

Exploring how we can master ourselves by looking at how experts say it is possible with your host Suswati Basu.

Intro music

Welcome to season 2 episode 71 of How To Be...with me Suswati as your timid presenter, guiding you through life's tricky topics and skills by reading through the best books out there.

Being busy is often seen as a badge of honour and a marker of self-worth, with a lack of leisure time viewed as a direct indication of status. However, over-scheduling yourself can negatively affect your emotional and physical health, as well as your ability to maintain healthy relationships. According to a study in the Journal of Consumer Research, Silvia Bellezza and company say an individual's perceived level of busyness may be heavily connected to their self-worth, as well as how others view their status. But at times this can lead to burnout.

So how do we stop being over-busy?

Here are Alexis Haselberger, a time management and productivity coach who helps people do more and stress less through coaching, workshops and online courses; Andrea Preziotti, founder and writer at Modern Vintage Ink, LLC; and Amanda Craven, an accredited and licensed clinical hypnotherapist, life coach, psychologist and author based in the UK with a global client base on their views.

**ALEXIS HASELBERGER:** 80% of working adults feel like they are too busy and like they never have enough time. One of the biggest culprits is over commitment. We say yes to more things than we can actually handle, and that leaves us in a vicious cycle of never feeling like we have enough time. So I'm going to share with you one of the techniques that I use in my own life and with my clients to help make sure that we do not overcommit. And it is called the heck yes test. So when something brand new is coming at you, whether it's a new opportunity, an invitation, a new task, a new project, whatever it is, there are a couple of questions that you want to ask yourself before you say yes. Right? We don't want to say yes by default. The first question is, is this a heck yes? Am I really excited to do this or do I really need to do this? This is essential for my job, for my family, etc. Or is it a heck yes? Now, if it is a heck yes, then we move on to the next question. And if it's not, we say no. If it is a heck yes, then we're going to ask ourselves, do I have time for this thing in my schedule, in my life? And if you do have time for it, then great. You can say yes to that. If you do not have time for it, then you're going to ask yourself a third question. And that question is, is there anything that's on my plate today that I would remove, that I could remove, that I want to remove to make room for this new thing, whatever that is? If you can't. If there's nothing else you can get rid of to make room for this, then you got to say no. But if there is something that you would remove, then you can say yes. And you can get to work removing that thing and replacing it with this new thing. When you use the heck yes test, you stop the vicious cycle of over commitment and you set yourself up for a more realistic and more fulfilled way of using your time.

**ANDREA PREZIOTTI:** So what I have done to ensure that busyness is not all consuming is that I go to bed early and I wake up early and I take a moment to myself before plunging into my work and my to-do lists. And I am trying to be more proactive about meditating every day. But sometimes I find it's just enough to be present in my head, in my space, and welcome the day and all that it has to bring. And that for me, that starts with no expectations. So that every moment is either a gift or a lesson. And so it shall be.

**AMANDA CRAVEN:** I'm going to share a top tip that I practise myself and that I share with all my clients. And this is to create a selfcare bag or a self care pack that I have. I keep it in the bottom of my wardrobe and I have a ton of stuff in there, including playlists of movies and music that I find uplifting. Some, uh, books with, um, inspirational quotes in, um, I have a colouring set, I have a mindful colouring book and some colouring pencils and a few little bits of luxury toiletries. You know, the sorts you can get free samples of are really good for popping in there. And I create ten minute blocks for myself. So I, uh, work from home and it can sometimes be good to transition from my office space into my home life. And I will often take myself into my bedroom and dip into my selfcare bag and choose something to do just to create that partition, really, between work and home life. And 10 minutes really is enough, if that's all you have, if that's all you can make. And that leads me on to the second part of the question, the harms of never having time. We always have time. Not having enough time is an illusion and it just means that we're not prioritising the things that we say we don't have time for. So if something is important to you and selfcare time for yourself is absolutely vital for each and every one of us, and we all deserve to have that, then that needs to be prioritised. Whether it's going to the gym, whether it's carving out a ten minute blocks for you to just sit and do something that brings you joy, that has to be put into your calendar and that has to be protected in order to keep you healthy and well.

(Back to host)

Our first book is from Dutch psychologist, author and an expert on stress management Thijs Launspach. He teaches at The School of Life Amsterdam, is a trainer and keynote speaker on stress and burnout and writes a weekly column for a national newspaper in the Netherlands. In *Crazy Busy: Keeping Sane in a Stressful World*, Launspach examines why we often work ourselves to the bone and what we can do to prevent this. He explains how to cope with stress and create more peace and calm in your life. He draws on the latest scientific knowledge, the methods used by experts and the stories told by those who have learned the hard way what stress can do to both body and mind. All to provide you with the answer to the question: how can you free yourself from a life of stress? He was kind enough to speak to me so here is a snippet but find the full interview on [www.howtobe247.com](http://www.howtobe247.com) or on the YouTube channel.

**THIJS LAUNSPACH:** So uh, the Dutch version of it, um, was actually pre-COVID. But I'm afraid to say that COVID didn't really solve the stress problem to say the least. So I think it's only become more relevant in our day and age because we live in a stressful world, as the title says. And there's just no going around it. And it's not entirely your problem either. And it's not necessarily bad to be a bit stressed every now and again or to be a bit busy every, uh, now and

again. And it's just perfectly natural. But it is something you should watch out for, especially when you sort of tip over into the chronic kind of stress, the bad kind of stress. So yeah, so it was a good time, uh, I think, to write this book because I think these skills are skills that we all need at a certain point, especially in our modern day of working and living well. The interesting thing is, I think the word burnout or the word combination burnout means different things to different people. Um, so actually we have a lot of people that are, um, in the Netherlands nowadays that are absent from their jobs because of prolonged chronic stress and that's what we tend to call burnout. But uh, it's something that's more severe than what you in English would call burnout. But there have been times when I was a little bit burnt out where I was pitying myself a bit because I was that busy. I was just doing multiple projects at the same time and I wasn't very pleasant to be around as a person. I wasn't very pleasant company for myself either. So uh, I think this was mostly, well, m, I'm an entrepreneur and a trainer so um, I take on my own work, uh, and I do really like my work and love the projects that I'm involved in. But then all of these projects combined tend to make for a very busy agenda. So this is something that I encounter weekly, let's say. But I do have the tools now, especially after researching the book, uh, to sort of monitor myself quite tightly, which is something that researching stress did for me. So I'm a psychologist, as she said. Uh, so we use sort of guidebooks for psychological illnesses, and it's not in one of those. And there are sort of different meanings to the word burnout. So the meaning that I take in my book is the following: you have stress, right? And that's something we encounter on, let's say, a daily basis. Doesn't necessarily have to mean that there's something completely wrong with you. It just has to do with the way we are working. It's quite usual or quite normal to have maybe one or two days, uh, a week in which you feel a little bit overstressed. I would say that's sort of typical. But when that's multiple days a week, or there's no getting out of the stress mode, let's say, or the alarm mode, that tends to be quite unhealthy for you. So it has all kinds of consequences. So you make worse decisions about your health, you tend to sleep a lot worse, uh, you tend to get more vulnerable for illnesses, all of those things, right? So those are all consequences of chronic stress. And if you have a prolonged period of chronic stress, let's say a couple of months for some people, it's even longer, then you run the risk of really getting to a burnout kind of situation, which is basically your body stepping on the emergency exit or, um, during the emergency brake. So you can sort of keep up a pattern of chronic stress for a long time, but there comes a point in which your body just doesn't respond as it should anymore. So when you're in burnout or in a burnout sort of state, you tend to be absent from your job. You tend not to be able to fulfil your daily responsibilities because of a prolonged period of chronic stress. And usually that takes about a couple of weeks or a couple of months to sort of recover from to give your stress, uh, system the rest it needs before you can slowly reintegrate in your usual day. So that's what I'm talking about when I'm talking about burnout. Um, so it's a stress related injury, let's say, for most people. Used to be something that you trade in your time for a salary. Uh, nowadays that isn't enough. And we sort of take our identity from our job as well. So it doesn't have to be just a proper job. It has to be something that fulfils us and makes us whole. And it's something that should be our purpose in life as well. And there's not necessarily something wrong with that, unless that keeps you from taking proper care of yourself because you're just working too hard all the time. And it was interesting you mentioned the word workaholic, which is a word that was quite common in the use, but it just, uh, about disappeared from our language. And that's not because we are less workaholic now, but I would

say it's because we all tend to be a bit workaholic every now and again. But yes, so work is more than ever, part of our identity and part of who we are. And it has all kinds of good consequences and good things involved. But also when it takes away from the time that you have to recover from your job, it tends to become a little bit dangerous. Uh, just let me add this. There's nothing wrong with working hard. This is m one of the misconceptions about stress. There's nothing wrong with working hard or with the, uh, occasional bow to stress, but you do have to be careful for a prolonged period of chronic stress. That's what you have to look out for. Yes, that's the million pound question. Right? How do we stop being busy all the time? In which I want to reiterate the fact that sometimes being busy is the right thing to do when it's important. When you're doing sort of an important project, or you have something that you have to give your all, then it's often the right choice to be busy. And there's not a lot wrong with that, as long as you take care of yourself and sort of recover in between bouts of stress. That's I think the most important thing. But I would say one of the ways that we sort of can achieve that is doing away with our maximising idea that we can sort of be everything and have to keep our options open and do multiple things at the same time. That's just the wrong way of going about things. And there's a bit of just the technology involved and we have to find out ways to use these. Um, and we're just finding out those ways. Um, and we're just finding out the etiquette there. Um, but we should sort of there is a couple of things that you can do. You cannot take your phone into the bedroom, for example, or not take your phone to family time, uh, and meals. Those kind of things really actually help. And it's about the things that you well, the agreements that you have with your family and friends as well, and, um, with your partner, about when you are fully present. And it doesn't have to be all the time, but at least having some time when you're fully present is really important, I would say.

(Back to host)

Launspach says back in the 1930s the economist John Maynard Keynes had a vision. He predicted that in the future we would only have to work 15 hours a week. Unfortunately this did not come true. Employers and companies instead discovered they had the opportunity to scale up using the same number of workers, which meant that they could actually produce more.

As a result, goods began rolling off the conveyor belt at lightning speed and productivity went through the roof. And the poor workers? They were condemned to working increasingly longer shifts, raising their production goals and dealing with micromanaging oversight. And these technology works in a similar vein. Now that people can work from home, there appears to be less work-life balance.

Hence Launspach addresses the workaholic culture that we have. Our work has become more stressful because:

- we do more overtime and allow work to impinge on our free time;
- the line between work and free time has become blurred;
- we believe we should always be contactable;
- our work is demanding more and more effort and expertise from us;
- our work is constantly changing and change can be very stressful;

- e-mail takes up a lot of our time, often at the expense of our actual priorities.

Research has shown that people who check their mail only three times a day are happier, more efficient and less stressed than people who check their e-mail continuously throughout the day. This suggests that you can cut your stress level dramatically simply by checking your mail less often: for example, early in the morning, after lunch and at the end of the day. Let's be honest, before the invention of e-mail no one spent the entire day in the hall waiting for the post to drop through the door.

Next he addresses the fact we seem to always be in a hurry. And it would do us no harm at all to substitute our FOMO, which is Fear of Missing Out more often for our FOBO: Fear Of Burning Out. You can reduce your daily stress levels by:

- letting go of the idea that you ought to experience as much as you can all of the time;
- making clear choices about what is worth your time and what is not;
- thinking long and hard about which choices are worth devoting a lot of your time to;
- paying less attention to the dictator in your pocket ie. your smartphone.
- minimising the number of things in your head that have to be organised, as they can quickly eat up all of your energy.

Launspach says one of the main sources of stress is the many different devices we use throughout the day. Our telephones, laptops and tablets overload us with information, even when we're not looking for it. Once you receive a notification it will stay in your head until you do something with it – that's just the way our brains are wired – including when you are busy doing something else. Turning off all notifications will result in fewer interruptions, less switching and consequently less stress. You will still have access to all the information, but only when you decide to access it yourself.

He also recommends training yourself to write down things that occupy your mind instead of storing them in your memory. The emptier your head, the more space you will have for the stuff that really counts.

You can choose to lead a less busy and hectic life, according to the author. He says you can create a less chaotic mind by:

- eliminating 'I have to' and taking control of your own life;
- eliminating or outsourcing tasks instead of putting them off until the last minute (procrastination eats up heaps of energy);
- knowing when something has to be 100% perfect and when 'good enough' is really good enough;
- knowing what falls under your responsibility and, more crucially, what doesn't;
- being prepared to set boundaries and to say 'no' when you need to.

This is where Launspach says that being 'good enough' is good enough. Stress is often the result of feeling overwhelmed by your work. This is especially true if you happen to be a perfectionist: it is impossible to do everything perfectly and extremely quickly at the same time. Try experimenting with lowering the bar in terms of what you demand of yourself. Chances are that others will not even notice – if you're a perfectionist, your personal standards are probably a lot higher than what others generally expect from you. 'Good enough' is good enough: this is true more often than you might think.

Unfortunately, a lot of stress responses come from a primitive aspect of ourselves. As a result, we suffer greatly from stress nowadays because:

- our stress system stems from a time when it had to decide how to react to a dangerous situation in a matter of milliseconds: fight, flight or freeze;
- there is a mismatch between this kind of fight-or-flight reaction and the types of situations that cause us stress nowadays;
- we spend too much time stuck in 'alarm mode';
- modern life forces us to deal with different kinds of stressors that often lead to much longer periods of stress;
- the combined stressors in our work and personal lives often make our baseline stress level quite high, causing us to become stressed even quicker when we are faced with a stressor.

Hence our best option is to breathe. By becoming more conscious of how you breathe you can lower your stress level in a matter of minutes. Breathing deeply slows down your heart rate and lowers your blood pressure, which results in a less troubled mind. You can delay or even eliminate your stress response simply by doing a few breathing exercises. It helps just to breathe calmly in through your nose and out through your mouth for a few minutes. Launspach suggests try breathing in less frequently but more deeply using the 4-7-8 technique: inhale for four seconds, hold your breath for seven seconds and exhale for eight seconds. Sounds simple, but it works like a charm.

Burnout syndrome first appeared as an 'occupational phenomenon' in the World Health Organisation's International Classification of Diseases in 2019. Burnout is not granted the same status, however, in the diagnostic manual for psychiatrists and psychologists but is listed instead as an 'adjustment disorder'. Burnouts are now an accepted part of modern life even though it clearly shouldn't. However, burnout is:

- the 'last stop' on a person's stress journey and like an injury to your stress system;
- a state that forces you to take a complete break to recover from all the pent-up stress;
- often the result of years of pushing your body to the limit on the strength of willpower alone;
- usually characterised by many peaks and troughs, including disappointments and valuable insights;
- treatable given the right amount of rest and phased reintegration into your work.
- And it certainly isn't a sign of weakness.

Research has shown that most people 'know' how to combat stress. Nevertheless, despite this knowledge, the majority of us fail to do what is required. With regard to stress, there are two main reasons: 1) because what we want in the short term often contradicts our wishes for the long term; and 2) because we are very good at telling ourselves tall tales. These are some suggestions from the author to figure out our warning signs:

- giving your body what it needs: proper maintenance with regard to sleep, diet, rest and exercise;
- taking care of yourself as if you were someone else who has entrusted their care to you;
- learning to recognise your warning signs at an early stage;
- taking action by adjusting your workload and cancelling appointments;
- when necessary, executing a contingency plan with measures designed to combat stress.

Stress does different things to different kinds of people. While one person may suffer headaches, another will experience pain in their neck and shoulders. Others have trouble sleeping or feel like they are always in a hurry. Some become cynical or develop a temper. Launspach says it is essential that you learn to recognise your own warning signs and react appropriately when required. It is only when you know how stress affects you that you can react in an effective manner. Your physical fitness has a major effect on how you feel. If you don't take care of your body, you will automatically experience more stress than when you are rested and fit. That's why one of the first steps when tackling stress is: take good care of your body, especially when you feel like you don't have the time to do so.

Try experimenting with the noble art of cancelling stuff. You don't have to stick to your appointments simply because they are in your diary. It's okay to cancel things, as long as you do this diplomatically and in a timely manner. And who knows, the other person might be just as relieved as you are when you do...

The emptier your mind, the less stress you will experience and the more time and space you will have for the stuff that really matters. Empty your mind by:

- spending your time on the things that really matter and ignoring the trivial stuff;
- transferring as much as you can from your brain onto (digital) paper so that you can use your brain for the things it was designed to do;
- setting clear goals and focusing on development goals instead of performance goals;
- learning how to plan properly, create and maintain a clear overall picture and adjust your schedule when necessary;
- spending the least amount of time possible on e-mails and devising clever ways of doing so.

There is a lot more to planning than simply making a list or adding dates to a calendar. A good plan involves creating an overview, setting priorities and making sure the most important things always get done. Ideally, it allows you to concentrate fully on whatever you are doing at the moment. And that helps immensely when it comes to keeping a clear head.

Finally, in the busy and demanding times we live in, your attention is actually a kind of superpower. Improving your powers of concentration is something that can be done at home and at work. You can reclaim your attention by:

- doing exercises such as mindfulness to train your brain and become more aware of what is going on in the here and now;
- engaging in short periods of intense concentration during which no one can disturb you and you can be super-productive;
- organising your working day better, for example by using the pomodoro method;
- using your smartphone and laptop as tools for improving your attention.

When the pressure is on it is essential that you can concentrate on whatever happens to be your top priority at that particular moment. In these days of constant distraction, being able to focus your attention is like a superpower. Luckily, there are ways to train your ability to focus. Mindfulness exercises can be a great help. Here's one simple exercise: go to the window and sit and stare outside for ten minutes. When you find yourself becoming distracted by your own thoughts, refocus your attention on whatever it was you were looking at.

Before we get on to the next book, here is parenting teenagers expert and psychologist Angela Karanja, Anna Hamill, who owns a small business called And Hope Designs, and Founder and CEO at Best D Life - Helping You Find the Bliss in Your Busy, Daniela Wolfe on their thoughts.

**ANGELA KARANJA:** Society that tells us that our value is in the business, we've got to be very careful about being trapped into this busyness syndrome. It robs us first and foremost, the ability to look after ourselves. We've got to be intentional about taking breaks and resting. The truth is, each one of us has 24 hours a day. And unless we are intentional and direct those hours to exactly what we want to do, we can end up being used and misused by the business mindset. Imagine if those beautiful, high powered motor racing cars never had planned pit stops. What would happen? They'll break and underperform. Do you know, I normally say it's okay to have those planned moments where you do nothing but brief. But here is the thing most people are afraid of doing nothing, yet it's in those moments of doing nothing, those moments of being at rest that our bodies and minds get into that state of um, homeostasis and that's a great space for healing, repairing and even better creativity and subsequently better productivity.

**ANNA HAMILL:** I have a few strategies to keep myself from being too busy. First, I limit my children's extracurricular activities so I'm not running with them to various places constantly. They each do one thing and I'm much less likely to forget. With four kids, that's enough. I make todo lists in my diary each day which are limited to three things. By having these and a list of everything I have committed to for the week in a master list on the opposite page, it helps me know how much I can say yes to without getting stressed. Finally, I guess how many events I can take on without risk of burnout and adjust year on year depending on how things went. I'm intentional in prioritising rest, family and my health, mental and physical and learn from mistakes. For instance, I used to be a wedding photographer and one year I took on eight weddings. I realised that was too much. For the following years I only took on six. Now, as a

shop owner I do markets and pop ups and I have seven this year. If that's too many, I'll cut back next year. I've learnt that if I take on too much I get really stressed, anxious and struggle to know where to begin. I also don't sleep as well and don't enjoy much of what I've taken on.

**DANIELA WOLFE:** These dangers are both mental and physical mentally in that it can lead to low self esteem from not meeting expectations, anxiety, depression and even burnout. Physically it can cause muscle tension, fatigue and insomnia headaches as well as an overall compromised immune system which could lead to long term chronic illnesses. So what I like to do to keep from being too busy is to look at my calendar a week in advance and see what can I possibly eliminate or delegate. If a day looks a little bit heavier, can I outsource anything such as dinner or postpone something that's not as urgent so that there's some space between the different tasks I do have to do? I also make sure I always build in my free time. For me, I personally book in my day with a consistent morning and PM routine so I don't get lost in the shuffle.

(Back to host)

Our final book is from Dr. Jacinta M Jimenez, who is an award-winning psychologist and board certified leadership coach. The Burnout Fix: Overcome Overwhelm, Beat Busy, and Sustain Success in the New World of Work is a practical guide to thriving in the modern workplace. Here she is

**JACINTA M. JIMENEZ:** I think it's that people don't have the tools. I feel like they just were not taught. I wish if I could redesign education I'd be like let's have introspection tools and emotional intelligence and all these things. And I think • um, if. We had the tools to do the self exploration where it doesn't feel as scary or a partner like a coach. It would be so different. And then society just isn't set up to allow us to pause ever. We're constantly busy. I, um, talk about my book Productivity. It is like we are just constantly feeling like we need to be productive or move or go. And stopping and pausing and having space to even sit with your thoughts is almost like a luxury nowadays. And it's heartbreaking for me because I feel like we cannot enter into a new world of work and solve some of the world's biggest problems if we aren't pausing. And I feel like the world would be such a better place if we were all able to do this work, um, to look inward. And it takes work though. And so that's where I get really, really like I'm not going to jump out of my chair excited about coaching at scale because if we have people that are helping others do this internal work at scale, there can be big shifts where people are pausing and really thinking about what is meaningful, what do we want? How do we want our children, • uh, to live? What kind of world do we want our children to live in? Um, these deeper things and running from the next thing to the next obligation to the next obligation.

(Back to host)

As we all know, the nature of work has changed considerably over the past couple of decades. And, as a result, modern workplaces are in constant flux; they're having to adapt to new technologies, expanding global trade, and frequent restructuring.

One of the unfortunate consequences of all this change and uncertainty is an epidemic of burnout. Employees often work long hours, hustling to get ahead, but in the process they're losing touch with their inner compass.

In grad school at Stanford, Dr. Jacinta Jiménez was a typical straight-A student. The child of first-generation immigrants, she'd internalised the message that hard work was the secret to success. But one day, it all came tumbling down. She got a call from her mother that her brother had been hospitalised.

Jiménez ended up needing to play a big role in his care along with balancing her dissertation writing, lab work, and other responsibilities. But instead of adjusting her schedule or asking for support, she reasoned that she could get through it by just hustling harder, working smarter, and eliminating social activities.

Soon, she became completely exhausted. She lost all pleasure in her work and struggled to get up in the morning. In short, she started experiencing burnout.

As the burnout epidemic shows, grit isn't enough to survive and thrive in the modern workplace. In 2019, the World Health Organisation officially classified burnout as a major global health challenge. And a recent Deloitte workplace study found that 77 percent of the employees interviewed had experienced burnout. Workplace stress has created unsustainable cycles of employee turnover and absenteeism, and it's a contributing factor in 120,000 deaths every year in the United States.

Dr Jimenez says anyone entering the modern workplace should assume that burnout is one of the greatest risks that they'll face. This may sound fatalistic, but it's actually pragmatic and empowering. With this knowledge, employees can take proactive strategies to foster resilience and avoid burnout before it starts.

The author says dramatic success is created through gradual , sustainable growth. Beyonce's first girl group was a bust apparently. And Disney's first company failed too. Success, for all of them, was a hard slog that took years to achieve. What they all had in common was that they weren't deterred by failure. They learned from their mistakes, pivoted in new directions, and persisted in the face of rejection.

Many of us believe that success should be instant. We reason that if we want to achieve big results, we need to take big risks and throw ourselves headfirst into new projects. But trying to do too much too quickly just isn't sustainable.

As a response to stress, our minds go into overdrive and often become filled with negative thoughts. These thoughts cause us to lose focus and enjoyment in our work. Even worse, they cloud our perceptions of reality. We lose our ability to see situations clearly or make good decisions.

We all become stuck in downward thought spirals. But by learning some simple mindfulness techniques, we can deal with them differently. The next time a worrying thought pops up, try becoming curious about it instead of instantly concerned. Ask yourself what thoughts you're having right now – and what evidence there is to back them up. For example, is there proof that your mentor or boss hated your presentation?

Next, adopt an actively compassionate stance toward yourself. Many of us are our own worst critics. We think that being critical helps us succeed, but perfectionist tendencies actually make people less innovative and productive. So instead of responding with knee-jerk self-criticism, try having compassion for your stressful thoughts. Think about what you'd tell a close friend who was in the same situation.

The final step is examining the information you've gathered by becoming aware of your thoughts. What have you learned about your thoughts, and what fuels them? And what action can you take? We can't control our stressful thoughts. But we can learn strategies for how to respond to them.

What do Oprah Winfrey and Bill Gates have in common? Well, apart from being two of the most ambitious people on the planet, they also prioritise time for leisure. Oprah Winfrey speaks often about how important it is to spend time in her beautiful garden, harvesting her own crops and taking her dog for walks. Bill Gates goes on regular retreats, where he reads books, walks on the beach, and gathers his thoughts.

Studies have shown that working harder and longer doesn't automatically equal better quality work. In fact, our productivity decreases with longer work hours. We're humans, not machines. If we're spending 70 hours a week working, we'll wear ourselves out. We all need to take the time to pause and nurture ourselves.

While we can't all escape to a lavish garden or beachside retreat, we can build moments of calm into our daily lives.

One of the most important ways is to disconnect from technology. Most of us suffer from information overload. We're bombarded by distressing news all the time, and we're constantly responding to messages. Setting times of the day when you're offline is invaluable for your mental health. Monitor your digital habits over the course of a week. Then decide which habits add value to your life – and which only serve to distract you or stress you out. Slowly start reducing your time online.

The second habit to cultivate is spending time in nature. How often were you outside in the past week? Being in nature for even 20 minutes a day is enormously beneficial for maintaining a sense of calm. Practice building time outdoors into your schedule. Sit in the garden at lunch instead of at your desk. Or walk to the grocery store instead of automatically hopping in your car.

The third strategy for building calm into our lives is solitude. Many of us actively resist being alone. It can make us feel lonely or indulgent. But solitude is essential for recharging our batteries and giving ourselves the space to think. We don't need to go on silent retreats. We can build solitude into our daily lives by letting ourselves get lost in our thoughts during our daily commutes – or by journaling for ten minutes before getting up in the morning.

Humans are wired for social connection. In fact, a 2019 study by leadership development company BetterUp showed that employees who felt a strong sense of belonging at work increased their productivity by 56 percent. The number of sick days they took decreased by an enormous 75 percent.

So, how can you learn to seek out support and connection at work? One of the best ways is to cultivate compassion for your colleagues, and practice being there for them. Check in with coworkers who seem to be having a bad day, and offer them support.

But helping people doesn't mean indiscriminately saying yes. In fact, having healthy boundaries is key to building strong relationships. Consider what you need to thrive and what you realistically have to give. And keep your networks diverse. People who interact with colleagues and friends who are different from them have more cognitive flexibility and are more resilient in the face of change. They also have better ideas because they're exposed to a range of perspectives.

Modern life is so busy and demanding that we will all get swept up in a tide of conflicting demands unless we prioritise what matters most to us. Identifying your core mission is like chartering your own boat. Instead of being pushed around, you'll be able to plot your own course – and stick to it. Pick five values that are most important to you and stick to it.

Next, identify your unique skills. Ask yourself how your best friend would describe what you're good at. Or what your colleagues always come to you for. Choose three top skills, such as storytelling, design, or negotiation.

Finally, identify your meaningful pursuit. This is the impact that you make – or wish to make – in your life. Ask yourself why you chose this job, how your work relates to society as a whole, and why your work matters. Now create your personal mission statement to help you stay on track.

We're used to keeping track of how much time we spend on certain activities. But we're less used to tracking how much energy they cost. Energy is our most precious resource – the thing that fuels our days and gives us vitality. If parts of our lives are sapping our energy, then we need to know about it.

The best way to do that is to conduct an energy audit. Track your energy levels over the course of a whole week, and keep a daily diary. Which situations leave you feeling revitalised and full of life, and which leave you feeling exhausted?

Sometimes, the diary will reveal that certain people always leave you feeling crummy. Like energy vampires, they deplete your ideas and motivation – or just require enormous amounts of patience and attention.

While monitoring your energy levels, it's also essential to tune into your emotions as you go through your day. Emotions are messengers from your subconscious. They let you know when something's not working for you, or if something crosses a personal boundary. On the flip side, they'll tell you when you are living by your values – you can't fake joyful enthusiasm.

So, how can you develop your emotional literacy and learn to interpret the messages your feelings are sending you? First, work on expanding your emotional vocabulary. This means identifying, as specifically as possible, how you're feeling. Say you're feeling "down." Don't stop there – dig deeper. Are you frustrated? Or despondent? Or chagrined? These emotions all have different charges, as well as different messages and solutions.

Tracking your energy and becoming receptive to your emotions will allow you to stay on track through the day, and it'll keep your personal pulse beating strong.

So to sum up:

Launspach says in *Crazy Busy* that stress is unavoidable but being busy is a choice. If you work during your free time, it's not free time. You are not obliged to reply to an e-mail just because someone decided to send it to you. E-mail is a to-do list for you that is managed by others. Your time and attention are your most important assets. Use them wisely. Missing out is unavoidable but it is not something we need to be afraid of. Finding the Ultimate Option – if there even is such a thing – is rarely a worthwhile investment of your time. If you don't choose how to live your life, someone else will do it for you. There are very few things that need to be perfect. You are probably less indispensable than you think (which is good news). A little tension can be a good thing but being subjected to too much stress for too long is bad for your health. When you are stressed you become pretty good at fighting and fleeing but not so good at thinking straight. Burnout is like an emergency brake for the body, an injury to the stress system. We are not just some kind of walking brain; there is a whole body attached, too. Stress is always accompanied by warning signs that differ per individual. You should be aware of your own warning signs. Your head is not designed for storing stuff; that should be done elsewhere.

You can reduce stress by setting development goals for yourself instead of performance goals. If you don't set priorities, everything becomes a priority (and so nothing gets prioritised).

Sometimes the most important things are the least urgent and sometimes the most urgent things are of no importance at all. The key to forming a habit is to set an easy goal, reward success and stick at it for at least a couple of weeks. A more peaceful life requires a good balance between doing and being. The ability to concentrate is the most valuable skill in modern-day work and work is a marathon, not a sprint.

Dr Jimenez says in *The Burnout Fix* that burnout is avoidable if you take steps to develop your personal resilience. Resilience isn't about toughing it out or having grit. Instead, it's about making space for vulnerability, tuning into your thoughts and emotions, and learning to ask for help. It's also about building positive communities at work and finding connections with other people. Company leaders have just as big a role to play in preventing employee burnout. They can do this by creating equitable workplaces where employees feel a sense of belonging and psychological safety. Hence she recommends making a "to-don't" list. We need lists to remind ourselves of things we shouldn't do because they sap our time and energy.

I've faced massive burnout before by overdoing it so I find myself having to be wary of going down that route again. Please join in on the conversation by following @howtobe247 on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, and subscribe to the podcast, which can be found via [www.howtobe247.com](http://www.howtobe247.com).

Please do leave a review if you found this helpful!

Before we go, here is Jennifer David, who is a mum of three and runs a business called Debutots, Meiko Patton, a federal employee and creator of *I AM Unbreakable*, an adult affirmation colouring book for women of colour and Sally Anne Carroll, who is an Integrated Life & Career Coaching for Reinvention & Sustainable Success. See you in two week's time.

**JENNIFER DAVID:** I can get really busy because I'm running my own business, but my top tip really is to just take a pause every now and then and I just concentrate on my breathing. I think about my abdomen rising and falling and just to stop for a few seconds helps me to come off of autopilot and back into the present and to think, is this as urgent as I think it is? Do I need to be doing it at all? Do I need to be doing it now? What's the purpose of me doing it? And just asking myself a couple of quick questions just helps me become more present and less busy. And ironically, I normally end up being more productive that way anyway.

**MEIKO PATTON:** Everyone has the same 24 hours in a day. When a person says they are too busy, to me, that means they are not prioritising. At some point, all of us fall into that category of not prioritising. What is important nowadays? What I do, I take time out to colour. I created an adult colouring book. And not only is it a colouring book, it is a colouring book with positive 'I am' affirmations. Such as I am powerful, I am strong, I am amazing. When I say these powerful affirmations while colouring, it relieves stress, relieves tension, and allows me to go on with my day.

**SALLY ANNE CARROLL:** As a coach for busy professionals. People often tell me that busy is taking over their life. And while a lot is often getting done, they're exhausted. They're not showing up anywhere at their best, and they're definitely not managing their energy in ways that will ultimately help their performance, their wellbeing, or even their own goals. I've been this person at stages of my life, and it's not sustainable. So I always ask, what's keeping you so busy? How much of that is truly necessary? Has busy become an ingrained habit? I think many of us hesitate to talk about this because it's so easy to use busy as an excuse for something

else. It can be a mask that we use to get our needs met, a way to manage what we're afraid of. That can be a means of avoiding actions that might feel challenging and culturally, it's acceptable. When too busy becomes a way of life, it's helpful to do three things. Uh, the first is to create white space, whether that's looking at next week's calendar, eliminating everything that's not essential just for one week, carving out 10 minutes at the beginning and end of the day to do nothing, starting a delegation habit and delegating things weekly, or even planning a mini vacation of like an hour or a week. Whatever fits your life. And with the white space you open up, then you can consider the impact that being busy really has on your life. How is that choice feeling in your body? Does a quiet mind feel like a pipe dream? What is all the busy doing to the quality of your work, your life, your relationships? When was the last time you checked in with your bigger picture vision? And then you can start setting boundaries and choosing what you're saying yes or no to with more intention. Make sure that you're committing to things that are aligned with your values, goals and priorities and your own definition of success. There's not just another way besides busy creating more space and more balance, more flow, more integration, it's all entirely possible. It just takes practice and a willingness to step back, take stock, and say no to what is not central.