Burned Out? The Realignment Your Soul Has Been Asking For with Dr. Danielle McGeough Transcript

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Introduction to burnout and the guest

Hey friends, I'm your host Dr. Elizabeth Samanta, the intuitive psychiatrist and you're listening to Stepping Into Soul Power. Friends, friends we're living in dynamic times and unfortunately some people are losing jobs.

Some people that have jobs are feeling it burnt out. In fact, studies are showing maybe 44% to 66% of people are are burning out and it's hard. It is hard out there.

But what if burnout wasn't just about things breaking down? What if burn out is a call? It is a call for a breakthrough, calling you back to your true self.

Our guest today is Professor Speaker. She's a transformational strategist. she helps high performing individuals go from exhaustion to inspiration. And she is just such an inspirational force that is truly, truly making making a heartfelt, authentic change in the world.

Dr. Danielle McHugh, welcome to the show. Thank you so much for having me. You got me blushing. Oh, you know, there is authenticity there and it's such a beautiful thing.

I wonder for people who are new to you, what led you down this path to really want to address burnout? So, I was not the smart kid growing up. I definitely was the weird kid.

And when I 20, decided I wanted to get a PhD. But I told myself that the only way that I would be able to do it is if I worked twice as hard as everyone else.

And so I created all of the habits, work habits study habits life habits.

Danielle's path into burnout research

You got to have it. I'm going to stack it and yeah. And, and, you know, the wild thing is it, it works. Got the PhD, I got the dream job. got tenure. and when I, got there, just felt flat.

Empty I was like flat and overwhelmed all at once and I Was definitely burnt out and i believe I, was also demoralized I felt like the work that I. Was doing Who it it wasn't making the empath that i felt, like it could it Could be making And it was wildly frustrating to feel that way and so So I knew that something needed to change But I didn't even know where I wanted to go because I was so disconnected from myself.

You know, it's just years and years of dissociating from my self with these habits that I know helped me create success. But, I also know that habits are designed to be automatic, to become unconscious.

And what I really needed was ritual, something that I should have known because that's something I study. But rituals are infused with meaning. And so I needed to replace some, not all, but some of my automatic habits.

with meaning-filled rituals. Can you speak a little bit to that? You're talking about rituals and how it's infused with the meaning. Are there specific small rituals that you have found to be helpful for people as far as reconnecting with themselves when they're feeling overwhelmed?

Yes. I think that that was one of the first things that I needed because I actually remember my supervisor bringing me in after I got in tenure and was like, friend, you got tenure, that's awesome stuff.

So what's next? What's your five-year plan? And I remember thinking, bruh, I don't even know what I want to eat for dinner, let alone five years from now, And so I started with some rituals.

that I would have described as time management at the time, but now I see as ways that i was collecting data on myself. So I'd go to plan in my calendar, and I was doing that because I'm so overwhelmed.

I just wanted to find strategies, you know, hacks to be able to manage my time better. And I felt like if I could just do that, then maybe I'll have more spaciousness in But what was wild is actually in the ritual of planning paired with, I would say, journaling prompts, reflection.

I started to learn about myself again. i would just ask myself things like, ooh, what did bring me energy last week? What was lighting me up? what is draining me?

And I'd start to realize, oh, that thing that I thought I liked, i was just kind of faking for other people. And I would also start to notice the things that did light me up and reconnect with them because I do think as we As we get older and we start doing all of the things, it can be really easy to still think that the thing that you like are the think you liked when you were 20. I remember working with a client and I was like, what lights you up?

And she was volleyball and then she's like wait, I haven't played volleyball in 15 years. She's that's what I loved in my 20s. And I like baking now. And sometimes we forget that even just our favorite things have shifted.

And so for me, I started with a ritual of just basic planning in the morning.

Using rituals and reflection to reconnect

What are three things that if I did today, would feel really good about it? At the end of the week, what are some things, patterns that I noticed? And having that ritual time of reflection made a huge difference.

Yes. Oh, that's so powerful. And in the world of psychiatry, we love self-reflection just because it's kind of like what you said. We can get so busy with just doing life that we forget to really start looking within ourselves or asking ourselves the important questions.

Can you paint a picture for us about how adding this has transformed your life? So I might start by offering a little bit more of a And then kind of describe the difference.

So when I was in that moment of burnout and demoralization, a lot of other tough stuff was happening. I just had my first kiddo, my second kid was on the way.

Yeah, so I'd had mastitis nine times in nine months. our house we had a water main break and it flooded out our basement at the same time we only had one full bathroom and its kind of a long story but there is no floor in the bathroom so we were living in my parents basement while these house repairs were being done and so it was just like one of those moments where you're like come on world really are you gonna keep hitting me with this And so at that time too, y'all, I was so annoyed with my husband.

So we had been married for 10 years before we have kids, and marriage was always really easy for me. I'm just like- That is a, hold on. You are an anomaly right here.

Not a lot of people can say that, but hey, Well, see, I learned. I've learned my lesson because I remember people being like, oh, you know, marriage, You've got to work at it.

And I'd be like really? You know like this is pretty easy. It's my best friend. We travel together, we work together. He's a nerdy professor too. And so we were just, we're kind of like life buds.

And all of a sudden I'm the one nursing. I am the dealing with mastitis. Why am I doing the dishes? For real. Like some of those gender roles stuff really started.

to rise to the surface at that time. Yes. And I was struggling with postpartum anxiety. He has ADHD and when you aren't sleeping, it was kind of like both of our mental health muck.

We didn't have the same resources available to navigate them. a mess. And I think that that was actually a huge wake up call for me because I could imagine losing my job.

That would have been really, really hard. I can imagine my house, like needing a different house.

Burnout, family stress, and reclaiming agency

But the idea that my marriage was a mass was this thing where I'm like, I've got to figure out how to get this right because that's not something I'm willing to sacrifice and so I think that that picture is so important to paint because it sounds so silly to say oh you got out stickers with your planner and you reflected and did these little rituals and it seems wild to go now boom my marriage is strong I have way more energy and excitement about my work.

I know what my value is, I'm bold and taking risks in ways that I wouldn't have ever thought of, but I also, probably internally, my brain used to be going, it was just flying all the time.

And now I'm like, ooh, it's kind of quiet in there. That feels really good. And I have such a strong sense of agency. Like, this is what I control over.

This is why I don't. The things that I do not, is okay. I am at peace with. But the things I know that can control, I got this. It's so hard to explain.

that I'm just really flipping healthy. Well, there's so much in what you just said. I think about what God bless you. And I just have one child. I have won and I know when you have a child, it's a huge change.

It is a change for people who are resistant, reluctant to change, what can they do to move in that direction? I do think that it took me. The first step was me deciding that I wanted.

a shift and that it needed to come from me. Because at first, I think that I was definitely a little bit in the blame game. I Was blaming my husband, was blaming academic systems, the work structures, and I want to acknowledge that there's crap there.

Right? That like I wasn't wrong. Right? There are things about our work structures that are not designed to support women that just had kids. Right. Absolutely.

Yes, there are gender roles. There is all this structural systemic crap that needs to be changed. And so I wasn't wrong there. But some of those things, I didn't have the capacity at that point.

to be the one championing those changes and they weren't gonna be able to happen fast enough for me to well. So I needed to go what is within my sphere of control and it hurt y'all, it kind of stung.

To go some of this is with my ability to make a difference. And it also stong a bit to You need to get yourself well so that you have the energy, the clear-mindedness, and the ability to tackle some of these bigger things.

And so I do think you will have to be willing to change and to recognize then maybe you're playing a part. You are complicit in some of the crap and that flipping hurts.

There's a lot of truth in that. It can be hard to take responsibility for what's going on. I wonder, as you've made this transformation, what are the different things within you, within your world that have changed?

How are you redefining yourself? So I think that one thing that's kind of odd is that I didn't think of myself as ambitious. So here I was stacking all them habits, going, working twice as hard.

And if you would have asked me, like, are you ambitious? I would've said, no, I wasn't a person that needed to get perfect grades in high school. I never tried to go to an Ivy league college.

It actually never even entered my mind that that could be a possibility. Like a little small town girl from Iowa. There is something really empowering about going, Danielle, you are ambitious, quit trying to sort of resist it, own it.

But also recognize that there's a cost to that ambition. And how do we want to re-identify ambition as something that's maybe, this is going to sound counterintuitive, but gentle?

What does it look like to have gentle ambition? Can I be content and ambitious simultaneously? And to kind of hold some of those paradoxes and tension with each other?

Gentle ambition and self-worth

So I think that One, owning my bigness was important because it also felt like owning worthiness. Help me understand, make that link for us about this worthness.

I think that my resistance to claim ambition was also me doing this, oh shucks, I'm no big deal. Like I was keeping myself small, as a way to please others.

And there is a flipping mental tax to that too. When instead, I was willing to go, you are ambitious. You do want big things. Yes, You have a kid, but you still get to dream.

For all the mothers, yes. Don't let that stop you. Yes, and once I could just admit that to myself I Could also go you are kind of big sometimes Danielle and You're worthy of taking up space and you're worth of having dreams And you're worthy of resting.

When you need to rest. Because you are going to do this gentle, ambitious thing. That seems to make no sense, but you will embody it anyway. Wow, I love that owning your bigness, like just stepping into your worth.

Yes, i'm all for it. I want to ask because we've been talking about burnout on a very individual level, but Teams can burn out, family can burnout, there are burnout communities out here in this world.

And so I wanna ask if you could speak a little bit to that. What does that look like and what might we be able to start to shift when we're looking at things on a bigger than individual level?

I love that question in part because I'm so fascinated by the way that the self and the social are so intimately and intricately connected. And it's also a doozy of a question.

Because I'm like, oh, if I can just solve this. We're gonna we're going to champion all sorts of change together. Let's go. So one I would say one thing that I I had a student give a presentation clear back in May and it's just stuck with me ever since she said that burnout and demoralization aren't the same thing.

And so I dipped into the research and she was right. There's actually a ton of research that came out on burnout post, like during COVID, especially around teachers and nurses.

So, and a lot of them distinguish between burnout, demoralization and disengagement. And they're all, there's overlap. there is definitely overlap, but in a nutshell, burnout is really connected to how much in the pace at which we do things.

And there are things that are cooked into our systems, our work systems or our family systems. Everything from policies that might hold those systems into place, how we make up urgency with due dates.

Burnout beyond the individual

thinking about families, the pressure to have your kids in 50 million activities, what is a good mom, right? Like cultural notions of what a is good Mom and that also conflicting with maybe what we need to do in our professional roles.

And so there are all of these things that play into this like go, go go. mentality that can lead to burnout. Demoralization is when it feels like the systems and the structures are blocking you from making the change that you think is possible.

So you're like, why do this anymore? Right? Like, Why do you this any more? because it's not making any difference and I hear that and then that leads to people disengaging saying fine I'm out right the quiet quitting that we heard about a couple of years ago and and so I think that what's really interesting is some of this needs to happen thinking about our policies in our workplaces So, you know, for example, thinking about our leave policies or caregiver policies, a lot of parents right now too are finding themselves having young kids at the same time doing caregiving for older generations, and that's a whopper of a thing to hold.

And then you have your own bodies doing weird stuff. It's like, oh my gosh, you're going through para menopause and taking care of aging parents and taken care young ones all at same.

Um, I also think though there are cultural things we can do in the workplace in terms of like, what are our expectations around emailing and how quickly we would expect an email back or when we send emails.

I'm like friends, there's this wonderful technology called schedule send. You don't have to send me an e-mail on the weekend. you can schedule it for Monday at 8 AM.

There are just these little things that we. That is both sort of individual, but also is about creating a culture together and recognizing to the ways that even if things are structural or cultural that individuals, you can still take ownership in creating the cultures that you want to be part of.

Absolutely. I think there's so much truth in that. Having one person can change things. The presence, the conversation, I have seen it. If you're in a system that is not working, you might be that change.

You could be that change. I'm in the world of medicine, and this can be a really tough thing, or even corporate life. People don't want to talk about that.

It can really be tough to have these types of conversations. And I wonder, are there specific things that people can do to initiate that conversation within their spaces, places, situations?

Yeah. So one really lovely thing to do is to propose a book club. And the reason that I say this is maybe I'm in a nerdy environment where people want to read.

But I think that there's something really helpful. If you can say, Hey, we're going to re for us, it's the slow professor, but maybe whatever your area is, you might be able to your workplaces.

Can you find a book that would get them thinking about the pace of their culture and their policies and practices? I think that what's lovely about having a book club is you don't feel like you're coming at them with the ideas.

You just say, let's read this book and discuss it. And then they can come up together with ideas for ways that they could implement what the book is bringing about into the workplace.

So that's like a really lovely way, I mean, to sometimes start conversations. And if that doesn't work, have an awesome podcast that you listen to like this one and have your office listen the podcast together and then discuss it at lunch.

There's just ways that way you can say, oh, this is what Elizabeth said on her podcast. What do you all think about that idea? And it doesn't have to come across as threatening, nearly as I think scary, or they can come up with the

ideas and go, we should do this.

Starting workplace conversations and asking for support

And you're like, yes, We should. So like that's been a really effective tool. I also learned to ask for what you need. This is a lesson I keep coming back to, but I was like, I have all these skills and these talents.

I'm just going to ask the president of my university if I could create a program for faculty and staff that would lead them through a lot of this stuff so that we could reassert our feelings of autonomy, purpose, and mastery in our work.

And I'm like, I am just going to write up a proposal and we're going see what lands. And he said, sure, go for it. So now, like I lead a strategic growth lab at my university.

What's been amazing is that people have heard that I do this and they're like hey, could you bring this to our law firm? Could you this our tech firm and then I like sweet, let's go.

And so there's just been so many times I had this happen just last week, I was like, Oh, i'm planning things in my business. I know I can do this on my own, but I'd love to do it in community.

So I just sent one of my entrepreneur friends an email and I said, Hey, you want to get a group together and do. And she's like. Oh I love too. Could I lead it?

And I'm like yes. Yeah. that all we need to do is ask? Oh. Yes. I love it. Oh, and I'm, I've loved this girl. But yes, yes. yes I told you, friends, she's doing great things in the world.

I'm trying. It's inspiring. I did want to ask. Our spirit, our soul is always speaking to us. And I wonder for you, when you think about burnout, what do you it means?

What message is it trying to tell you on a soul level? I think that for me, I was not only disconnected from myself, I think I WAS disconnected, from my spiritual connection.

That I couldn't hear myself. I could not hear, you know, God, or a higher power, whatever source, Whatever word you want to use. But I THINK MY SOUL WAS TIRED.

Right? And I had quit listening to myself And because I was just trying to get stuff done. And so I do think that it can be, I don't wish burnout on anyone.

But if you're in truly not just like I'm having a hard week and I am tired, but like a soul deep burnout moment. I Do think, that that's an indication.

that you need to reconnect and that it's not enough, I think, to just, you know, take a bubble bath, get a pedicure, even take week-long sabbatical or vacation.

Most of the time, this needs to be a rewiring about how we're moving through the world.

Soul-level meaning of burnout and closing resources

Powerful. Pa-wer-ful! Oh, yes! For our listeners, because I know they're going to want to get in contact, you get ready, they are going want get into contact with you.

How can they find you? The first thing is, you know, check out my podcast too. I know podcast listeners listen to podcasts. So checkout Plan Go Plan, but you can also go to PlanGoPlan.com.

And on there, there's also a stuck assessment that will help you indicate how exactly are you stuck. Then it will give

you a mini ritual to help your unstick based off of your stuckness.

Check it out. I said, thank you, I see this, you are a beacon of light. And I just can't wait to see what happens. I'll just see you fly in. So, but thank, so much for being on the show.

Thank you so for having me. It was a flipping joy. If you haven't heard it yet today, I appreciate you. The soul in me honors the soul you if you want to see more episodes like this, please subscribe or click here.

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