



OVERCOMING BURNOUT

Dr Sharon Grossman



UnstressHEALTH



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with Dr Ron Ehrlich



Podcast Transcript

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:00:00] Hello and welcome to Unstress. My name is Dr Ron Ehrlich. I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which I am recording this podcast, the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation and pay my respects to their Elders - past, present, and emerging. And I do this acknowledgment to our First Nations People because I truly believe we have so much to learn about connection and respect.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:00:31] Well, today we are going to continue our exploration of burnout and burnout and the difference between burnout and chronic stress, and a whole range of different things. But we're going to focus on this from the point of view of the individual. Of you as an individual who may be chronically stressed, who may be facing burnout, who wants to start thinking constructively. My guest today is Dr. Sharon Grossman.

Now, Sharon is a psychotherapist with over 20 years of experience and has written some wonderful books on this subject, which and has a podcast called Decode Your Burnout. She tells us all about that. There is so much in this podcast that is of great value. I felt like it was a therapy session on its own. I'm sure you will too. I hope you enjoy this conversation I had with Dr Sharon Grossman.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:01:20] Welcome to the show, Sharon.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:01:23] Thanks for having me.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:01:25] Sharon. Burnout. Boy, is that a word that people can identify with. And obviously, that's what we're going to be talking about today. I know you focussed your whole career on that, but I wondered if you might share with us how you got to this point.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:01:40] Of being a burnout coach.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:01:42] Yeah. Yeah.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:01:43] Yeah, absolutely. So I actually am a trained psychologist and I started as a therapist. I have been doing that for about 20 years. And while I was still in grad school, I ended up going to one of the American Psychological Association's annual conferences. And I attended the session with a psychologist who talked about what it's like to be a practitioner in private practise. And one of the things that he said that really stayed with me was how burnout was so prevalent amongst therapists and private practise. And so at that point, I had kind of made this unconscious decision, I think, that I wasn't going to be in private practise because I don't want to be one of those people that burned out, you know.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:02:34] And so when I graduated from school, I ended up working for a non-profit and I was like, "This is great!" They take care of everything. They're didactic, which I really appreciated. There's a great team like we do all these things. So, so it worked out really well. I learnt a lot, but over the years I kind of climbed up the ladder to the point where there was nowhere more for me to go other than management. And I said I didn't go to school for ten years to sit in meetings with people and talk about data and all of these kinds of bureaucratic things like that. I have no interest.

So I started looking for jobs elsewhere, and as I really looked around at all my different options, I realised that none of them really fit because I was doing the search through the lens of my number one value, which is a lifestyle. And so I realised if it doesn't exist I have to create it, which meant that I have to go into business for myself. I have to be a practitioner in a private practise. And I said, Well, I remember what that guy said, and I have to figure out how to do it smarter so I don't end up burning out. And so I got an office space that was near my gym. And I created my schedule such that I would see a few clients in the morning. I would have a large break in the middle of the day where I'd go work out, have my lunch, and then see my afternoon patients and then do all my notes before I go home so that I could just, like, completely unplug. And so that's how I really avoided burnout as a therapist.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:04:15] But I was really intrigued with this concept of burnout, and I started doing some more digging and research into the topic. And the more I did that, because I was I decided I was going to write a book on it. And the more I did this research, the more I understood what it actually was. And I would start listening for it. And I would hear my patients talk about what they're going through and how they're feeling and all of these things. And I was like, "I just read about this." Like, I know this sounds like burnout. And so I would say, "It sounds like you're burning out." And there would be like, "Oh, yeah." And I was like, this is an interesting phenomenon. Like, people are burning out and they don't even realise it, right? They don't even have the vernacular to express what it is that they're experiencing. And I thought, okay, I have to make it my mission to really go out and educate the public about what burnout is so that people know what to look for. And as a therapist, I feel like that's actually really important, because if you don't have the right diagnosis for what you're struggling with, then you don't have the right treatment.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:05:12] Yeah, yeah. That's a big statement. Such an important one.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:05:16] Totally.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:05:17] That is a big statement. I mean, you've said so much there already. I mean, values. It's so interesting because I spoke to somebody in medicine recently who after 18 years of practise, burnt out, working 50 or 60 or more hours a week. And yes, interesting. Early on in your career you focussed on that because similarly myself in my background, I really recognised very early on how taxing it was physically and mentally and I didn't want to burn out. This was when I was 25 and just thought I would find that sweet spot that it meant enjoyment, lifestyle, quality of delivery, of service. It's a really important values decision early on, isn't it? In a person's career.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:06:03] Yeah. And I feel like. There is something that happens for a lot of people where that's not the value that leads their decision-making. It's more about the accomplishment and there's a reason for that. I think that as a culture, as a society, we're very much programmed to think about accomplishment as part of your identity and what it means to have a good work ethic and our self-worth is often very much wrapped up in our productivity and so we're not focussed on ourselves, we're focussed on everything external to us, right?

And the perception others have of us and what it means for us to get accomplished and to reach certain milestones and be successful in the world, if you will. I think there is a lot of that kind of external mindset that leads our decisions. And so it's really not that surprising that so many people are burning out.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:07:04] Yeah. And isn't writing a book so cathartic a great way to organise all your thoughts?

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:07:11] Yes, I do. I do have to say that when I decided that I was going to do more than just therapy, that I was going to go into coaching, everybody said, "You have to write a book." And I'm like, "Well, I don't know what to write about." I talk about so many different things with my clients, and I can go in a million different directions with this. Like, how do I take all of the things that I've been teaching all these years to my clients and put it into like a system, a framework, something that is cohesive, that makes sense, that allows people to have a transformation? And then when I started doing the research on Burn Out, it all came together. And so it was actually a very cool project to be able to think about how to take all of these different tools that I teach and bring them together into a kind of like a step-by-step blueprint for people.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:08:02] Hmm. Yes, isn't it? It's great. I mean, I've written a book myself, and it's just a great way of organising your thoughts and making yourself a little more accountable, which you focussed, as you've said, on burnout. So let's dive in a little bit and how do we define it?

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:08:19] And this is perhaps the best kind of takeaway for people. Burnout, very simply put, is chronic stress.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:08:30] Okay. Because I was going to ask you, what is the difference between burnout and stress? But maybe it's a question of degree, like pulling on an elastic band for a week and eventually, it breaks.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:08:43] Right. So. So there's a difference between acute stress, which when I think when we say,

"Oh, I'm so stressed out." We usually talk about it from an acute perspective, like, I got so much going on right now or, you know, I feel really stressed out because I'm in my car and I got to go to my appointment and I'm running late and there's a stupid guy in front of me and he's driving like 20 miles an hour and I'm like, you know, so, like, we feel stressed when there's this crunch, there's this pressure, when there's a lot of demands on us and we don't feel like we have the resources or the capacity to perform given our circumstances. That is how it starts. That's acute stress. And it's when those stressors keep showing up day after day that it's almost like an onion effect where they build one on top of the other.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:09:36] It could also be that you have stress coming in from all different directions in your life. Like your relationship is rocky and you know you're having a hard time with one of your kids or your kid has special needs and that's really stressful. Or you just got a puppy, you know, and you got to train the puppy or you just had a newborn and you're waking up in the middle of the night every 2 hours and you're not sleeping. So you're exhausted, right? There are so many different things that come into the mix about what makes us stressed. And sometimes it's like just the grind of day after day, and sometimes it's just the accumulation of things from all over the place that come together for the perfect storm. And it becomes this more chronic picture of stress. And that's where we experience burnout, which is really like where we're breaking down. Right.

So whereas with acute stress, like if I'm stuck in traffic, I'm going to be stressed at that moment. But when I get out of the car and I finally made it to my appointment, I kind of forget about it. I'm over it. I don't like take it on with me for the next week and tell everybody, "Oh my God. Like, you can't believe what's going on in my life. Like, like we just forget about it." But like, with other things, we take it everywhere we go. And it's hard for us sometimes to disconnect from the stress. A lot of the people that I work with will say how they can't turn work off at the end of the day, so it's hard for them to fall asleep. They're constantly thinking about what else they have to do.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:11:09] I had one guy who I talked to who said that he was planning a vacation for Christmas with his family.

And I asked him, "Well, how does it feel when you think about the way that you have your vacation structured and everything? Like, imagine you take yourself through the next eight days of your vacation and then you're right back to where you are right now, sitting in your office chair. How does it feel?" And he's like, "Not great." And I was like, "Why?" And he said, "Because, number one, I have pre-planned too much. Like, it's just overkill, right? So it's not relaxing. And number two is I'm going to be checking emails from 10 p.m. until 2 a.m. every single day." So I was like, Well, that doesn't sound like a vacation at all. Right. But there's all these different ways that we think about what we have to do. And so we're putting ourselves in these situations where we're perhaps working too hard, we're not disconnecting enough, we're not recharging enough. And it doesn't give us the opportunity to get back to ourselves and to really live life. Coming back to our point of lifestyle and all this kind of stuff, like, yeah, like you value being responsible and doing a good job at work, but there's more to the equation than that. And I think a lot of us have lost sight of that. The rest of the equation.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:12:33] Hmm. I know you said there are so many directions you could go in when you were writing your book and you've already mentioned quite a few that could contribute to a stressful situation. Sounds like you've got to take a really more holistic view of the things that are impacting that.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:12:52] 100%. Actually, I have a podcast called Decode Your Burnout. And what I do there is I'll interview people about their burnout story, and then I'm basically there to listen for three contributing factors. Their programming, so these are a lot of your subconscious beliefs that are driving your decisions. Their environmental stressors, which are the things that we're usually most aware of. So that's where people are complaining about their job, their boss, their industry, their husband, their wife, their kids, you know, all of these things. And then there's what I call your personality or your burnout profile, which is whether you're, as I call it, a thinker, a feeler, or a doer. And there are all different things that come along with each of those. And then based on what your burnout code is, we think about how to create more customised recovery solutions for you. So it's not a one size fits all.

We really want to take into account like what is showing up for you so that we can custom-tailor the approach that we're taking for your recovery. Because if you're burned out and I'm burned out, we might be burned out for very different reasons. And we got to work on very different things.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:14:12] Yeah, that's terrific. I'd love to go through that a little bit in more detail, because personalising approach to health, in general, is where we're all headed, hopefully. But at some point and is it just a question of degree? It is burnout. And what are there features of burnout? Go. Yes. This person is burnt out. I know. You know, I've been reading about the work of Christina Maslach, who seems to be the world leader, you know, in putting present company aside, of course, a world leader on burnout. And they're kind of... there are Some features of it that are quite unique.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:14:57] Well, I would say this. Yeah. Christina Maslach talks about burnout in, first of all, more of an organisational perspective. So she's really focussed on what can organisations do to support their workers. So providing certain kinds of resources and also using her measure to figure out if your people are burned out and how many of them are burned out and what kind of symptoms are showing up for them. So it's kind of like broad strokes. Right. It's like, yes, 60% of your workforce is burned out. They are exhausted. They are cynical, and their productivity has gone down. Great. Now it's your job as an organisation to do something about it. And actually, I'm glad you asked that because I started doing research on burnout in 2018, which is pre-COVID, and at that time there weren't a lot of books on the subject as there are now. And when I came across her work and some of the other people that were talking about burnout in that space at the time, I thought, "Well, what if I'm that person working in an organisation that's burned out?" Like, what if I'm one of those people taking the Maslach Inventory, right? And I'm like, "Okay, I already know I'm burned out. Now you're telling me I got to sit around and wait for my organisation to make some changes. We all know how quickly they move."

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:16:21] Yeah.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:16:21] And I thought, well, that's actually pretty disempowering to me.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:16:25] Hmm.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:16:27] And so I thought, well, I want to write a book that's for the professional so that they can actually think about what they can do to help themselves, rather than sit around passively waiting and hoping that maybe their organisation's going to do something about it.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:16:40] Yeah. Brilliant.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:16:42] And that's why I wrote the book.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:16:44] Yeah. So your focus is very much on the individual experience of burnout.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:16:50] Mm hmm.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:16:50] And you've mentioned those three things first and programming. Let's talk about programming because I mean, tell us about programming.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:17:01] Yeah. So we're all humans and so we all have programmes whether we realise that they're there or not. And it's basically when you think about how we started out in the world, we all started as these blank slates that we were subjected to certain experiences. You had your parents, you had your teachers, you had your siblings. If you had any your colleagues, your peers, your friends. And being exposed to these different circumstances and these different people left a mark on you. And some of it is good and some of it is bad. And there are all kinds of ideas and beliefs and notions that you carry around with you that you don't even question. And it's become so automated that it is kind of running the show for you without you even realising it because it is subconscious.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:17:57] And that's actually the job of our subconscious mind, is to take certain things that it deems.

Something that can help us stay safe and survive in the world and bring it below our conscious awareness so that we don't have to think about it because it would be exhausting. Think about this. If everything that you do on a regular basis, you have to think about like, imagine driving a car. Remember when you first learn how to drive a car? Right. And you were just like, "Oh, my God, I'm so nervous. I have to look left. I have to look right. I have to turn after this." Right. Like, it's exhausting to have to think about it all. And it's like, don't talk to me because I have to focus. But now we can drive and we don't even, like, remember how we got to from point A to point B, and that's because that entire thing has been learnt and routinised and like pushed under our conscious awareness so that we can do it and it doesn't tax us. So that's a good thing when things become subconscious if they're helpful.

But then we have some things that we have just kind of accepted or haven't questioned because that's how we were raised or those were the experiences that we had, and that's the interpretation that our brain came up with at that time. And it could be when we were three or five years old when our brain wasn't fully developed. And I mean, I'm saying this from experience because I've worked for like 20 years with therapy clients and I know, like, this is what it always goes back to. And so when we bring that online and they have more self-awareness of this is what they believe and this is the conclusion they always end up with no matter what it is that they face in the world now as an adult. If you can trace it back to these core beliefs, that's what it always ends up with.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:19:50] So for instance, if you have somebody who believes that they're not good enough, which is a very common belief, then every time something happens, their brain is processing that experience through the lens of 'I am not good enough'. So this person didn't pay attention to me because I'm not good enough and this person didn't give me this promotion at work because I'm not good enough. And my wife left me because I'm not good enough and my kids don't respect me because I'm not good enough. Right? And so we don't even recognise that this is what's happening, but that's part of the programming. And also if you believe that about yourself, then what happens, especially if you're one of these high achievers who also values accomplishment, you're going to find ways to overcompensate.

So there's this desire now to go above and beyond, which is where we're putting so much into work and we're neglecting other aspects of our life because we want to feel adequate, we want to feel valuable, we want to feel worthy. We don't like feeling like we're not good enough. So it's like, I believe it, but I don't like it. And so I have to do something about it. And I have this idea that if I do that, then I'm going to overcome this uncomfortable feeling within me that I am inadequate. Right. So think about people who have imposter syndrome.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:21:12] I just wrote that word down.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:21:13] As an example. Yeah, that's an example of a thinker, right? When I said I have my three kinds of types. One example of a thinker is somebody who's got imposter syndrome. And so I've worked with a number of people like that who, as accomplished as they are, everybody can see that they are super accomplished. I had this woman that I worked with who was in a construction company. She was elevated to VP of the company like that's how much they approved of her and thought she was doing a great job. But it didn't matter. Didn't matter. Every time she had to send out a companywide email, she would be scanning for errors two, three, four, five times over. Because she was like, if I send this and it has any sort of mistakes in it, they're going to recognise that I don't belong here. They're going to realise that they made a mistake. And so imagine if that's you and everything you do. Now, that could take 30 seconds now takes 10 minutes, and multiply that times all the tasks that you have every single day. That's a lot of extra time at work.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:22:29] Mm-hmm.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:22:30] And that's a lot of anxiety and a lot of energy spent. And something that's not even real. That only you believe that nobody else thinks about you. Like you're so worried about people's perception of you. Nobody else is buying into that at all. And you're just like, I refuse to believe that, you know? So these are the kinds of things that are part of our programming that are really detrimental to our well-being.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:22:56] Mm hmm. I mean, it's often, you know, I think it's said in Jesuits or Francisco, I forget they say, show me the. Let's be appropriate. "Show me the child at seven and I'll show you the adult." You know. And a lot of these values are ingrained very early on.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:23:12] Yes.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:23:13] Is reflecting on that is what therapy is all about? Is that the therapy journey? Does that what one has to go through to change those patterns?

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:23:26] So. I would say that would be a helpful thing to go through in your life if you decide to do that work. In therapy, yes. Especially if you have trauma. Very helpful to heal from it, to process it, because so much of our identity is wrapped up in these ideas. Right. And a lot of times it's just that we've misinterpreted things. So imagine if I told you, you know, the reason that you feel so horribly or that you have such low self-esteem is because there was a misunderstanding. Right. That you just told yourself this story that doesn't actually add up. But you believe it and it's causing so much turmoil in your life. Like wouldn't you want to rewrite that story? Right. Like. And I feel like that's what happens for so many of us. Like, if we have trauma in our lives, right. If somebody is perpetrating something against us as children, especially. There's so much shame that we carry as if we, the victim, did something wrong. And so we have the story of like, well, I shouldn't have done this or I shouldn't have showed up or I should have told this story. Right? And we keep telling ourselves like, it's my fault that this horrible thing happened to me. And that's the brain of somebody who is either too young to understand the truth or to emotionally wounded to be able to think rationally.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:25:06] Mm hmm.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:25:08] And we know that somebody like that, if you ask them, well, you know, your friend just experienced X thing, and they think that that it's absolutely their fault. What would you say to them? Like, "Oh, no, of course not." Like, of course it's not your fault. Or you poor thing. But we can't have that self-compassion.

You can't have that compassion for ourselves in the same way that we have it for other people. And I think it's because we're so wrapped up in the shame and the guilt. And so, yeah, I think doing some of that work in therapy would be super helpful. What I focus more on in burnout coaching is just helping people identify that there are some of these erroneous notions and helping them wrap their mind around the fact that they don't have to buy into it and that they can do things differently. And we work through it in less of a therapeutic manner, but more in terms of like mindset, if you will.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:25:58] Mm hmm. Now, the second aspect you mentioned there was environmental aspects. And I guess by that, you know, you've been clear you've used that word environment in a very broad context. Could you just expand on that a little bit for us?

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:26:21] Yeah. So it's kind of like what I was saying earlier. It could be all these different aspects of your life. So your work. And even that you can break it down even further. Could be like a task that you're working on where you don't feel confident. It could be the timeline that you have to get your work done where it feels unreasonable. It could be the number of tasks that you have in the time that you have allotted, you know, all those kinds of things. It could be that you work with somebody who's a micromanager. It could be that you are in a toxic work environment. Maybe you're being discriminated against at work. It could be that you are working inside of a team and you have to wait until your team members have done part one before you can do part two, and they're stalling or they're not taking their time, and you're getting stressed out sitting here and waiting because, you know, there's that crunch that happens. The closer you get to the deadline and the longer they take, the less time you have. There could be a million things just under the umbrella of work.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:27:21] And then we have everything else in our lives. All of our relationships, right? Whether you're single or married or dating or I mean, dating itself is like so stressful, right? And we have marriage, which we have so many people getting divorced because they're having so many issues. And we have parenting, which is super stressful and we have health issues that come up for us.

So what if you get diagnosed with cancer or what if you have an autoimmune disease or what? Right. Like there's endless amounts of things that stress us out in life. And now imagine that you have one from this category and one from that category. And like, that's kind of normal, right? There's all different things happening all at once in our lives, all the time. Then we can say it's pretty stressful to be human and it's pretty normal to have stress.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:28:14] Yeah.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:28:14] But it's really up to us to learn how to manage that stress to prevent burnout. Hmm. And that's what I'm here to teach.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:28:21] Yeah. And I, you know, stress is obviously a major focus of this podcast and actually my professional life. And I always say, in order to solve the problem, it always helps to know what that problem is, the full extent of it. Which comes back to your original thing about diagnosing something. If you're going to fix something, get the diagnosis right first. So you know what it is you're fixing. And I think people I don't think people have a full understanding of what stress actually means. They just think, "Oh, it's emotional stress. You know, that's it." But as you point out, there are so many other contributing factors to that stress experience.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:29:02] Right and it can be stress that's in your mind, as we often see with burnout. We talk about, you know, you mention Christina Maslach. One of the flagships of burnout is exhaustion. And when she talks about exhaustion, it's actually not what we typically think of. Like, I just ran a marathon and I'm just like falling on the ground because I don't have an ounce of energy left in my body. But it's really mental and emotional exhaustion. And it's that brain fog that I just can't even focus anymore, right? Like I'm here in person, like my body's in the chair and I'm just fried. Like, I can't even think straight. You know, I had a day like this. I do salsa dancing, and I had...

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:29:33] All right.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:29:33] I had a month ago...

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:29:51] I'm a very keen ballroom dancer, too.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:29:54] Nice.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:29:54] Go, go, go. I love the Latin parts, but go on. We could do a little segway into some different dance moves. But let's just stay on topic. Yeah, go on.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:30:04] So about a month ago I had a day where I didn't get much sleep or something happened, and I showed up to class, and you know, we do it in the evening. So it's kind of the end of the day as it is. And I felt like my brain was so fried that I couldn't really focus. And then like these guys were turning me and I felt like I was going to fall on my face because I couldn't even, like, turn, like my head was spinning and I was just like, this is what it must feel like when you're burned out and you got that brain fog. And it's like, you know, normally what you could do, like you could usually follow instructions and do all these things and do a turn. I could probably do three turns on a good day and like on a bad day, I can't even do one. Like I'm falling over myself. And I was like, I was telling everyone I feel like a drunken sailor. Right. I just like I don't even have control over my feet and I can't focus my mind. And I'm just like, in la la land, I'm like, what is happening? And I very much feel like that's kind of the experience that a lot of people have with that emotional, mental exhaustion of burnout, where it's like, "Yeah, I'm here in person and I intend to show up to do the work, but I just can't anymore." Hmm.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:31:25] Yes. Well, yeah, the dancing part of it, of course. One of the things I love about it is that for an hour a week, I get to lead my wife. So that's really, you know, quite an you know, I relish that. I relish that experience. But we digress.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:31:40] Coming back to the third thing, which you talked about, which was the burnout here and the burnout profile. Yeah, I think feel the dua and you mentioned the thinker was, you know, suffering from imposter, but there's obviously more to it than that. Can we talk about those three profiles?

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:31:59] Yeah. So the thinkers can be a variety of different, you know, different versions of that. I've already mentioned the imposter syndrome, but another version might be somebody who is a perfectionist. They live very much in their mind. They're constantly valuing and devaluing their work. Which means that they're focussed on and mind you, they have good intentions right there. They're really focussed on doing quality work. But it's just that underlying thing of nothing I do is ever good enough. And so I have to keep working harder, have to keep perfecting, and I have to keep iterating and reiterating. And it's that dissatisfaction. And it also is even if I do an amazing job on this one thing, I am so over focussed on this that I have neglected all these other areas of my life for all these other tasks that I'm supposed to get to. And so there's a lot of procrastination on the other side of that. So I can't focus on these things. I have to focus just on this and on procrastinating, all these other things which I know I still have to get to. Like, it's not like I don't. I only have one thing to do. Right. We don't have that luxury.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:33:02] And so there's that there's also this fear of failure that happens where if I want things to be perfect and I don't quite believe that I can do a good enough job, there's that good enough thing again. Then I might as well not even try. Because if I do it and it's not up to standard, then people will judge me, then I'll get rejected, then something bad might happen. So there's a lot of underlying anxiety, whether it's imposter syndrome, whether it's perfectionism, was procrastination, and like all of these things. And what we often see with a thinker is somebody who is filled with a lot of negative self-talk, a lot of ruminations, a lot of catastrophizing. And so one of the things that I do is I help them work on their mindset. So yeah, there is a lot of that self-compassion that we need to cultivate, but also like how to think about things differently so that they aren't so scary or they're not so worried about the future and things of that nature.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:34:19] Mm hmm. And the feeler?

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:34:23] So the feeler. Those are the people who tend to put other people's needs ahead of their own. They're your people pleasers. they have a really hard time setting boundaries because they carry a lot of guilt.

And they're signaling what's going on and they're able to signal other molecules about what's going on, and that molecule might gravitate towards another molecule accordingly. So there are various forms of this ultralow frequency UV light. One for me is the free radicals that are being released from the electron transport chain inside our mitochondria. Another example is how UVA and infrared light are interacting with deuterium in our blood plasma, and that results in the release of UVC light. And I mean, melatonin is a topic that's frequently covered in the health space, but a lot of people are not really thinking from a Physics standpoint that melatonin is made from an aromatic amino acid called tryptophan, which has a peak absorption of 280 nanometres, which is in the borderline UVC UVB range.

Dr Jalal Khan [00:42:28] And the thing is that barely any UVC gets down to Earth from the Sun. We are protected from it by the Earth's surface. If tryptophan results in the eventual production of melatonin as a peak absorption in the UVC range and we are getting a little UVC from the Sun, how are we actually making melatonin then? And that's because we make the UVC light ourselves. And the same goes for dopamine. Dopamine is made from tyrosine, which is another aromatic amino acid, which is that 274 nanometres is its peak absorption. So it's well into the UVC range. So, I mean, it's beautiful to think that we ourselves are emitting light, which is resulting in the activation of hormones to do what they need to do on time in line with Circadian Biology. And I also think just from a social standpoint, you walk into a room, sometimes you get a good vibe or a not-so-good vibe from somebody else. And I interpret that as us reading the light that is being released by that person and our gut... at that gut feeling. Yes, it could be very well coming from the gut, but it's also a water feeling. I think it's our water in our body, sensing that UV, ultra-low frequency, UV light, and deciding is this person something that we gel... someone that we gel with or not? That's pretty cool.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:43:55] It is very cool. And you mentioned the gut and of course, our friend Dr Pran Jagannathan, when I asked him, Is the gut the second brain? He disagreed, which resulted in a pregnant pause on my part. I was just waiting for it and he said no, the guts, the first brain, but pushing on. You know, Jalal, you mentioned I'm your mentor,

They believe on some level that they're not as important as other people, so they neglect their own needs in favour of everybody else's. And then they experience a lot of resentment because they're like, Here I am, taking care of everybody else. What about me? Who's taking care of me? Right. And there's a lot of this anger that bubbles up. And then what happens sometimes is that spills out. So well, maybe, I mean, in some cases. So, you know, they might actually become really irritable and say something or do something to let the person know how resentful they really are. And then they feel guilty about that. So then they have to overcompensate and then they they're stuck in that cycle of constantly having to do to compensate for the fact that they've, you know, been more like aggressive. And then they get back into that passive state of doing, doing, doing.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:35:39] And then you have the people who actually don't externalise it. They don't externalise the anger. But then you got like the quiet quitter, you know, the quiet quitting that we're hearing about, where it's like, well, fine, you know, I'm not going to say anything, but I'm just going to, like, sit here and I'm not going to do anything. Like, screw everybody. Yeah, I'm just going to sit here, you know? It's, like, great. But, like. Why? Like me. This is your life. Like, don't waste it, you know? Maybe there's something more for you. Like, maybe something different for you. Like, maybe this isn't a fit. Like, let's have a conversation about that, you know? I think that's kind of shortchanging you.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:36:22] Mm hmm. And finally, the doer.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:36:25] The doer is the person who has that compulsion to constantly do, do, do. And it's because they have their self-worth wrapped up in their productivity. So there is that need to constantly prove that they are worthy. And it's almost like they have this fictional story that if I do all this stuff, then I'll finally arrive. It's called the arrival fallacy, right? It's like if I do all these things, then I'll be happy. And then you finish doing that task, you finish that project, or you accomplish that title, or you get the next pay raise or what have you. And then you're like, "Oh, well, now I got to, like, make sure I do all the things that can justify the fact that I've gotten to this point." Right. And so we're constantly in that race and it doesn't end ever.

And so it's.. And the thing is, it's not even just that work. It's kind of as I say, it's a personality, right? Your personality is to just constantly be doing.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:37:29] So as an example. We do this also on our vacations. So I just had a conversation with a CEO of a company, and he was telling me about his planned vacation for Christmas and how he is not so much looking forward to that vacation because he feels like it's going to be actually pretty exhausting. So like wants to go on vacation because he wants to do all these fun things they usually he doesn't have time for. But he's also like, yeah, know, I'm going to get back and it's going to be so exhausting. And I'm like, Why? He's like, Because I've over planned. I've overscheduled. I've got a call from one day. I got scuba diving on the next day and we're going to go fishing. And I do this and I do this and I'm like And what would make it more relaxing? And he said, If I didn't schedule anything, I said, And what are your thoughts about having a day on your vacation where you don't schedule anything? And he said that it would be a waste of time.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:38:34] Yeah.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:38:34] Okay. And so and so there's this inner conflict of I have to do because otherwise I'm going to be wasting time and I appreciate that. But as a doer appreciate that. Like we want to, like squeeze every minute out of life, right? Like there's passion in that. And I also think that there's got to be balance because as you even heard in this example, there is an inner conflict. There's like, I want to do all these things, and I also want to relax, but my mindset won't allow me to have that whitespace in my calendar. My mindset, my beliefs, my programming doesn't allow me to take time for myself. Oftentimes when I talk to people who are burnt out, I ask them on a scale of 0 to 10, like how would you rate like the time that you create for your selfcare? Like how much are you actually engaging compared to what you feel like you need? And it's usually like a three. Like I don't spend a lot of time on self-care. I don't have time for self-care. You know, people will always say, like, Oh, who has time for meditation? Who has time to go to the gym? I'm like, I don't have time for that. And I always say, like, if you say, and I wrote this in my book, if you say that you don't have time for that, you're doing it all wrong.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:39:52] Yeah, yeah, that is. Yeah. Boy, if people didn't get anything else from this conversation and there's so much that you've already said that statement alone... It's worth listening to the whole thing. But we're all a combination of those things, aren't we? I mean, it's a bit like saying, are you an introvert or an extrovert? It's a continuum along the line. And maybe you're a 60% this and a 40% that. Is that how it is? I mean, are we all combinations of that? Thinker, feeler, or doer? And we're predominant in one way or another?

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:40:26] I think so. I think that you can really fit like one profile or you can fit all three. And the way that I like to explain it is depending on how many things you've checked the box to in terms of these profiles. It just means that there are more things for you to unplug from.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:40:44] Yes. Okay. Well, oh, Sharon, this is like a therapy session for me. I know. I've often you know. But anyway, I'm ticking a lot of boxes here. I don't feel burnt out, though. And that's an important thing, too, isn't it? It's about your attitude to what you're doing. Like if, "Oh my God, I'm doing this." "Oh my God, I'm doing that." But, "Wow, I'm really excited to be doing that!" "I can't wait to do that!" There's a big difference there, isn't it?

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:41:09] Yes. And I'm glad you brought that up, because stress, if we were going to go back to the definition of burnout and what it's all about, stress is about perception. And so if I perceive what I have to contend with as something that is not something that I want to be doing where I feel stuck or trapped. These are words that a lot of people use, right? If I feel like it's against my will, if it's not something I enjoy, if I'm bored with it, if I'm overwhelmed by it, whatever it is, the way that we describe it, that's why language is actually really important, because it describes how we think about it and how we think about it very much influences how we feel. And so that's why a big chunk of the work that I do in my coaching as I help people really reverse engineer the results that they want to have and really look at the thoughts that are creating these negative emotions and really asking them, "How do you want to feel instead?"

Assuming this is a situation that you have no control over and then you can't change the external right? Your boss isn't going to change or you know, COVID isn't going to magically disappear. And this is something that I had a conversation with a lot of my clients at the beginning of COVID when they were all freaked out. They're "Oh my God I have to be in quarantine. I can't do this and can't do that. And like this sucks. And I have to work from home and like, I have to homeschool my kids." Right? Like, everybody was freaked out, and I'm like, "Well, we don't know how long this is going to be around. But given the fact that it's here, how do you want to feel?" And they say, "I just want to feel calm." And I'm like, "What do you need to think about COVID in order to feel calm?" And it would really force them to think in a more focussed way. And that's one of the things that I think is really great about coaching, is we ask really powerful questions to help focus your mind on what you want rather than focussing on all the things you don't want.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:43:15] Mm hmm. And this and as I often do say that while you don't have control over the events and people in your life, you do have control over how you think about it. In fact, that's your best tool you've got. But of course, that's easier said than done. Which brings us back to your second point about the external stressors of health and sleep and kids and relationships and all of that which don't allow you to change your attitude. So it's important, again, to take this kind of bigger, bigger picture view of what stress actually means.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:43:50] Absolutely. I do a lot of work with people all around. And it's funny because a lot of times people aren't even aware of what they're feeling or they're like in denial or, you know, there's like the people who are really stuck in their mind where they know what they're thinking, but they have no access to their emotions. And then you have the people that are, like, so emotional, but they have no access to their thoughts. Like, I feel this, but I don't really know why, you know? And my job is to kind of tease it out and then say, okay, this is what's actually happening. And listen, I'm going to read you back everything you just said. You said this, this, this, this, this, this, this is do you hear all the thoughts that are going on in your mind? Each one of those thoughts actually creates another emotion inside of you. That's why you're feeling this and this and this and this and this, right?

And then they're like, Oh, okay, that's how it works, you know? And then there's also this epiphany that happens when they're like, so actually. This thing that's going on in my life. Is different from my thinking about it. Right. And they're always like, think that it's those events that are creating their feelings. That's why we'll say, You made me feel this way. It's like, wait a minute, there's a step in between there, those two things. And that is your thoughts. Right. And that's the stuff that you actually get to control. And that's the stuff that Christina Maslach doesn't really touch on.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:45:17] Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, as you say, I think her focus is very much on organisations and group trends. But to your point about, you know, it's still a one on one problem, you know, you have to deal with the problem. And this is what you're talking about.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:45:33] Tell me. I mean, I think burnout stress, chronic stress has been a problem for quite a while. And the last two years have or three years have been an interesting time in human history. What impact do you think this period has had on the amount of burnout stress you're seeing?

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:45:56] We certainly have seen a rise in burnout. I think that's part of why you're seeing so many more people writing about it, talking about it. It's very much at the forefront right now because it's just like people's burnout has gone through the roof. Actually, funny story. So I started researching my book in 2018. I was ready to publish it in March of 2020 and write about that time. Like, you know, it's like, "Oh, wait a minute, wait a minute. Hold on, press."

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:46:26] Maybe I should include another chapter.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:46:31] So all of a sudden they're like, Oh, everybody go home. And I was like, Wait, my book is for the person that's sitting in the office and they're burned out. And now everybody sitting at home, I can't publish this book. So I just like, put it on hold. And I waited six months and then it was September of 2020, and everybody was burned out working from home. And I was like, You know what? This still applies. This still applies now more than ever. So I actually ended up publishing it in September.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:47:02] So yeah, it is kind of a funny thing how, funny, but not funny. Right. Where we're seeing we're seeing a lot of this and I am glad to see so many people rising up and saying, like, we're working on this problem. You know, there are so many more people that are authoring books on burnout that have started podcasts on burnout that are coaching on burnout. There are a lot of physician coaches, a lot of physicians who turned into coaches that are now coaching physicians because of the whole healthcare crisis. I mean, there's been a real transformation in this field, so I'm really happy to see that because there's a need for all of those workers, for sure. And I'm just kind of, I should say, proud to be part of that movement.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:47:52] Wow. Yeah, you really picked that. But, you know, I would describe the pandemic as an opportunity or a period of global reflection on values. And that's a really important part of the process of dealing with burnout. So if people needed a kind of a wake up and go, hey, maybe you need to be thinking about what you're doing. The pandemic certainly forced that issue. Tell me if people would just people listening to this and thinking, wow, I think I could be what would be a couple of hints to avoid burnout or if you were dealing with it, to deal with it? You know, a couple of things for our listeners to go away with and think about. I mean, you've given this a lot to think about already, but just yeah.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:48:36] I mean, I would say in addition to everything that we talked about, if you're still kind of wondering and you're not sure. I've actually made it really simple for people. So I've created a burnout checklist which people can just go and download, and it explains in very simple terms what to look for. And you can literally like check, check, check, check and say like, oh, this applies, this doesn't apply. And then based on what you've checked, it kind of gives you some broad recommendations on what to focus on first, second, third, that sort of thing. And then, of course, I've got lots of other resources on my website as well. So if anybody's interested in that checklist, it's on my website. So it's drsharongrossman.com/burnoutchecklist. You can also find it on the home page as well, along with a couple of other free resources that I have there. And I also encourage people to check out the Decode Your Burnout

the podcast.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:50:11] Right? Great. And you're talking to clients or patients or other practitioners, professionals, or you're just covering all these different areas?

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:50:20] Yeah. I mean, it's not usually people that I've worked with. It's more people who are either professionals in their own right and have experienced burnout and they want to come on and share their burnout story. The other type of guests that I have on the show, I also include people who are experts in their field and they come on to debunk the main myths about what it means to be successful in that area. And then my job is to kind of take those myths and the tips that kind of that they are sharing and think about how we can apply it to all of our lives in an effort to prevent burnout.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:51:02] Mm hmm. Terrific.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:51:03] Listen, I just to finally one taking a step back from your role as a therapist focussed on burnout because we are all on a health journey in this modern world as individuals. What do you think the biggest challenge is for us as individuals on that journey?

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:51:20] As we're trying to lead a healthy life?

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:51:23] Yeah.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:51:24] I think it's prioritising. You know, we all have 24 hours in a day and we all have to make decisions about how we spend that time. And again, I think it comes down to your values and your programming. Those are the things that are going to be often leading your decision making, whether you realise it or not. And that's why I think we often see that people are stuck in a pattern or a loop, often sometimes of self-sabotage. And we often see people that they have the same results over and over again. Right? Because they're always making the same kinds of decisions because they're always driven from the same values or the same beliefs. And then we also see how people will prioritise things like work over their self-care, over their family.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:52:19] I actually work with a lot of male executives right now that are in that like 50 to 60-year-old range where they're kind of thinking about retirement, and they're going through that second wave where they're like, you know, I'm kind of burned out, and I'm rethinking this whole thing. And I realise like I just missed out on my kids and I don't want to be that guy and you know, like, so now it's like wakeup call, as you said. Oh, yeah. Like, there's a better way for me to do this. So I think that we all come in with this motivation and drive and we want to accomplish and we want to achieve and we want to have something to show for ourselves. And then we get to a point where if we've burned out, it gives us that step back. Big picture, what's going on? And then we're like, You know what? I'm reassessing this, and this doesn't work. This isn't sustainable. I want more. I want different. And then we redesign the way that we approach work. And that's why we are seeing, especially during COVID, so many people going through a transformation and changing their careers and relocating their families and doing so many different things right. Taking the great resignation and sabbaticals and like so much change has happened because all of a sudden people are like, You know what, I do want to live next to my family or I don't want to commute to work or whatever the case may be. Right. So many different changes. And so I think yeah, it boils down to prioritisation with your 24 hours and making the best decisions for your global health and wellness.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:53:55] Well, what a great message to finish on. And Sharon, thank you so much for joining us today and sharing your wisdom and knowledge with us. And we will, of course, have links to your Web page with all those great resources and your podcast as well. Thank you so much.

Dr Sharon Grossman [00:54:10] Amazing. Thank you, Dr Ron. I appreciate you having me on.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:54:13] Well, I've often said that COVID was an opportunity, in fact, a time for global reflection, not just on health, but on the values in life. And it was so interesting to hear Sharon talk about those three things of programming, external stressors and the burnout profile, whether you're a thinker, a feeler, or a doer, but it's the programming and the reflection on values that I thought was so interesting.

And it reminded me of the conversation I had with one of my heroes and guests on this podcast who was on the Summer Series, Allan Savory, who's written the book on holistic management.

Dr Ron Ehrlich [00:54:54] Now Allan's focus has been on holistic management in general, but holistic land management in particular. And one of the most important things that he said to me that I think keeps coming up in almost every podcast we do, is how important the holistic context is. Before any decision is made by governments, by organisations, by individuals, by you, by me, by any time we make a decision or a decision is made, there needs to be a holistic context which sits over the top of every other decision. For example, governments might have a holistic context which says every decision we make needs to be of value to the individual to improve the individual's quality of life. And we need to also protect the environment. So whatever else, whatever we're talking about, those are the holistic context by which we will make all subsequent decisions.

And here we're talking about values and the programming which goes into us as we have values which drive us in life. And hopefully, this podcast and this period in human history has been an opportunity for you. And I certainly have reflected on my values and what I think is important in life. And this is the first step in taking control of chronic stress and avoiding burnout. And I think the other thing that was so interesting for Sharon, her acknowledgement that there are so many other stressors externally and internally. I think we can include chronic degenerative diseases as an internal stressor in that model of working our way through and dealing with burnout. Look, we will, of course, have links to Sharon Grossman. Dr Sharon Grossman's site. It is a wonderful resource and she has a checklist and she's written a great book on the subject and of course, her podcast. I hope this finds you well. Until next time. This is Dr Ron Ehrlich. Be well.

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