Jacob Morgan 00:00

All right, and then I'll jump in that works for you. Excellent. Yeah. All right. Hey, everyone. Welcome to another episode of leading the future of work. My guest today, Jennifer moss. She's the author of a book called the burnout epidemic, the rise of chronic stress and how we can fix it. very timely topic. Jennifer, thank you for joining me.

Jennifer Moss 00:19

I am so thrilled to be here. Yes, you're right. It's relevant. I think for a lot of us, including me.

Jacob Morgan 00:25

Yes. And I was gonna say, including me, including my wife, including pretty much everybody I know. So let's start kind of high level with Why did you decide to write a book? And what was some of the research that went into the book?

Jennifer Moss 00:40

Well, you know, it's circuitous, I started out working with, you know, with organizations and this data research technology company that I co founded with my husband, actually, and

Jacob Morgan 00:52

we have a separate podcast.

Jennifer Moss 00:56

Yeah, and lead to my burning out for sure. You know, one of the reasons that it's tough to get funded when you're married co founder, and you're a female co founder, there's just so many different barriers to that. And that leads to a lot of burnout. And I know that, for me, you know, working in this space, we were also a bit ahead of our time, we were, this is Gosh, 2010. And we're looking at happiness in workplaces. And at that point, they sort of were rolling their eyes about the topic, workplace well being had become, you know, a massive cottage industry around wellness products for work. And so we were coming in saying this is really important. But I started to feel a bit fraudulent, because not only was I really stressed out, but also we were attacking the problem relief to far downstream and around, you know, social emotional intelligence and psychological fitness. And I found that there was maybe about 20% of each organization, I'd work with that were open to this, and they were engaged, and they were optimizing. They already got that, you know, intuitively, and they were well, but then you have this huge swath of the workforce that's feeling overwhelmed, their workloads unsustainable there, they're dealing with discrimination. I mean, there's lack of community inside of their organizations, they're not getting paid well enough. I mean, these hygiene issues weren't being addressed. And so I think, my own experience in this role of an entrepreneur and my burnout, and then also understanding what companies were experiencing, I decided I wanted to sort of focus more further upstream. So I flipped from being an happiness expert to an unhappiness expert. And, you know, with the same goal, I think, is get helping people to feel more well and healthy.

Jacob Morgan 02:41

Yeah. And so when you decided that this is a book that you wanted to write, can you share a little bit about some of the research, what did you do to get the findings, the insights, the data that you actually were able to collect.

Jennifer Moss 02:52
So I've been collecting it just working within organizations. And with policy work, I started really trying to understand the impact of wellbeing and wellness on the world as part of the EU, the global global happiness Council, and they're actually part of focusing on UN Sustainable Development Goals. And I was looking at it from a research standpoint, and I started in that around 2003, or sorry, 2013 2014. And working with economists, and really interesting researchers all around the world trying to solve this problem around, you know, chronic stress and unhappiness, the who was involved. And, and we just kept hitting the same sort of patterns, you know, nothing was changing. And, you know, we're trying to affect engagement. And the numbers continue even just in this last year to be lower than they ever have before. And, you know, and then I started digging into my own research, pulling people together, like Christina Maslach, Dr. Mazaki, and Dr. Michael later, and working with them to understand what people were feeling. And then writing about it and researching it as a journalist for maybe four or five years before the pandemic struck. And then I actually started writing the book before the pandemic hit and okay, and yeah, which was curious. So I started writing it, I was, I was already saying, This is problem, we should pay attention, but you know, would not have imagined that the pandemic would be such a boost to my career, sadly, and unfortunately, you know, by say both and Anthony, Dr. Anthony Fauci and I were surprised by the experience of the pandemic on our careers. But that's one of the things that ended up shapeshifting was okay, I've got to scrap a lot of words and sort of start fresh because everything was so new and rapidly changing and evolving. And I think I rewrote the book. I don't know how many times in the intro, I don't know how many times until it was in Word lock. And I still miss things. Yeah, like I just wanted to add more and the great resignation and quiet quitting has happened since so. This is definitely Really, there's a part two in play for sure.

Jacob Morgan 05:03
Do you think that the pandemic has accelerated burnout,

Jennifer Moss 05:08
I definitely see it as a major accelerant. Actually, I said, we were already at a boiling point, it was a problem. And we were about to be exposed for it, I think there was going to be something that happened to expose this issue, but having something happen, so global and collectively sharing an experience so traumatic for a lot of people, and, and also just the fact that we sped up the future of work so rapidly, the adoption of everything in our lives was so rapid, and then you're you're trying to do this with the pairing and family life and you know, just this increase of infiltration in the home. I mean, it was like, you know, the, it was boiling, and then we just turned the burner up to high, and then everything blew up.

Jacob Morgan 05:52
Yeah, it's interesting. So I kind of heard both sides on this, right. So that, you know, I've heard the side of like, you know, employees are getting burned out, they're getting tired and frustrated and unhappy. And then I've also heard the side on a lot of leaders that I interview, who say that employees are just

being unreasonable, they're asking for things that are not sustainable, they want more money than a company can pay, they want entry level employees want equity. Now in companies, they don't want to show up to the office. So it's kind of like this tug of war between employees who are kind of wanting, you're trying to ask for as much as they can get, and organizations that are saying, well, you know, it's not sustainable. We can't, we can't pay you that amount of money. Like, we can't do that for you and everybody else who works here, it's not a sustainable model. And so I'm curious to hear your take on this, because it seems like there's not really a balance at the moment between what organizations are comfortable doing versus what employees are asking for. Are you saying that to

Jennifer Moss 06:50
you, I think that whenever there is an opportunity for people to be capitalists, they're going to take it in some circumstances. And I think it's ironic that, you know, these organizations that have been highly capitalistic for decades, are now frustrated that their employees are acting in the same way that they have been acting for a long time. And, you know, it's, it's a provocative statement. And I work with lots of leaders to say, you know, we've created this scenario, we have pushed people for too long, we've said above and beyond without any delineation of what above and beyond looks like we've dangled carrots for some people that they've never going to achieve, because there's barriers to be able to achieve that we have women disproportionately impacting the pandemic, because they have to be working this 20 extra hours per week, and unpaid labor, which we haven't solved for societally. So, you know, there is a reason why this is happening. And so employees are saying, I've changed my relationship with work, my social contract with work has changed, I'm no longer gonna pursue a carrot that I don't even know if I want. And so you're gonna have to, to adjust to what my needs are now. And it's a revolution. It's sort of like roll to work in the 70s, were really bad labor practices, really rose up unions and people saying, I'm not going to be treated this way anymore. And so this idea that, you know, now I'm really frustrated that these people are capitalizing on this opportunity. It just seems pretty tone deaf to me.

Jacob Morgan 08:23
Yeah, it's sort of like reap what you sow. This is the environment that you created, where you push people and try to get as much as you can for them for so long. You fired people when your business wasn't going well, you had at will employment, you, you know, you treated employees, however you want it, and now you're kind of upset that employees want more from you? Well, that's kind of your problem.

Jennifer Moss 08:43
It is, I mean, and it's blunt, and it's provocative, and, you know, and, and I work with both sides to try to get, you know, a really happy marriage, that relationship. But I think until we have, you know, if we get out of the state of denial, then nothing's really going to get solved and just saying, Let's jam the toothpaste back in the in the tube and get workers back to work. And that's how it has to be and deal with it. And being surprised by that. You know, the reaction of people quitting, I think, or quietly quitting, I think is it's just naive. We've changed we've, we've changed.

Jacob Morgan 09:19

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Yeah, it's interesting, because we saw I think it was Elon Musk. And there were a couple of companies that were basically like, get back into the office full time. I don't care if you don't even know back in the office, find another job. Which was and then you had people like Malcolm Gladwell, who was like, What are you doing with your life if you don't show up to the office and you're just working at home in your pajamas, like your life is meaningless? And, you know, both of those people got quite a lot of backlash for it. But I mean, you know, I always try to see both sides like I also understand leaders who are saying look, we we value in person work, you know, we do have a job. We do have a Business. So I mean, I tried to understand both both sides of you know, where the organizations are coming from and where the employees are coming from to, but I agree, I mean, it's, it's really hard to find that balance. And for many, many decades, organizations could basically do whatever they wanted. And now employees are like, Well, now let's see now that now it's our turn to get a couple of punches at the bag.

Jennifer Moss 10:20
That is exactly what's happening. And I think that we have swung the pendulum really far in one direction. And yeah, that isn't necessarily a sustainable place to be either. So I'm not really recommending this kind of revolutionary behavior is what we need to see in the future of work. I think we need to pause and say, Okay, where are we at odds? I personally feel like fully remote work works for some, but a lot of people have come to make remote work habitual, and they don't realize why they're lonely, why they feel like their careers atrophying why they don't feel inspired, why they feel disconnected, which loneliness is a byproduct of remote work. And this last couple of years has escalated and people the lonely they've ever felt. So there's a benefit of looking at each other in the eye. There's a real danger to constantly being in these meetings virtually. And we need to start thinking, okay, so this isn't working over here from employers, there's way too many demands from employees, but employees don't actually know exactly what is good for them either in every circumstance, so how do we come to a compromise and a Goldilocks zone is really what we should be aiming for, you know, that just right zone. And that's going to take some effort. But I mean, let's think about hybrid differently, let's think about the office differently. Maybe it's not the place that you physically go to do the same thing that you would do at home, maybe it becomes a place of play, and levity and interaction and collaboration and ideation. I mean, maybe we think about what that place looks like what that other place looks like, and reestablished, what the future of an office could look like, so that it makes it compelling for people to want to be there. And that's the kind of thinking we need to start to deploy.

Jacob Morgan 12:13
Yeah, I completely agree. And I, you know, I still think there's value in person work, I think it also depends on the tasks that you do. I mean, I have a fully virtual team. I mean, a lot of my team does task based work, like very specific, I mean, if I had a big company, for example, you know, 1000s of employees, I think, if your expectation was that you wanted to grow and move into a leadership role, where you are responsible for motivating and inspiring others, then your role would probably, you know, require a little bit more of the in person stuff, because part of your role is to be around people and to you know, motivate them, inspire them coach them not to say that it's impossible to do in a virtual environment, but it's not quite the same. But I think if, for example, you're doing just task based work, picking up the phone, responding to emails, you know, and you're content with that, and you don't want or don't care about kind of growing into kind of a leadership kind of role than Yeah, that's fine for you. But at least for me, I think it's very, very hard to grow inside of a medium or even a larger size

company, if you never have a physical presence, and nobody ever sees you. Whereas one of your counterparts, these in the office, and they you know, that person is getting coffees with their leader, they are having casual conversations and chats, they are brainstorming ideas, and you're just behind a screen, and you don't get any of that. So, I mean, I totally agree, I think there's a lot of value to the in person work, it's not to say that everything needs to be done that way. But you know, depending on the work that you're doing, there's still value in it.

Jennifer Moss 13:45
Yeah, and I think the benefit, positive byproduct of the pandemic was realizing that we can work remote and that we're capable of it. And I do think, you know, there's different ways to be thinking about it. And it doesn't need to be the same. We haven't declared that hybrid means two days in and three days out. And, you know, that's what it's supposed to look like. I mean, the idea that, you know, we make it so that it's so flexible, that it actually counteracts what the benefits would be. And I see this for those that are in, you know, very marginal roles or at risk roles, or they're females, I mean, women of color, for example, we're really hard hit. If you're asking anyone to come in whenever they want, then you see more people that have the ability to do that to come in. And so then we're going to see more exclusion of certain groups because they don't have the same ability or access. And so we want to make it where it's very clear, open text, for example, is, you know, in various different departments based on tasks that they have some of their senior people that do need to collaborate, come in, they fly them in once a quarter for, you know, three to four days and they bond and they hang out and they connect and then they go back to their other prospective homes and work remotely. And then they fly them back in I mean, they It can work differently for different types of personalities and uses. But when we kind of make it non, like, formalized when we make it too much up to the employee, then what ends up happening is actually it's not helping them, it's potentially hindering their advancement in the company.

Jacob Morgan 15:19
Well, before we get into burnout, maybe last thing we could talk about is quiet quitting. That's kind of been like a new, a relatively new theme and topic that that's been coming out. And for people not familiar with it, it basically is kind of like checking out like doing the bare minimum at work, and not going above and beyond. And you're sort of like, you've, you've mentally quit, but you're physically there is kind of a way that I think about it. It's not like you're purposely tanking and doing a terrible job and everything, but you're just kind of like, kind of coasting doing the bare minimum. And there are two, I've heard both sides of the debate, right? I think it was Adam Grant, who was like, I think he said something along the lines of quiet quitting as a result of like bad bosses and organizations who don't challenge their people. And on the flip side, I've heard leaders say, well, quiet quitting is a result of employees not speaking up, not asking for more not saying they want more responsibility or more challenges. And it's kind of you know, who's responsible for the quiet quitting? So I'm curious to hear your take on that?

Jennifer Moss 16:17
Well, I definitely think that people that have been quiet quitting, and what they what I've been, you know, hearing, and I've been interviewing it a lot, because I'm writing a bunch of pieces on it lately. And what I keep finding is that people are saying, I'm just burned out, I'm really burned out. And I have been pursuing sort of this carrot or this idea of promotion or reward. And I'm not getting recognized for it,

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people are so busy and so tired that they're sort of just putting work on me. And I'm not getting any value for that. In sort of two or three years that I've been doing the same job. And because of COVID, no one's really talking about succession planning or advancement. And so I think maybe, right now, I want to just do what I'm supposed to do and be continued to produce at the expectation that has been defined for me. But no, I'm not going to answer emails now after work and after hours, and no, I'm not going to go to those extra, you know, choose if you want to training sessions, you know, that you can decide to opt into, because it makes you look good are going to those networking events. So you can be seen, you know, we're not, I'm not going to do that, because I'm finding that even when I did work 6070 hours a week, it didn't really get me anywhere. And so I think what's happened is people are just disengaged. And we see disengagement, it really is sort of a very similar description of what quitting is. And so we have to kind of deal with the disengagement piece, the burnout piece before we can re inspire and re Energize. And we should be as leaders really evaluating, you know, who are the people that we see are quiet quitting? Are they people that have worked really, you know, hard in the past? Have they been really competitive and inspired and passionate, and then all of a sudden, they're just not? Well, that's probably because they're chronically stressed. And we miss diagnose that often. So it's not every case, there's going to be people that, you know, are disengaged and actively disengaged and don't really care. But we tend to create a lot of policies and discussion around the 10 or 15%, that take advantage. But there's a big swath of people that are really in that middle bucket where they're pretty tired. And they haven't seen the fruits of their labor yet.

Jacob Morgan 18:34
Yeah, no, I agree. And I think that's a very great way to think about it. And, and it's a good transition into what I wanted to talk about next, which is burnout. So what is the definition that you use for burnout?

Jennifer Moss 18:49
Well, I follow the WHO definition the World Health Organization, and that's that it's workplace or institutional stress left unmanaged, it's in the UK, it's an occupational phenomenon. It's not in the life aspect of chronic stress. It's specific to workplace and institutional stress. And it shows up in three major signs, high level of depletion, so frequent levels of sort of exhaustion at the end of the day, maybe not wanting to get up in the morning, because you're so tired, and you don't feel like you're engaged and want to go to work. Maybe you're drinking more coffee or Redbull in the day, because you don't feel like you can, you know, stay motivated, and maybe you're using downers at night, like alcohol, which we've seen a lot of, you're not engaging in your hobbies outside of work. So you're sort of in that level of exhaustion, where you're also emotionally distanced from work which is disengagement essentially the sort of the according to Maslow's sort of, er, Doctor Maslow X MBI, Maslach, burnout inventory, the antithesis, essentially, of burnout is engagement. So we're seeing that right now and then, and then cynicism a sense of hopelessness, and that that really is something that we're seeing more of and the cynicism piece has really increased lately. So that's sort of how I define it. And it is important that they distinguish this and 2019 in a joint research with the ILO, when they found out after six years of made a study, a massive analysis that 750,000 people die from overwork alone every year, every year. So they wanted to make a point, they added it, who added it to their International Classification of Diseases, made a point to say it's really serious. And I think that's so that we can have more accountability to the issue.

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Jacob Morgan 20:32
Yeah, so what I wanted to ask you is burnouts like a real thing, because some people, you know, there's some people who are like, Oh, burnout is, you're just tired. You know, it's not like a real medical thing. It's just your way of saying that you need a break, but it's actually a real, legitimate thing. It's recognize their symptoms, there are causes. It's, it's a legitimate thing that people go through.

Jennifer Moss 21:00
Yeah, and I love that you are establishing and reinforcing that. Because for us, you know, a long time and still to this day, this idea that, you know, burnout, and it has actually been defined as a whiny, millennial problem, which

Jacob Morgan 21:16
exactly, it's like, it's not real.

Jennifer Moss 21:20
I know. And this is Jill, the poor, you know, someone that's really well established writing this. And then, you know, the the New Yorker, like, these are people that are saying that we trust that it's just whiny millennials, and it's an even just saying, like, we don't have religion anymore. And this is why, you know, we're, we're burning out, I mean, just really kind of wacky things about this serious, very serious syndrome that is caused by, you know, root causes, like overwork, systemic discrimination, lack of fairness, lack of community, like all of these things that are very seriously contributing to it. And so I think, you know, what we need to understand, especially in Sweden, they call it extreme exhaustion disorder, and it can lead to PTSD, chronic illness, suicide, I mean, that's why we need to like and when we finally started talking about mental illness, it was really helpful. And I think burnout is just this next wave of that.

Jacob Morgan 22:15
How do you know, if you are suffering or somebody on your team is getting burned out versus just tired? Like, what's the, what's the difference between just, you know, maybe being a little lower work versus legitimately like, You got to stop?

Jennifer Moss 22:30
Yeah, you see that in signs like they're withdrawing, they're more argumentative, maybe more volatile, and they used to not be before but all of a sudden, it's very conflict based your discussions and communications with them, they look, you know, like, they're extremely tired, you can kind of see it in your physical dinner, people start to complain of stomach problems, like they're sick more, they're late more, and they're having a hard time getting motivated. They're making more mistakes. I mean, we've seen this specifically even in encoders, and software programmers where you start to see this depletion happening with burnout and, and then there's a lot of errors in the code. I mean, we want to be tracking, sort of, if that person was this sort of high energy, healthy, happy person, and then you've seen them, as the workload is increased, that they've started to get more and more depleted, we don't want to miss diagnose them as underperforming, we want to probably think that they are really burned or at risk of burnout and getting to the point where they're going to hit that wall. And I think one of the also the really

interesting things that we found in the language of the research is you're starting to hear more languages, language a permanent, so people starting to say things like, always, and never, you know, it's always going to be like this. I like that hopeless language. And then I using a lot of AI words where people are sort of inside themselves a lot very myopic thinking. So those are all signs to look out for and appear.

Jacob Morgan 23:56
Okay? And what's the impact of burnout? You know, because sometimes people just say, oh, you know, you're fine, just power through it. But the reality is that burnout has a significant impact just on you as a human being probably on your team. Everything that you're a part of. So what are the actual negative impacts of burnout if you just kind of ignore it and try to power through?

Jennifer Moss 24:20
Well, from a business and a performance standpoint, if you're someone that is a high performing person, it can be really difficult on your confidence to start to be making mistakes all the time and having brain fog and not be able to concentrate, you have to work harder to be able to get to those same goals. So you're sort of in this constant state of toxic productivity, which is exhausting. So from a business standpoint, there's that impact and obviously leaders don't want people feeling like that, because that's not good for morale and also bottom line. But from a personal standpoint, individual standpoint, when you actually track sort of the pattern of someone who is experiencing symptoms of burnout. It's usually like this 18 months to two year timeline where you can Uh, yeah, where you can kind of I mean, some folks have better, you know, guess stamina against chronic stress than others. But I mean, really, it's not a stamina thing, like, you should be proud if you've been able to work under these conditions for four years, versus someone who can only work under them for eight months. But what it is that you sort of hit these thresholds and kind of like a happiness set point, you bounce down, but then you rebound up to where you can manage it. But there's a point where all those symptoms start to go from pebbles to a boulder. And when you hit a wall, Dr. Maria's Berg who's based out of Stockholm, what she says is that you hit a wall and you fall way down. And there's the setpoint is just really hard to get back up to. So you're dealing with post traumatic stress disorder, you're dealing with depression, anxiety. So burnout, and depression and anxiety aren't the same thing. Depression, anxiety can become a symptom, an outcome of burnout. So there's depression, there's anxiety, and then you could have, you know, a requirement of therapeutics or pharmacological treatment, cognitive behavioral therapy, and that can take if you hit that wall, like if we get to that point where we fallen off the cliff, it's about the same amount of time of recovery. So it can be 18 months to two years to get fully back. And that's why we don't want it to get to that point. And you know, and we've seen that we're why we've seen so many people quitting, and not even going to another job there. The the number of mental health disability claims is the highest, it's been in workforce history right now. So people might not show where they're quitting, but they're actually inside the company, but on long term mental health disability. So that's what happens, you can be off work for for a long time, if you get this unwell.

Jacob Morgan 26:46
So you said that around 18 months to two years, so this isn't just something where you show up to work and you're like, I feel burned out today, this is something that usually manifests through like ongoing,

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you know, you feel like this for a certain amount of time. And it's, it takes time to develop, it's not just, you show up to work one day and say, I feel burned out.

Jennifer Moss 27:08
No, it's an evolution. And and actually, if you look at the timeline of the great resignation versus the start of the pandemic, it's almost lockstep to, you know, to that timeline, where people are, it was about two years, you know, of people just being in the trenches, and then 41% of the global workforce decided that they were going to quit in the next three months. So that is a definite a, you know, a great, you know, parallel to what we talked about in the research is that you can sustain it, you can sustain it, you can keep going with it, there's an there's loyalty that kicks in, like, I don't want to leave my boss or leave my my friends behind my coworkers. And then there is literally a point where you have no more capacity, you have no more neural capacity, physical capacity, emotional capacity, and you have to leave and take a break or change things up. But what we're seeing when we see this reshuffle is that people are leaving one burnout situation for another thinking that it's going to be better for them to leave. So the people that actually took time off, or sabbaticals or had the privilege and the financial ability to take time away, are the ones that will be able to be more likely to, you know, stay in another organization in a more sustainable way after they returned to work.

Jacob Morgan 28:32
Yeah, I try to I mean, as you know, when you work for yourself, you feel like you should be working all the time. So I'm constantly trying to like, do stuff, you know, weekends, relax, like just to make sure that I'm not constantly working all the time, because it's very, very easy to do. What are some of the causes of burnout in the book, you talk about six causes, which I think are very important to kind of identify. So you know, what, you know, what is it that can make you feel this way? So maybe we can go through each one of these causes for one to two minutes?

Jennifer Moss 29:03
Sure, yes. So overwork, I think we all know that one, sustainable workloads. And that's probably going to always be the leading cause of burnout is unsustainable workloads, and then lack of agency so not feeling like you have autonomy we've seen a lot more of that with just more micromanagement, you know, increase in boss wear and things like that which are making people feel like they have no control. We're seeing that now with people just saying come back into the office, not feeling like the rules make sense for some and it's just arbitrary. That feeling of not having autonomy, even just not having autonomy to get to your goals. So really managers following your process versus thinking about you just getting there and giving you that authority to get there. Lack of pay and are sort of reward and recognition essentially but it's basically like are you being paid commence relief but also all the overtime we see this in nurses and you know, and first responders and police officers working these unbelievably unsustainable overtime hours. And that being not necessarily commensurate with what they should be getting paid. And also just recognition, a lot of people are not feeling recognized, people are too tired to say thank you literally these days. So that's a problem, lack of community. So are you know, it could be anything from just feeling bullied at work to being excluded. You know, we see a lot of these wellness programs like even these, you know, steps challenges for people with mobility issues, that's not necessarily inclusive, so othering of people, and also, you know, even just isolation and loneliness, people feeling really disconnected from their teams and not feeling part of something. It's

also lack of values and mismatch. That's another one, where you're feeling like, you're you used to love what you do or used to feel good, like you knew what you were good at, you had mastery, you're burning out, so you don't feel like you have any mastery, and that that lack of self efficacy is a big one and just not fitting, you know, not feeling like you fit. And then you know, the lack of fairness piece, and that's just discriminatory behavior in the workplace. Okay, we've seen that a lot with, you know, women, like I said, and women of color inside of this pandemic, they felt this lack of fairness in their ability to do their job well being expected to juggle their home life.

Jacob Morgan 31:23
Okay. Are there when you look at these causes? Is there one that is most common or most impactful one that shows up more than others? Because it seems like from all of them, and hopefully somebody isn't, you know, being smacked with all six at the same time. But when you look at all these, how would you kind of prioritize them in terms of which one has the most significant impact of burnout in which one is most common inside of companies?

Jennifer Moss 31:51
workload is number one, always you see that this overwork, the amount of hours people have working, and they're working are creeping up. And I think the lack of agency and the overwork come in really hand in hand, because what we're seeing right now is that you know, there's some countries even Canada right now is instituted the the right to disconnect law, which makes it unlawful for you to connect with people after hours. And so we're starting to see the psychosocial policies, okay, like, across the world. Yeah. And France started in 2016. And other you know, Scotland, other countries have followed along, and Canada's adopted it now. But what what is sort of that's one example of many, but what we're finding is that when you feel like you have to respond at 11 o'clock at night and have an answer by the next morning, or you don't have real protection in that space, that's already been really infiltrated, that lack of agency can just, you know, fuel this cortisol response, you know, you get a ping, at a certain time of night from your phone, you just feel this with this urgency, we have this sense of urgency constantly to respond and that overwork piece, the toxic productivity, and the lack of agency, those two things, those three things sort of have really made it very difficult for us to even take pauses and breaks. I mean, we're filling up any extra time that we have with work, commuting time used to be just, you know, listening to the radio, and it's socked, which I don't recommend anyone having to commute it's terrible to, but like, why didn't we just take that time as time back? But no, we've looked at it as Let's fill all of our time with work when we can. And that's really been disastrous.

Jacob Morgan 33:34
Is there a difference in burnout for leaders versus non leaders? So basically, an individual contributor who's working at an organization versus a leader who is responsible for a team of people? Are there any differences there as far as what causes burnout?

Jennifer Moss 33:49
You know, there's, it's interesting, because in the data, we really saw that the more tenure you had, the more agency you had, the better you were able to say, I can't take on that project. Middle managers, though, are sandwiched in particular, between their boss and trying then to be able to communicate to their team, even if they agree or not, they're saying yes, and it's hard to say no to their boss. Yeah, I'll

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take that project on and then having to message that to the team who, you know, almost hates you at this point, because you keep loading work on them. They play, they have a really difficult role that they've had to play in this last year. So this idea of us and them has been frustrating for me because really, it's way way at the top that a lot of these decisions are being made. And so this idea that that middle manager all of a sudden has all the autonomy in the world to say no, I'm not going to ask my team to do that. is sort of unfair. But so they're dealing with that but we are seeing demographically that our younger workforce is the most burned out there the most impacted interest and a lot of that yeah, and a lot of it has to do again we say this whiny, millennial problem but a lot of it has to do with the fact that it's a you know, a high control low agency. Roll, they they're sort of, they have to do what they're told been told to do. They're trying to establish their brand and who they are, they don't have the seniority, they also haven't been like, haven't been at the company for a long time. So they have haven't proven that they are a hard worker yet, or that they are the creative one, or the innovative one, or whatever that is that they you create, after 15 years in a organization, they haven't established that. And then they've also come off of student debt, and they have no frame of reference. So there's, you know, they're coming at this as their first job potentially, in the last few years. And this is nothing like, you know, we've ever experienced before. And you've really tired leaders, who are now trying to lead you in this remote virtual one on one world where they're exhausted by it. So they're just feeling really depleted in that group. And so the idea that they're just wanting were more work life balance, they just want a different experience of work that isn't so disengaging and tiring.

Jacob Morgan 35:58
So you mentioned work life balance. And you know, a lot of people listening to this might say, well, you know, we have self care programs, we have health and well being programs, so our employees aren't going to get burned out, because you know, we're taking care of them, we have yoga and healthy snacks, and, you know, meditation apps and stuff like that, is that not enough to keep all these things from happening?

Jennifer Moss 36:19
You know, I've been pretty vocal to about just what is going to remedy burnout, and what is actually going to help people to motivate and optimize. And I think we need all of those things, I wouldn't say you know, kick all those programs, out of, you know, your strategy, it's just understand that they're going to play a certain function. And so self care is important, leaders need to model self care, they should always, you know, if there's some new wellness program that you should be attending and promoting the did something that they should we should all be doing, they should be disconnecting, too, they should be taking breaks, taking their vacation, and not answering emails on vacation, all those things leaders still need to do. And that is actually establishing a model of caring about wellness. But when you're looking at burnout, prevention, all of those things aren't tackling systemic discrimination, or the disproportionate impact on on women inside of our workforce, or they're not dealing with, you know, lack of grief, and policies that are there for all of the people that have dealt with grief over the last two years. It's not tackling, you know, compensation structures and, and reward and recognition structures. Like it's not tackling those things. So when we're really looking at well being when it comes to burnout, we have to look at that as a culture, strategy, effort initiative. And then wellness is a perk. And those are two different things like the wellness, those tactics or perks, they're not prevention interventions, they're, they're very different. And until we bifurcate, that within our strategy and look at burnout

prevention as a cultural phenomena, then it's just not going to solve the problem. It's like giving ice cream to people who need water.

Jacob Morgan 38:01

So in the last, like 1520 minutes or so we're going to talk about some specific action items around what what to do. But maybe one or two questions before we get to that point. One, you talked about curiosity in your book. And you also talked about empathetic leadership. And so I thought maybe we could start with curiosity and why what is curiosity have anything to do with burnout?

Jennifer Moss 38:23

Curiosity is maybe my the chapter and curiosity was my favorite one to write. And so I just find it so compelling. It was really interesting. I had some great chats with Dr. Martha bird, who's the chief anthropologist for ADP. And what I loved about that conversation was a fact that ADP has hired someone into a sea level role that's an anthropologist is incredible, but just this idea that, you know, we we stopped being curious. And that's making us less empathetic. We're really practicing more perceptual curiosity all the time, which is just scratching itches that don't actually resolve themselves and feeling satisfaction. I mean, we are doomsday scrolling on social media constantly, we're looking at the news all the time, in the pandemic, you know, we are just our media diet was feasting on news that wasn't going to make us feel better. And what we weren't doing was actually just practicing epistemic curiosity and philosophy, this idea that we should be learning for learning sake and and you know, spending time just appreciating that there's other parts of the world that make us more macro instead of so myopic. And we do, we're getting like that societally. But inside of organizations, there's a lot of my apathy. And when we practice this constant, my apathy of like, can I get news that's going to satisfy what I need to know right now about me to help me and my life instead of saying broadly Okay, let's be out in nature and appreciate moments of awe. Let's have spiritual rest, where we actually you know, connect to the world that has been around for a really long time and has injured a lot of terrible things. And, you know, my stuff isn't the most important piece. And you see that in organizations that have much more, you know, curious cultures, they care about other stories, they dig deeper, they listen, they find out what lights people up. And they they promote that by following up on that and asking more questions. And they learn about that that person, they learn about that person enough that if that person is starting to kind of become burned out or sort of decompose in this current environment, you're aware of it much earlier than then that point where it's the drop dead date for someone like you're paying attention. And that allows us also to connect with people to create sparks, and to be creative, and to innovate and be competitive. So it's a building up of just being slightly more interested in other human beings, so that you can then you know, grow as an organization, but your culture really shifts if you behave in that way.

Jacob Morgan 41:04

Yeah, and I guess that ties very well into this theme of empathetic leadership, which is something we've been hearing about quite a bit. And I think we're doing a little bit of a better job at this than we have been over the past few years. But this idea of trying to put yourself in your employees shoes, leading by example, which is one of the things that you alluded to earlier, right. I mean, I think one of the best ways that you can get your employees to avoid burnout is if you demonstrate as a leader, what those behaviors should be, like disconnecting taking your vacation time, you know, having that kind of

balance, because if your people see you burned out and working out all the time, they're gonna assume that that's culturally the way that things should be. You know, and in fact, it's a little deceptive. If you look at a lot of job descriptions, when you apply to work there, and they say it's like 32 to 40 hours a week, and you end up working like 5060, say, if you would have told me that I would have never taken this job to begin with. So I think we'll see some interesting change start to happen. But let's use the last, you know, 1520 minutes or so to talk about some specific action items. Starting off with how do you actually measure burnout? Or can you measure burnout? Because it seems like you could just feel that way. But how do you know if that's actually the case? And you're not just tired? are having a bad day? Like, how do you know that burnout is a thing?

Jennifer Moss 42:29
Well, you know, the MBTI, the Maslach, burnout, inventory is one of those more academic scales, but there's all social felly is engagement scale. But I mean, we don't need to be looking at academic scales to determine our own levels of burnout. It's sort of, like I say, a very simplified version of considering what it might look like, if you're getting closer to that it's looking at those three, three symptoms that I mentioned, the depletion, the exhaustion, and, and the cynicism like, how often am I feeling hopeless, and that disengagement and looking at it a frequency scale, you know, two to three times a week, over a period of time, because we have a lot of, you know, in our workforce, there's compressed workloads, for some folks that just

Jacob Morgan 43:11
might have a bad day, and you're like, you're doing something one day that you don't want or you have a bad interaction with a leader or a co worker, and you're like, Oh, my God, this sucks. But that's no, you're not burned out, you're just having a bad day.

Jennifer Moss 43:24
Exactly. And that can even be you know, for accountants, for example, or auditors or teachers, there's certain times the year that it's a month of just, it's or six weeks or two months, where you're in a project, we're just, it's really hard. And you could be feeling that way for a while. But it's really in this predicted, you know, predicted job satisfaction or predicted engagement piece that really narrows it down. So ask yourself like in three months, do I predict that I'm going to feel like this still? And then if the answer is yes, then you want to start to say, Okay, how frequently per week and my feeling like this, and how long has this been going on. So if I'm feeling like this two to three times a week or more, that's, that's an at risk person for burnout. And if you've been feeling that for six weeks, and you also assume that this isn't going to end, you're really in a high risk zone. So it's more about just kind of checking in once a week looking at those three signs. How frequently did I feel them this week? And if you're starting to notice it, start to label it more and see where it's showing up and writing down you know, what is it that that what is the thing that is that pebble for me? Is it that you know, I keep getting dumped work on because we haven't hired a resource is it that my boss is always, you know, pushing back on me all the time or doesn't want to listen to what I say, Do I feel like I can speak up in meetings was I turned my idea turned down for the 10th time. You know, I analyze what are those things that seem to get to you and your experience of work and that continue to be those those those things that bump you down and you bump back up and bump you down? You bump back up because eventually if you don't address them And then you you hit that?

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Jacob Morgan 45:02

Is there a danger of comparison? Because somebody might say, you know, like if I was working at a company and I went to my my leader, and I said, you know, I'm I think I'm having signs of burnout. And my leader says, Well, what are you talking about? Jennifer weeks works way more than you. And she's great, you know, she shows up to work every day with a smile on her face, she's ready to go, like, Hey, what are you talking about? Is that it? Because I would imagine a lot of leaders, you probably fall into that of like, so and so's up right now. And they're doing more than you, why are you burned out?

Jennifer Moss 45:33

There's a huge legacy problem that has to be fixed. And a lot of it is just that we all grew up in these environments that that didn't really care, you know, you just like, it didn't matter. And so you didn't really have a choice. And so there's this mindset, that it's about choice, you know, like, I can choose to not be burned out. And I think that it's kind of like, oh, I can choose to not break my leg. And I can choose to not deal with depression and anxiety that's crippling, I mean, this isn't choice, this is what's happening over time, because of our inability to sustain certain parts of work. And, you know, and we all have different experiences, and history and trauma and, and stuff that holds us back, we could be, you know, a young, new graduate woman of color, we could be a single parent, we could be a Muslim, you know, representing as Muslim, or person that's really dealing with LGBTQ plus, you know, issues, we don't know what other people are actually dealing with that create barriers for them, and experiences in their history that make it difficult to sustain. We might not have a partner, we might not have kids, you know, we might have a partner and no kids. So that gives us a lot more stamina, there's a lot of things that give us that boost. And so we have to understand that everyone has a different marker for potential threat and risk of burnout. And it varies.

Jacob Morgan 47:03

Okay, let's talk a little about some of the strategies to avoid burnout from happening. And then we can talk about some of the techniques to use after you're already in that burnout stage, and you haven't been able to prevent it. So let's talk about first the prevention piece. And maybe we can do this from the perspective of, well, I guess there's two sides, right, as a leader who's responsible for others, and then you're an individual responsible for yourself? How do you help make sure burnout doesn't happen? Because it seems like in today's world, it's, it's almost inevitable that it will happen at some point?

Jennifer Moss 47:38

Well, you know, maybe I'm a bit more irrationally optimistic that like, we it is possible to prevent it. And there's a swath of the workforce around 20. You know, 2% said that they were high performing, that they were the happiest they've ever been inside this pandemic. So there's, there is going to always be a group of people that are just more like dandelions, they're just kind of pop up anywhere. And you know, they seem to be able to endure any weather, like they can climb through a rock and be resilient. Like, there's a lot of people that sort of, that we don't recognize, they're just sort of built that way. And a lot of it is genetic, you know, it is there. Part of that is genetic and conditional. So I think there's some people that will get through it. But I, I do think that we have to understand that this is a problem. And like I've been writing about this before years before the pandemic hit that it's an issue that we need to address and that we have to start recognizing that unless we do really pay attention to it. And leaders are

actually organizing around it and putting money and budget towards preventing it. And legacy has to change. And also we as individuals need to show up to work without learned helplessness, which is important to we do have the capacity to come to work, and have practice psychological fitness at home, we could give ourselves an extra 5% of buffering, you know, the more inspired we are in our lives and our work, the more sleep we get, the more we focus on rest, the more that we actually practice gratitude, the more that we work on our hope theory and create plan A's and Plan B's and create strategies for success. We time manage, we do say no to the things that are in our control to say no to we have huge FOMO we're not great at saying no to things that don't really matter. We need to get better at the joy of missing out you know Jomo, there's a there's pieces of the puzzle that we can interact with that are in our control. So we should be controlling the controllables as much as possible.

Jacob Morgan 49:42
So if you were, let's say a leader at a large company, and you showed up to work today, and you're like, Okay, you know, we're going to put some strategies in place to avoid burnout, like what are some of the specific things that you would do?

Jennifer Moss 49:55
I wouldn't address workload First, I would be asking people what's going on with Then within their teams and in reinforcing with direct managers that they need to get a really good understanding of where workload is making sure that we just as direct managers to are learning where the inefficiencies are. Is there someone working on something that that's not their strength, but it's sort of just been pushed on them? Like, how do we get that off their plate? What is a what is plan to give people technical training, a lot of people were thrown into the pandemic, and have never really actually become efficient on the technology, they were told they had to learn really quickly. So we haven't gone back to, you know, just give people more training and support around these things that they're doing kind of badly, but they're doing, you know, finding out if people are off project, like, are they on a different trajectory, and you haven't really just looked at workload for a long time or looked at what priorities are. So these inefficiencies can be easily reduced, we can reduce these inefficiencies, by 20% off workload, like that's the first line thing that we can do is just look, every job manager look at where people are working, how they're working, and where their strengths are being, you know, pulled and there's, you know, their lack of strengths are being leveraged. So looking at that first and then starting to create guidelines on when is appropriate for people to disconnect giving people a little bit of life back, I think we need to have really good standards around that. And that's a top level lead where they're saying, Okay, we're agreeing that this has to be some sort of protection around our time, and you are okay to not be answering and we don't want leaders to be sending emails out after this time to that there's KPIs attached to burnout inside of organizations that say, if you're going to continue to model that behavior, there's a risk response to that. There's a ramification to that. So those are the things I'd say right away that employers can start to initiate.

Jacob Morgan 51:52
Well, seems like it's just talk to your people. I know it sounds like basic and simple, but it's like have a conversation with your people don't just, you know, how's that project going? Like? What's the update on those sales figures? It's like, hey, you know, how is your like, talk about some human stuff for a little

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bit and just get a sense of where your people are? Seems like the easiest and most basic place to start, like be a human being.

Jennifer Moss 52:18
Be a human being. Yeah, number one, like, I could just write a book that says that, yeah, be a human being. But the thing is, is we need to be a human being. But we need to be as managers and leaders be supported by the highest level of the organization to action, what we're hearing. And so we can say, like, how are you and someone says to me, like, I'm doing 70 hours of work, and I'm really exhausted, I can't do it anymore. And then managers can be like, well, sorry, that's kind of how it has to be. I mean, that's not helpful. They need their senior leaders to really say, I back you like, whatever you need to do, we're going to figure that out. And we're going to make this a priority. So managers don't really have the ability to action, what they learn unless they have that high level support to say, Yeah, I learn Listen, action.

Jacob Morgan 53:08
Okay. Well, last few minutes, let's talk about some strategies or techniques to come out to combat burnout when it actually happens. So it's too late to prevent it. I'm in that stage, I'm burned out. What do I do to like, get back into it?

Jennifer Moss 53:24
Yeah, this is important to recognize is that there's a point where it's not like you can, you know, be resilient enough to get yourself out of burnout, or let's gratitude my way out of burnout. You know, like toxic positives going

Jacob Morgan 53:38
on a nature walk and meditate, I'll be good tomorrow,

Jennifer Moss 53:40
like, take a bath, your burnout is gone. I mean, it's just, it's not like that. So at this point, we need professional support, we probably need some sort of teletherapy or therapy, looking within our EAP to see what's offered a peer support is really helpful. There's a lot of organizations now that are doing this mental health one on one training for peers, and they've created consortiums of, of peers across the organization that are sort of tagged as being able to provide support for those in crisis but also for those people that maybe need some long term direction around on even just guideposts. You know, having these employees be able to say, well, we have this thing, I'm going to help you get it right away and you don't have to dig through all of the, you know, the the insanity that is or AAPs I know where to go. So we're seeing more of that and I think so what we need to do as individuals is say, Okay, how do we, if we have that access, seek that out? If we can talk to our boss, talk to our boss, but in lots of organizations we can so how do we get access to local community supports or a trusted professional friend that's why I really believe strongly in developing mentorship now before you burn out and developing allies outside of your professional world, so you can rely on them if star Is this something that starts to take you over and helps you also prevent it? And then you know, just don't be afraid to talk to someone and get the help you need. And if you are depressed or anxious, it could be a whole host of things that you might require to get healthier and better.

Jacob Morgan 55:15

So how do you because I suppose one of the challenges is, if you're burned out, you still have to show up to work each day to do your job. Like you can't just call in and be like, Hey, I'm burnt out, I'll be back in a month, like you still are expected to show up your your managers or leaders are still expecting you to do your job. Do you recommend going to your leaders and saying, Hey, I know, I'm burned out like I like because you're still you know what I mean? Like, you're still having to do the work, like you still have that professional responsibility for your team and your company. Meanwhile, you're also burned out, you're trying to get help with that. So how do you balance those two things?

Jennifer Moss 55:53

Well, when you have hit a, an official wall of burnout, you probably have to take a leave, you need to take a medical leave, or you need to, you know, medical leave is what where you're at. And that's the seriousness of it, if you are burnt out, you need to consider a medical leave, if you are experiencing symptoms of burnout, which is different than hitting that wall, then I think that's when you talk to your boss to say, I don't want to hit the wall. And I'm concerned, I'm about to hit the wall, because I've been looking at my scores, you know, and my self awareness is telling me I'm really going to burn out here soon. So let's come up with a strategy so that I can get some prevention measures or measures before it is that point because your boss doesn't want you to hit that wall? I mean, of course, and you know, and that's, that's the thing is that when it gets to that point, we are we are beyond showing up for work, we are over that threshold, and it's about, you know, getting to a place where you can be, you know, healthy enough to survive that situation. It's really dangerous. So we need to be talking to people beforehand, and leaders beforehand, and having more leaders aware, because they hit the wall places is catastrophic.

Jacob Morgan 57:06

Do you have a sense of like, how long does it take to get past it? Are there any numbers or stats on this? Are we talking like, you know, when you say medical leave, you know, a day two days? Are we talking a week, a month Soph? Is it just all over the map?

Jennifer Moss 57:23

Well, a real, if you've hit the wall, and you're burned out, and you've hit that extreme exhaustion disorder place, you know, which is what it's called in Sweden, where they actually treat it with pharmacological responses at that point, the you're looking at, it could be four months, six months. And it could be for some 18 months to two years. And some people when they talk about this burnout event, they say that it is impacted their career permanently, that they suffer PTSD, that they go back into work, and they are not confident they've decreased their chances of being promoted significantly, you're less likely to actually fulfill what you would have from from a salary over your life salary is decreased substantially. I mean, there's real impacts to it hitting that wall. And it isn't just a couple, this isn't just a week off to solve for burnout. And that's why I get so angry when I see these headlines, you know, oh, we gave a, like a big celebration, we gave our burned out employees a week off and like, you know, a new extra week of vacation. And it's just, it's not celebratory we should be it's just a band aid. I mean, you're just stopping what's going to eventually happen. And so we need to stop thinking about this, like,

oh, well, it takes a couple days to recover, it can take a couple years for some people to recover. That's a real major danger that I don't think a lot of people recognize.

Jacob Morgan 58:53
Yeah, I mean, that's crazy. Because who can afford to not work for a couple years and on the flip side, you know, who's gonna pay you to not work for a couple years if you get diagnosed with burnout? So I mean, what, what most people do, because as you can imagine, it's pretty it's you know, longer than maternity or paternity leave to just be like, Hey, I, you know, I need 18 months or 12 months off, like, Are there any examples of what companies are doing to help with it? Or are they paying time off for 12 months?

Jennifer Moss 59:21
Well, it's through insurance. It's just medical. It's just a medical disability leave and so, okay, I see what you're saying. Yeah. So they'd be they're not being paid to, you know, be off with burnout. They're actually considered a medical leave. And so at that point, it's insurance lives covering it and no one really wants that in the organization. And that's why we're seeing that number actually rise. Like I said, the highest it is has been in workforce history. People are taking it off. And it's because what's happened is that the burnout has resulted in severe anxiety. I mean, we've seen anxiety self reported Generalized Anxiety go from you Around 6% of the workforce to now we're looking at 37% of people with generalized anxiety in the workforce. I mean, this, this pandemic has really played a toll on people and, and, and then with work adding to, you know, the stress with workload, etc. While people I mean millions of people have dealt with losings people in their lives, sometimes multiple people in their lives. And, you know, our grief policies are only two days off. So these are the things that have now over time have just created this consequence, we're in a paradigm shifting moment like no other. And so this is where we're at. So now it's digging people out of out of a hole, I think, are the workforce out of a hole and trying to do things differently in the future.

Jacob Morgan 1:00:48
Jennifer, where can people go to learn more about you and your book, anything that you want to mention for people to check out?

Jennifer Moss 1:00:55
Yeah, it's Jennifer dash moss.com. And everything's there. But I mean, I do want to just say quickly, before I go, it isn't hopeless. You know, it sounds like it's a really hopeless situation. But there's a lot of work being done in the pandemic changed a lot of perceptions around, you know, around well being and wellness, and they've made adjustments in there. We're talking about it for the first time, and we're offering teletherapy, which we never did before. And we're training people on Mental Health First Aid, and people are learning about a topic that they were talking about before. So again, it's that cautious optimism. I think we can be transformative, we just can't waste a crisis. You know, we just can't look at this as we didn't learn anything. We just want to forget about it. Let's Let's take something from it and give it meaning by being better humans, better leaders in the future work.

Jacob Morgan 1:01:47

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I like that. It's a great way to wrap up. Jennifer, thank you so much for taking time out of your day. I really appreciate it.

Jennifer Moss 1:01:54
Thank you so much for having me. It was great chatting with you, of course.

Jacob Morgan 1:01:57
And thanks, everyone for tuning in. Again. I guess Jennifer Moss, make sure to check out her book, the burnout epidemic. You could find it pretty much everywhere. I had a chance to read it some really cool advice and tips in there. And I will see all of you next week. All right, let me just push