

# 6 Understanding Workplace Induced Trauma with Katie O'Malley.

**Michelle Harris:** [00:00:00] From Bosstrack, it's Her HypeSquad, a show about amazing women who've made incredible strides as leaders in their industry. They're here to support you and your leadership growth to encourage you and hype you up as part of your hype squad.

Hello and welcome back to another episode of Her HypeSquad with Bosstrack. I'm your host, Michelle Harris. Today I'm talking with Katie O'Malley, a career coach and workplace consultant and founder of (en)courage Coaching. Katie and I are talking today about workplace induced trauma, including what it is, what experiences can lead up to it.

The effects of workplace induced trauma and what can be done once it's been identified. We also discuss how as leaders, we can avoid causing it ourselves. [00:01:00] But before we get into our conversation, let me tell you a little bit about Katie. Katie O'Malley is a career coach and workplace consultant with 15 years of professional experience serving the nonprofit, corporate, and education sectors.

Across these workplaces, Katie noticed her strengths and values consistently steered her toward the support and development of others. In 2012, Katie translated this observation into action, earning a master's degree in counseling and board certification and coaching. Since 2018, Katie has worked alongside more than 125 clients as the founder and principal coach of (en)courage Coaching, founded with the noble mission of providing exceptional, financially accessible coaching services to Chicago area professionals.

(en)courage Coaching has grown to support individuals and businesses from coast to coast, as well as in the uk, coaching clients in the design of authentic career paths. Effective [00:02:00] leadership practices and courageous workplace cultures is in the DNA of encouraged coaching by leveraging and mix of evidence-based practices from the fields of counseling, organizational development, and leadership education.

Katie equips her clients with customized strategies to meet their individual needs and aspirational goals. Prior to opening the doors of (en)courage Coaching, Katie served as a leadership coach and co course instructor to MBA

and graduate students at Chicago Booth, the University of Texas at Austin and DePaul University.

Recently featured in Fast Company and Thrive Global. Katie's research and writing supports both sides of the workplace equation, encouraging and employers and employees to remember, we're all in this work thing together. I am so excited to bring you my conversation with Katie O'Malley. Hi Katie. Thank you so much for joining us today.

We're so happy to have you here.

**Katie O'Malley:** I'm so delighted to be here. Michelle, thank you for the invitation. [00:03:00]

**Michelle Harris:** Yeah, and I'm really looking forward to our discussion today. Cause I think what you have to, to say to the audience and what you have to offer is so important. So I'd, I'd love for you, we did, uh, an intro in the beginning and told everybody about your background, but I'd love for them to hear about you directly from you.

If you don't mind sharing a little bit of your background.

**Katie O'Malley:** For sure, for sure. Um, people's stories are, are fascinating and, and the way that we tell them on paper, written up in a bio can be very different than than how we tell them in, in conversation. Um, for me, I think I'll, I'll start at the end and maybe, maybe work my way backwards just a little bit to provide context.

Uh, but I am, I'm a leadership coach, a career coach, um, and workplace consultant. I've been in this space for, for the last 10 years, primarily, um, working with institutions of, of higher education and developing the next [00:04:00] generation of, of leaders and, and helping folks identify. Where they can really thrive in their career.

Uh, and so done that at places like DePaul University, university of Texas at Austin, most recently the University of Chicago Booth School of Business. And what I realized in doing this work is that it's great, um, for the students that, that are at these institutions, some of which are considered relatively elite.

And I really wanted to make sure that. Exceptional leadership education, exceptional career development is accessible to everyone, not just folks who attend elite universities, business schools, or work for companies with really

deep pockets. And that's when I decided to open the doors to encourage coaching.

And when I say open the doors, I put up a website in 2018, got my LLC, um, and just wanted to see what would happen if, if I put this service and offering out there to really, really [00:05:00] democratize coaching in a way. Um, and started off with, with a client from a former nonprofit that I had worked at. That client, um, had a great experience, referred me to a couple more.

And so it went, um, until this last spring, I was able to transform, encourage coaching from my side hustle and passion project into my full-time gig. Um, and so after spending four and a half years working, Eight to five, uh, at a university institution and then coaching clients from five to nine on the evenings or, or in the weekends.

I am able to focus my full-time and attention on folks looking to make career changes to advance where they're at. Um, or help create environments that are really rooted in, in a culture of, of courage, um, that encourage folks to bring and feel safe in bringing their whole self to work. Um, prior to that, I was a bit of a career [00:06:00] nomad myself.

Uh, started off in political campaign work, transitioned into the nonprofit sector, knowing that I really wanted to make a difference in, in the world. And I thought those were the only two paths to do it. But it turns out you can also really make an impact on a more micro level and plant lots of seeds by working with folks one-on-one.

And so, uh, transitioned, uh, into the corporate sector for a little bit. Uh, found my way to graduate school where I trained up to become a therapist and then just ended up taking that skillset in, in a different direction and, and applied all of that learning and education and training into the field of coaching where I'm at now.

**Michelle Harris:** It really, uh, your, your work really aligns well with what we do at Bosstrack, so I, I really have enjoyed the conversations we've had offline from, from this podcast. I, I'd love for you to kind of talk us, talk to us [00:07:00] about the topic for today, which is the workplace induced trauma. Mm-hmm. And kind of give everybody an overview of what, what is, what that exactly is.

**Katie O'Malley:** For sure. And I know Michelle, we've, we've talked about this, uh, before leading up to this podcast, and when I pitched it, I could

remember you being like, Ooh, trauma. I don't, I don't know. Um, and it's, it's a big word and it can, it can cause fear or be, be triggering either because folks have. Um, have that experience with it, or it feels so far removed from what they expect it to be.

And so if we can just take Workplace Induced away for a second and, and talk about what trauma is, I think as a baseline for us. And, and for your, for your listeners, it's starting to, to understand and reframe trauma, not as what happened to you, but what happens inside of you. So every day, [00:08:00] you, you, me, your listeners, we have dozens of experiences that our brain will code as positive, neutral, or negative.

Negative experiences get coded a bit harder and, and more deeply in our wiring. Um, and repeated negative experiences, um, can actually cause traumatic. Responses within us. Um, and so sometimes when I say trauma, when I'm working with clients, they'll say, oh, no, no, I haven't been, um, I haven't been in a natural disaster.

I haven't been held at, at gunpoint. I haven't had these big traumatic experiences. And I'll say, well, Back to the point, trauma isn't what happens to you, it's what happens inside of you. Um, and so picking up the response to, to those negative experiences, things like anxiety, depression, [00:09:00] chronic pain, insomnia or sleeping.

Sleeping too much. Uh, feeling, feeling guilty about things, feeling fearful about things, difficulty concentrating. All of these things that can really prevent us from succeeding in our, our current roles or if we've made a shift really starting to succeed in, in future roles. And so now that we're clear on, on what.

Like what trauma is when we're talking about it. When I say workplace induced trauma, I'm talking about two main categories of events that a person might experience at work. The first are very overt events, so things like harassment, discrimination, retaliation, a hostile work environment, things that actually have a legal recourse attached to them and are relatively, um, overt in the way that, that they are expressed and and perpetuated in the [00:10:00] workplace.

Then we have the more covert instances and experiences that people have in the workplace around. Around bullying, microaggressions, and this kind of catchall term toxicity, which tends to be around, um, the way things are communicated, lack of transparency. Often folks will come to me and say, I keep having this carrot dangled in front of me and I hit the mark, and then they move the mark.

And it is, um, in that consistent repetition of those. Experiences that has us start to have those trauma induced responses around, again, anxiety, lack of concentration, um, being unable to work from a place of courage and instead having to work from a place of fear. Um, so both sides, both the overt and, and covert experiences can [00:11:00] cause that, that trauma induced experience that holds us back, um, in our current work environment or future, future work environments, um, if we're not paying attention to what's going on.

**Michelle Harris:** Great. And you talked a little bit about this, um, in what you just said, but in terms like the effects of workplace induced trauma, I'm thinking about like what you just said about the constantly putting the carrot in front of the person and then that person reaches that carrot and then it just, you know, it's pushed out a little bit more and it just keeps going.

Like, how do you know? Whether you're ex experiencing workplace induced trauma from something like that,

**Katie O'Malley:** Yeah, it's, um, cuz it can be, it can be hard, um, with folks who have the, the, the trauma experience internally. One of the first things that happens is denial. Michelle. Truthfully, it's, no, this didn't happen to me.

It couldn't have happened to me if this happened to me, especially for women. It's [00:12:00] my fault that this happened to me, so I'm not gonna talk about it. Um, I think recognizing if there's denial, usually if there's denial, there's something good to explore and lean in there, lean into there wherever there is resistance.

I always encourage folks to get curious. So if you're listening and you're resisting this notion, it might be an opportunity to say, you know, what, um, is, is there something else going on here with me? But I think the other telltale signs are, uh, fear to share ideas. Um, fear to take. Um, a well calculated risk at work out of what the, what the response might be.

Um, a lot of times that's because you're in a volatile environment and you're not sure how your boss will react, how your colleagues will react. Sorry, excuse me. Um, and so really honing in on has my performance been affected [00:13:00] lately? Am I feeling demotivated? Am I having pain, whether it be physical or emotional?

Am I questioning my worth and value? If those things are popping up and they're not coming from a very clear internal place, it might be because something is happening externally to you and those messages that you're

receiving, you're starting to internalize and, and question all of, all of your capacity and ability to really perform, uh, in your, in your job.

Thank you.

**Michelle Harris:** And I, and I guess to clarify, the same thing could happen to two different people and one could trigger the workplace in induced trauma because of the way they react to it. Mm-hmm. And, and the other person, that same situation might not, if I'm thinking about what you're saying, correctly it correct.

**Katie O'Malley:** Um, that, that is absolutely, absolutely a possibility. Um, who we are and [00:14:00] how we move in the world, how we move through the world. Um, that's a big part of how we receive, absorb and, and respond to things or more simply put, um, how we think, feel, and behave when, when something comes up. Uh, just because someone doesn't respond doesn't mean the bad behavior wasn't there.

Right.

**Michelle Harris:** Got it. Thank you for, for, uh, clarifying that. Um, so how do. How does someone identify, navigate, and overcome workplace trauma once they've, well, once, once they've identified it.

**Katie O'Malley:** Yeah. And the identification can, can be the hardest part. Mm-hmm. Um, be because like I had mentioned so often, and I know your audience, um, is, is, uh, people who identify as, as women and, and female.

Um, for women. Like I said, so often if there is an issue or if something doesn't feel [00:15:00] quite right, we assume it's something we've done. Um, a lot of that comes from, from the way we've been socialized to be, to be pleasing, um, to not rock the boat too much, to be nice, to be warm. Um, and so I think the very first step is starting to talk to people around you in, in your work environment and ask those questions, Hey, this thing happened.

I've been assuming it's my fault or something I've done. But has this ever happened to you? And, and starting those questions with people you feel like you can, you can confide in if you're in an environment where you feel like you can't confide in anyone. That, that to me is, is a, is at minimum a yellow flag, perhaps a red flag that you are in a type of toxic environment that's perpetuating these types of cycles.

Um, in that case, I would say reach out to, to a mentor, reach out to, to a coach or a [00:16:00] therapist or another, helping professional to get an objective opinion. Is this normal? Um, or, or is this not normal? And there's this wonderful book that just came out by Dr. Gabor Maté. Uh, he studies trauma and the book is called, This is Not Normal.

Um, and it's all of the things we've come to accept as. Normalized within the human experience that are actually trauma. And so again, it's starting to reconfigure our idea about what trauma really means. Um, and again, what the, the impact is it on us? So there's the identify. Then there's, there's the navigate piece.

So again, if we can go back to those kind of two categories, the, the overt negative experiences around retaliation, discrimination, hostility, um, uh, my goodness. Why am I blanking [00:17:00] on that last one? Uh, if folks wanna hear it, they can, they can rewind the, the podcast or, um, the more covert experiences. If we're looking at the overt side, um, people have a lot of legal recourse that they can take.

Um, one of, one of my favorite resources to point someone towards is, uh, the Me Too Foundation. The Me Too Foundation, um, came about late 2018, early 2019, um, in response to a lot of the harassment, um, and, and sexual, um, Sexual assault that we were seeing happen in Hollywood. Right. Um, and what come, people have come to find out it's not just Hollywood, it's all workplaces.

Where, where this can really happen. The Me Too Foundation, if you submit a request, um, we'll, we'll connect you with lawyers [00:18:00] and attorneys who have signed up to do this work, pro bono, to defend you. Um, and, and to defend your, to defend your claim and to defend your rights in the workplace. Um, so that's, that's definitely one avenue.

The other is the, um, equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The E E O C, you can file a claim with them. Um, the, the challenge there is knowing what, what to file about, um, and also doing it within the right time period. So I can, I can share. Back in 2019, I reached out to the Me Too Foundation, um, submitted what I thought was an experience of discrimination, harassment, and retaliation in the workplace.

Um, and within 24 hours, Michelle, what I received was the contact information for three attorneys that were willing to speak with me about my case. I spoke to all three of them. Um, [00:19:00] each of them said I had a valid claim of, uh,

definitely harassment, discrimination, and retaliation in the workplace based upon my gender.

Um, and they said, unfortunately, uh, time's up and. Now I am realizing, I've been calling it the Me Too Foundation. It's actually the Time's Up the Foundation, so you can make that correction, uh, the, the Time's Up Foundation. And ironically, my time was up, um, so you only have 180 days from the experience that, from that negative overt workplace experience, um, you only have 180 days to file a claim.

This actually works against the employee because so often we need that job for our livelihood, for any number of reasons. Um, and the fear of retaliation, whether it be through receiving fewer projects, less work, or even getting fired, [00:20:00] um, that fear can prevent, feel people from filing until they're able to lead that role.

Mm-hmm. Um, and so. One of the things to be on the lookout for is once you have this experience connecting with someone right away, um, getting that experience validated so you can feel confident moving forward with, with what happens next for, um, for the events that are more covert. So toxicity in general, bullying, carrot dangling, um, Uh, microaggressions.

Those are things that it often helps to, again, uh, talk to your colleagues about, see what's happening, see what's happening with them, um, that you can absolutely file through the Times Up Foundation. To see if you have a case. But there are also other, other ways to begin to navigate it, which is finding a champion, having somebody else, um, be able to be the [00:21:00] voice for you and call out the kinds of behaviors that are happening when they see it.

Um, because it can be scary for the individual experiencing it, especially the woman. When we advocate for ourselves, when we adv, when we advocate for ourselves, we're looked poorly upon when we advocate for others, that's often very highly regarded. Um, and so being able to form allyships and alliances with folks at work, but also sometimes just being able to say, this is no longer for me and I need to get out of here.

Um, I know that is a luxury. Not everybody, not everybody has, but if you do, um, being able to talk to a career coach, being able to talk to. Recruiters and get your name out there. Um, there are lots of folks, uh, including me, who are willing to provide that kind of support, um, on a sliding scale. And so you don't have to stick it out.



And I think especially for women [00:22:00] to know, we face this myth, um, that is very much been internalized with us again, that we are, it's called the only one theory, that we are the only ones in the environment or at the table experiencing this particular thing. And that's what keeps us from speaking up. Um, it's just not true if you're experiencing it.

Dozens of other women are too. Um, you just need to find the courage and to be able to move through the fear to talk to others about it.

**Michelle Harris:** Um, I mean, there are so many good reasons to have that allyship and, uh, group of, that network that at work that you can rely on. Mm-hmm. There are so many reasons, but I, I love like, just having it for this reason alone is so valuable.

**Katie O'Malley:** Um, and I know we're gonna talk about books a little bit Yeah. A little bit later in our chat. Um, but particularly, um, one that is [00:23:00] very concrete and super helpful as it relates to navigating workplace induced trauma is called Feminist Fight Club. It's by Jessica Bennett. Um, great resource. It'll give you all the giggles, um, and concrete tactics and strategies to, to employ and even starting a, a book club to read with your, with your colleagues who might be finding these same challenges.

So you all have the same tools in your toolkit. When the time is right to deploy them is, is one of the things that, that I really recommend to women at work.

**Michelle Harris:** Thank you. Well, yeah. Well, uh, well maybe there'll be some more when we get to that, but have more. I love that. I haven't actually even come across that book, so I'm definitely gonna pick that up and, and read it.

Thank you. You're welcome. Um, so. One of the concerns, I guess, some people on here might have as a leader is how can they prevent themselves from [00:24:00] unknowingly causing workplace induced trauma?

**Katie O'Malley:** Yeah, and it's, um, because we can, we're all, none of us are immune from doing it from, from misstepping, um, from engaging in behaviors that are unbecoming of the type of leader that, that we wanna be.

Um, or from seeing those bad behaviors in our teammates and in our colleagues and, and not calling them out. So one of, I think one of the things to do is to get really smart, especially for women, um, the, the four types of biases that women, women face in the workplace. Um, and those, those four biases can

really help us when we understand them, to know what it takes to avoid them and, and advocate.

Advocate for something, for something different. Um, so the first of those four biases, [00:25:00] uh, is, is the performance bias. Um, women are judged on what they have achieved, um, what they have performed, what they have done, the performance bias. Sometimes you'll hear it called the prove it again and again and again, bias, um, which is basically just saying, show us that you can do this.

Keep showing us you can do it, and then maybe we'll give you the opportunity to actually do this thing. Whereas men are often. Evaluated in terms of their performance actually on their potential. So when it comes time for promotions, men are promoted based on potential women get promoted based on what they can prove.

And this is one of the main gaps that occurs, um, in the, in the, the gap that we see between, um, Women, um, in the C-suite and men in the C-suite. Um, and they say for, for [00:26:00] parity to happen in the C-suite, it's gonna take close to 200 and and 50 years. And who knows, we might already be colonizing Mars or, or other planetary systems at, at that point.

Mm-hmm. Um, but it happens right out of the gate. So when, um, men and women arrive at a new company from. Um, undergraduate or graduate school, and then it's two years till their first promotion bit. Men are promoted three to one over women and it's based upon their potential because how much can we really prove in two years?

Right? Um, so part of it is, as leaders looking at your hiring practices, who's coming into your pipeline, looking at your promotion practices, what are those criteria and are they same across the board? Um, and as I'm saying all of this, I want your listeners to know and believe as women, we are not immune from this.

Um, it's not just men [00:27:00] perpetuating these cycles, it's, it's us too. Cuz we don't, we don't know. And we just go with, go with what we got instead of putting a critical eye on it. Excuse me. Um, the second type of bias is maternal bias. And this works, this kind of works on both sides. Maternal bias looks at how women are viewed once they have a child, um, or how women are viewed in the interview process if they're of childbearing age.

And while it's illegal to ask those questions, do you plan to have a child? Do you have any children? Um, you know, the, the worry of that can often prevent women from getting hired in the first place or from being given big projects, high profile clients out of fear, um, that they will take maternity leave and never come back.

Or if they do come back, they won't be as committed because women are more committed. To their, to their children than, [00:28:00] than men are, which is simply not the case. Um, and so there's that worry. But then on the other side, um, it's what about the women who don't have children? Is there something wrong with them?

Are they not feminine enough? Are they not warm enough? Um, and running up against that bias as well. Um, and so there's, there's the struggle there. One of the things, um, that can be really helpful with this, um, is implementing parental leave policies for both men and women. Um, this starts to reduce that stigma, um, because now both parents can, can participate equally in the raising of the child.

Um, and men will take it if it is offered to them, um, especially if they see, um, male leadership doing, doing it as well and upholding it. The third is all about performance, attribution bias. Um, performance [00:29:00] attribution bias says if something goes right on a team, uh, the team lead, uh, even if it, if the team lead is a woman, the team, uh, is who gets the props for it.

Um, which is very good as a leader to give your team props. We wanna do that, but also as a woman, we need to be able to say I more often and not, and not make it a we. However, when things go wrong, um, on a project or with a client, um, it is the women who more often receive the brunt of that and often the blame.

Um, and again, this goes back to the internalized systems we have. Oh my gosh, it went wrong. Something happened. It must be my fault. And there's not enough pushback there. So when it does come to performance review time, we can see how these two, these two dimensions are unevenly stacked, um, as we instead of eyes, [00:30:00] and then, um, unfairly balanced toward the negative.

Uh, so again, encouraging your team to be able to say, yes, this was a team effort and here's what I did to help make the outcome happen. It is okay to say these things, right. Also being able to say, yes, it was, it was a team effort. Things didn't go as planned. Here's a misstep I made. Here's how I see the team can be better in the future.

So as a leader in your company, for your team in your organization, pushing your women to be able to say those things and when you catch them taking full responsibility or not taking full responsibility, uh, for the achievement, encouraging them to do so. Um, also just keeping a tracker. I like to call it my kick file.

Um, keeping a tracker of all the great things that you've achieved throughout the year. Um, you never even have to share them [00:31:00] till performance evaluation time comes along, but being able to remember. The work that you did, because so often we just assume the work that we did is our work and it's our job, and these are our responsibilities.

Uh, but it's okay to elevate those as ways to, to shine and, and toot your own horn as well. Yeah. The final bias, oh, go ahead Michelle.

**Michelle Harris:** Go ahead. Yeah, I was, I was just gonna say, I love that. I think Gretchen Rubin has something like that where she calls it her Ta-da list, that she keeps track of the things that she accomplished.

**Katie O'Malley:** I am, um, I'm gonna steal that from Gretchen. It's no longer a kick file. It is a ta-da list. That is,

**Michelle Harris:** yeah. Look it up and make sure I'm right about that. But I believe that's a, I saw that, uh, come across in, in the feed once from, from her, so,

**Katie O'Malley:** oh my gosh. I love that so much. Um, yes, a ta-da list. Um, so encourage, encourage all of your team members to build out those ta-da lists.

Um, and I think the third, and this is the one [00:32:00] that's most, Challenging to talk about and, and sometimes most difficult to hear is that as women. We can sometimes hold other women back. Um, and it's this idea, it's what's called the tug of war. Um, my gosh, there can only be one woman at the table. I wanna be that woman.

I gotta elbow everybody else out. Or oh my gosh, to get to this table I had to go through so much vs. That I'm gonna make all the women coming up behind me go through that same BS too. Um, and that doesn't help. Uh, it doesn't make anyone stronger. It doesn't make anyone better, better for, for the wear and the struggle, all it does is keep women out of the place that decisions are being made.

Mm-hmm. So anytime as a leader, you have the opportunity to elevate another woman, to promote another woman, to sponsor, to champion them, to make life a little bit. Easier for them, even if it wasn't [00:33:00] easy for you. That is the very best thing that, that you can do to help prevent workplace induced trauma. Um, one of, I'm trained as a therapist and, and the orientation that, that I use when working with clients is very existential in nature.

Um, and there's this wonderful quote from John Paul Sartre that says, freedom is what you do with what's been done to you. Um, and it, it's just so power. It's a simple sentence, but it's really powerful. Um, just because it happened to you, free yourself from that. Don't keep engaging with the tools of, of the people who caused you to have these traumatic responses and, and oppressed.

You Don't use their tools to do it to other folks. You can choose a different way to free yourself from all of it completely.

**Michelle Harris:** Yeah. And I think that's so important for women listening that are higher up in the executive [00:34:00] levels, vp, uh, senior VP in the C-suite. Um, sponsorship is so important and I don't, you know, you see more of it, but I mean, if you're not in a large company and even a lot of large companies just, they don't ha have that.

And I think it's important for all of us, the women, to recognize that sponsorship is so important in bringing up those lower level, mid-level managers to, to those higher levels. So I appreciate you bringing that up.

**Katie O'Malley:** Yeah. Thanks Michelle.

**Michelle Harris:** Yeah. So, so what is the answer to all this? Like is there an answer?

**Katie O'Malley:** Yeah, I, I mean there's um, there are few answers I think, and the, the first is really starting to train leaders before they become. Folks that are in people leadership roles. Um, so the average person gets promoted, um, into a people [00:35:00] people leader, people manager role, right around age 30. It is 12 years between when they become a leader and when they receive any leadership development training education that is 12 years of people running around engaging in practices.

That are likely not, not effective at best, um, and damaging at worst because that's what they experienced and that's what they went through, and those are the leaders that they saw. So for me, the first solution, um, is, is getting your

people, managers and people who are coming up as people managers trained on effective leadership practices, leadership skills, and understanding their own identities so they know how they're showing up as a leader and being experienced by other people.

Um, so that's, that's the first thing. The second thing I think is, and we're starting to see a lot more of this, [00:36:00] is focusing in on mental health at work. Uh, so one of the reasons, Michelle, that I chose to go the, the career development, leadership development, career coaching route, instead of sticking with.

Therapy is that so often in therapy, um, you know, in therapy is often tied to working with, with insurance companies. Mm-hmm. Um, and insurance companies will pay for very specific things. They will pay for very, um, is specific modalities for the therapists to engage in. And very specific topics or diagnoses for the therapists to work with.

Work, um, is not a medical diagnosis. However, work causes so many of the mental health challenges that, that we see as helping, as helping professionals. And so the next step is to really think about what, how is work [00:37:00] impacting people's mental health? And are there things that we can do to disentangle. The, the triggers of the challenges that I've named, right?

So again, those trauma responses, anxiety, depression, denial, um, physical pain, whether it be chronic or related to sleep and insomnia. All of these things inform and influence how your employees and team members and colleagues show up to work. So if we're not addressing those issues, whether they are trauma related or not, performance will never be what it can potentially be.

And people want to show up to work feeling good, um, but that can be impossible if we're not understanding what's causing them to have those, those traumatic experiences internally to begin with. Um, and I think, you know, the, the third piece is, and, and we're, we're seeing it with millennials, we're seeing it starting to come [00:38:00] up with Gen Z.

Um, these two generations have the opportunity to really transform the way work is done and shake things up. Um, and that is a good thing. Um, I really do, I really do believe it. And so part of it, especially as you were saying, for folks who have risen to those higher levels in, in their organizations, Really staying connected to the talent from other generations.

Mm-hmm. Um, bringing their voice to the table and doing something with it. Um, Otherwise, I think we're just gonna continue to be in this stalemate of

people asking the people, saying Folks are really entitled right now. Um, and folks being employees, employees are really entitled right now and employees saying, oh my gosh.

Um, this workplace is just so toxic and this leader is so toxic. Um, and at the end of the day, we're all in this work thing together and we have to be figuring out [00:39:00] how to effectively work alongside each other so that we can be the best versions of ourself outside of work, um, because we are on this planet to live a full and beautiful life.

Um, and we can't do it if the 8, 10, 12 hours a day that we're spending at work is, is really derailing and diminishing how we see ourselves and how we wanna move through the world.

**Michelle Harris:** Thank you for that. And that reminds me, I've had, had somebody reach out recently about a toxic coworker. Mm-hmm. Uh, how, I mean, not to go into a therapy session for that person, but are there maybe one or two things that you would tell a person that's experiencing a toxic coworker and not a toxic leader?

**Katie O'Malley:** Yeah, for sure. So, um, and, and it sometimes it can be easier to pro, uh, approach a coworker than, than a leader. Sometimes it can be more difficult. Um, the, the first thing is always to ground yourself in [00:40:00] self-awareness. Uh, so what is the thing that is upsetting me so much, uh, about this coworker? What are the behaviors they're engaging in that have me use the word toxic to describe them?

Um, once you can get clear on how it's impacting you and also what the, the concrete behaviors are with that coworker, I would, uh, uh, you can invite them to coffee, you can invite them to a Zoom chat. But I would say set aside time and let them know what you wanna talk about. Don't just bring it on them.

So say, Hey, I know we've been working together, um, this project, um, There are some things I know I probably bring to the table that are a bit, uh, annoying or disconcerting to you. I'm hoping we can have a conversation, um, about how we can best show up for each other, for the duration of this project, or program or responsibility, whatever it is, so that they have the [00:41:00] opportunity to give you feedback as well.

Mm-hmm. Um, and really frame it as a feedback conversation. You want this person to recognize what's happening and to change their behavior. Um, and the best way to do that is to have an open conversation rooted in dialogue. So you

have to be willing. Uh, and willing to hear and, and open to absorb what they're gonna share with you too.

But I'll tell you, once you open that door for somebody, they are much more keen to hear what you have to say. Um, so by opening that door for them, it doesn't close the door on what you wanna talk about, but it essentially can kick your door wide open. And so being prepared to talk about here's the situation, uh, that, that we were in together and be very, um, be very specific about what it was.

Here are the behaviors that you engaged in. Be very specific about what those looked like. [00:42:00] And then here is the impact of those behaviors on me. On the team, on the, the outcome of the deliverable or the project, whatever it is, moving forward, it would be really helpful to me if instead of X, you could do Y.

Um, because what we do then is we take the, um, we, we don't take, we depersonalize, um, the feedback because it's no longer about the person, it's about the behavior. Mm-hmm. And people are much more willing to hear that than you are a toxic person. You are this, you are that. It's no, this behavior, which I've never actually seen you engage in before, was really troubling to me.

Is there a way we can shift that in the future? Um, and so the, the framework, the acronym for it is SBI. So situation, behavior, impact, and then introduce the behavior you wanna see.

**Michelle Harris:** Great. Thank you. I [00:43:00] appreciate you providing that little bit of advice there. Sure. Um, one thing to kinda, uh, go back to the, um, finish up the workplace induced trauma, if somebody has experienced it, I mean, what is the way that you would recommend to be able to heal from experiencing that?

**Katie O'Malley:** Yeah. Healing from, from workplace induced trauma can be one of the most transformative and, and profound things that, that a person can ever do. Um, healing from workplace induced trauma first requires, like we talked about, identifying that it happened, navigating your way through it, and getting yourself into a situation where you can heal a workplace situation that did not cause the harm.

Um, it is impossible for humans to heal in the environment that made us sick. Um, and I, I think the same holds true for, for our emotional, cognitive and physical responses to workplace induced trauma as well. So the first is find a



new [00:44:00] environment if that is possible for you. Um, the second is, is talk to talk to a helping professional, whether, whether it's a therapist, a counselor, a coach, um, but make sure that person is trained in trauma-informed practices, um, because that is just very important.

We don't want more harm to be caused for you. So ask questions around that. And then third, um, I mean, post-traumatic growth. What we're looking to achieve there is, is a greater sense of, of personal strength. The ability to cultivate and form close relationships with, with colleagues and coworkers and bosses in a way where you're no longer scared to do it, um, to begin imagining possibilities for yourself again, because often, um, experiences of trauma cause us to put blinders on and limit what we think we're capable of, what we can do, what we can achieve.

[00:45:00] Um, and it's through the healing process and beginning to take those blinders off that you can see all of those possibilities that are awaiting for you that you just thought weren't, weren't available anymore. I mean, when I was going through, through my experiences of this, um, back in, in 20 20 13 to 20, yeah, 2013, and then a little bit again in 2015.

Um, I, I didn't see any possibilities for my life. I, and I, I definitely never imagined myself, um, being someone who earned a master's degree to help other people in this, in this very thing that I experienced. And so, um, remembering that there are possibilities and so just jotting down even if it's one really small thing a day.

Uh, and then finally just, you know, having a greater appreciation for your life. Work is not life. Our life is our life, and we want work to fit into [00:46:00] that. Um, and I think too, one of your very first questions, what is a sign when work is overtaking all of your thoughts, your dreams, your wellbeing, when it is overtaking your life, that is a sign to that, that you may, may start responding in a more trauma, trauma focused way.

Mm-hmm. Um, and that's, that's what I got.

**Michelle Harris:** Good. I'd love for you to share, uh, just with your leadership experience. Do you have any, uh, general, like interesting or just funny, uh, moments that happened where you're like, oops, I shouldn't have done that. Or, oh, what, maybe I shouldn't have done that.

**Katie O'Malley:** Yeah, I mean, I, I mean, we all have them, right?

Those, those moments of, of misstep. Um, but our mistakes do not define us. Uh, but they can be a great guide into opportunities for, for growth or improvement. And I think [00:47:00] one of, one of my greatest missteps, and this is deeply rooted in, in my personality, that is, that is high energy. Um, also very much setting high standards for myself and and others.

One of my, my biggest career missteps is misdirecting that energy in a negative way. Um, and allowing, allowing stress to get the better of me. So when we are under stress, uh, we are not as likely to self-monitor cuz it is just not the priority. Um, and so I was working through this big event for, for a university transporting 650 students from, from Chicago to Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.

Um, and had a, a colleague on my team that was not fulfilling their responsibilities, um, from, from my perspective, right? Um, and I was not kind [00:48:00] in in those moments, um, because from my. Perspective, we were putting students potentially at risk by not having forms signed and not having good contact information or all of these things.

And from their perspective, uh, I didn't communicate well about what my expectation was. Um, and so for me, what I, what I really learned there was, it's fine to have high expectations of folks, um, but if you're gonna have high expectations, then you need to be very clear about what those outcomes are, what it looks like, what you want it to look like.

Um, people need those, those boundaries, um, to be able to, to perform well. And so, even though ball were dropped, I dropped the biggest one by not communicating my, my full expectations around what needed to be done. And just assuming. It's known, [00:49:00] um, but that's the fault of assuming everyone moves through the world like me and, and they don't.

And so, uh, I think it's something like 82% of employees say they want more communication and more transparency from, from their leaders. Um, and leaders are saying, we are, we're already doing that. And then it's, they say, we need five times more. You tell us once, tell us five more times. Um, and it's not viewed as excessive, which I, uh, was just astonished by, but also really helped me see the importance of, again, communicating those, those expectations and desired outcomes and setting people up for success.

**Michelle Harris:** Yeah. Thank you. And thank you for sharing, uh, about not everybody. Moving in the world the way you do because it's so, I mean, as a leader, that's definitely important because you need to, you, you're leading your

team and building trust with your [00:50:00] team, and you have to recognize that everybody's different.

But even in life outside of work, it's just so important to remember that when you're interacting with people. And I, I even, I have to remind myself about that sometimes. I mean, it's, it's easy when you're in your own little circle and you know what to expect, but once you, once you start getting outside that bubble, um, it's I think even more important to recognize and remember that

**Katie O'Malley:** Absolutely.

And to, to not bias positively toward the people who move like us. Yeah. Uh, or negatively against those that move differently. Cuz if we're able to integrate. All of that talent and knowledge and energy from the place, um, where it's most strongly rooted, the outcome is always gonna be innovation and, and a bigger bottom line.

**Michelle Harris:** Yeah. Yeah. Very important. Um, is there a mentor that you attribute a significant part of your career too, that you look back and, uh, recall?

**Katie O'Malley:** [00:51:00] So it's, um, yes. Uh, and it's, I, I, I'm going all the way back to 2002. Um, and it was, it was one of my professors, um, his name is, uh, Dr. Denny Roberts. And he is just a giant in the field of leadership, education, um, and leadership education.

All the really good stuff. If you wanna find it and you wanna know where it is, it's all in higher education. Um, that's where it usually starts before it trickles out to companies. Um, and Denny, my goodness, um, he. Uh, just brilliant. Um, so give him a Google pick up his books. Um, very much, very much worth the read.

Um, but what was, what was so fascinating to me is when I was in college, uh, I served as our Panhellenic president. Um, so for folks who were not in sorority or fraternity life in college, that essentially just means I was [00:52:00] leading all of the sororities on, on campus and, and trying to lead us in the most ethical and responsible way, way forward.

Meanwhile, I had the opportunity to do an independent study, um, with Denny, Dr. Roberts, uh, and as a way to get more curious about the field of, of leadership education, what this work could look like after I graduated from college, if it's something I wanted to do, um, and also get, get course credit for it, and work alongside a really, a really brilliant person.

And while I always knew he was a brilliant person, It wasn't until 13 years later in my first graduate school course, um, that on the syllabus was his book with his name, um, and different chapters from a text book that were written by him that were assigned to us to read. Uh, and I was just blown away by the, his humility.[00:53:00]

I never, I never knew about this. And our professor was like, this man is the guy, um, when it comes to, to leadership development in, in higher education. And it was such a, a striking moment for me that someone who has done so much for, for a field that has done so much for educators that I didn't even know it in the moments I was studying alongside him.

All I knew was this is a really committed. Student affairs professional. Yeah. Um, and 13 years later to learn I was studying at the feet of the person who wrote the book on all of this was just a great reminder to me that, um, there are lots of ways to have an impact, um, without telling people the impact you're having.

Mm-hmm.

**Michelle Harris:** Nice. And then maybe it came from, uh, him, but the best advice, the best [00:54:00] leadership advice you've ever received. What would you say that that was?

**Katie O'Malley:** Yeah. Um, it, and it, I think it, it might've come from Denny, um, but a lot of people, a lot of people have said it so I don't wanna miss attribute, uh, but it's great leaders create more leaders.

Um, so my job as a leader is to develop other folks to be able to do my job better than me, um, so that they can keep moving and growing and, and having impact. My job as a leader is, is not to have the, the followers who just fall in line, um, that doesn't serve them. Um, and at the end of the day, as leaders, we're here to be of service to others.

Um, and that is, that's what I've tried, I've tried to spend my career doing, whether it was in politics, the nonprofit sector, commercial real estate, higher education, or, or now through, through coaching.

**Michelle Harris:** That's great advice. Great advice. [00:55:00] Uh, just, and you talked a little bit about men mental health and wellness earlier, and it's so important, um, as a leader to have that, that, you know, if we can call it balance,

I know it's not really balance, but, um, is there anything you attribute your wellbeing to?

Is there a morning routine, an evening routine that really keeps you aligned? Um, person personally?

**Katie O'Malley:** Yeah. I think there are a couple of things. Um, first I, I like to know and keep myself grounded in, in my three, three core values. Um, so courage, curiosity, and, and justice. Those are, those are my three values.

And so throughout my day when I'm faced with a decision, is my decision aligning with at least one of those and, and hopefully all three, I think. Um, one of, one of the reasons we get off kilter with, with our mental health is that our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are not [00:56:00] congruent and they're not in alignment.

And so if we're able to continuously make decisions that are congruent with what we think and feel, um, and then inform how we behave, there's a great way to be able to keep that balance. So anything that is not aligned with those three things I try and kick to the curb. Um, in terms of morning and evening routines, um, I'm always hopping on the Peloton.

I don't know if you're listeners are fans, but you can follow me at courageous Kate. Always happy to do a ride. You can find me on there any, any time between six and 8:00 AM depending on, on the day, but that just helps. Exercise helps get my heart going, um, helps to wake me up. Yeah. And then, uh, at night, uh, it's really just following the same bedtime, bedtime routine every night.

Um, and in that routine, your body learns to, to fall asleep. And I feel so lucky that I do not have struggles with sleep. But if [00:57:00] you are struggling, doing your best to come up with a routine and following it every time, we'll just. Get you to the point where you don't even have to think about it, it becomes automatic and you get into bed and your body knows what time it is.

Yeah. Which is time to fall asleep.

**Michelle Harris:** And going back to your core values, how do you check in with yourself to know is do you have, you know, once a week you sit down and, and think about what you're working on and what you're doing? Or is it just something you're continuously thinking about?

**Katie O'Malley:** So I, I try to be continuously thinking about it.

Um, truthfully, I think about it the most when I feel off balance, um, or off kilter. And I think to myself, what, what of the, which of these values am I not, am I not following through on, am I not living congruently with? Um, and that tends to reveal Yeah. Uh, an opportunity for, for me to really reevaluate or, or reconsider what's going on.

**Michelle Harris:** Got it. That makes sense. Yeah. So, [00:58:00] um, Pump up song when you're feeling like you need that energy Besides the Peloton and might be, might be a song that you listen to on the Peloton, is there a song or maybe two songs, three that really get you going when you need, when you need that bump?

**Katie O'Malley:** For sure. So the, the first one is by Lady Bri, and it's called Just Watch Me Now.

Um, it is great for folks who are, you know, uh, Looking to leave their current work environment for entrepreneurs that are looking to, to bust open new, new doors and make some big moves. Um, it just, the, the beat is great. The message is great. Huge fan of that one. Um, and then, so that one's just watched me now, the other, and I'm, uh, I am going to catch hell from this, from my husband for not knowing the artist.

Uh, but the song is, How [00:59:00] Do You Like Me Now? Um, and it just, I don't know. There's something about it that makes me smile, like, look how far I've come. I've done this. Yeah. Um, and you can't take it away from me. Nice. So whenever I'm feeling, um, not necessarily down, but questioning my capacity, my ability, Um, either of those songs really gets me in the mindset of, no, I, I've done all this.

How do you like me now? Or Just watch me now. Yeah.

**Michelle Harris:** Oh yeah. And maybe if you follow up, uh, with an email, once you remember, I'll just make sure I put it in the show notes for everybody too. Yeah. Check out that song.

**Katie O'Malley:** Yep.

**Michelle Harris:** And then, I know we already talked about this a little bit, but books or podcasts, are there any that you have really enjoyed lately that you would recommend to our listeners?

**Katie O'Malley:** Yeah, so for, for books, um, actually reading What Happened to You, um, by Dr. Bruce Perry and Oprah Winfrey, if folks, um, enjoyed listening, I, I [01:00:00] shouldn't say enjoyed, but got curious listening to our talk about workplace induced trauma, that is, that is a great book to learn more about trauma, what happens in our bodies, how to start recognizing it in yourself and others.

Um, really, really great book there. Um, and the other, uh, is called Invisible Women. And it, it is a really great read, um, on all of the ways the world was not set up to support us and how women are actually changing those mechanisms. It came out in, in 2019, um, it's a bit dense. It's a lot of, it's a lot of research, but it's told through story, which is, which is really helpful.

But if you're. Ever thinking to yourself, oh my gosh, this happened because of something I did read. Invisible Woman, and you will see all of the ways from even before you were born that this is not your fault. Great.

**Michelle Harris:** Well, thank you. Great [01:01:00] recommendations. So I know, um, we've been talking for a little while and I appreciate everybody listening, hanging in there.

Uh, I think it's been a great conversation and thank you again, Katie, for coming on and spending time with us and sharing again such. Valuable information for us. Um, I'd love one if there's anything you wanted to mention that we haven't mentioned, but also how can, how can our listeners reach out to you?

What's the best way to get ahold of you if they wanted to follow up from this conversation? If, if they're, if you're okay with

**Katie O'Malley:** them following. Oh, uh, absolutely. And I think our conversation was just so in depth. I don't, I don't have anything else to add, but always happy to continue the conversation, uh, with others or answer questions.

Uh, so you can find me via my website, uh, encourage coaching.org. Uh, you can also find me on Instagram and Facebook, uh, at Encourage Coach Chicago. Uh, or feel free to send me an email, [01:02:00] [katie@encouragecoaching.org](mailto:katie@encouragecoaching.org).



Any, any of those ways are good. If you wanna connect with me on LinkedIn, um, I think it's slash Katie O'Malley or Kate O'Malley 82.

Um, so I can get. Michelle, you that handle as, as well. But happy to connect in any of those ways, all of those ways, um, and always here to be, to be a resource to, to fellow women looking to make a difference, uh, in their, in their work.

**Michelle Harris:** Well, thank you. I appreciate that. And again, we'll follow up in the notes, uh, with all that contact information as well.

And with that, I just wanna thank you again. I always enjoy talking with you, and I hope we continue our conversation and have more conversations in the future. I'm, I'm looking forward to that.

**Katie O'Malley:** Me too. Me too, Michelle. Right back at you.

**Michelle Harris:** All right. Well, enjoy the rest of your day.

**Katie O'Malley:** You too.

**Michelle Harris:** Bye-bye. Hi everyone.

This is Michelle again. Just one more thing before you take off. [01:03:00] If you've enjoyed this podcast, sign up for our free weekly newsletter. It's easy to sign up and easy to cancel. Every Monday we send out a short, exclusive newsletter of what we found during the week that we're excited about, we're inspired by, and we're watching and reading.

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