



## Episode 17 – Emotion at Work Stories - Burnout Chatting with Amy King (@Amy\_C\_King)

Phil: For this episode we are going into the topic of burnout. Our guest has had a very personal experience with that and it is something we are going to get into and talk about today, but for me the reason I really want to talk about burnout is because my experience of it is that often we just ignore it and we pretend it is not happening. I vividly remember one occasion where somebody who I worked with got signed off from work because they were burnt out and someone said to me, I kind of saw that coming and I thought really, you saw that coming and we didn't do anything about it. That is not good. That is a whole host of bad stuff that is going on right there and so for me it's important that we get the topic of burnout out and we get it heard and we get it talked about which is why when I got chatting with Amy she said she would be happy to share. I was really excited to get her on the podcast. I've mentioned her now so we should get her on air. Let's welcome this episodes guest Amy King. Hi Amy.

Amy: Hey Phil, how are you doing?

Phil: I am full of cold thank you and I am self-editing to make sure I don't do lots of sniffing as we record the podcast today because that's the last thing an audience member wants to hear.

Amy: I agree.

Phil: Is me sniffing away, so I will make sure I work really hard not to do that. So before we get into the main content of the podcast one of the things I do with all the guests is ask an unexpected and yet innocuous question to get us going and we'll both answer it if that's alright. So I'll ask it and then come to you first and then I will give my thoughts afterwards.

Amy: Good.

Phil: So what I'm curious to know is what has got in your way recently?

Amy: Okay what's got in my way? I think probably, so this year I have been really quite determined and focused to get back, as everyone does, into getting fit. So yoga has become my thing and I found that the big thing that has got in my way, I have been really good, I have been going three to four times a week (by the way if you've not been, I really recommend it, it's amazing), but has been travel and it will be really relevant to what we are about to talk about today. When you have to travel longer distance and when you are not in your normal environment how much that impacts things that you are trying to do. Probably travel, I live in Bristol, I'm always in London and I'm always having to pack my suitcase and think about being away for two, three days. Travel has got in my way recently I'd say. It has obviously got me places too, but I think in what I have been trying to do recently it has been the thing that has been disruptive and I've had to think about managing more.

Phil: So the travel has got in the way of doing yoga and so what does yoga do for you? How do you find the experience of yoga?



Amy: I guess a few things really, obviously you can look at it in terms of it builds on your core strength and it sounds almost like a relaxing exercise but actually it's really hard. You have to hold these awkward positions for long periods of time and almost what you learn to do is, it's not just the workout that you're getting but it's the connection to leaning into the pain and the awareness of your body and your mind and that relationship. It builds a sense of consciousness and awareness and stillness which means that all the other things that exist in your life that maybe work you up and get you anxious they disappear because in that moment you are purely focused on the balance or holding that position, so it gives you this sense of clarity and connection and I think it helps you reconnect with some of the things that are really important to you, with yourself, so I found that really useful. I love the challenge and the workout and you get toned and all of that but it's also the other side of it which is much more mental and emotional which I found really powerful. The big thing for me with yoga, which perhaps is different with other sports that you can do is you can have a class full of people from experienced yoga practitioners to complete beginners and you can go through the same routine and you will just have different levels that you can do it at but there's this sense of no judgment. You don't worry about what anyone else is doing, it's just you and your practise and it's not about being competitive or comparing yourself to others which we are all guilty of doing. So it actually helps you learn to do that as well and just do what you need to do for you. I have found that really valuable this year, not just physical but mental well-being. So it's really important to me now to keep that up. Different people find different things but that's something I found really valuable.

Phil: Therefore the travel is the thing that gets in the way because it takes away the times or the opportunities potentially for you to do that.

Amy: Yeah it is. It means you have to get up really early in the morning so you can't do that morning class or you get back really late so you can't do it in the evenings. I think when you find something that is important to you it's easy to let these things become excuses and to give up on something that you're trying to do, so for me I am going to have to work out when I am travelling backwards and forwards. How do I incorporate that into the day, which really isn't hard to do but our brains are wired to the easy option and having to just re-think and re-plan that, once you do it a few times then it's easy. It's been a thing that has got in the way a little bit this year from the yoga. Not in a major way but it's something I want to make sure doesn't stop what I am trying to do as I travel more. Yeah, so that's me, how about you. What's your thing that's got in the way Phil?

Phil: So I think it's me if I'm honest this week, but in particular it's me saying yes to stuff. So I mentioned off air to you that I'm just mad busy at the minute and the challenge is I'm loving every single thing that I'm doing. That's the bit that in a way I'm finding quite challenging. So what it's meaning is that I am struggling to find time for things like pilates, so I'm not doing yoga I'm doing more pilates instead and I'm not doing classes. I met an instructor and they gave me a few exercises to do to try and work on my core so I do them regularly during the day. Similar to you being busy is getting in the way. Me saying yes to things and being busy is getting in the way of that. I have really found it interesting grappling with what I have created as a dichotomy, being too busy but similarly absolutely loving every minute of what it is that I am doing. There is nothing that I am doing that I am finding a chore or difficult but because I have got so much of it I am working in the evenings. I've



pulled a couple of really late nights recently where I've been up working through to half one in the morning.

Amy: That is long.

Phil: I know from a health point of view that I can't sustain that and I suppose, I hadn't deliberately thought about sharing this actually, this is going to take us into the burnout topic for today because I know I'm tired. I know I'm pushing myself really hard at the moment and the bit that I am finding really challenging is that I don't want to stop doing any of the stuff that I'm doing because I'm really loving it. It's not like the work I'm doing, I'm finding laborious or cumbersome. There isn't somebody else saying you have to work this hard. This is something that I am absolutely putting on myself and it is short term. I can see an end to it, come the first week of March it eases off a lot. The flip side of that I know February is going to have been a really hard month, a physically and mentally tiring month.

Amy: I know we are going to talk about me but it all feels so familiar. Is there anything in February that you think would help you stop getting in your own way because you love everything you are doing. You are right, you can't sustain that work rate necessarily and sleep particularly is so important. Do you think there is anything else you can do to help for this month other than just accepting that it is an intense month?

Phil: I am carving out time for things that are important to me. So yesterday, no Wednesday, I carved out time to go swimming. It would have been dead easy for me to say actually I'm not going to swim because I am so busy. I am only in the pool for half an hour but by the time I drive there and get changed and shower afterwards and drive home, that's an hour and a half gone. So it could have been really easy for me to say no, I am not going to do that, but physical exercise is something that is important to me right now. So I've carved out time for that. I've carved out time for family, so my wife and I went out on a Valentine's Day date in the evening. That is the first time we have done that in years. We haven't gone out on Valentine's Day in a long long time. Again we made it so we had a babysitter, we could come back whenever we wanted. We could just take the time to relax and again it would have been dead easy to say, we are not going to go out because I am really busy and I have got this fee earning work that I am going to do. I am working hard to carve time out but I think it's also thinking more cleverly or creatively about how I can get other people to help me with what I am doing. Simon who edits the podcast for me, I've got him on standby because I knew we were recording today. I want to get this podcast out as soon as we can, so I have got him on standby to do the editing, whereas again it could have been something that I could have said I will do that myself because it is quick and easy. I've got a couple of workshops coming up in late February that I need to create a load of handouts for so I can get my VA to help me with that. When you are in it, it's hard to stop and go, oh, who can help me. I think that's the other thing, is stopping and going right who can I ask to help me? What deadlines can I see if I can move? All these things that I am putting pressure on myself for, actually is there any flexibility or wiggle room with it.

Amy: I'm sure we will talk about all these things. It can become very difficult when it's all on you. It's knowing where the headspace is and where you can get that wiggle room to do other things. I actually found one thing that is quite useful is not creating a to do list when you are such a busy



person. You kind of know what you intuitively need to do, you obviously don't want to forget things. It's the not to do list. It's the things that just need to wait.

Phil: Oh I like that.

Amy: You are never going to complete the to do list which itself can feel like a burden really. You are never finished if you see what I mean but ruling out the things you have to except. Okay I know that I would like to do this or it is actually important for me to do but this right now is in my not to do list. I am not going to think about it or this is going to wait until March. That's actually quite useful, or even the things in the day, your day to day habits, what's the one thing you can remove. It can be really small. That helped me, thinking about what no to do. It's worth thinking about.

Phil: Is there a... and I don't know if I like this word but it's the word that's in my head and it words that I can't think of anything different now, is there a sacred list of, this is what I absolutely have to do. So for example just now you were talking about yoga and if anyone has listened to my podcast which is episode 15 I think it was, because I can't run at the moment, that is a real struggle for me. That was my place. When I wanted it all to quieten down, when I wanted it all to go away and to let everything settle. I use the metaphor of settling the sand a lot. When you've got a glass that's got sand and water in it, when everything is calm the sand is at the bottom and the water is at the top and they are clearly delineated things, whereas what life does is it shakes the glass up and it makes everything a bit cloudy. So having ways or mechanisms or approaches to get that sand to settle back down again so that everything can be just that little bit clearer is really important and running used to be my sand settling activity. Whenever I came back from a run I was always a hundred times better than I was before I left. I would be more relaxed, I would be tired, physically tired, but mentally I would be clearer, I would be more relaxed, I would be more focused, I would be more attentive, all of those things. For me know, not having that I feel more tumultuous than I did before and I haven't found something to replace it yet. So swimming does not do that for me. I don't come out of swimming having all of that stuff happen. I still haven't found that thing that I can do that will allow all that stuff to take place.

Amy: I think it's really individual in terms of what you personally like doing and I think it is just so hard when there is something you love doing and it has been your release and something that helps you and then you are not able to do that. It is a little bit of trial and error as to what works best for you. You asked what are the golden rules to help you feel better. I think there are a number of things that can help. For instance you mentioned you were working until 1.30 am and I am guilty of that, I've done that a lot in the past. One of my big golden rules now is sleep. I have become really strict on my sleep and the research is insane showing how important sleep is to our brain functioning, our cognitive functioning and just our general sense of wellness and vitality in a given day. I find I can actually operate well even if I get six hours sleep, no one would think anything of me. I am not making massive mistakes, but if you do that continuously where you are getting less than six or even less than seven as research shows, it massively changes how your brain works and it actually is meant to be as bad as if you have been drinking alcohol the day before and then you work the next day versus having less than six hours.

Phil: Really.



Amy: Yeah because it changes. It's about the speed of functioning and how well you can remember information, your alertness and things that you notice. You might find your mind wanders a little bit more, you have to just work harder, it takes more energy. You can't hold information as well even if you feel that you can and I know there's people who say they have trained their brains to sleep less and I'm quite intrigued by that. There must be some techniques, but in general sleep is restoration. All your synapses in your brain are trying to work out what memories and what things you processed during the day are useful or not so that you can organise all of that to work optimally. This is the psychologist of me coming out. I find if I get less than that I do notice it now and because I have been sleep deprived, I went through a period where I was majorly sleep deprived for a long period of time and now I am really regimented to get seven to eight hours. If I go to bed late I will purposefully and I have a bit more flexibility now, but I will plan to get up later. I won't rush up and put pressure on myself to do certain things that might be good. Like I might want to go out to do yoga for instance or if it was for you, you might go for a run. I will decide that is something I haven't managed properly so I've gone to bed late so I'm going to get up later. Or if I know that I am going to get up early, even if it feels quite hard to do I will make myself go to bed early. Really simple stuff and probably everyone is thinking obviously, but how many of us actually stick to that and actually do it. I don't know and I think sleep deprivation is everywhere in the workplace. So that's for me.

Exercise is just getting to know what works for you. Getting outside is a really big thing, being outdoors. There's emotional wellbeing which is your relationships. Downtime and actually switching off and having your me time, it has actually got really positive associations with how you feel and your energy. Play, we talk about that, there's loads of things. Downtime, play, time to connect with others, physical activity, sleeps massive and relationships. They're the big areas that actually make up a healthy mind basically and it's in all the research, it's everywhere. You can make your own personal experiences, they're my initial rules of thumb.

Phil: So the question I want to ask is, you mention that you were sleep deprived at one point and I want to explore that with you, but before I do my daughter has just come back from a sleepover and there's nobody else in the house apart from me and I can hear her in the lounge going hello, hello. I am just going to let her know that I am here and I will be back in 20 seconds, hang on.

So then fair listener, the last 25 seconds or so we would have edited out the podcast so you don't get to hear me opening a door and closing a door, but my daughter is safe, she is fine and happy just to put everyone's mind at rest. Everything is good.

So you said you were sleep deprived. Tell me more about that.

Amy: In terms of how I operate as a person and I think, well hopefully people relate to this, maybe not enough people, genuinely I loved my work and I love doing things that I am passionate about. My work is very much in the psychology of people and I apply that within the world of consulting. So I work with organisations. It requires lots of travel, obviously the world of consultancy can be very client focused so you are always on to meet the demands of the client and I was also working in an organisation which I absolutely love. I'm not actually working there anymore but I spent seven years working in a small consultancy that was going through growth. It had introduced technology and it



was going through its evolution and so there was continuous change in that environment too. I grew with it as it grew and I suppose in sum what it led to was I took on more responsibility and I will talk more about what led to the sleep deprivation, but it got to the point where I was travelling a lot and I would get up at five, half five in the morning because I had to travel long distances and I would get home. I would work easily a 12 hour day which is not good to do regularly, but I would easily find ten hours was normal and up to 12 and then I would get home at nine o'clock at night with the travel. If I was on my own you could potentially use that time in a different way but then you've got other things that you need to do and my other half would be there. I would feel guilty for being away and for being so late, you end up staying up later, so before you know it, you are getting into bed late and night on night you're getting five to six hours a night and what's weird is I found that I didn't really realise it for a while. I didn't realise actually how little sleep I was getting and it just overtime started to erode my sense of vitality, like I said on a day to day basis. I would be able to get up, it was never that, oh my god I'm so tired I can't get up. It was looking ahead at the day and I had so much on, I would be jumping out of bed because I needed to get everything I could out of that day, but sleep was the thing I compromised on and to be honest, very, very early on I was more naive in that I would, like you, if I had something really that needed some additional focus and attention. Sorry if it's a bit noisy in the background, there is a lorry going past, but if there was something that required more deep work and I like to pour everything into what I do. I don't like to half do things. I would just think to myself, well I like this work, I am going to stay up until I feel like I'm happy with it. I could easily stay up until midnight working on something because I enjoyed it. It wasn't like I sat there saying, oh I hate this, this is horrible. I would enjoy it and it would get stupid and I think I was very naive at the start and I didn't realise how doing that was so detrimental to then my in the day energy and therefore it would impact my performance and it was only once it became a problem for me that I realised. So I started to track it actually using an app, just to create awareness, so that I could see it and then I saw the problem. As soon as I saw the problem then I started to try and make changes but even then it was hard because by this time I just had a lot of demands and I had to do this, what am I not going to do approach rather than trying to do everything and be more efficient so to speak. So sleep I guess, that's the story about how it developed, but it was interesting because it does add to your exhaustion and burnout (which is what I know we are going to talk about more) it is just a number of things. It's a state through chronic stress that you develop burnout and then lots of things contribute to it, but ultimately it's down to you have a depletion of your resources. So that could be your personal resources like you've not had enough sleep and you don't have as much energy generally but it could be other things like your support and your demands are chronically asking too much of you than you can deal with. If you do that for long enough your body is producing all this cortisol and it's a chemical reaction. It's not a hyper stress response, it's not an adrenalin kick, it's generally wearing your body down over time and it has a massive impact on your emotions and how you then relate mentally and physically to your work. Sleep was a huge part of me not looking after myself and that's been a major learning that you have to look after yourself. You're not superwoman, superman, you can't force your body to do things that it's not designed for. Does that make sense?

Phil: Yeah absolutely.





Amy: And I think that's what I did for a while. I was so motivated by what I was doing that I just wanted to do more and more and more but it just doesn't work that way so don't do that guys if you are doing that.

Phil: There's a couple of bits in that I find really interesting, one (I was going to ask a different question but we will stick with this at the minute), what I've heard in the past when I have talked to other people about burnout, exhaustion, stress is about the expectation that the organisation, or the institution, or peers or managers put on somebody is what's caused that to happen. So whether the expectation is whether you arrive at eight and you don't leave until eight and if you do anything different to that, then you're not working hard enough or there's an implied competition for who is the last person to comment on the Whatsapp group about the work they're doing. Who can commit the latest in the day because that then signifies they are working the hardest because they are still working at whatever time, but what you were describing and you can tell me in a minute if that was part of it in a way, but what you were describing was almost like a self-imposed or a self-driven aspect to it.

Amy: Yeah, I would say it was definitely both. I put a lot of responsibility on myself. I just had a different setup. I was lucky in that my work was always very flexible, I think some people are in a really difficult position. They're expected to be in at a certain time and leave at a certain time and you get this presenteeism effect which is really damaging to people and the business as well because you're not actually present at work you're just turning up and you are not actually being particularly productive. So I didn't have that challenge, I could pretty much go into work when I wanted, how I wanted. I could go in later, leave earlier, I could work at home as well but to be honest that's really important to me so it wasn't that so much it was really two things I think. I've learnt in my personality and what I'm like, I find that I'm either on or off. So when I'm on I go all in and assuming that I love my work and that is important to me, so I just wanted to do more and more and more. It wasn't for any big crazy ambition that I wanted to get to the top or anything, I just wanted to do great work and I enjoy a challenge, so I take on new challenges that just interest me. By my own motivations and makeup I find that I just like to do that. I thrive, as long as it doesn't go too far where I take on these things, so it's definitely an element of me here. Now the bit that then flips and I saw this happen to other people, is you can actually work hard and it feel like play. It doesn't really feel like work, you can be up late just reading, it doesn't have to be you are working, it's out of choice that you are doing that, but it did flip for me where it wasn't that I was just passionate about it, I wanted to do a good job and that was maybe part of it, that you don't want to feel like you are not performing, you want to hold up the standard that you set for yourself, but within my work I was getting more demands on me. There was more change and ambiguity. I was continuously having to pick up and learn new things and I was being put under pressure to how I did that. There were some things that were within my work that just suddenly meant I had too much happening, so my day was very clichéd, back to back meetings, literally one after the other and that is exhausting because you don't actually get to do your job, you're just in meetings talking to people about stuff. The switch in your thinking from one meeting to another, you are having a very sensitive conversation with someone you work with, versus then you are with a big client in a big presentation, versus a serious management decision. They're so varied with the different hats that you have to have on, so that switching becomes exhausting and then you have all the things that you read about which is you get to you inbox and you've got 300 emails unread from the last two days and you think well, when am I



going to do that. Basically you then start to play catch up and that's when it starts to flip, you end up doing longer hours, so eight hours turns to ten hours, you are using the train journey for emails or whatever and then on top of that if I add my passion and motivation, I want to do a really great job so I probably do a bit more on top of that, I felt motivated to do that so overtime that starts to really wear on you. So I think it's a bit of everything, I think you could look at the same opportunity or position I was in, I would approach certain things very differently now because I've learnt from that and I wouldn't take certain things. Like some opportunities are really exciting things, I wouldn't want to miss out, I'd be running podcasts, I'd be running workshops, I'd be doing talks for businesses. I would do all these things that I love but something has to give and you are much better off focusing on the few things that you can do really well rather than taking the world on because you don't want to not do it because it sounds interesting. Then I think there is another part, I did not ask for support and I didn't ask for help and I was just trying to perform and be my best every day without really realising, I did just need more support generally. I think it's a real mix and I think some people treat their work much more transactionally so it's easier probably to negotiate those things. I think actually when you love what you do and you feel that you are doing well at it and then you also get those demands it can actually be quite an interesting concoction which can lead to burnout.

I think it was a real mix to be honest Phil in how that it develops and it happened without me really realising, because I can perform generally speaking under pressure pretty well. I don't think really it was something people would say, oh god, Amy is burnt out, people wouldn't have noticed it per se other than I was rushing around like a mad person but eventually I noticed it started to wear on my mental wellbeing and how I felt about myself and I was more emotional and I'm actually really naturally very calm. That's how people see me and they would have seen me as calm still, so they wouldn't have seen that per se, but I knew the difference and I needed a real break. I had to take myself away from it for a period of time.

Phil: I'll pay you later for the link. The other thing as I said before I asked that last question, there was two things I was really interested in, so the other thing was about the awareness, so I am going to make the link back to what you were talking about sleep and then I'll give you the choice of where we go from here, but you mentioned that you started to become aware of your sleep and then you used an app to track it and then the result of that tracking you thought I need to make some changes because what I am getting wasn't enough. Then you mentioned just now that you started to notice things like emotion was happening, you said emotional, I don't know what that means for you, but you were more emotional. So what helped with that awareness or where did that awareness come from because that's one of the things I think that is really hard when you're in something, it's really hard to notice that you are in it. Sometimes it takes someone else telling you or someone else highlighting it, so then being aware yourself is really tricky. It is one of the throw away lines I hear a lot at work, they need to be more self-aware, but do you know how hard that is. That is really hard to do.

Amy: So hard yeah.

Phil: So for you what brought it into your awareness or how did that awareness come for you?





Amy: That's a good question. Obviously people who are close to you probably pick things up but they don't really see the workplace environment and how you are reacting to that. There was one particular example that stands out which was it had been a particularly intense three months and I was in a series of management meetings and I had a close colleague who was in some of those meetings with me and she had known me for years. We always had a joke because she is very different to me. She is very emotionally expressive and reacts very quickly and intensely and emotionally like positive, negative, whatever it is she wears her heart on her sleeve all the time and we have a good laugh because we've had several situations where we are both in it and how different we react to it. I have always been the calm kind of level headed and more relaxed person generally. I tend to have a more delayed reaction, it's part of who I am. We'd had a particular meeting with this bunch of people and clearly something had wound me up, I don't even know what it was or I'd reacted somehow after the meeting. I remember talking to her afterwards and I was probably offloading or saying what was frustrating or whatever it was and she'd been talking to me a bit already and she replayed it back to me and said you're so emotional right now and I've never seen you this way before. You're really emotional and because we've always had this joke that we are opposite, she was now saying it to me and she was saying this isn't right. I was like oh, you're right. It made me realise and check myself and say I am really emotional, I am reacting to the littlest things emotionally and it's really winding me up and it was really odd. I was like you're right and then even when you are aware, what is weird is I couldn't just stop it. I was just feeling that way was what I realised. So that was the first point where it was a reality check and at this point I didn't think I was burnt out. I was just trying to do everything that was being asked of me and working on brilliant amazing things, but I think that was when I realised I'm not being myself basically. I think that's what other people around me started to see. She is a good friend of mine and I have worked with her very closely at different points. She at the time was working in my team and there was a particular, and this is boring, but there was a particular piece of technology that was being put in and everyone was learning how to use it. I just remember she just made a bit of a comment. It was a change and it was extra effort on top of everyone. I remember I snapped at her, I actually felt angry. That's not me and eventually we spoke about it and she said she had never seen me that way before where I was snapping and I was visibly annoyed and angry about something. There was just a couple of occasions where it did come back to me. The good thing was I had good relationships there and people that I could trust and they knew me so I don't think they judged me for it per se, but I think that's what does it. It's people that know you well and see what you're like and they don't see that's you. They see you're not feeling yourself basically, so those were the two examples that probably spring to mind. So if you are going through a difficult period of time or if you are having people say or make a comment and mention things to you that's normally a good sign that somethings not right and it's easy to brush it off. I think it's only if you really look back and say I can really see that now. I think with the emotion, I think the other thing that I started doing because I realised that I wasn't feeling my best and I knew that I needed to get out of that. That's actually quite hard to do because like you said, once you are in it, you are in it and all you are trying to do is keep things going and you start to actually resent it because you have realised it. Then you want to change it, but it's hard to change unless you do something drastic and I genuinely think that's why lots of people say I'm quitting my job, I can't do this. I'm going to go off travelling, whatever big change it is, it's obviously a really quick way to fix it because you immediately eliminate the problem. I didn't do that. I focused on how I did it. So I started to write down how I felt every day. What are the things...



Phil: Like a journal?

Amy: Yeah, like a journal. It wasn't like a dear diary thing, it was what am I trying to do and achieve and what's getting in my way and how am I feeling because actually how I was feeling was starting to impact just everything really. Not that anyone else would see and if I was being really honest and this is why it is important to talk about it because I don't think there's enough understanding or recognition for stress and burnout. Just wellness at work and these things become, not almost taboo but we still have got a long way to go before people feel they can talk about it.

Phil: No I think taboo is okay.

Amy: But what I realised is someone who is seen by other people most of the time as I'm optimistic, I'm calm and relaxed, all the things. I would end the day and I would be really negative towards myself. I would feel not good enough, I felt like I was failing. I realised eventually that my self-esteem was starting to get impacted and I realised that as I started to write these things down because I felt really bad about myself. That was what was happening, it wasn't just there was a lot happening and it was intense, because it had been sustained I started to realise I felt bad about myself and that's when I was like okay, that narrative, the cognitive I am not good enough, going over in your head, that has to stop because that's really not good for you at all and I do generally believe because I am doing a lot of research into this. I am really passionate about it, there's a lot of challenges that lots of people face is everywhere. I know lots of people who have had challenges, I am not talking about burnout now, I'm just talking about wellness I suppose. There are lots of challenges out there and even if people around you look like they are okay, a lot of people aren't. There is all the behavioural masking and presenteeism like I said. There's a lot to be talked about and dealt with and more can be done. It says nothing on the person and whether they are good at what they do or not, it's just about how do we look after ourselves and take better care of how we are functioning. So I started to take action to fix that and I didn't really know how to do that other than you can look at the tangible things like I am going to have more sleep or I am going to not work these long hours, I am going to talk to someone to get more support so I am not having to do all these extra things. There are easier things to tackle but I also started to look for other sources of inspiration. That was quite a long answer to your question, but I think there's a lot in it in terms of how you start to build your awareness and to be honest you don't really realise until you start to move on from it really and see the difference in yourself basically.

Phil: I am a big advocate of journaling. I think it's a hugely beneficial activity to engage in and I think it has, you mentioned the dear diary thing and I think that's one of the challenges of journaling is that people think there is a perception that that is what it is. It's like a teenager dear diary thing but it's not about that for me, it's about cognitively you can't retain everything you experience. It's not like your memory is not a tape recorder, your senses don't video or record what's happening and then you recall it when you need to, so there could be a whole lot of stuff happening and going on that you're not aware of and it's only through the reflective aspect of it and capturing those reflections that you then start to try and make sense of what it is. I think that journaling aspect is hugely important. I am happy for you to say no, but I am curious about the, I'm not good enough narrative. What were you not good enough in comparison too? What were you not good enough against? What was that about? If you don't mind me asking.



Amy: I am happy to answer that. It's a really good question because I think it was never about comparing myself to other people, ever. I had an idea in my head of who I was and wanted to be and I just felt like I could never, I was just getting too far away from that and it felt like I was skimming life, if that makes sense. You are in the shallow end doing a little tiny bit of lots of different things to keep things going rather than what I really care about, doing great work and I couldn't ever give anything my full attention and energy. I always felt like I wasn't doing enough to what I wanted it to be. I realised I put that pressure on myself and I think you can get this sense of perfectionism can creep in which is very dangerous. I had to let go of that actually, that sense of trying to be perfect because no one's perfect and it's not achievable either. I think it was more my own idea of who I wanted to be and how I wanted to be rather than comparing myself to anyone or anything. I had aspirations of how I wanted things to develop to be and what you were saying earlier, I was getting in my own way basically. It was never that I was getting any feedback saying I wasn't good enough or that I looked at other people and thought I couldn't be that. I've always tended to have self-belief so it was a surprise to me when I started to feel negative about myself to be honest that I couldn't do it all. Now I look back, basically I just didn't look after myself. There was a bunch of other things of course that could have helped, whether you look at managers or support of the business. Things that are happening around you, but I think the thing that I learnt is, it has to come from yourself. This is the thing about mental wellness generally. I am not just talking about burnout here. You have to learn to look after yourself and to forgive your own short comings and you're only a human being and you start to build up resilience. The thing that started to turn it or was just the tipping point is we wake up with all these distractions. The first thing is you want to look at your phone, you see a bunch of emails, you're already now in this anxious state thinking I need to do this, I need to do that and I stopped doing that. So I stopped looking at my phone in the morning and I read a book called *The Obstacle Is the Way* and I think it is Ryan Holiday who writes it and it's basically a book which brings in more ancient philosophy called stoicism but it brings it into everyday life and the idea of it is really simple. You can influence your perception and your actions. There's loads of stuff you can't change in life, fortunately there's a bunch of stuff you can. There's always going to be good, there's always going to be bad, there's always going to be pain, there's always going to be elements of joy so it's how you perceive that and relate to that and how you except that to build resilience basically. I'm sure there's better ways of describing it but I just started to use that as a source of strength to look more objectively at what was feeling quite overwhelming at different times and to build some mental resilience really. So that was just the start of it and since then I have just started to learn really. You have to look after yourself. You have got to start to build awareness of what's good for you. What gives you the injection so you feel good. I don't mean oh yeah, I'm having a nice time, it's your energy. What gives you energy and what drains your energy and ensuring that you've got the right balance there because you are always going to have things that drain your energy and that can be just making decisions. It could be anything that requires you to focus and think about things. It could be emotional. Have got emotional demands on you at work and at home. It can be physical as well which relates to sleep. You kind of loose your day and your body so you start to realise right now I am depleted physically, emotionally. All the things you start to piece it together. You just have to learn to look after yourself. There is just not enough out there. We live in such a busy crazy world now where technology is everywhere nonstop. You are accessible, actually that's the other thing that I should mention. I was surprised also at how I found social life stressful because I would get to the end of my day. I had a bunch of emails that I needed



to get to. I had been back to back in meetings and I would always have all my work to do and this is a modern day problem, but everybody contacts you on Facebook, on Whatsapp. I would have group messages and there would be 200 messages. I just couldn't keep up with what my friends were talking about or doing. It was all these things build up. I think some people just reach a point where there are lots of things happening and they have to regain some control.

Phil: I could suggest that stress and social life and not being able to keep up, that reinforced the, I'm not good enough narrative.

Amy: Yes.

Phil: Because if I can't keep up I'm not a good enough friend or I'm not a good enough part of that social circle, because there's this whole conversation that I'm not contributing to and if I'm not contributing to it, the me that I know would contribute to that and they would have something to say, or they would be wanting to get involved. Well I'm not, so therefore I am not good enough. Would that be a...

Amy: Yes absolutely. Definitely, there's a real element of expectation and the role that you play in different parts of your life. That's definitely the case. I don't have kids and a family but I can imagine it's even more of a role where you have your family obligations as well as work and social life. I did some work when I did my MSC in the role of burnout. It's funny how these things happen. I was exploring the role of positive psychology which is much more, rather than focusing on the problem, what are the things that actually help influence and protect you from some of these negative things that can happen and it was about social identity and social support, which is the idea that when you are part of a group or a team or a business you internalise those values and if they align with you and social support which is your peers and people you can trust and relate to, these are aspects that can help protect and buff you from burnout. It's not absolute but it can help protect you. I had open ended questions I went back to that research really recently. I thought okay, I am going to look back and see what I learnt and the research did prove, it showed that if you are part of a team you connect with and if you have support in your peer groups within that team at work, then it does buffer burnout. I had isolated myself a bit because I had so much on. I actually realised I didn't have that so much. I had close confides but I hadn't had the time to draw on that resource which I did have, I hadn't used it. But when I went into the qualitative stuff, so written information that people had shared in the survey, I remembered at the time I was blown away by how much people shared when you actually ask questions around how is it? How are you? How it feeling and the relationship of those demands and the stress you are experiencing at work, with your family life. There is some really heart wrenching stuff in there of people feeling like they're not good enough and they are letting down their family, or they can't be good at both and there's this feeling of, you have to be this superwoman if you are a female or superman if you are male. I think probably the superwoman came out more in women because generally they felt more obliged to be the key caretaker so to speak at the time. So to be honest I find it fascinating and I'm actually really interested now to go back to that and I think we need to do more at work to address it and a lot of it is building awareness. There is a lot of attitudes out there. I think stress is a well-known concept. I think it can be unfortunately misunderstood and you get attitudes like they can't hack it here. This is



just what it's like blah blah blah and there is highly stressful roles, don't get me wrong. There's heaps of it in terms of medical professions that actually have shown the amount of emotional cognitive strain that they get but there's so much more to be done. There is not enough understanding of what burnout is and what the signs are and increasingly just from what I read it's a growing problem that is probably impacting lots of people and their performance and their health. Health problems, you are more than likely to experience all sorts of diseases if you are burnt out for a long time and you're right, it's entwined with what are the expectations. You are letting down your friends, or you are letting down your family because you will probably go home and get criticised. Your home late or you have forgotten something again and so you are always missing the mark for what you expect of yourself or what others do, if it gets that bad.

Phil: You mention that narrative if I am not good enough wasn't part of who you were and then became part of what's happening when you were in that burnt out kind of phase. Is it with you now?

Amy: No not at all and this is where I think I talked about yoga at the start. There is so much that you have to let go of I think to overcome difficulty and this isn't anything major. People go through much more difficult things, but I think regardless, no matter how big or small, you have to learn to like yourself and to forgive yourself and to just know you are doing your best all the time. It's them things that you can do to help insure you are managing yourself better basically. So no I don't feel that way anymore and I have made a bunch of changes that I think have been better for me all round. I think part of that is other people will say things to you to help you realise things, positive or negative but only you can be a true judge of where you are and what you need because it's all your own emotion basically and your own energy. So yeah, I feel much better in myself and interestingly people then notice it. They say oh you seem really energetic, you seem really well is the comment that you get. So you can put in positive things that make it possible, but the big thing is it is up to you do to that really. As much as all these things around you can build stress and burnout you have to learn to recognise it. Organisations have a massive role to play too.

Phil: I agree.

Amy: To ensure there is the right balance there because unfortunately as human beings we're by design we end up trying to do what's expected of us. We're social creatures and it can be taken advantage of by organisations that can lead to all sorts of problems. It is in their interest. That's what I'm really interested in now.

Phil: Okay I want to come back to that in a minute. I made some notes earlier on about something you said and I want to come back to it. I want to stick with and if you feel like I am being too personal then tell me, but I want to stick with that shift in the narrative because I guess I am coming from two different perspectives. I am coming from the conversation that I had with Amanda recently that I talked about in the introduction to the podcast. I am thinking about my own self-talk that I get in my head and also the conversations that I have with others as well. So changing that narrative from I'm not good enough to then being free of that, that is something that I think a lot of people really struggle with. So I would really like to know how did you do that? You mentioned yoga but how have you got from a point of I am doing my reflections, I'm capturing it in a journal



and what I'm hearing and seeing on the page is, I'm not good enough and I am not good enough in this way or that way and now that's something you don't have with you now. How did you go through that? What was the transition for you?

Amy: I am guessing it is different for everyone but I guess I drew my inspiration from, it sounds a bit deep but I did draw my own inspiration from stoicism because what that's doing, it's building your awareness of yourself. It's awareness of your emotions, how you are feeling, what you are thinking and it's not giving you a step by step guide by the way of this is going to make you brilliant and happy but it just gave me the strength to recognise when I was having a hard time or maybe why.

Phil: So what would be some of the stuff that you would do then? What would be an activity that you would do or a practise that would happen within that?

Amy: It's really hard to describe. Basically I just started to listen to snippets every single day. So I have become a big believer that there's this saying that you are the sum of the five people you spend the most time with. We are influenced by our environment and the triggers around us. It could be the advert you see on the TV. Even if it's on a subconscious level, all these things are adding to how you think subconsciously, so to talk more broadly before I talk about me. We are always being inundated by all these messages that you want to buy new things, that super models look like this, all the things that we know about. To be honest what I started doing is realising I can't just magically switch this. It doesn't just happen overnight. I have to change my environment and the triggers and the things that were stimulating my thinking every day to be better, to be more positive and that are going to help me just see and feel things in a different way. So I would first of all not look at my phone in the morning. That's a really practical thing. So I would not look at emails, nothing. The first hour of the day is your hour, last hour of the day, your hour. Don't let other things get in the way with your thinking. I listened to interesting books and podcasts and these stoic meditations so to speak every day. I didn't even need to be listening to it properly, it was just positive noise and narrative that are giving me a different perspective to what my brain are doing at the time. That was one of two things. The journal thing I have kept doing, even though I feel so much better. Every now and again you have a bad day and it creeps back in. You creep back into, life feels harder, I don't feel good again. I can't achieve... this sense of fear creeps in that you are not the person you are trying to be. So just by journaling it you start to realise it's happening because you started to change things around you. You catch it, so I notice that now and I've got to the point where I can spot it and I don't believe it anymore. I just see that this is my emotion and this is how I'm feeling and I'm like ha, that's interesting. That's what's going on right now and because I had been building gradually, it takes a long time, all these things that are positive, I don't see that as me anymore. Does that make sense, I just see it as, it's a state and you actually have to learn to let go and just recognise that you are doing your best and it's okay and it's good to like yourself. You just have to look after yourself and then the last thing is to try and remove judgement of other people and only rely on your own judgement of yourself basically. Only you know your journey and what you need for you, so it doesn't matter what other people think, it doesn't matter what people say, it doesn't matter if someone says to you, oh it will never happen. I don't think that it's a good idea or yeah, right you are more like this. People will box you in and have a view of you but don't let that define you, just focus on yourself. It is a daily practise. You can't not do it every day. Again I have ended up talking about psychology, but cognitive behavioural therapy is basically





you're based on that. Changing your thinking patterns. Who do you spend time with, are you around people who are actually inspiring you. Have you got things that you are working on, or that you are looking forward to you that add to who you are, your sense of purpose and that you enjoy. You are not doing things because you feel you have to and that you feel obliged to, these are all these things that add up. They are additive over time to you feeling better about yourself and not succumbing to this idea of I'm not good enough. I don't know if it ever completely is never there, but you have to learn to accept yourself basically. I think it is different for everyone but you can't do it on your own. You have to find sources of inspiration around you, get support, practise it every day in some shape or form and you just learn to build the awareness overtime and then you start to overcome it and you start to feel more of a sense of flow. You start to get the positive affirmation of the things that are actually meaningful to you. I am still on that journey but that's what I've found.

Phil: I don't think there's an end though. As humans we love our journey metaphors but I don't think there is ever an end to that journey because things change and life changes. As an example last year was probably the hardest year I've ever had mentally, from a mental health and wellbeing point of view. 2017 was by far and away the toughest year I have ever had. I've had difficult years and stressful years and so on but it was just really hard and it took a lot of effort and a lot of work to get through it and navigate it in a way where I felt well and some of that still translates into this year but did I intend to fall over ice skating and fracture a vertebrae in my back, no, but that's what happened. There was then a need to deal with what happened, the investigation to find out that's what had occurred, then the remedial action to fix it and I had to learn a whole new set of skills last year or re-learn or reapply some of the skills that I had learnt in the past. I don't think it's a journey that ever really ends.

Amy: No.

Phil: So we talked about different depletions. We talked about physical depletion in terms of sleep and the physical exertion of travel and work. We've talked about mental depletion in terms of concentration and attention and those sorts of things. We've talked about emotional depletion which culminated in you acting in ways that are different than you would normally be, being snappy, reacting to things as opposed to the calm that you would normally associate with you. Were there any other aspects that form part of that burnout for you?

Amy: I guess it might have been applied but perhaps not as closely as you... because you're focused on just doing what you need to do you end up conserving resources like your energy or trying to steal moments. So you end up doing things that you wouldn't normally do like I would go into the office and I would try and get there before people would get there because people became stressful, because people became distractions or people became interruptions to the stuff that I was trying to do. I actually started to withdraw.

Phil: That's really interesting. The way that you framed that was really interesting.

Amy: I like spending time with people but I found that I would withdraw. I would take myself away from people, so I would come in and go straight to a meeting room because I didn't want to see



anyone. I just needed to get what I needed to do done, because I knew if I didn't get it done then it's like a domino effect for the day and I would find it really stressful. I would go from I would be in a meeting and I would be walking to my next meeting and I'm now switching, okay I have been in with these people talking about these things, I am now moving into a completely different challenge or situation, personality, different mind-set of how I need to now put a hat on for. So I would be doing that and that is sacred when you're running until empty. That's a sacred period of time to get into the next bit to be prepared otherwise you get caught out. You turn up and the worst case situation is you're not prepared and you don't show up in the right way and no one wants to feel caught out like that. Because I was unavailable more, actually it meant that people would then seek you out more.

Phil: I was going to say...

Amy: They need you.

Phil: Yeah, yeah, you are hiding away from me, where are you?

Amy: Yeah, so they would actually come and walk with me from one meeting to the next and I would sometimes have more than one person because they needed something, so I created this bottle neck for myself where things were bottling up to me because I wasn't managing it. That's one of the additional things is when you're stressed and burnt out, your brain starts to become really focused on what do you need to do and the task and you can't think as big and as creatively and it's really hard to explain because unless you've gone through it, you kind of hear it and you're like well just change this or do less or delegate it to this person. It feels so obvious to say what that person needs to do, that's your whole psychology, everything in your body is chemically different and you're just in this narrow mind-set. Everything becomes about how you focus on those key things. I noticed I withdrew from people, I didn't want to be around people because I didn't like how I felt or I would just be exhausted because it's another emotional drain. You are using more of those resources that you have a limited supply of. You might need to save for the next meeting and sometimes you just couldn't do it. You would be drained in the meeting and you wouldn't be your best, you wouldn't be on point. So that was probably another element, is just how people and relationships that are normally positive actually start to feel like they're just adding to the stress basically and that you take yourself away.

Phil: I imagine if I try and link stuff together from what we have talked about that it creates like a paradox of I know you need my help and I really want to help you but I haven't got time to help you because if I don't help you, I can't do this X work or this project or these actions that I need to do. Which is the lesser of those two evils? Do I want to be the person that doesn't help somebody or do I want to be the person that doesn't deliver the work and then that reinforces the narrative of I'm not good enough because there is no way you can succeed there. There's no outcome from that scenario where your view of yourself is going to be a positive one. Because either I've let somebody down because I have not delivered the project or I have let somebody down because I have not given them the help that they need.



Amy: Exactly, I think you have hit the nail on the head there because you're continuously basically trading off what different situation and what that might mean and basically it gets to the point where you just feel like you're working 120% to keep whatever you're doing going but your failing at everything. That's what it feels like because you are only giving everything or everyone a little bit or you're having to trade off. You're never in a win, win. You're always in a sense of loose, loose and that's the thing I won't forget. I would start a day, look ahead at what I need to do and what my time was like and how I felt and I would just start it and it would be like taking a gigantic breath and thinking I don't know how I'm going to do today. It's not possible to do everything that I need to do and everything is critical and really important and you look back on it and think, it's just job, it's just work, come on, there is so many more important things in life. That's the thing, you lose all perspective when you're in it because you're just trying to keep things going. You do start to feel like your failing, everyone and everything. That's how it feels. The interesting thing is unless you knew me well you wouldn't necessarily know that, I'm just running around and doing what I need to do and people wouldn't know that. They would just see that I'm doing my job and I'm busy. Other people probably deal with it in different ways and people generally do have breakdowns and they have to stop work. I read an article literally only the other day of a senior HR person who is very well respected, very good and what she does and she's written about the fact that she has gone through that and her experience of that and it is all about how you have to look after yourself. You end up having to feel like you're trading off all the time on certain things at work and at home with different people.

Phil: If you can remember it, can you send me a link to that article, I'd like to put it in the show notes if that's alright.

Amy: Definitely I will send it to you and I am seeing more and more of that now which is really positive. People sharing their experiences and it is probably easier to do when you are senior leader maybe because you're there putting the voice out saying it's okay, but I think there is lots of people who hide it every day or whatever their struggle is. They don't get to talk about it. It's good to read these things to see that we are all human and people who you wouldn't expect are going through difficult times.

Phil: It's really interesting because, how do I frame it. Let's talk about it from a personal experience point of view. For a long time I didn't want anyone to know that I was struggling last year as an example. Not because I was scared of how I would be perceived. Instead of doing what it wasn't let's do what it was. So what it was, was I didn't feel like I was clear enough in myself about what was happening or what was going on so therefore I couldn't articulate it to anybody else and it got to October time. I did a blog post on LinkedIn which I called The Hush or The Race and I wrote it from a first person point of view of the emotions that I was feeling. I wrote it as if I was the tumultuous emotion that was running constantly in me and I found it really cathartic as a start but also it helped me because it was the first time I felt like I could articulate it well and then I was able to share it. So I agree with you, I think there are hundreds, thousands, hundreds of thousands of people struggling everyday with this sort of stuff and I think part of it is the stigma that is still around it. I think part of it is also the inability to articulate what it is, so I know that something is not right but I don't know what it is. I don't know what's not right but there's something that is just not right, right now and I can't say and articulate what that is right now. It's only afterwards, maybe not



completely afterwards but when you are in it, it's really hard to work with it and reflect on it and make sense of it because you are so in it. It's only when you can find some space or time to step out of it, even just for a minute that allows you to go oh wow, look at all that stuff that's happening over there, that's wow. That's amazing.

Amy: Yeah, I completely agree. It feels like you can't quite grasp what it is, it's just you're in it. Everything is cloudy and it's almost not quite realising what's going on yourself for a period of time until it gets to the point where something else is giving you feedback on it, whether it's a person, whether it's realising you haven't done stuff that you would normally do. Whether it's you changing and lots of people end up eating more unhealthily or drinking more, all these things add up but the other thing which I was thinking as you were talking is there are certain professions that have been more well documented and researched by people who are dealing with this, nurses and medical professions.

Phil: Yes or emergency services as well.

Amy: Yeah and it made me think, it made me reflect on my own experience but also probably what other people feel is you are in it and maybe you haven't even quite grasped exactly what it is, you just know that it's hard and that you don't feel good and you don't really know why and it's just hard, is the sense of you are stuck with it. You don't see what can change because you are so caught up in it that you don't see the way out. You are just dealing with whatever demands are in front of you and that becomes your main focus. Do you see what I mean, you don't have any other capacity to help you get out of it and that must be really hard if you've got a job which there maybe is less flexibility and it's just the nature of the work and is that being looked at enough. I definitely felt that over a period of time. I just saw my massively long list of things to do and it just felt like I didn't have any energy to work out how to get out of it. So all my energy was I need to be as best as I can at these things and then obviously you have a break and a break helps but actually burnout can take up to two years to recover from because of the physiological effects it has and mental affects it has on your overall wellbeing.

Phil: I agree.

Amy: The break just becomes restoration. That's what Michael, my other half would say, I would come home on the weekends and I would be exhausted. All I needed to do was recover and it's not like I wouldn't do things, I don't know if you are listening and thinking god, you're a mess. To be honest most people wouldn't know, I would come across still okay and I would still do lots of things but it is just how it feels. You lose the space of being creative and all of that and you are right, I think you had a hard time last year, how do you process that and what do you do with that? Actually that's where writing does actually help or talking to someone.

Phil: And it's part of the reason that I continued the podcast all the way through last year, the podcast was something that gave me joy. It was a chance for me to be (a) I could be at home so physically I didn't have to travel around to do it, I could be sat down at my dining room table as I am now, but it also meant that I could have really interesting conversations. Some great insight with lots of different people and it was an opportunity for me to do some of the stuff that I loved but not



having to worry about some of the physical activity that goes with it. And I agree with you, the restorative part is vitally important. Someone I know really well they got to a point of burnout and when they got signed off from work they were sleeping for 14-15 hours a day. Sleepover night, sleep loads during the day and they would still be absolutely exhausted by the end of the day and it was almost like the body was saying, right now you have stopped, I need time to build it all back up again. You depleted your reserves so much that actually I need to repair and to do that I need you to rest and that's the physical restorative part and then there's the mental and emotional restorative part which is still an ongoing challenge for the person I am thinking of. They are still having to work really hard to restore that sense of self, that sense of identity, that sense of being capable of what they are doing and failing others or failing themselves and those sorts of things.

Amy: It's really interesting because there was something, just talking about that restoration and recouping what you need to feel better, I read an article and I can try and find it again and share it which was...I can send a list, I've got lots.

Phil: That sounds good.

Amy: This one I thought was a really interesting angle, it was something called when a benefit isn't a benefit and it was basically pointing out an organisation who with the best intentions created a benefit, which meant if you hadn't been off sick from your job for six months you got a free duvet day and is a nice idea but actually what this person was saying was that's not a benefit. A sick day shouldn't be something that you shouldn't do, if you are not feeling well and it could be obviously you are genuinely, you caught a bug or something, but a sick day could also be you just need to have a rest. You have overworked and you're not on form and if you don't do that, you don't take time off to recoup you get this presenteeism effect, which is you go to work but you're not really being effective and so many days get lost to that. It's not good for people obviously or organisations but it was just a really interesting article to say actually this isn't right to have this condemning sick days and you get a free duvet day and I am not saying duvet days are bad, to be honest that sounds great, but it's not a bad thing to have a sick day. I started thinking recently what do we really mean by a sick day and should you feel guilty for having a sick day and I think that's the thing, people feel guilty for not working unless it's not working unless it's not physical sickness.

Phil: I agree completely and I obviously don't work in an organisation, but if I think about a lot of the people that I do work with, the idea of them ringing up their boss and saying I just can't concentrate today, I'm that tired, I'm that exhausted, I've been thinking that hard about all the different work I have been working on, I have been working that hard I just can't come in today. I need to take a day off and I will be back in tomorrow. The expectation would be either, you take that as holiday, not sick, or it would be you are incapable of doing your job. Phoning in sick for mental depletion, whether that be through stress or anxiety or whatever that is, it's just not a credible thing to do. It's just not okay and that's where, if I did some analysis of absence reasons within organisations I would bet my mortgage on the fact that mental health only is recorded as a reason for absence when it is long-term absence. When it is a week or more, I would put my mortgage on the fact that nobody rings up and says I'm off sick today for mental health reasons. I think it's the reason why people are sick, off a lot, but I don't think it's the reason they would give. They would give a stomach bug, flu,



cold, headache, migraine because those physical ailments are okay to be off with but mental ailments aren't.

Amy: Yeah, I would agree. It's funny you would say that because there is some interesting statistics which have come my way as I have been looking into this and trying to understand it better. The office of national statistics, I don't know what they have based this on, it might be as you said, is it long term sickness or absence or is it being measured in a different way, but 40% of work related illness cases report to be stress, anxiety or depression related. One in two of all working days lost are due to ill health linked to stress, anxiety or depression, so basically half of lost working days are because people aren't feeling well in themselves and some of that might be more clinical work and that is obviously more extreme but a lot of mental health issues can be caused by work. Burnout and mental health is linked.

Phil: Yeah absolutely.

Amy: It is crazy. It just got me really thinking, okay well what does that mean. Do you what I mean? I don't know if there is an answer to that yet and is there work being done around that and how we just organise our work places and help people and manage and have more flexibility in that obviously, flexible working helps regardless. I'm just not hearing enough of seeing enough in how we tackle that. It's quite shocking really, how many sick days and how many working days are lost to this.

Phil: Like I said I don't know, I would have to read the ONS Report but I would wager that the reason we get to one in two is things like anxiety, depression, stress, they account for so many days and part of the reason I set up Emotion at Work. Part of the reason I call my company the work I do is because what ends up happening is we reach the catastrophe point. We reach the point where somebody can't cope anymore and then the system triggers to say right, now we'll give you some help and for me that's just arse about face. It really is. I am going to link it back to part of your story earlier on, I love my work, I enjoy my work, my work gives me joy and passion and I work really hard because of the work I do. At some point, I feel like, whether this is fair to say or not, I feel like somebody in that organisation needed to say to you slow down or stop because you're in it and you can't see that. It's one of those things where the narrative at the moment around the workplace, whether it would be Simon Sinek, whoever it is, give us purpose, give us meaning, give us work that brings us joy and we are passionate about and we can really engage in and we feel like it really matters, but what's not being said is that could cause real big issues for people. Because they love their job so much, because what they do matters so much, because it has so much meaning they then prioritise that over themselves and they don't give themselves the permission or the opportunity or whatever that is to be well and look after themselves too. So it is all very well getting a workplace full of people that are passionate and determined but the risk is that they will then overwork and then burn themselves out. Just like the net result of absence and burnout is the same as it would have been if they were in an organisation where they were being micromanaged. Where they were expected to do too much or they were being ridiculed if they left early, or they were being negatively rated if they went to their child's or a caregivers important meeting, or whatever that might be. The net result is the same but I don't think that is really talked about either.





Amy: Yeah, I find that really interesting. There's a few things that spring to mind. One is, so absolutely, I think if I really had someone who seriously called it out with me and helped with that and it's not just calling it out, it's actually working it through with that person and getting some practical things. The problem is when you are in that space, like I said, the mental horse power to think is already being used up on so many things, so you need someone to actually help really break it down and simplify it and make it easier for you. So you are not having to use more of your energy to fix it. It helps where someone can push their way in a bit to help you but you have to be open to that. You have to be ready for that. So totally agree with that and it also got me thinking how I was at the British Red Cross the other day and obviously they have a lot of volunteers and fundraisers and people who get very, very emotionally invested in their work because they care about the cause they are working for. They go off to other countries and are in these very difficult situations with poverty and war and very challenging circumstances, but she did mention because I was talking about stress at work and some of the things we've been talking about. At the British Red Cross they have planned holiday days that you have to take when you are in that world because you don't want to stop. When you love what you do and you see a bigger problem than yourself, you actually can start to compromise on your own self and rest and you exhaust and burn yourself out so they actually plan that in, which I think was quite interesting. The other thing I was thinking as you were talking was, this is a story of me talking about my experience and what I have learnt and how that was and I liked my job. I liked my company and I had meaning to my work. Overtime that starts to feel a little bit more challenging when you are in that space but overall I did. What if you are going through that and you don't love what you do. That blows my mind. Imagine really hating it. You're burnt out, you're feeling everything that we have just talked about and you don't see a way out or you feel that you have to, or it's work that you don't see the point of and where do you go with that. That's a sad thing to think about and hopefully there's not too many cases of that. Unfortunately I think there are probably more than we realise, but my advice is if you are in that position you have to just stop and get a support network around you and start to seek help in either people or in reading things that are going to help or journaling or whatever it is. You just have to stop because the thing that I found is I kept thinking I just need to get over this bit. If I just get over this point then I can deal and make this better but it just ends up carrying on because you have actually started to become tolerant of your own stress and burnout, even though it feels horrendous. You have to just stop and take a rain check and talk to someone, even if you don't quite know how to articulate it and I think like you said that's the challenge but you have to find somewhere to start.

Phil: And that circles us around really nicely, back to the beginning where I said first week of March, that's when it stops.

Amy: (Laughs) I know back to you now. Yeah, but you do, you can't sustain it, that's the point. The longer that you do, you rationalise in your head that you just need to crack on and do it but it starts to affect your productivity and how effective you are. I don't know if you have found that actually Phil? This is what I found, if I was on point optimal health and energy I would be able to do a certain task in 30 minutes and it would be high quality. When I was feeling exhausted it could take me an hour and a half, that same task because I would be getting distracted. I just wouldn't feel as motivated by it. All these things, so if you think about the mathematics of that, just taking a break for an hour a day that you maybe feel like you don't have time for, or just introducing more breaks



regularly, just 15 minutes, go for a walk. That's one thing I also did, I stopped and I would just break for 15 minutes, it actually gives you back energy to tackle things so you can do it quicker.

Phil: Yeah I agree. Alright, so I am going to start to pull us together and wrap up if that's alright. For a few different reasons, (1) I really need to go to the loo, (2) is I think we have covered an awful lot of ground today and I am so grateful that you have been so open and are happy to share both how it felt at the time and what all the different aspects were. What your coping mechanisms and strategy were and all those sorts of things. It's been a really valuable conversation so thank you very much. I am very grateful. If you could send me any links to those articles, you said you have got quite a few so if you could send me the links to those, that would be great and I could pop them into the show notes. Is there anything else that you want to add or pull together before we close.

Amy: Not massively, just thank you Phil for having me on. I've really enjoyed talking about it and it's cathartic just working it through. I hope for anyone listening, if you're in that situation, it might have helped raise your awareness in some way of what you are going through, to think about or if you don't, maybe you've never been in this situation, but you might know people or recognise some of the signs so you can start to see that so you can take some action. That's probably it, it's been really cool being on this podcast. Thanks Phil.

Phil: Thank you and if people want to get hold of you, what would be a good way to get hold of you? A twitter handle?

Amy: Yes I'm on LinkedIn, I'm on Twitter. I think my Twitter is amy\_c\_king so feel free to get in touch or Amy Charlotte King on LinkedIn. They're probably the best ways to ping me a note if you would like to talk.

Phil: Wonderful I will put links to both those profiles in the show notes as well. Alright thank you so much for sharing your experience, sharing your story with us Amy and it's been really great to have you on the podcast so thank you very much.