



**Podcast: Episode 18 – Emotion at Work in Stress and Wellbeing  
chatting with Cary Cooper**

Phil: Hello and welcome to the Emotion at Work podcast where we take a deep dive into the human condition, and for a change in format this week I am live with my guest. So rather than doing the recording over Skype which I've done for the last few episodes I'm with an actual person physically face to face today. For a number of different reasons this podcast was important to me, the role of emotion in the workplace, I talk a lot about how important that is, but how that then links into wellbeing, how it links into mental health, that's a really important aspect for me. If there was a voice from within the UK that I wanted to get on the podcast then my guest is that today. So let me welcome our guest Cary Cooper.

Cary: Hello, good to be here.

Phil: Thank you. And thank you for taking the time to speak...

Cary: No problem, it's better doing it face to face anyway.

Phil: Yeah, I enjoy the mix and the variety.

Cary: Yeah, me too.

Phil: Which is good. Okay, so as our regular listeners will know I start with an unexpected but innocuous question, so my question for you is going to be, what has surprised you in the last week or so?

Cary: What surprised me is the fact my daughter has decided having been with somebody for 12 years and has two kids they decided they're going to get married, and they're going to get married in Los Angeles, where I come from. So it's not only surprised me but stressed me because of course what I have to do is now find accommodation for my other kids and we have to...the groundwork we have to do is enormous. But it's quite nice because it's going to be in my hometown where I have nephews and cousins of my kids. So very surprised, but pleasantly surprised.

Phil: So pleasantly surprised?

Cary: Oh, absolutely.

Phil: So for me I was surprised this week that I played football for the first time in a long time, I had an injury last year which meant that I wasn't physically able to do as much as I would like to. I went to the park with my son and some friends arrived at the same time, and I haven't played football for a long time, it's got to be at least a year since I kicked a ball around. And I thought I was going to be in lots of pain afterwards and I was really pleasantly surprised that I wasn't. I was in some discomfort and I was in...that I wasn't in lots of pain. So that was again a pleasant surprise.



Cary: I don't think I want to talk about that because I'm a Man City supporter and we just lost to Wigan last night. So I'm not sure I actually want to go into the football arena at all. Although funnily enough in a way I'm not pleased they lost but I think they need less pressure on them and to focus in on what are important things like in their world the Premier League, the Champions League and the League Cup Final.

Phil: The League Cup.

Cary: So I'm not...I'm unhappy but not terribly depressed by it.

Phil: Okay, for the listeners when I arrived in the office I noticed there was a Man City book, but there was also a Leicester City Football Club coaster.

Cary: Oh, no, it's only somebody I know who supports Leicester City and he gave that to me when they won.

Phil: Oh, okay. So it's memorabilia?

Cary: Yeah, it's memorabilia stuff. Man City 100%.

Phil: Okay, yeah, Bristol Rovers for me, so I...

Cary: Although I must admit I'm one of the few people in Manchester who my second team is Man United.

Phil: Is it really?

Cary: Always has been, because the guy who brought me to Manchester was Sir Roland Smith who was a chairman of Manchester United PLC.

Phil: Okay.

Cary: And he was the head of the management of what we're currently in.

Phil: Oh, right.

Cary: That one time.

Phil: So that affinity with the person that brought you over then...?

Cary: Yeah, so I've always been...if I've decided to make Manchester my home, which I have and all my kids were raised here, then wouldn't I want to see both teams do well, but I want to see City beat United but just. So if they come one, two as they did a few years ago I'm more than happy with that.

Phil: You're more than happy with that?



Cary: Yeah.

Phil: That is really rare.

Cary: It is rare.

Phil: When did you come over to Manchester?

Cary: Well I came over from the States in the sixties as a student and it wasn't Manchester. So I came over to Leeds University, I was going to stay for a year and then Leeds University...I done an MBA at UCLA, University California Los Angeles. And what ended up happening is they offered me to do a PhD. Then my supervisor moved south from Leeds to Sussex University. So I was still working on my PhD but it was a Leeds PhD but I was in Sussex. Then I got a PhD, went to Southampton University in the psychology department and I was a lecturer in social psychology. And then from there came up to Manchester, Sir Roland Smith the chairman of Man United, he's the guy who brought me up, and I've been here ever since. I came in the mid seventies to Manchester.

Phil: So when you say brought me to Manchester you meant brought you up from the south?

Cary: Brought me up from the south up to here, yeah. So it was really good.

Phil: Has wellbeing and mental health always been part of your passion or interest?

Cary: It's not just from a workplace point of view, it always has. The reason it has stems from my college days at UCL, University of California, because I came from a working class background and in order to go through...I was the first person in my whole family who went to university.

Phil: Oh, really, wow.

Cary: Of the whole family. My father was a hairdresser, he didn't have very much money and he was from Russia actually originally and my mother was Romanian, so I'm Eastern European background, although born in LA. I had to work to go through university, they didn't have enough money. One of the jobs I had, a really powerful job was a social worker for the city of Los Angeles, while I was doing my MBA for example at UCL. At the same time I was working full time for the city of Los Angeles and they let me go to classes whenever I could fit them in, go see my clients at night. And when I saw that kind of deprivation, and believe me this was south central Los Angeles, so it was the black community. I also worked with down and outs in the middle of LA, it was horrible. What I saw was so depressing because in the US there is no welfare system. So the poverty, the stress in people's lives, the financial stress, I think that really influenced me dramatically. So from wanting to be a lawyer which is what I was thinking I was going to do, it shifted into psychology. I guess I transferred that to look at the health and wellbeing of people in the workplace, because I had an MBA. I then did a PhD at Leeds on that kind of topic. I was looking at what affects people's health and wellbeing generally, working people in every kind of occupation. That's where it stems from but the ideology of it is definitely being a social worker in the most deprived part of Los Angeles.

Phil: How, emotionally was that for you having to see that deprivation, see that poverty, see all of that?

Cary: It was a shock. Although my father was a hairdresser we weren't very well off, we were okay, we were living a middle class life in a white neighbourhood, everything...there was very little ethnic mix where I was. And then to be exposed to a part of Los Angeles where there's a heck of a lot of people in those conditions living in, yeah, many living in poverty but certainly experiencing financial stress. Every kind of stress you can imagine, stress in families, influenced me a lot. The good news was that I'm glad I was exposed to that. I was doing it as a job to work my way through university, it wasn't that I was seeking it out. But once I got exposed to that I then thought to myself I'm really lucky. Then when I finished the MBA and started doing my PhD I started to ask myself questions like what about workplaces they can damage people. How do...what do we do about it? What is causing people to do it?

Then I did a project, one of the projects I did with a PhD student I was asked by a big multinational could I go in and explain to them why people were not taking promotional moves internationally? So we were just doing something on executive mobility. Then when I started to do interviews with them and then I was going to do psychometric testing with them with a PhD student, who by the way later became a professor, she's a really lovely person. They kept saying well it's the stress, do I really need that? I have a young family. Yes, it is promotion but it's going to the country. Do I really want to leave my support systems here? My employer really doesn't care about me, just wants to shove me off there. I started to hear things about what the workplace was doing to individuals and how that impacted their families. So then we did that project for them and then we said do you mind if we come in and do a study of your top 200 execs on the stress levels they're experiencing, because we're hearing a lot about this. And we were the ones who did the very first study on manager or executive stress. That was very revealing because people would talk to us because it was done anonymously and we did a really interesting study that raised a lot of the issues. Then once we started to publish that, write books on it, articles and everything else, then other occupations, nurses, teachers. I've done probably 85 occupational groups looking at what are the factors that cause you to get stressed at work and how does that impact your family life? And how does your family life impact your workplace? The work/life balance bit. So since then...and I thought maybe I'd get out of this field but we haven't sorted the problems really.

Phil: No.

Cary: We've identified issues that cause individual problems whether it's a pilot or a teacher or an executive or a shop floor manager, we know what causes them problems and that does by the way vary with new technology and everything else. So it's always...it's a live thing, it doesn't just...it's not static. But a lot of organisations haven't dealt with it and some have and the ones that have, have been more productive. This is an important issue for UK PLC because the leading cause of sickness absence is the common mental disorders of anxiety, depression and stress. That's the number one cause now. It used to be muscular skeletal when we were in heavy manufacturing, but we're not in there, we're a service based economy, knowledge based economy. So the people issues are the big ones. So it's the biggest cost of that. It is a very important factor in our lack of productivity. The UK is



seventh in the G7 and 17<sup>th</sup> in the G20 on productivity per capita. I'm sure it's about the sources of pressure on people like how they're managed, the hours they work, their relationships in the workplace. All of those kind of emotional issues.

Phil: It's a bit of a loaded question because I'm going to open it with...

Cary: No, load your gun.

Phil: I'm going to open with, in your experience, which applies that I have my own experience, but in your experience...because you talked earlier on about how when you went in to do that first study, because it was anonymous people would talk about their stress they were experiencing and the causes of that. But they wouldn't talk about that openly because of the lack of anonymity. Has that changed over time? Is it more okay or is it more credible or is it more permitted for people to talk about stress in the workplace now?

Cary: It depends on the organisation you're in and Mind has a campaign at the moment, don't they talk about your mental health problems. In some organisations I think people are still inhibited from using the 's' or 'mh', mental health, stress words. They don't...they're inhibited because they think it could adversely affect their career, but the more senior people are doing it, the more it becomes permissible. So when the chief exec of Lloyds bank said he was taking time off for depression that changed...that started to change it in the banking sector. I still think that people are very inhibited from talking. I think it's still a stigma to talk about mental health and your emotions and the fact you're not coping. I think that organisations still, if they were thinking about promoting you and they heard that you were having...you were not coping well with the pressures of your job. Rather than saying how are we going to help that person because they've got the technical skills that we need and maybe the people skills that we need, so how do we do it? Rather than thinking that way I think deep down they never say it but deep down your promotion will be inhibited. So it's still around. There's still a stigma about mental health, about expressing your emotions, about showing any form of weakness. It depends on the sector, it depends on the senior management but it's still there.

Phil: My experience sort of supports that, I think and part of the reason that...when I set my company up and I called it Emotion at Work I've lost clients off the back of that because they said, oh can you not talk about emotion in that overt way? I said, no, because that's what drives people, that's what drives us a human species. I'm not going to come in and minimise it or make it smaller. They said, yeah, but if you talk about feelings, yeah, everyone thinks that's soft and fluffy and they're not comfortable with that stuff.

Cary: Well for many years I had the problem of the 's' word, stress. So in a sense the field of workplace stress morphed into wellbeing because the company saw that was more permissible. We're trying to enhance people's wellbeing rather than reduce their stress levels. The reason they said that, they never said it, the reason they moved in that kind of direction was the implication was that if you're under stress and a number of people in your organisation are under stress, it should be your responsibility as senior management that you are one of the primary causes of it, therefore they don't want to say that. Wellbeing on the other hand in people's heads it's about apples on



desks, beanbags, ping pong tables. It's not about that but wellbeing is a more generic less evaluative construct and that's why people morphed into wellbeing. I didn't mind that in a way and the reason I didn't mind that, because when you're looking at wellbeing you are looking at stress too, but you're also looking at how do you enhance people's wellbeing, how do you create the culture to do that? Rather than just reduce the stress levels, what other things should you do? So for example...and when you talk emotions at work why that's critical is because the line manager is the most fundamental person in the workplace for your health and wellbeing as a person. Whoever you are no matter from the shop floor to the top floor, if a person has high EQ, they have good emotional intelligence you're not going to get ill and you're going to be enhanced. So why wellbeing in a way is a good one because it incorporates stress in it, is because, for example I might not have a boss that stresses me but I might have a boss that doesn't manage me by praise and reward. He doesn't manage me by fault finding but he never tells me when I'm doing a good job, he never does the recognition which is a positive construct. So number one you want a line manager from shop floor to top floor who has really good EQ, who manages people by praise and reward, not by fault finding. Who gives feedback that's constructive when they don't do a proper job because we all make mistakes. Who understands they need flexibility because of commitments outside. Who allows them to work flexibly and doesn't feel...make them feel guilty about it. All of those kind of characteristics are fundamental to a wellbeing culture.

Phil: I want to take myself on a small diversion because I think it's important that we think about those key factors that impact on workplace wellbeing and workplace stress. I think one of the challenges that we have especially around managers being emotionally intelligent in that way is the narrative that is present around wanting people to be happy at work. I support and challenge that narrative in a couple of different ways because I think what it's doing is it's creating an impression that the only credible emotion at work is happy. And if you are angry or frustrated or upset or anxious or scared that they're the wrong kind of emotions to bring into the workplace. The challenge with that as well that just isn't reality, people will bring all of those things in when they have a particularly important project to deliver. They will bring with them some anxiety about that. That might be then going to the line manager and saying, oh, can I just run some things past you? And if the line manager isn't attentive to that and isn't able to think, oh actually they need some of my time, they need me to listen, they need my support. The risk is that it gets perceived as lack of certainty or lack of confidence or lack of belief. And it's none of those things it's just concern about doing a good job and anxious about wanting to make sure that it's right. If the line manager isn't attentive or able to pick up on that then it then risks that building, so that anxiety doesn't get recognised once and then twice, and then three times, and four times...

Cary: I'm with you on the notion of happy, I'm not for the happy, let's create a happy working environment. A happy work environment could be ping pong tables and bean bags, and slides and all sorts of things you get...you hear about in the Googles of the world in Silicon Valley. But for me the word wellbeing is about contentment. It's about being content. That's not transitory, being happy one day and sad another is transitory, that's just in emotion you experience. I don't want to make people wandering around just happy. What I want to do is create an environment where they feel content, valued, trusted, cared about and that's the kind of environment I want. A lot of that is created by managers partly and by colleagues, and the team, and all of that stuff. It's about people being able to talk about problems they've got and feel safe in doing so rather than they're going to



be punished down the line. So it's about creating a culture and it's primarily by line managers but other people do it too. Because to be honest with you there's an overarching culture which you get in the organisation you work for which can affect your small little area. If you're very bottom-line and we expect...you're in a law firm and you have billable hours and you have to meet the billable hours, and we're ruthless about that, even if you have a good senior partner working with you as a lawyer but that's what's coming from up high. It's going to affect you, it's going to affect him or her or whatever. So it's about just feeling valued and trusted in your organisation and feeling there's a real true psychological contract between you the employee and the employer. The contract. Contracts are two way, so I can understand the employers saying we need you really committed working hard, long, whatever we need you on, we need you. But the reciprocity, reciprocal relationship in a true contract is, we will value you, you'll have reasonable job security, we will train you if you need it, we're there for you. If you need flexible working, fine, if you need to spend...if you want to work a lot from home because of commitments with kids or elder care or whatever, we're up for and we will facilitate that in any way we can. That's what we need, don't get a lot of that. And unfortunately one of the things that does trouble me is the kind of manager...the bulk of managers we have in place now in my view, the bulk of them, the majority are pre-recession managers in...before the recession there was a lot of mobility, the economy was...all the world economies were going up, there was blips in the eighties and blips here and there, but basically look at the stock market it was going haywire. In a way you didn't need to create wellbeing cultures as much because people could get jobs elsewhere. If I don't like my employer, guess what I'm gone. And they did. Recession occurs, massive job insecurity for ten years, well say eight years and that's still with us. So now it's wellbeing and managing stress and all that sort of stuff is now a bottom-line issue to retain good people. Because they sheared off so many people during the recession and changed the nature of the psychological contract, so jobs are no longer for life, you're a disposable asset, da, de, da, de, da. But if you want to retain...it's really mean and lean now in most organisations. You can't afford to lose key people now therefore you're going to try to create a culture. But the problem we have is the managers, many of them are still in place from the old culture. So we need them to be trained up more EQ-ed or those who don't have EQ and are untrainable should go. I don't mean go, fired, just give them a non-people job. There are some people who just shouldn't manage people, they're good technically at doing a particular thing but interpersonally they just can't do it. They can't cope with emotion, they don't have...they don't recognise when people aren't coping. So I think we need to do kind of an audit of our manager cadre and say who are untrainable, the bulk are trainable incidentally, and the next generation of ones we recruit to look after people whoever they are should be people with EQ.

Phil: What informs that view for you then, has that come from the experiences you've had of speaking in companies or from research you've done? Where does that...so I agree with you and in my experience the recession completely changed the way that both employers and employees viewed work. So from a combination of a) as you said disposable but also I think there's been a slight shift in people saying well if I am going to have to work, I want to do it somewhere that I can enjoy it and I can feel like I am contributing in some way. I don't think that's not necessarily universal, I think there has been a real shift in what people want from work. I don't think that's generational, people talk about millennials and generation whatever. I don't think it's generational. I think it's been a shift in the psychological contract between the two. But that again is based on my experience of the work I do with my clients and so on. I guess I was curious for that...

Cary: Where does it come from?

Phil: Yeah.

Cary: I think well I do a lot of research, I do big studies and it comes partly from that, partly from my experiences. But I think there...you're right that a lot of people now given the recession and now a bit more mobility occurring, in other words people can now shift. They couldn't for about eight years, it was very difficult to get another job. And the downsizing that took place in the finance sector and many other sectors was massive, 25-35%, whether you're in the public sector, private sector, it was horrific. I think now people are saying...but I think that the millennials are slightly different in that the millennials are saying and research and surveys are showing that they're saying I'll go to work for that employer but if I feel they're not giving me what I need as a person I'm gone, I'm going to look elsewhere. The mobility is higher among them. I think probably the reason is they saw their parents, the millennials, get really stuffed, using a nice technical term, during the recession. I think they think quality of life is very important, probably more than older generations. So I think there is a slight generational difference, but I think for all employees of all generations you are right, I think they're thinking about the quality of their working experience now more than ever. And now the mobility is coming back in and people can shift from one job to another, however, the fly in the ointment is Brexit. So my worry now is that Brexit are making people feel really insecure. Now not a good piece of research has been done on this and I'm talking to colleagues about doing this now, a big one, because I think this is a real big problem. You talk about the insecurity of the recession and that was almost a depression, forget a recession, Brexit is in the UK having the same, I think having a similar sort of effect, an insecurity effect. Now maybe people are making decisions to go places they think, well, because there might be a period while we're negotiating trade deals and that will take ten years minimally to do that. That maybe I better go to somebody who's pretty safe globally, a company that's global, it's got this characteristic secure. They may seek security rather than quality of life. That's the worry I have or may not be as entrepreneurial in creating their own businesses because again what if Brexit occurs and we have no trade deals and I can't...I'm creating this business but I want to export or I want to do this, that and the other. And I'm not going to be able to get the staff because of immigration policies. I don't think the government has thought through that, the implications of Brexit and people's sense of job security and what that might mean for being innovative, for being mobile etc. But I think it should because I think it's...you're hearing a lot of talk about that now.

Phil: Yes, I think...so the innate ability that humans have to catastrophise is great. So whether you call it the threat response or the stress response, the ability to see a threat and then...

Cary: Uncertainty.

Phil: ...and uncertainty, is a huge part of that, without a doubt. So it's that...I remember there was one organisation that I worked in and within two different guises, and it would get to a particular time of the year and everybody would start freshening up their CVs, everybody would start having a look on job boards because they knew that when we hit this time of year, this was the time of year that generally speaking a piece of organisational redesign would happen. It happened for five years

in a row, so in year one and year two it was really catastrophic for people to experience. But then it would get to a point, well we're entering that month of the year when we expect to hear in the next month if there's going to be a big part of organisation redesign which means jobs are at risk. There was one population that were put at risk every year for three years in a row and some people would stay and some people would go. But the degree of uncertainty that that creates at an organisational level is really debilitating, because essentially it meant for a quarter of the year, a month before the organisational design would happen, the month it happened and then a month after, not a lot got done, because everybody was so anxious and such and such and now at societal level we've got that...I'm with you, that uncertainty now is at a societal level...

Cary: And this is real uncertainty, this is profound uncertainty and for any...almost every sector you can think of is worried about it. And more and more you get the drip-feed of it in the media that look at...there may be no trade deals with the US on the aerospace industry. The banks are not going to be given the passports to trade in Europe, Frankfurt and Paris will take over all the business. You hear of the constant drip-feed of the negative makes people feel very uncertain. That affects people's job security, it affects how innovative they're going to be, whether they're going to move and who do you move to. So maybe we'll be in the same position as the recession because people didn't move, but there wasn't that many places to go to by the way. There probably are places you can go now but then you ask yourself the question, if I go from there to there what are the likelihood that this Brexit might adversely affect that company or organisation more than the one I'm currently in? I'm sure in the back of people's head there is that, they're very dependent on trade in Europe. What if I go there and they've no trade deal or the trade deal is terrible? So you're getting that I think...so we went from one uncertain situation to a hiatus for a couple of years or a year or two and now we're back into another one. I'm not saying that the UK couldn't trade internationally and everything else, it's the uncertainty about lack of clarity about what the implications are. And the dishonesty of governments to actually...particularly the UK government, they wouldn't even release the impact...

Phil: Studies.

Cary: What happens when you don't do that? Think about the uncertainty that you introduce when you don't even want to issue the impact cases, which existed but said it wasn't...they didn't exist. And when you get things like that going on, people think this is a real potential disaster. You're just creating uncertainty.

Phil: You're creating those gaps...

Cary: People need that to perform well. Human beings need a sense of security not massive security.

Phil: Not guaranteed security.

Cary: Not guaranteed like it might have been in the 1970s when there were all sorts of pretty rigid trade union laws and there was more job security because the trade unions were very powerful and industries where trade unions were powerful. But people to innovate have to feel reasonably secure and to move around and create businesses and all that, that requires a certain amount. We have the



population to do it, we have a lot of creative people in the UK, really creative people in the UK but we all need a certain level of stability.

Phil: I'm going to make a comparison which may or may not be fair because what the...if we stick with anxiety and we stick with uncertainty then, so the physiological changes that occur with that, both in terms of the changes in cortisol that's released, the changes in blood pressure and heart rate and respiration. So it's like having...if you're walking through a dodgy area of a city, so every city has got their dodgy areas, and when you walk through that you're on hyper alert, you're hyper vigilant for potential threats, potential issues, potential concerns. Your body can sustain that for a short period of time, but if you walk around and around, and around, and around that area you're either going to lose some of your attention because the body can't sustain it or you start to become immune to it and neither of those are helpful. Because it dampens down the ability to then be innovative or to be creative or to do something different or to stand out because you don't want to stand out.

Cary: It's the difference between acute and chronic stress. Acute stress you can deal with, I have job interviews, I have exams to take at university. I can deal with that because it's going to end, it's a finite period. When it's chronic like it was during the recession, that was real chronic uncertainty, insecurity and worries about whether we'll ever recover from this or not. Of course we did but...and the same thing with Brexit, lack of clarity is doing the same thing. It's more of a chronic thing that's going on and on and on because there's less and less clarity as we move along. You'd thought by now we'd have the clarity on it. So you're right a person's own individual bodily reaction, psychologically or physically gets more impaired and undermined the more something is chronic and the uncertainty is there for a longer period of time.

Phil: Is that...that chronic stress aspect then is that anything that you've experienced in your...obviously in your research you've found it, have you ever experienced it personally in your...?

Cary: Yes, I experienced it personally because when...I've been married twice and I have two kids from each marriage and all my kids are friends with one another, they're really great. But I experienced it when I knew my marriage was failing and I got ill. I got something at the time was called ME, chronic fatigue syndrome, but I got it at the time. Totally unaware that even though I work in the field, totally in a way unaware that it was that potential breakup which was causing me to get...for my immune system to be...because that's what you get when you get chronic fatigue syndrome, basically the stress...the chronic stress you're experiencing of the uncertainty in a relationship diminishes your ability to react to the microorganisms you have in your body. In other words we all carry viruses, your immune system collapses, the virus takes over, then the psychology takes over which is am I dying? Am I this? Am I that? What have I got, the doctors can't find it, blah, blah, blah. And that's what, in a way, that's what chronic...so I had that at that point in time which was 30 some odd years ago. It affected me directly and eventually I understood what was happening but when you're in it even if you're a scientist like me and you're looking at doing studies. As it transpired I then did studies on chronic fatigue syndrome with a colleague who herself suffered with this, it was PhD student of mine who was suffering with it. And we both then did some work, big work, we were looking at chronic fatigue syndrome and why was it so prevalent in...more prevalent in women than men.

Phil: Really?

Cary: Oh, yeah, and there was a whole load of explanations why. But we were looking at people in the workplace who have chronic fatigue syndrome and trying to identify the factors that predicted it in their life, in their work and so on.

Phil: And what did you find if I can ask?

Cary: Yeah, we found that the stresses of relationships, the stresses of work particularly on women at that time that we did the study, this is 30 years ago, it was when the medics didn't even know what it was. They knew it was virally linked but they didn't know the mechanism, the psychosocial factors we'd call them. We found that why women tended to suffer more than men is because they have a lot of stress in working environments because there were glass ceilings, women couldn't move up. They were more micromanaged by men, little career opportunities, trying to juggle that and raising a family and not necessarily getting support from their partners, their husbands. All of that hitting them at the same time, yet they were very diligent in the workplace and carried on even though they were fatigued a lot. It's called chronic fatigue syndrome and they got more and more fatigued and the more they tried to continue to work and to look after the family and do everything the more they got very poorly. By the way it happens to men too but I'm just saying we were looking at women because at that time...we were looking at both men and women, but at that time we were looking at women because they tended to report more of it. And the reason they got worse was because they didn't want to let other people down which is a more female than a male characteristic. I don't want to let the people down by not turning up. So here I have all these pressures on me trying to juggle home and work, trying to invest in my relationship, do things for the kids, be a professional at work where it's difficult for women because there are glass ceilings and problems, and women have difficulty in being recognised in those days. By the way it's not that different now, it's better, there's more mobility, the glass ceiling has been pushed up but it's still there in many sectors. All of that led to the phenomenon which was partly a stress related illness but not entirely because it's linked, if your immune system collapses then the viruses take over. You have viruses in your body all the time or you're more vulnerable to viruses and then it actually becomes a physical...it is a physical illness as well as maybe the ideology of it is stress. So stress is maybe a trigger to it. In my view...we came up with the view that it is a trigger to it but it is a physical illness that needs to be treated properly, and probably on both levels physical and emotional.

Phil: It maybe that they're not linked or they are, is it similar or different to burnout in that way?

Cary: No, it's different from burnout. Burnout is...most of the people who work in the burnout field work in the caring professions, so social work, nursing, teaching. These are the caring professions, social care people and burnout is when you...your capacity...sorry, you're dealing with people's problems all the time whether it's a psychiatrist or a nurse all the time, just overwhelms you and you can no longer cope. It's the stress of caring in effect. So it has been linked with that but it doesn't have to be that, it could be that you burn out. I remember once talking to a manager who said to me I burned out at work, and he was a manager. So in a way it's partly caring if you're a good manager

and I suspect this guy was who I was talking to. I said, how did you know, what happened to you? He said, well I was driving to work one day thinking I was...everything was okay, I was driving to work, and just before the plant that I go to, there's a roundabout. And I drove to work and as soon as I saw the building I automatically went around the roundabout and headed home and the next thing I knew I was sitting in my lounge at home, I couldn't go back into that building, that's burnout. He couldn't any longer work there. You get teachers who do that, they walk into a classroom or you get an actor who cannot remember their lines go on stage and just lose it. It's like fusing, it's a fuse in you, I can't do this anymore, I can't do the job anymore. Something triggers it and it's probably an accumulation of the stress levels in that job and it's emotional labour. It's usually associated with emotional labour, not always but usually. Social workers who can't do it anymore they go to the office and you know what, they look at a client and they can't remember their name, they can't remember anything about them. Teacher goes in front of a class and can't remember what they're supposed to do. It usually hits a big...that's what usually happens to a lot of burnout people, some major event realises they have to get away from it.

Phil: Just for the clarity from the listener point of view then, the emotional labour, how would you define emotional labour?

Cary: That's the overload of dealing with other people's problems or doing the job which the emotions of which you find difficult to be able to contextualise or cope with and it just burns you out, you can't do it anymore.

Phil: I was talking to another guest for the podcast recently and she wanted to come and take part because she felt that she had burned out, she got to a point where she loved her work so much and she loved the impact it had on other people, she loved the team that she was in and she cared so much about the work and doing the work well and making a difference and helping people grow. That she said it got to the point where she again she just couldn't do it anymore and...I've forgotten where I was going with that...

Cary: But that's right, it's about not being able to do it, the emotion of the job overloads you so much that you just can't cope with it anymore, you can't teach that class of kids anymore. You can't do the social work job. You can't be a counsellor anymore and listen to other people's problems all the time.

Phil: Do you think in a way and maybe I'm catastrophising where I don't need to, if...because there's lots of...I know lots of organisations that are working on things like giving people more meaning at work, having more clarity about how they're contributing to the good of others or good of society. Is there a risk that we might then end up with people caring too much and people burning out because their work has so much meaning and has so much...?

Cary: No, I think meaning is important, giving people a sense of purpose is very important for your health and wellbeing. You're doing a particular job and you have to feel it's making a contribution somewhere to something other than your bank account and paying your mortgage. No, I think sense of purpose and meaning at work is important. More of our waking hours are spent at work than with our families, think about it. Think about how we work on average in the UK of about 10 to 12 hour

days, that's the average, that doesn't even include commute time. That doesn't mean even you picking up your mobile phone and doing emails at night, weekends or while you're on holiday, you don't even count that. And even when you're with your kids you're probably doing that, using the mobile to do your emails or whatever. So I think having a sense of purpose I think is really, really important. But you do need to have safe space, I don't know if I mean safe space, you need to spend time, you need to stop all the stuff to do with your work at some...when you come home you should just stop, you shouldn't start checking your emails, you really shouldn't. You should spend devoted time with your kids, everything else. But that's not reality, recent surveys in HR magazine and elsewhere, just the surveys, nearly 40% of people first thing they do when they wake up in the morning is turn their mobile phone on to look at emails. Last thing you do at night is the same thing, about 40%, 35-40%. We know that's the reality and on holidays, how many people check? It's probably because of mobile technology because I think when it was a laptop it was a pain in the backside to turn it on, you wouldn't do it as much. But now your mobile phone is always on, I'll just see what's going on at work and that's a killer.

Phil: I think...again I think there's elements of self-pressure, of wanting to know what's happening and feeling like you're not letting everybody down and you're up to date with what's happening. But also I think there are organisations where the expectation is that you're on.

Cary: You're on. Yeah, but that's changing and even...there's a whole field called techno stress I published papers in it, looking at email technology and what it's doing to people's health and wellbeing, and productivity incidentally. But companies are realising it. So if you look at Volkswagen for example, Volkswagen in their headquarters are blocking people's emails at night and turning on next morning at eight. You're getting organisations saying you're not allowed to send emails to somebody in the same building. Other ones saying you can only CC in two people, this is very profound now. And the French passed a law six months ago, the law says you as a manager by law, national law, are not allowed to send emails to any of your subordinates, your staff out of office hours. Now totally unenforceable but it's sending a message. So the evidence is mounting that that's causing people to be on 7/24 but you don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater because we want the technology to be able to work flexibly, right? So if you say oh no you can't use it at night. No, what companies need to do in organisations is have guidance about what is appropriate behaviour and they don't, inappropriate behaviour. Don't send emails to somebody in the same building because you want to build up relationships, it's about emotionality. Number two, don't do at night unless absolutely necessary. Don't do it on holidays unless it's absolutely necessary. And that kind of thing. And managers should be very conscious of sending somebody an email out of office hours unless it's extremely important. If it's important, fine, people...

Phil: But even then you can just pick up the phone couldn't you and ring them rather than send them an email?

Cary: Yeah, you could. But whether it's ringing on a phone or sending an email...

Phil: It's still the interruption.

Cary: It's the interruption. Whichever way it goes but only do it if it's a necessity, a real necessity.

Phil: In terms of...so you mentioned some of the key triggers for workplace stress, what would be some of the advice that you would give then, so if I got some HR people or some business leaders listening to this podcast what advice would you give them for how to...?

Cary? For them to personally manage it themselves or create the culture for other people? They're two different things here, what would you do as a person versus what would you do if you're in a role like a HR person or occupational health or something like that, what would you do to create the right culture? They're two different...

Phil: So let's start with the culture one first?

Cary: All right, let's start with the culture one. So I'm a HR person trying to create the right culture in my organisation. Number one I would find out from people what they want because you may think you know what the right thing for them is, but you have to find out from them. So what a lot of companies are doing is wellbeing audits with proper psychometric tools, you do it, you find out what employees think anonymously. So you don't walk around and just ask them. You have them fill it in, you look at the data, you break it down in every which way you say, women really would find their stress levels would be lower, their wellbeing would be enhanced if you did this, this and this. Men would say that. Senior managers would say that, shop floor people would say that. You break the data down and you find out what's causing people high stress levels, lack of wellbeing, mental wellbeing and then you deal with it. Then you bring the people together to solve it, that's when you bring people together.

Phil: So find out what they want?

Cary: Yeah, you find out what they want. I did a big study years and years ago now on a local authority and we find social workers had high sickness absence rates and everything else, we did a wellbeing audit. Once we found out what the problems were we then sat them together and said that's what the psychometric says is you're probably...we've aggregated all your data. Is it number one, is it accurate? Yes, it is. What's the solution? We're not going to tell you what the solution is, I'm an occupational health psychologist, I'm not going to tell you what it is, I don't do your job as a social worker, you tell me what the solution is. They came up with the solution. We coasted the solution, did what they told us to do and reduced sickness absence massively the following year. And the cost of it? Because social workers you have to get supply social workers, they cost money, we reduced it. But that's because we followed that kind of process. So number one, find out what people think about their job and we have very sophisticated tools to do that. Bring people together to come up with the solution. Another thing is quite a lot of people...so what are some of the things that would come out of that? Lack of flexibility would be one. Again line managers who are bullies might be another one. A long hour's culture is definitely one. Lack of work/life balance. Lack of involvement in making decisions, that's the engagement one. So when you would unwrap it those are the kind of issues that come up. Glass ceilings for women, the feeling they can't progress. But you don't know until you do it what they are but those are the kinds of things that keep coming up. Now that's if you were the HR person, you do it strategically, you don't do it apples on desks, you don't do any of that garbage. And you don't come up with what you think causes them stress

because that is not going to help anybody. You are probably wrong and we have found very unique things you'll find in an organisation...that group of workers feels that, you never thought that. That one thinks that. Really? No I can't believe it. You'd think da, da, da, da, da, okay, if you're an individual for you as an individual you have to do in a way a mini audit of yourself. What don't you like about this workplace and what do you like about it? And then putting...getting a list of those and then saying what can I actually do, can I make a change myself that will help move me in the right direction on that, reduce my stress levels. And if the answer is on all the things that are causing you pressure and it really is you can't personally make any changes, then you go seek another job, you can do something, you can leave, not right away but you can find another employment and get the hell out.

On the other hand there may be things like my boss treats me this way and I really have trouble with it, I don't feel he values me or she. But the boss doesn't know how you feel, so one option you have is to find a less stressful time to have a conversation with your boss and explain to him...with specific examples, here's what...these kind of things have happened and have really upset me. Maybe the majority of those people don't realise they behave that way so they'll learn and maybe they'll improve. On the other hand if you say you have autocrat as a boss you say that to them they might really put you down big time, it's not maybe the best solution. So for every problem you have you do a cross benefit analysis of the options open to you to deal with it. Long hours, I can't walk out at five o'clock but most of my workers are pretty well organised I can complete by then, but the culture is such you can't. Well you've got to deal with that because you have commitments outside with kids or something, so you've got to find a way of finding a solution to that. What are the options open to you and take the option with the least cost and the most benefits, that's what you do, that's what...in life that's what you should do. But in action is no answer. If you're not coping in action just saying well I hope it improves won't deal with it.

Phil: And I think back to one of the points you said earlier on, sometimes that can be really hard to see when you're in it.

Cary: Oh, it's totally...by the way that's the other thing I would suggest, with a work colleague or a friend, maybe a work colleague you trust, work with them to think through the issues and how you might cope with it best because they might know your workplace. It's something in the field called co-counselling and why not? Why not go to somebody you trust who you feel is not threatened by you, doesn't compete with you, you trust their view and listen to them, tell them what you're troubled with. My boss does this all the time to me, do you think I could...the options open to me is tell them he does that. What do you think, do you think he would listen or would he be angry that I confronted him with it? And that's how you...so working with somebody else to look at the options open to you in the context you're in is very useful. People don't tend to do that. Women do that, women employees tend to do that more than male employees because they have higher EQ and they'll talk to other women about their problems, my relationships. Men don't tend to talk to other men about it, that's the difficulty we have as men.

Phil: So that's two white men in a room...



Cary: Absolutely. But men don't have the...many men don't have the EQ to open up and feel...don't like talking about emotions as much and therefore don't talk to other men. They might talk to a woman by the way more than they're likely to talk men about these kind of problems.

Phil: I think there's lots of different factors that can come into it, gender or status within the organisation.

Cary: Absolutely, yeah, these are all factors, yeah.

Phil: Okay, all right. I want to bring it together and wrap this up then. So for the studies that you've talked about I've written some of them down, but would you be able to...if I gave you a list of the ones that we talked about would you be able to give me references for them?

Cary: Well most of the work I've done is in a variety of my books, so I'll give you the list of books.

Phil: Yeah, that would be good. It's just...

Cary: I got lots of books in these fields.

Phil: I'll put them in the show next to the podcast so that if people want to go and find more...

Cary: Yeah, Well-being: Productivity and Happiness at Work is a very good book you'll like that, and it's a good case study examples of companies, specific companies like Rolls Royce who do things. I'll tell you a list of books.

Phil: That would be great.

Cary: You can put them together.

Phil: Yeah, that's fine I'll do that.

Cary: Okay.

Phil: All right, so is there anything else then, anything else on the topic or themes around emotion and mental health, and wellbeing, stress in the workplace, anything that you think is important?

Cary: No, I think we've kind of covered it, other than to say that it's no longer a fuzzy nice to have it's a must have now. And really from a variety of points of view for the UK economy aside from you individually, one in four people suffer one common mental disorder in the workplace. It's costing us...mental ill health in the workplace costing about £100 billion a year, it's really bad from that point of view and it's a productivity problem. It's a big productivity problem. Government now understands that, and DWP and DH, Department of Health are really on top of this now, particularly DWP about the mental health issues. And if you look at incapacity benefit the biggest cost of incapacity benefit, 40% of it is for mental ill health in the workplace, it's bigger than cancer. So we have an issue, it's an individual health issue but it's a national productivity issue too.



Phil: Wonderful, well in that case thank you very much, Cary, thank you for your time.

Cary: No problem.