing them consistently, are we doing them in all the ways we need to, but at least people are trying, but the suggestion I have made to the organizations I am working with is whether you are a leader or the organization in general, it is very simple question to send something out that allows people to answer anonymously, where are we sending mixed messages? Where are we saying one thing is important, but demonstrating something else. This becomes really important, especially for leaders to be able to take feedback and take things in and recognize that although you may have the best of intentions which 99% of the people I meet do, 99 are trying to do the best by their people, it doesn't mean that that's your impact, and sometimes the philosophy, as do as I say, not as I do is creating an environment of really mixed messages, that isn't what we do. Given the space, most people will do things to belong before they will do things to change. We will do things to feel like everyone else to increase that sense of safety. Our leaders really are our barometers. They not only set the emotional tone but whether leaders realize it or not, their actions become the expectations and people believe that leader has that, and if you say it's really important to shut it down at night and then it's like don't worry, I am just trying to close out my inbox and it's 11:30 at night, that is a mixed message, and though it's well-intentioned, I think we really need to start paying attention to what nonverbal cues we are putting out in the workplace.

Jen: Yes because they are often more powerful than the verbal cues.

Sara: Anybody who has ever been in a relationship and then you have said to your partner, they look like they are upset and then you say what's wrong and they are like nothing. We all know that nothing is like never nothing but we know that because of the body language but we seem to forget that when we are thinking about it from a workplace perspective.

Jen: One other area I want to touch on because I know you talked about this in your book and I feel like this is so important. It certainly has been really important for me in my life and my career is defining success for ourselves. We were just talking about leader behavior and how they often set the tone and I think that especially for me and my own story and so many people that I have talked to, what led to burnout for me was actually just following what others did because I perceived them to be successful and I hadn't taken the step of saying okay well okay hold on a second, what does success look like for me and then what are the behaviors associated with that success rate because I was just following others, and that's why the leaders role is so critical in terms of their own behavior, but I think also helping others understand what success for them could and should look like and it doesn't look the same for everybody. So, I want to get to that because you talk about it a lot and I think it's so important and so powerful.

Sara: Thank you. Well, I can also say that one of the best leaders I ever worked for truly one of the best, we had a bit of a hard conversation not too long ago after this book came out because she created this environment where people were so unbelievably loyal, like just so unbelievably loyal to her because she was amazing and she made work matter and she made us matter. But she also had a habit of having teams who would burn out and they would burn out often because of their loyalty to her and because of the direction that was set. That was something that I can put myself right in that bucket. If there is an undertone and I will hit the kind of definition of success, but if there is an undertone, I really hope we have number one is sense of self compassion for ourselves because I think in most instances we are really just doing our best with the resources, the information, the environment we are working again and we need to grant grace to other people because they are doing that as well, and you already said it, it's like we are human beings who need to work together as human beings and figure out what is going to work most effectively, work in a way that works for us but be careful to not just point fingers at people who have created this environment we don't like because it's rarely a single person. It is often a learned behavior, a cultural expectation. I say in the book as a society, we have morphed overwork into an admirable work ethic because we really have. We have a tendency to do that, so defining success for yourself is really important, but it is really hard. It just genuinely is. Even for myself, I hit it most days and then I will look and I will catch myself, which is I really do limit my time. I almost never scroll social media. I look at things, but I limit my time because it is the thing that if I am working in a way that is healthy for me and I am showing up as my best to the people who deserve the very best of me because there are many times where they end up with the leftover me, I can all of a sudden discount that because I will look around, I will be like, well I should be doing more and it's like, but I defined this as success. I think we just have to recognize that it is really hard and I would find people saying they not need to redefine success for themselves, but didn't know where to start. What happened for me as I was doing these interviews for the book, I found that there were kind of these what I call four success traps and I call them success traps because they are things that have actually made us successful at some point in our life or have given us a benefit to some degree but over time trap us, they keep us from fulfilling our potential, they keep us stuck in that survival mode and they can be really deceptive because they can get tied into our values and the way we see ourselves. I can just very quickly define

those four traps because for different people it might be helpful to understand. I find myself falling into all four at times, but I think to give people a starting point, one of the traps that I see most consistently with people who love their work is that they think because they love their work, that's the ultimate protector that you can't burn out if you love your work and the rules of overwork and consequences of overwork don't apply to you because you love it so much. The challenge is this kind of over investment, over personalization ends up putting people in this place where everything feels personal, like everything is either validation or vindication, and it is one or the other. I have seen so many people who are like, but I care, why don't people care, but what they don't realize is they create an environment where there is no opportunity for other people's perspectives or ideas where there is this all or nothing mentality that ends up getting created and this kind of over-investment keeps you from being able to recognize where you are plateauing and where you might actually be getting in the way of other people doing the work that they need to do in the way they do it in a way that's healthy for them as well. So, this kind of believing that if you love your work, you are safe from burnout is one trap that I see people fall into always, especially if its work that's really meaningful and important. I did it a lot of work with healthcare workers, frontline healthcare workers throughout the pandemic and this was one of those places. This work even if I am tired, it's too important for me to be tired and ultimately at the end, then it has really negative outcomes because you can only run on fumes for so long until you absolutely can't and then there is a person who is no longer available, and you are no longer to help in the places that you need to. It's a big deal. So, loving your work can't be the only thing you love and feel fulfilled by. The second one I always say it's kind of wrapped around the value of being of service, being a helper, being somebody who is super responsive and we are seeing this now in this kind of era of work-life blur that we need work life boundaries that just because somebody can reach you doesn't mean that you have to be available to respond to them and I think that this is really important in a world where it can go everywhere with us where we just are picking up our phone away of being able to be in contact and establishing some of those boundaries so that you have that space to actually do the work for yourself, enjoy the life that you want to have. So, being helpful is important, being available 24/7 is unsustainable. It also sets a precedent, as we said, for other people and it creates this always on environment.

The third one is around the value of drive where we believe that if we work 8 hours, that's good, but if we work 16 hours, we will get double the productivity out of it. As much as the data shows and the amount of people said that there is a point of diminishing returns. I think it is still hard for people to recognize when they reach that point where more work stops being an asset and actually starts to become a liability. Those are some interesting stories of people who have been too tired and have sent emails or have done things like. I have heard some of the most, some make you laugh and then some are just like company ending, so unbelievable. So, we need to also recognize that we require rest. Our brain requires that, our soul requires it, and this belief that you can work your way out of over work and more work has more of an impact is an easy one. The last one is one that I am working on continuously right now and it is the one that we believe that setting high standards is what fuels us. Again, that standards is not a problem but when that standard is perfection, when that standard is far higher, that expectation we have for ourselves is far higher than anyone would ever have, then we are kind of constantly in this chase and strive mode where we never feel enough. I caught myself in the place of mistaking, putting myself down as a way of driving myself forward, and the only reason I literally figured that out is because I sat across from a client once and I felt like they literally were mimicking back my internal voice and it is their internal voice and my first instinct to them was what a cruel way to talk to

yourself and I was like I do the same thing and mistake that for being the thing that's going to push us forward. So, each of those are wrapped around values that matter to us, like caring for your work, being helpful, being driven, striving for excellence, those are all powerful values for us to have, but when we morph those in a way that causes us to override our needs in order to achieve those, they end up being the things that trap us and those are often the areas we need to redefine our success around.

Jen: I was hearing my internal voice through all of that.

Sara: Is there one for you that you find yourself slipping into that you need to work on.

Jen: Certainly the third one, the way that I talk to myself, I am certainly not my biggest cheerleader by any stretch of the imagination, but I think what's powerful to understand is that the belief that's driving that is that if I talk negatively to myself, it is going to push me to go further, to do better, and that's just not true.

Sara: There are four emotions that really play into that. We often do things from a sense of fear that will cause us to override ourselves, a feeling of obligation, a feeling of guilt. The one that I always say is the icky one because it's hard to acknowledge also a sense of validation. So, when we look at many of those beliefs, we have a tendency to override our needs when those emotions come into play. Like that fear of if I lower the bar will I still be driven, that is really genuine feeling like I need to work all the time might be because I feel guilty if I am not doing something, like there are more hours in the day, maybe I should do more. I still have energy if I am not straight up depleted, am I dedicated enough, answering every e-mail might come from a sense of obligation and having people applaud us for working hard and that work ethic can be a very seductive and enticing thing that makes redefining that success for us challenging.

Jen: Very much so. Well, Sara, this has been amazing. I think I got through three of the questions that I actually wanted to ask you. Please do not apologize, I feel like we need a part 2, so we can keep going, but for now I just want to thank you for your time, for all that you are putting out, into the world to make us think about aliveness as opposed to being less tired and everything that you do to motivate me and inspire me every day. I appreciate it and I appreciate you being on the show.

Sara: Thank you. Thank you for the time.

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