



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

The Hidden Cost Of Guilt In Leadership: How To Break Free And Thrive

Shannon Waller: Is guilt getting in your way? Stay tuned for an interesting conversation about guilt, the negative impacts, and the way through so you don't have to live with a sense of remorse or regret any longer. Hi, Shannon Waller here and welcome to Team Success. Today I'm going to talk about an interesting topic and that is feeling guilty. It came up in a recent workshop and I was completely inspired and really kind of curious to lean into the topic of guilt. Now, I was raised by someone for whom guilt was a four-letter word. It's not in our household. I was not raised with Catholic guilt. I was not raised with generational guilt. I was not raised with any kind of guilt. My mother was like, yeah, not doing that. However, a lot of people were. Now, is it an effective means of social conditioning? Absolutely. It works. So, I'm not saying it isn't effective.

However, I get to see the downsides. I get to see the downsides when entrepreneurs feel guilty about delegating certain types of activities that they have a certain perception of to their team, so they hang on to them way too long. I see guilt on the behalf of team members and team leaders, feeling like they need to be hyper-responsive, hyper-vigilant to make sure they're doing a good job, which means they have no boundaries between their personal and professional lives. And I just see people feeling so stuck and kind of in pain, which I always want to heal. I always want to kind of fix that. So we're going to do a little bit of a deep dive into feeling guilty.

So I'm curious as to when this happens for you, if you're kind of conscious of whether or not this is how you were raised, if you actually have a practice of making other people feel guilty at the risk of diving into a scary area. We're going to go there. Just saying. All right, so how do you feel when you feel guilty? Well, it's a feeling of remorse, regret, and shame. Shame is not a really high-level emotion. Just to let you know, people do terrible things to themselves and others out of a sense of shame. And also, it really isolates people. I love Dan's take on it. He goes, he's always paying extreme attention. He's very alert to when people are feeling isolated. And shame isolates people. Think about all of the things coming up in the news where people were made to feel badly about certain things that have happened in their upbringing. It's like, oh, the shame that goes with it. It's this heavy weight on your heart. Not good. And so I'm very conscious as a human being to not incite shame in other people. I'm sure I fail miserably sometimes, but I really hate that feeling for myself. I remember being in an early relationship where that was how I felt and, oh, it was awful. And then I went and wandered, I felt so badly, I like wandered the streets at night, which was not a safe thing to be doing because I felt so ashamed. I never want to feel that again, nor do I want to have anyone else feel that way. So it's not good.

Now, does it also keep us in line sometimes? I looked up and there's some people actually think that there's a healthy version of guilt. I'm like, yeah. Not so keen on that. However, it might help you make some course corrections or make sure that you deliver on what you feel you're responsible for. So there is that. You know, I'm pretty conscious of delivering on my



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

The Hidden Cost Of Guilt In Leadership: How To Break Free And Thrive

commitments and showing up when I'm supposed to. And I don't feel guilty when I have too many emails in my inbox, but I do feel guilty if I miss a meeting or if something's dropped out of my brain. Definitely feel badly for that. However, I'm kind of talking about the guilt that doesn't feel good and prevents you from being in a good place and moving forward. So that's what I'm talking about. So this is really excessive or misplaced guilt, leading to negative self-perception and stress without resulting in constructive change. For instance, feeling guilty for taking a day off work to recharge, believing that you should always be available for your team or to your entrepreneur, even when it's detrimental to your health.

So that's the kind of guilt I run into a lot more. And I just see it preventing progress. It prevents positive action. So my personal strategy with that, because by the way, I feel it in my body. You probably do too. It's a sick feeling in your gut most of the time, makes you freak out a little bit. So I need to take action immediately to fix it is how I have worked on it, and I also realized, I was talking to Katrina before we started recording this, that I actually have designed my life to make sure that I can show up in the best way possible so that I don't feel badly if I can't do it a certain way—learning about myself, my Kolbe profile, my PRINT profile, my CliftonStrengths, I put myself in situations where those are valuable and very useful and I stay out of situations or commitments where I cannot deliver on what is needed and I would feel horribly guilty about those things. I actually think that avoiding guilt, it's provided a ton of direction in my life. Now, fortunately, it's directed me towards productivity and profitability and creating value, because I cannot stand the feeling, and you probably can't either. So just wanted to, this is kind of a personal podcast, so let's talk about what you can do about it.

So, we've talked about what guilty is and how it feels. Why it doesn't work is it holds back people from being their full selves, their true selves, their most contributing selves. And it keeps them from kind of, again, being healthy in terms of having effective boundaries and things that we're going to talk about in terms of how to solve this feeling. And also, I think it's a big cause of anxiety, before we leave this topic. You know, worrying about the consequences of one's actions or how others perceive you is really a function of guilt as well. And you can blame yourself. It is, you know, that shame, that remorse, sense of deep regret. I don't want to feel that way and I certainly don't want to have anyone else around me feel that way. So what are some of those triggers? Personal relationships when you feel like you've failed to meet expectations, professional obligations, not fulfilling responsibilities towards colleagues, clients, or stakeholders, and then lack of self-care, neglecting yourself, your personal well-being in favor of work commitments. These are some of the common triggers for this.

So in terms of why we have guilt, there's a whole list. Perplexity.ai was my research partner. So childhood experiences and conditioning, including trauma, violation of moral standards or personal values, empathy and concern for others, cognitive distortions and negative core beliefs often instilled in childhood, mental health concerns, cultural and societal factors, that's a big one. And evolutionary adaptation used to be that if we did something that violated, I'm



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

The Hidden Cost Of Guilt In Leadership: How To Break Free And Thrive

going to use the word tribe, you know, violated the morals or the habits or ways that our tribe operated, we were physically at risk for survival. We had to get along with the mores and the morals of our tribe or we would be pushed out and then we'd be on our own and you don't survive without your tribe. And so this is evolutionary as well. So we have adapted to this. Now things have shifted a little bit. The nice thing about having so many people on the planet is you can find your tribe wherever you are. And I certainly have found mine with entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial teams. Thank goodness. Those are the playmates I want to have in my life. So we've adapted to survive that, but sometimes it actually holds us back. Again, lots more research you can do on this, but kind of interesting.

So what is it that you can do to actually kind of solve this? How can you overcome the guilt and not set yourself up or other people up for failure? Okay, so that's my number one thing. It's most important. Number one is reframe your mindset. Actually question some of those beliefs. Ask yourself, is it really true that I'm failing at my job if I don't answer an email that comes in at 3 a.m.? No, you are not failing at your responsibilities or your job if you're not answering something that comes at 3 a.m. or on a Free Day or some other boundary that you probably, quote unquote, should have. No, you have to kind of question that because we have this reflex where we think we're in trouble or we will be in trouble and we just pay attention to how we're feeling without actually questioning it. So taking a second, pause between stimulus and response to ask yourself, do I really need to freak out about this or should I actually wait until tomorrow? So really questioning that versus just reacting because you're actually reacting to your feelings. You're not reacting to what happened. You're reacting to your feelings about what happened. Big distinction. So learning how to calm yourself down, questioning it is very, very powerful.

There's a couple people who have said this, but like question your thoughts. They're not always correct. So make sure you, you know, how am I responding to this? Why am I freaking out? Maybe you don't need to. Recognize that you're allowed to have multiple priorities. You can want a great personal life as well as a great professional life. It doesn't have to be one or the other. And really trusting your decisions and intuition as a business owner and leader. So that's really looking at your whole mindset and how you're looking at things. Now, one of the most important things you can do, and this is what I think you'll do as you finish listening to this podcast, is setting clear boundaries. Why do I love our Strategic Coach distinctions of Free Days, Focus Days, and Buffer Days? Because it gives you incredibly clear direction about what your focus of mental energy and emotional energy needs to be on each of those types of days. The purpose of Free Day is rejuvenation. It is to not work, to restore yourself, to make oneself young again. This means no work. Right? So without that distinction of Free Days, everybody is working all the time. They're checking their work email. They're just making sure nothing gets lost. It comes out of this incredible sense of fear and scarcity that there just isn't enough. That unless you pay attention to it all the time, something's going to go wrong. Again, question your thinking about this. It's not actually true.



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

The Hidden Cost Of Guilt In Leadership: How To Break Free And Thrive

So one of the things I really, really, really appreciate about Coach is how we put in place some of those very important boundaries. Focus Days. These are your money-making days. This is when you really put your mental, physical, and emotional energy on growing, on serving your clients in the best way possible, internal or external. Buffer when you're working on your own company, not your clients. Again, there's lots more detail in the Program about that. But just really important to have those boundaries between work and home. And also even at home, time for yourself, time for your family and friends. Are you getting enough sleep? Are you eating good quality food? Are you doing the things that nourish your soul? Which could be reading, it could be praying, it could be meditating, it could be spending time with certain types of people, it could be giving in your community. I don't know, but you need to. Make sure that you are feeding yourself so that you have enough to give to others. The whole oxygen mask metaphor is so true. Put your own oxygen mask on first before you help others. Otherwise, you're dead. You can't help anyone if you're completely depleted. So very important to do that.

The other one, and this is very much on leadership to do that, is to please communicate your expectations. One of the things I find so fascinating, and my purpose in life seems to be to bridge the gap between entrepreneurs and their teams. It just is. It's endlessly fascinating and motivating for me to do this. And part of it is like, okay, if you wake up super early, and lots of my really good client friends do this, you know, your brain is on. You're thinking, you're working, you're brainstorming, you love that quiet time. I think it's Stephen Kotler who calls it no time when he does his writing. But other people might be getting the pings on their bedside table where their phone is as you're messaging. You are just trying to get it out of your head. You're in motion. One of the things we talk about is delegated memory. When you put it into an email or a chat or what have you or Slack, you're delegating your thinking to technology so it can get out there. Is your intention to have people responding at 4 a.m.? Probably not, at least I sure as heck hope not. But it's so that you can get it out of your head, otherwise it gets lost. It gets stuck, it's not gonna go anywhere productive.

But make sure that you set the expectations with the people receiving it by when they need to answer. Now, more tech savvy people than me, which is a lot of people, actually do all the emails, but set them to not send until 8:30, nine o'clock in the morning. I really like that. Someone was telling me that they do this even though they haven't been at Coach for quite some time. This is one of the habits they set in place and they've taken it to every company that they've started past the first one when we first do them. This is what he does. He says, yeah, I wake up super early. I do all my emails and I set the time for them to actually go through to other people so that I don't wreck their time off. And I was like, props, dude, this is awesome, because he's setting expectations. And he also is very clear with his team. I am not expecting you to answer. In fact, if you answer emails after 6 p.m., I'm going to be asking why. What's the problem that you can't get your work done during the work hours? So I love that.



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

The Hidden Cost Of Guilt In Leadership: How To Break Free And Thrive

So setting really clear expectations. And if your expectation is people are working 24-7, we need to have a chat. That is actually not the best way to get things out of humans. So that's a different conversation. So really make sure you set reasonable expectations with team members and with clients. One of our great clients, Paul, really great at taking Free Days, does lots of real travel, and he will sit down with his clients and say, I'm going to be away for like three weeks because I'm going, name a cool place. And it's like, what do we need to accomplish before I'm gone to make sure that you're looked after? And his clients aren't mad about it. Mostly they're like, oh, where are you going? Sounds super cool. And the next question is, how can I do that too? Right? Like he's fully, fully, fully present when he's with them. And the freedom of time that he has is admirable to other people. They're not wanting him to be accessible 24-7 because he's got great clients. And anyone who's not like that is not his client.

Again, setting clear expectations and boundaries. But they want to know how can they have that freedom of time and those kinds of boundaries too. So this is what's interesting is that when you are someone who has clear boundaries, that when you're with your clients, you're with your clients, you're not distracted by other people. When you're with your family, you're with your family. You're not checking your phone and wondering how the team is doing, wondering how clients are doing. People respect that. Boundaries, you know, our fabulous iPhones, I've got ahold of mine right now, are wonderful, but they're also, they take us off task. They take us off purpose sometimes because we can distract ourselves. And we do this to ourselves, let's be super clear, we don't do it to other people. It's important to set boundaries with ourselves, it's very important to set boundaries with other people so that we can be present, we can really show up. Just imagine being in a client meeting and picking up your phone and taking another client call. That would not go over well. So telling people, which our clients do, it's like, when I'm with you, I'm 100% with you. When I'm with my family, I'm 100% with my family. They're like, oh, that's really cool. How can I do that too?

So you want to really set up, communicate, establish those really clear boundaries and stick to them. It engenders respect, not derision. So I know a lot of people are afraid of setting these boundaries because of what will people think. But again, the right people will think the right things. They'll actually go, oh, how do you do that? Because I'm not very good at this. Can you help me? And then you'll end up coaching them, which is super cool. Now, the other one is having the confidence to say no, to learn how to say no to commitments that don't align with your priorities. And there are some lovely ways of saying no. In fact, I'm pretty sure I've done a podcast or two about that. There are gracious ways of saying, I'm sorry, that sounds really interesting, but that doesn't align with my priorities right now. I can't take that on. My plate is full with other commitments and responsibilities, or I know someone else who might be able to help you with that. It's not something that I can do.



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

The Hidden Cost Of Guilt In Leadership: How To Break Free And Thrive

There are lots of very gracious ways to acknowledge the request, but to say no when it does not align with those priorities. And sometimes you help other people stay clear. They're like, oh yeah, you're right. I was just getting distracted by this bright, shiny object. And so again, people can appreciate when you are setting clear boundaries with that. So I think it's key. The other one is to be compassionate to yourself, right? Don't beat yourself up, which when I was younger, I was very good at doing that. Very good at not doing it now. So forgive yourself. You will screw up. We all do. Whatever. It's very normal. And be okay with apologizing and say, hey, I messed up. I didn't deliver this when I said I thought I understood, you know, the project and I didn't. So I wasn't able to deliver what I thought I was going to, whatever it is. But if you can be upfront and clearly communicate and let people know what you're going to do differently next time or how you're going to fix the problem, people are accepting of that.

So you need to forgive yourself first and then ask for the appropriate forgiveness with someone else. Frankly, it's not a big deal. And if you're not making mistakes, that means you're not risking, which probably means you're not growing. So I don't expect perfection around people around me because frankly, we're making stuff up. Who the hell knows what perfect is anyway? I expect people to be accountable to what they committed to, and if they're not going to, to be upfront about it, and to solve the problem, and to move on, and to make sure we make a different mistake next time, not the same one. I am perfectly happy working with team members, or anyone for that matter, on that basis. If someone covers up the mistake, or hides it, and I don't find out about it until later, and then they don't learn from the experience, that does not bode well for our future together. But you have to be okay that sometimes you're going to screw up. And again, that's actually not a sign of failure. It's a sign of learning. It's when not learning from it that actually becomes a problem. So really key.

And then build a supportive network around you. You know, again, you don't want to be isolated with those things. I actually try and it's like, oh, I really screwed up here. And I will tell my friends and they'll support me, they'll console me and they'll help me figure out what to do better next time. Because they're like, oh, yeah, that wasn't good, Shannon. What are you doing about it? And they're saying it not in a harsh way, but in a supportive way. So that is super important. So really surround yourself with like-minded entrepreneurs, like-minded team members who get it, who get kind of when we are striving hard and sometimes we put too much on our plate and we don't fulfill every commitment. But again, I would much rather people play big and make some missteps than play too small. I actually don't get playing too small. It doesn't make any sense to me. And if someone wants to play small, they're probably not in my universe.



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

The Hidden Cost Of Guilt In Leadership: How To Break Free And Thrive

So again, I'm okay with people stepping out, and I can be a supportive person on that. I don't have to be someone super critical or harsh. I can let people know when I'm frustrated, but I'm not out about making them wrong. I'm like, but that behavior didn't work. So criticize the behavior, not the human, is really the part of that. And then the other thing is, you know, the power of letting go, of really realizing you cannot be in control of everything. Being a control freak has its limitations. You can be in charge, provide energy and electricity, as Dan Sullivan says, but you don't need to be in control of everything, and not everything's going to go perfectly, and you can still get a great result. I think that's key, and know that that leads to increased business growth and success, much better mental and physical well-being, and much more authentic leadership and decision-making.

And I love that word authentic. For me, it is so critical to be a real human being. You do not have to be perfect to be a great leader. You just have to be super honest, provide direction, and not make people feel guilty. You say, hey, we're striving. We're going to do our very best. Sometimes that will work. Sometimes it won't. How are we going to handle mistakes? What can we learn from them? You know, apologize when you've screwed up and that will absolutely give permission to your team to do the same. Encourage people to play full out. We like to say play offense, not defense. We talk about having no defense budget at Strategic Coach so people know that they can take risks to do that and they won't be made to feel shame, regret, remorseful, because we want people playing a big game with their areas of Unique Ability making the biggest impact they can.

So, these are my thoughts on guilt. Can you use it to kind of correct your behavior and show up as an even better person? Sure. But let's do it from the positive way, reinforcing what's working. That would be my praise podcast versus beating yourself up. Because frankly, it's kind of a negative path. And again, I think it leads to people playing small, not big. And I'm sure that's not what any of us want for ourselves or for others. I hope you're able to use this to coach yourself to be even mentally and physically healthier and set appropriate boundaries and communicate those to other people. So again, you can be your very, very, very best self most of the time. If you pay attention to the guardrails that guilt provides for you, I think you'll end up on a path that will lead you to be the most creative, most impactful, most effective, in your Unique Ability person you can possibly be, in great teamwork with others. So I think it provides some interesting guardrails, but please don't hang out there. Not a great place to be. The center where you are doing your best work with your best audience That is my recipe for no guilt. So hope you've enjoyed this. Any thoughts or considerations or experiences? Love to hear them at questions@strategiccoach.com. As always, thank you so much for listening. And here's to your team success.