



Humaning: the shit we need to talk about with Steff Gallante

Episode 77: What if work gave more than it took?
Work shouldn't cost you yourself.

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Steff Gallante 0:02

Hey y'all! Welcome if you are a first timer to the show, and welcome back if you've been here before. Super excited to be connecting with you in the ether, whenever, wherever, however this is happening. I'm super excited for today's guest. This week we've got on the show Shenelle Brooks. Really funny. We met via Garden State Equality. We actually were in space a year before we actually like met met, but didn't get to really cross paths with one another personally. And so this couple months ago, actually, we were in the same space that Garden State Equality was hosting for a symposium, we were both presenting, and finally got to be in space with one another, both in each other's talks, and then get to connect afterward. And so, really excited! Thanks, Garden State Equality. Anybody's listening, all the folks over there doing all the hard work for advocating for the LGBTQ plus community and bringing folks across New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York together in the name of equity, safety, social justice, especially for the LGBTQ plus community, but really everybody. But Shenelle, I would love for you to go ahead and take some time to introduce yourself to everybody, please.

Shenelle B 1:20

Yeah, absolutely. It's funny. I was just thinking to myself, like, shout out Garden State Equality. But no, seriously, they are a phenomenal organization, and they have a phenomenal team of people who are just so passionate and dedicated to supporting the community and its allies. So, really big shout out to them, and also shout out to you for number one inviting me, but then also just for being a light. Like I just feel like there's no such thing as coincidence, and I think that we met and committed to following up with each other at the appointed time. So I'm just happy to be here. A little bit about myself: I'm in the Philly area or Philly South Jersey area. My pronouns are she/her, and my job. If anybody's interested in that, is I help people discover what's getting in the way of their ability to connect across difference, and I guide them through. So the vehicles in which I do that are consulting, also leadership development, as

well as coaching. So again, just really happy to be here and looking forward to the conversation. I think it's going to be extra, extra juicy.

Steff Gallante 2:25

Ooh, we love juicy! Thank you so much. So, as always, I start off with this phrase: "The shit we need to talk about this week, Shenelle, is..."

Shenelle B 2:36

Oof. Your company would rather fund your therapy than fix the job. Yes, your company would rather fund your therapy than fix your job.

Steff Gallante 2:46

Oh my gosh, I love this.

Shenelle B 2:52

Where do we even start? I mean,

Steff Gallante 2:53

I was just going to ask you the same thing. Like, where are we starting? You get to you get to choose the jump off point here.

Shenelle B 2:59

Yeah, I mean, I think it's I think there's an opportunity to unpack a little bit, right? So, what do we mean when we say that for the folks who may not have the awareness or who may not be from a corporate environment? Although, in my experience, I've seen it across corporate, nonprofit, all across the board. It's just that corporations tend to have better total rewards packages. If I'm being all the way honest, so essentially you're being sold healing because it's much cheaper for an organization than fixing the system that was built from an exclusionary place and then perpetuated for decades. Right? We've just we've all heard it this idea of like following the status quo and all of those things, and that expands into our own well-being, which I believe is part of why so many folks are currently struggling with their well-being in the workplace, their engagement. There's an increase. Plenty of studies highlighting the accelerated rate of burnout, and a lot of us realistically have gotten to that place because we've accepted what we've been offered by these organizations, because healing on your own is a lot less frightening and less confusing than asking the system itself to change. If you don't know that the system is even broken, how are you going to ask for it to evolve? Where do you even start? Which is also why I got into the work that I do to number one help the individuals come into that awareness, but then helping the organizations actually make the change that drives innovation and creates sustainability.

Steff Gallante 4:32

Oh my gosh, yes! So I think part so for the last piece that you said, the accepting what we've been given by the organization-that this has been perpetuated decades and decades and decades-and I think one of the other pieces that feeds the problem is that it's very common that we, if we are experiencing this. We know other people outside of our organization, outside of our industry, that are also facing this, and so it's normalized. It's that idea that the absurd is becoming normal because we

see others who are educated, who are hardworking, who have ascended the ladder, who have like done the quote unquote professional corporate things, right? They're crushing it, perhaps.

Shenelle B 5:27

Yep.

Steff Gallante 5:28

And they're experiencing the same thing. So then it becomes less of oh, this is so weird, and more of like oh, well, I know about 10 other people who are experiencing this too. It must be usual. This must just be what it is.

Shenelle B 5:42

Yep. Yeah, it's so funny you mention that because I was just having a conversation with someone the other day where I was saying how a lot of times on the surface level we understand that something is off or something may not be right, and we tend to look for that confirmation bias that helps us justify that behavior or that choice, and I think what you just called out is spot on in this context, where it's just like we live in a society that glorifies grind culture. So for so many people, it's like, oh well, yeah, I'm feeling burnout, but like, let me just figure out how to slap a bandaid on it versus actually get into the root cause, which is why people struggle to break the cycle. And one of the things that I talk about a lot is just this notion that it's not always we're talking about symptoms when we talk about things that show up in the workplace that impede on our ability to perform as our best self, a lot of times, what's out there, including what organizations offer, is very much centered around addressing symptoms. We want to help you be able to just hobble your way through it, as opposed to doing the work, committing the time, committing the resources to actually fix the root cause.

Steff Gallante 7:00

Yes, I have two ways that I want to go forward with this conversation. So I'm going to start with one and see if we can get around to the other. We'll see what happens. Yeah. But something that I have seen from both sides is the endeavors that companies have, and you know, every industry does it a little differently of like workplace wellness programs. That's what comes to mind for me when you say the words your company would rather fund your therapy than fix your job because they would obviously through if you're lucky enough to have health care, then hopefully you have access to therapy, right? And so in that aspect, literally, you could say they are funding your therapy, right? Yeah. But also, there's that other piece of in-house things happening where it's a lunch and learn about some sort of self-care or wellness practices. You see emails that come out to remind you about HR and the various services that are available to you within the company, and of course, again, the size of the company, the structure, all of that will change what is available to folks. Right in your experience with this, I have been on the side of being, you know, having a corporate full time job and you know attending these things, I have been on the side of the person being brought in to lead these things, right? So I've seen it from both sides, and while we can understand perhaps the intention, what we also know is intention doesn't always equal impact, and the impact is where the problem is. Obviously, the intention too, but the impact is where we're really seeing how this is very problematic for folks because it's so interesting to sit in on a session where somebody's talking about stress relief or taking better care of yourselves, and all the folks in the room, who maybe are not the CEO, anybody below the CEO, right, or the people

who are not the decision makers are sitting there saying, "Yeah, this is all well and good, and it makes sense. And also, the culture here sucks."

Shenelle B 9:14

Right? Like, when do I have the time to actually employ what you're telling me?

Steff Gallante 9:18

Right. When would it be okay to do this, and yeah, it's well, it's great to give me, you know, coping mechanisms and stress relieving techniques. But when the stress never stops, and when the stress follows me home, because you know maybe people are expected to stay connected even after they left the office or close their computer if they work from home, whatever it is, right? There's like some sort of expectation sometimes with connectivity, it's almost laughable, right? Like that you that folks actually expect that the impact is going to go beyond checking the box that we as a company provided this service. We as a company. Supported our employees in this manner.

Shenelle B 10:02

Yeah, yeah. I think I think what you're talking about is spot on. And for me, I've experienced it in the same arenas that you talked about it. Right, like I've attended these webinars as an employee. I've gone to these events, and then I've also been brought in to support organizations through this work, and one of the things that I ground clients in before we even sign any contracts is like my job is to come in here and make it very clear that yes, there is-it's a yes and. So yes, your employees have to do some individual work to be able to navigate through, and it's also the responsibility of the organization to create the conditions that allow them to thrive. If that does not exist, there will always be a gap in performance. There will always be a gap in culture, and no amount of, you know, wellness programs or ERGs and ERG events and activities are going to fix that problem, and there are a good amount of organizations that are out there doing the work, like they and they're building the roadblocks to cultivate that environment for their employees to show up as their best self, and really driving home psychological safety. I've been doing a lot of conversations with organizations about how to really practice psychological safety because I think that it's become a buzzword, and it's gotten so many folks farther from what the goal is. To your point about the impact, it's like we we apply it at a surface level, but then when we think about the organizational structures and policies, there's a huge gap in the way that different employees experience those processes and policies. So it's individual, but it's also systemic as well.

Steff Gallante 11:51

Yeah, I could imagine it has to do with like employee level, like as in like, are you new or least experienced, if you will, are you like a middle level person? Are you like more of the higher experience, higher level? So yeah, I and then I think also lived experience and identity,

Shenelle B 12:14

yeah,

Steff Gallante 12:14

also play a role in those factors as well. So I think that's something that is important for folks to understand is that folks experience as an employee in the company in this realm, in terms of safety, in terms of advocacy, in terms of just ease in doing their job, goes beyond just their experience level and their level within your company, I think more people need to understand that folks' identities and lived experiences are not left at the door.

Shenelle B 12:49

Correct. That is the reality nobody wants to say out loud.

Steff Gallante 12:55

I'm rolling my eyes. Nobody can see me, but I'm rolling my eyes like vigorously rolling my eyes.

Shenelle B 13:00

It's so true, though. It's so true, and then it just creates so much more frustration because it's like once you accept that little nugget, you start to look at the whole workplace experience so different.

Steff Gallante 13:14

How so?

Shenelle B 13:16

Well, I think it. I think because it opens your mind to embrace nuance. Like I think when we talk about this idea of of the workplace and how it's historically functioned, it has looked very linear. And I think when we accept other people's perspectives and lived identities and experiences that shape the way they show up in the workplace and what drives and motivates them, what allows them to connect with others. Once we expand our thinking to accept the fact that all of those perspectives matter, it really makes it forces you almost to think more intentionally about how you can serve all of those employees. It's been my experience that a lot of times, leaders are just fixated on their particular worldview, and they think that it's a one size fits all. Even in the context of you know wellness programs in the workplace, there's so many leaders who are like, "Well, we give them like a great benefits package, and it's like, "Okay, like sure, that's great, but like, have you ever considered that there's a lack of trust when it comes to leveraging those benefits. Have you talked to people about what it is that they're interested in to support their well-being in the workplace? And that's usually when it's crickets.

Steff Gallante 14:36

Yes. Okay. So first question on this: Have you ever experienced pushback or a lack of interest when you say to companies, "Yes, I'm gonna, I can do this work with you, but understand that this is not the employee's responsibility. To learn and then enact change, there is an onus on the company from the top down to begin to do some of this work in thinking differently, creating culture differently, systemic change. Eventually, have you ever? I'm just curious. Have you ever experienced either a lack of interest or pushback.

Shenelle B 15:23

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think

Steff Gallante 15:27

you know.

Shenelle B 15:27

Yeah, I think you know because of the work that you do. Like change is hard for people, especially adults, right? Like we conditioning is real, so we grow very accustomed to our way of thinking, our worldviews, and we hold strongly to those because sometimes without them, folks would just crash out. Like they would just full on crash out. So yeah, to your point, sometimes it's that dismissal. Which the way that I try to resolve that is that I try to make it relatable. So I talk to them about a real human experience of like put yourself in this position, and what would your response be? And then bring in this is where there's an expectation, right, for you to have this outside external factor have some semblance of control because you recognize that it's impacting your experience, and then in that same realm, you recognize that there's a way for you to respond when that factor shows up in a certain way that may cause some discomfort, confusion, whatever the case may be. So again, it always draws back to like if you are looking to be at your best self and perform at your best self, it takes two, and it's okay. I promise you, the world will not implode if you accept two things can be true at the same time. And then the other piece that I think is just really valuable for me as somebody who's a small business owner, entrepreneur, is just coming to terms with the fact that like my message is not going to be for everybody. So there may be some folks who, on the surface, say like, "Yes, I want to do this work, or I'm interested in what you have to say. And then when I tell them what that work entails, they sing a different tune, and I'm okay with that. I know that my message is important, and I know that there are spaces and places that are looking for what I offer. So if we can't come to an align alignment or agreement about what the path forward looks like. I'm not going to say I'm just going to shut the door, but I am going to offer an option, and if that option just doesn't work, I can just be okay with that.

Steff Gallante 17:30

Yes. Oh my gosh, yes. That's the hardest thing I think.

Shenelle B 17:35

Yeah. Yeah.

Steff Gallante 17:37

To be able to have, I don't want to say boundary, but to have that knowing and the willingness to say, like it's all good if we are not aligned on this.

Shenelle B 17:56

Yeah,

Steff Gallante 17:57

and being willing for you to walk away.

Shenelle B 17:59

Yeah, or if you're not ready, because that's the other part. Like going back to my original point about change being hard. Like some people are just not ready, and that's okay.

Steff Gallante 18:07

Yep. Something that I was thinking about as you were talking is, you know, when it comes to whether it's a CEO or some person who is high enough up in a company to like be able to make the decision of bringing you on and beginning to create change, beginning to have conversations differently, beginning just to change the conversation, right? That is being had.

Shenelle B 18:33

Yep.

Steff Gallante 18:34

It has me thinking about elders' experience. Experienced folks who, you know, these folks likely have been in the industry in the working world for quite a bit of time.

Shenelle B 18:52

Yeah,

Steff Gallante 18:53

and I'm speaking specifically to the folks who may not be ready or may be purposefully pushing back. It's interesting that sometimes people will be part of the system and almost feeling as though, well, yeah, like burnout is real. I've been burnt out for the last 15 years of my career, but I'm still pushing forward and I'm still getting the job done. Right, I've had to sacrifice this. I've had to sacrifice that, and still I'm going and doing the job. It's you know other folks can do it too. You know that kind of mindset, right? Where yeah, like we're all experiencing. That's what the working world is. Yeah, we we all have to you know it's like paying your dues, pulling yourself up up by the bootstraps, like the that whole rhetoric,

Shenelle B 19:46

Yeah, right.

Steff Gallante 19:47

What I also think could be happening though, and this doesn't have to be like a big part of our conversation, but it's just something that I'm thinking about now that you're talking about this. Sometimes I wonder if folks who. Feel that way and are experiencing that are also like oh my god there's a glimmer of hope and there's another way but I can't let myself take it. What would people say? What would happen? Like could this actually work? What does that mean for the way that I've moved through my working life? Right, it's almost like identity crisis ish, right?

Shenelle B 20:22

Yeah, especially because our brains are hardwired to avoid and fear the unknown. So if you've functioned a certain way for most of your life, particularly in the workplace, it's funny. I was just talking to an executive client the other day where I was just leading with curiosity, because what I noticed immediately in the conversation is that they were so accustomed to doing exactly what you described, and pushing that onto the teams that they manage. And it wasn't until they their role was eliminated that they really had to sit and reflect. And what was coming to the surface, even though they didn't have the

language for it, was that the job had become their identity. So as a result, now that they didn't have the job, it was like, well, what the hell have I been doing all this time? And like, where do I go from here? And they went into like this mini panic attack, and it's like, well, hold on, right? Like it goes back to the the point I made earlier of just like two things can be true at the same time. So yes, maybe you did work yourself to the bone for X amount of years in this organization because you were focused on survival, and that is what our brain is hardwired to do. And now you're at a turning point where you may be being called to do something different, and it's up to you to figure out what that looks like, what that next phase of your life looks like, and then offering them the tools to be able to do that effectively. So sometimes, yes, that's sitting with some uncomfortable realities and questioning why you were so driven to put in that much time and burn yourself out all of those years. Was it because you actually wanted to do that work, or was it because it was someone else's story that you were living out? So, like, my push is always it's time for you to like walk in your purpose. So, like, let me help you figure out what that is. And for some, it is still climbing that corporate ladder. And what I offer to those people is that you can do that without self-sacrifice. That is the thing. And then for the people who no longer want to do that, it's like, well, let's start to unlearn some of those behaviors that you've grown accustomed to, and figure out how to get you aligned to work that feels fulfilling and purposeful. And then there's those folks who are in the in between, so it's like okay, so like yeah, let's talk about some of those ways that you can manage being in this type of climate without feeling like you have to give everything until there's nothing left.

Steff Gallante 22:52

Yes, yes, yes. I'm thinking about what you were saying about nuance, and I love that the way that you frame things as you receive pushback, or you know, as folks are starting to realize hard stuff and maybe try to skirt it, or right-it's the nuance. piece. I think is is such an important part of the conversation because something that I see in this part of the work that I do in terms of self care, obviously, not being part of like the consumerism, commercialism, but like simply just caring for yourself in a way that allows you to like be in a place in your body, in your mind, in your spirit that feels at ease, feels nourished.

Shenelle B 24:02

What a concept, right?

Steff Gallante 24:04

What fucking concept? I know. You know, when we think about just the ways we exist in the world, it's not straightforward. Like you are saying, it's not linear. Even as we sit here and have this conversation. There's more going on in our experience than just the words coming out of our mouths and how our ears are perceiving them and how our brain is processing them, right? We are having sensations to temperature, and there may be sounds that we are are processing in our living space. There are other things that went on yesterday and 10 years ago that are still kind of you know floating around in our in our orbit, right? Like it, our experience as humans is nuanced, and capitalism, colonialism. I mean, essentially. Created this idea that we must be machines, that we must function as robots, devoid of emotion, devoid of needs or desires other than success at any cost. And I think that's where the rub is part of it. One of the rubs, right, is that the human experience in the workplace. Whether you are a business owner, because let's be real, these things that we are talking about can exist in small

businesses, can small, you know, franchises, right? It doesn't have to be these large organizations. It's anywhere, yeah.

Shenelle B 25:42

Anything. It's been my experience that anything that is relational, because that's the thing. Is I've been sharing with a lot more leaders, is a workplace relationship. Being on a team, if you are an individual contributor, regardless of the role within the organization, like it's still a relationship, and we like to act like it's not like it's like oh we don't I don't want to be friends with everybody I work with. You don't have to be friends. Friends and a relationship is not the same. It's no different than any other relationship that's personal. It's still another human being. To your point, bringing their own lived experiences and beliefs to the dynamic, and as a result, it creates a responsibility for you to be able to engage with that to work towards whatever that common goal is. It's just that in the workplace, it's specific to an organization, and it's the same thing with a small business, right? Like it's still a relationship; it's just a different context.

Steff Gallante 26:40

Yes, and I think also there's something to be said too. Even like for me, I'm a solopreneur. I own my own business, but I'm the only employee.

Shenelle B 26:48

Yeah,

Steff Gallante 26:49

and this idea of relationship also plays into how I'm in relationship with myself.

Shenelle B 26:55

Yeah,

Steff Gallante 26:56

with my work, right, and all the context in between, in addition to obviously the relationships that I create outside of myself and the work that I'm doing in collaborations and you know whatever it is, right? But I think it's so important this idea of relationship that we understand that, to your point, it's not just friendships or romantic relationships, right? There are so many types of relationships, and but it gets construed a certain way because of how you know society and mainstream media. But I think that's so important, right? Like this idea of relationship between one another, this idea of our relationship with our work and the teams we do it in, I mean, all of that really matters. And I think that you know when the conversation begins to happen around doing things differently, centering our human behavior and our human experience a little bit more than just being cogs in a machine, right? I think there are some higher ups, if you will, that are like, "Well, how long is this going to take?"

Shenelle B 28:13

Right?

Steff Gallante 28:13

How much time do we have to put forward to this? What's the money going to look like?

Shenelle B 28:17

Yep,

Steff Gallante 28:20

and that becomes, you know, a big barrier.

Shenelle B 28:25

Yeah, yeah. I think that's part of the reason. At least from what I've observed, that's part of the reason why addressing the root cause is so important. Because in that conversation, it helps to highlight for folks that it's not a final destination. The human experience is constantly evolving, which is part of the reason why our survival methods have to evolve as well. So, to the point we were talking about earlier, there's a lot of things that may have served previous generations because that's what they needed to survive at that time, and now we're trying to apply those same survival tactics to the present day, and they just don't work because society has evolved. We're no longer the same society. We're no longer the same workplace. We're no longer the same political system. So there's something to be said about coming to terms with that realization, and then sitting with the discomfort of having to learn something different, because that's what it always comes back to. It's like you don't want to evolve because of the unknown, right? You don't want to transition into something new because what you maybe, I mean, it's been my experience that it usually comes back to fear. But like, what it is that you may be leaving behind, or to the point you made earlier. What is this person going to think, or what is that person going to think, or how is this going to impact my ability to be successful, especially in underserved communities, because there's so many systemic barriers to us being able to thrive. So if we have some sort of financial. Stability through a job, even if it is toxic, we're more inclined to stay in that and give ourselves all of these reasons for why we can't find another way to make that money, or we can't take the risk of working that plan because of all that's at stake for our life outside of work. So there's so many different factors that contribute to it, but I think ultimately it's calling for us to change the way that we. I think the point you made earlier was beautiful in that your relationship with self it starts with with self. Like my business mantra is very much we're shaped from the outside in, but we change from the inside out. So it's really important for people to understand themselves better and how they show up in the world, and then what that, and then address what that looks like in relationship to other people in the world, and how that then helps us as a collective progress into a more human centered space. Like I think that that's what centers my work is how do we how do we remind folks of their humanity?

Steff Gallante 31:04

Yes, because I think that a a a potential barrier for folks, if we're talking about well being, if we are talking about self care, if we are talking about stress management, if we are talking about moving through burnout and trying to find a better way forward for ourselves, so we don't keep landing back in burnout. And yes, systemic change has to happen. But part of the problem that I've experienced firsthand, and also seen folks experience too, is sometimes when you, as the person who are starting to take the reins over their care and over their well-being practices, and maybe beginning to employ some at work. For instance, it could be you know your lunch break instead of sitting in front of the

computer, you go outside of your you know your workspace and eat, or you go and take a walk during your lunch break. Like whatever you choose to do with that time that is, I don't know, supposed to be yours. I think,

Shenelle B 32:05

right?

Steff Gallante 32:05

Then people like, oh wow, Steff's got time to go and take a walk. Oh, look at Steff away from the computer, eating her lunch. It becomes other people's business.

Shenelle B 32:15

Yeah,

Steff Gallante 32:16

and it's like then the assumption is, oh, I don't have enough work or I must be putting something off right there are all kinds of stories that can be created right but to your point if we are centering our relationship with ourselves with our within our understanding of ourselves. Then it shouldn't matter what the hell other people are doing, right?

Shenelle B 32:47

Or what they think about what you're doing,

Steff Gallante 32:50

exactly. You know, and but I do I hear that from folks. So you know, if we're talking about like ways in which they can bring small pieces of care into the workplace, so that they don't feel like they're just you know grinding themselves down to the bone and then coming home and having being spent and having no time or energy to do something that is nourishing for them outside of work. And I'll say to them, okay, well, what about like what does this look like for you? What does this other thing look like for you? And they're like, yeah, but so and so may talk this and that, and and I get that to your point, right? Like there are so many factors present for us in our experience at work, and why we put up with the shit that we do, right? Like you're saying, whether it's because you need the health care or you need this, right? Whatever it is, and we can't fault people for this when we don't have universal healthcare, when we don't have certain structures in place for folks to feel safe,

Shenelle B 33:45

yep,

Steff Gallante 33:46

and steady,

Shenelle B 33:47

yeah,

Steff Gallante 33:47

right, and so like that-that's why I think this this point that you're making, where it is systemic change that has to happen in the workplace because these band-aids are not helping us, and there are always going to be people out there, our peers, sometimes even our bosses or our boss's bosses, that are not going to get it, or they're not going to be ready for it, and they're going to criticize the people who are trying to care for themselves through it all, who are trying to do things more efficiently or effectively in a way that saves company morale, or honors that, or honors the humanity of the folks that they're working with, and so I think that you know it's so important for all of these things that we're talking about, pointing to how important that systemic change is and why.

Shenelle B 34:40

Yeah, yeah, and I think what it really surfaces is the shared responsibility, right? Because I think when we talk about systemic change, that's not something that's going to happen overnight. Especially because I've worked with CEOs, like I get it, they have so many things that they're worried about on any given day. And they also have direct reports, and those direct reports have direct reports, right? So it's the role of all of those people in between to be more considerate, to be more curious about what would it look like for me to employ a yes and. What is the harm if I continue to perpetuate this system that isn't allowing my employees to perform at their best, and then what can I do to create the environment for them to do their best work? And a lot of times, it's just about giving ourselves the permission as a leader. It's about giving yourself the permission to do what's right for the people who you lead, and then going through the discomfort of figuring out what that may look like, and for the person who is having this challenging experience because they feel like all of the onus is on them to resolve their challenges in the workplace, is giving themselves the permission to do exactly what you talked about, setting those boundaries as uncomfortable as they may be around how you're going to use your time. Yes, I am absolutely going to get done this work that you ask me to do, and I'm going to take one hour out of my day on these days of the week to go and do this, so that I'm able to do this work that you're asking me to do more effectively. That's it, and that's all. And sometimes we don't allow ourselves that permission to exactly what you called out because we are thinking about what somebody's going to say or you know how they're going to react. And yes, there are some people who are hell bent on trying to ruin your career or don't want to see you succeed. That has been my lived experience, and it's what birthed the question that I always ask my coaching clients, which is, "What's the cost though? So it's like sure, if I want to, I can keep playing this game and sacrificing myself, abandoning myself. But what's the cost? And in asking myself that question, I realize, hold the phone, I don't even want to climb the corporate ladder.

Steff Gallante 37:00

Yeah,

Shenelle B 37:01

like I'm sitting here worried about like how holding a boundary is going to impact my ability to progress forward in the organization. But like, if that's not even what I want to do, what's the harm in me holding the boundary? And also, me holding my boundary is actually not wrong. So why should I feel shame or guilt about that?

Steff Gallante 37:21

Yes, yes. it's so funny because the question I pose to my college students the entire semester is yes you can do this but what's the tax so it's hilarious that we land on the same thing what's the tax

Shenelle B 37:35

yeah and it's

Steff Gallante 37:39

something so important to consider what is the cost to you.

Shenelle B 37:44

Yeah, I agree, and only I think that's where the nuance comes in, right? Because that's going to look different for everybody, which is why it's not a one size fits all, and that's also what reinforces the responsibility on the organization as well to really lean into the people and not just offer these these benefits or these wellness programs because you see your competitors doing the same thing.

Steff Gallante 38:12

That's right. And what we know, what research is showing us for those people who are like, yeah, but show me the numbers. What we know that research shows us is that breaks are beneficial, not just the vacation, not just the sick time, which that's great, and more companies need to provide that fully paid.

Shenelle B 38:29

Yeah,

Steff Gallante 38:31

but taking breaks throughout the day, folks enjoying being in your workspace, whether it's virtually or in person, folks feeling safe to create relationships outside of you're my boss or you're my peer, and this is the work we both take care of, and how that's connected.

Shenelle B 38:50

Yeah, right.

Steff Gallante 38:50

People who can be completely human in life is falling apart today, and I need a moment, or I need 10 moments. Right, like I'm not at my best today. Here's what I can contribute, and I'll make up for it tomorrow or the next day when I'm, you know, feeling a little bit more resourced. Right, like any of these things, and so many more things.

Shenelle B 39:13

Yeah,

Steff Gallante 39:14

what we know is when we are what research consistently shows us time and time again, is when we can center that stuff, productivity is never an issue.

Shenelle B 39:27

Yep.

Steff Gallante 39:29

Good quality work is never an issue when we can center those things.

Shenelle B 39:35

Yeah, and I love what you call out because it speaks to one of the things that comes up all the time in like leadership development trainings, and it's this idea of effective communication. Like this is probably a conversation for a different podcast episode, but like realistically, we don't know how to communicate well in any context. Like that's just what it is. I think that's part of the human experience. We haven't been taught how to do it. We don't trust each other. A lot of times, we don't. Trust ourselves, so we just fumble through communication in so many different instances, and in the workplace in particular. One of the things that I've learned through my experience working in HR is that where the broken rungs come in is because it's just not good communication. Whether it lacks transparency, or it's not clear enough expectations, or it's just not consistent.

Steff Gallante 40:22

Yep, or the fear, like you were talking about, that fear of what's the repercussion going to be if I'm honest here?

Shenelle B 40:29

Correct. So there's this top down, and then there's this bottom up communication. These gaps that exist, and then they just create more tension and distrust within the organization, which is what leads to employees having these shared experiences, but not being able to talk about them or not being able to say the uncomfortable thing because they may not have the language or they may not be safety to do so, as you mentioned. So that's where it works on both sides. It's on us to give ourselves the permission, and then on the other side, it's up to the organization to create the conditions for people to feel safe enough to speak up about what it is that they need, because that's what it really boils down to. Whether it's through a survey or managers asking in one-on-ones, people should have the safety to speak up about what it is that they need to perform at their best.

Steff Gallante 41:21

Yes, and so to that point, if you've so we may have maybe two different types of listeners have like experience right now. You may have some people who are the employee, no matter what level, but maybe they're not the CEO or like the top level person. What if they? So it's a two pronged question. What would your suggestion be to them if they're listening? Like, like there is this thing they want to advocate for, but they're not sure how to do it. And of course, like, there's no one, you know, answer that you can give that's gonna, you know, work for everybody, right? But like, I'm just curious. Like, is there something that you can offer to a listener who may be the employee who wants to advocate for themselves, and then on the flip side, what if there is somebody who is a boss and is recognizing change needs to happen, but they don't know the first step to take? So that two pronged approach. Feel free to run with this however you want.

Shenelle B 42:19

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, it's a great question. I think for both groups, I would say start small, because I think that a lot of times it's been my experience, my lived experience, and my experience working with other leaders that we'll talk ourselves out of something real quick because we overwhelm ourselves with how many steps we need to take in order to fix "quote unquote" I'm doing air quotes, fix the problem. And the reality is to the point that we talked about earlier. Like it's an evolution, so it's going to ebb and flow. It's no final destination. So start small with like what works best for you. So for the individual, that may look like first starting with building trust with yourself, so that you'll build the confidence to set the boundaries that need to be set. And when I say that in a workplace context, I'll give you a couple that worked for me specifically when I was doing this work transitioning out of corporate. One of them was I was prone to overperforming, so I was one of those people that was working like 60 to 80 hours a week because I'm just like, oh yeah, just this one last thing, and then I'll leave it alone till tomorrow. So the first boundary I had to set for myself because I realized the toll it was taking on me and my relationships outside of work was I committed to one day a week, and this is just what worked for me. I committed to one day a week where I would work late. That was the only day, and I set a time limit for that. And I didn't allow myself to exceed that time limit.

Steff Gallante 43:48

Was that hard for you to to get started with and like actually do?

Shenelle B 43:53

Yeah, it was definitely a journey. But like, I was like, you got to do it because I would always remind myself of again that cost. What was it costing me?

Steff Gallante 44:04

I think I just wanted to ask because I think it's important, right? People be like, "Oh yeah, Shenelle, that's good for you, right? But like, no, it was hard, right? Like I'm, I'm, I'm gonna say it. I'm gonna assume, but you can correct me if I'm wrong. I would assume anything it is that you're offering, especially something that you've done for yourself, because it's same for me too, y'all. It's not easy. It's not straightforward. No. Yeah. Right. Like so. So know that that's the underlying assumption that you can make as the listener that all of this was messy for us in our doing of it as well.

Shenelle B 44:34

Yeah. 100% I totally fumbled my way through it. There's still a lot of moments, especially now as an entrepreneur, it's very much like fumbling my way through it because I'm sure you know we're prone to just work and work and work because work doesn't look the same for us as it did when we were in these other systems. So yes, it's still a journey present day, but I'm doing my best and giving myself grace when I don't get it right, and then staying. Committed, so yes, I committed to the the one day a week, and then because of the challenge with that, I doubled down and gave myself another boundary of on those other days holding myself accountable to leaving when I needed to leave at the end of the day, and that was even more difficult because of the way that I'd grown accustomed, and through the work that I've been learning about habits and how they're formed, and all of those things, it's important to tie an action to the new habit that you're trying to create for yourself. So I created like this mini

routine that I would start maybe 30 minutes before I was supposed to leave, so that my brain was picking up on the fact that like, hey, we're moving into leaving. Like, I need to be aware of this, and like, we're gonna do these things so that we're getting accustomed to leaving at this time. And that became a new habit. And again, fumbled my way through it. But like, the more I stuck to it, the more I stuck to that mini routine, the easier it got for me to make that transition, and once I got comfortable holding those type of boundaries with myself, then I started to think through like, okay, so if this is how I can perform as my best self while maintaining my relationships, then what does it look like to verbalize that in other areas of my day where I can optimize my time? So one of the things I was just talking to an organization about was like the meeting thing. So everybody's like, "Yeah, like I got hella meetings on my schedule, like all day, and like some of them I don't even need to be in. And I'm like, "Okay. And did you tell anybody that? And it's like, no. And I'm like, "Okay. So the solution is you just been ruminating on it, and then like just hoping that somebody will figure that out, like that's a golden opportunity for you to set and hold a boundary.

Steff Gallante 46:49

That must have been like mind blowing for them to hear

Shenelle B 46:52

100% because the permission. It's like wow, I didn't even know I had the permission to say something like that, and it's like yeah, you always do. So long as to your earlier point, you don't really care that much about if that means somebody's gonna say like, oh, like why aren't they on the meeting? Like if you don't care about those whispers, you'll feel more comfortable saying that, especially if it's gonna give you the space and capacity to do your actual job. Yep, like isn't that what you're being paid for? So like, yeah, say the thing. So I think that that was the other piece. Is like once I got comfortable with that, then it was easier for me to to say the things out loud and find other pockets where I was able to optimize my time. And again, small steps. I wasn't looking to change everything about my day to day. It was very small steps, and then what was really cool about it was because I started doing those things, other people realized that they had the permission to do the same, and it started to shift the culture. So on our team, people started to speak up more about what they had capacity for and what they didn't. And even if there were certain people on the team that they didn't feel comfortable doing that with, they felt comfortable doing it with me. And if I needed to be the person to convey it to someone else or to our leadership, like I would help them in doing that, because I appreciated the communication, and I also recognize that it's hard. That's hard to do, and I think that that leads into the part of the leaders because I've played both roles, I've been a manager who had direct reports in a contact center environment. Lord have mercy, but then I also played the individual contributor role where I wasn't necessarily directly managing folks, but I oversaw 10 employee resource groups, so they were like my team.

Steff Gallante 48:38

Yikes!

Shenelle B 48:39

Yeah. So yeah, with a minimum of like 15 people on the leadership team per year. So fun times, but it goes back to the shared responsibility because there were certain things that I realized they didn't feel comfortable with, and then it became my job to think through. Number one, to listen and lead with

curiosity because some of those conversations did require me to enforce some accountability for people because it was easy for them to blame someone else for why their workplace experience was happening a certain way, and I would be like, "Well, hold on. Going back to the meeting example, it's like, "Well, did you communicate this? Right. So it was little things like that, and then the trust that was established allowed us to work through together what it looked like to solve those challenges. And then on the other side, there were those things that would come out that would highlight highlight a systemic barrier, which would then position me to be able to bring it to the people who needed to hear it. And because of the work that I was doing specifically in HR, it was like I was also a part of those spaces and places to inform and help drive the change. So I didn't shy away from that. If there's an expertise, a platform that you have as a manager or leader, you should absolutely be using that to. Not only strengthen the the team that you support, but to also ultimately shift the culture. Because, like I said, you may not think so because of the role that you sit in within the organization, but there's always people watching and paying attention. And to the point that you called out earlier in the conversation, intent and impact are very different. So, if your goal, your legacy is to leave an impact so that people who come after you will have a better experience, you should absolutely be leaning into that. And I think overarchingly, what I would say to the leaders is start by just listening to your people, having conversation with them that goes beyond just how you're doing. And if it is going to be a how you're doing to get the conversation going, actually mean it.

Steff Gallante 50:47

Yep,

Shenelle B 50:48

like actually ask some follow up questions, get more curious about what motivates them, what drives them, and figure out what's in your realm of control to be able to help support them to perform at their best,

Steff Gallante 51:03

I love all this, and I really love how you just began it with start small because that's something that I also say in all of my work, and it's something that people are like eye rolling at, and like, what do you mean, right?

Shenelle B 51:19

Like, what does that even mean? Like, we don't start anything small

Steff Gallante 51:22

exactly not American culture what are we doing is

Shenelle B 51:25

go big or go home that's literally our motto

Steff Gallante 51:27

that's right that's right and so I you know but I think that and this may just be my lived experience coming through but like when you're sitting in that seat of like this is not good, and it needs to change. It

can feel so overwhelming. It can feel isolating. It can feel so many things that feel very big and very real. And yes, they're probably valid, right? But truly, the only way forward in a that's sustainable would be small steps.

Shenelle B 52:09

Yep,

Steff Gallante 52:09

and we are talking the smallest of steps, like literal baby steps, the smallest of things that you can do. So thank you not only for giving examples, but also talking about your own ways that you did this too. Because I think that that is really beneficial for folks to not only hear like, oh, these are the ways that you could start this, but like this is actually something that I tried. Because even if that those things that you named for yourself is not resonating with somebody. I think that it could also spark thoughts for them in what will be resonant for them. Because the reality is, each of our ways forward is going to be different, and that gets to be okay. So, thank you for that.

Shenelle B 52:55

Oh yeah, that's 100% the approach I try to take. Is like, hey, I'm going to preface with this is what worked for me. Recognizing that it's not going to be the same for everybody else, like I don't want to be one of those thought leaders or consultants that's like, yeah, it's just this one size fits all. When it's like, well, even present day, there's lived experiences that I don't understand fully. I'm open to learning more, but I can't assume that what work for me is going to work for somebody else, even if we do have similar identities, it's just different. That's just the beauty for me. That's just the beauty of the human experience.

Steff Gallante 53:29

Absolutely. My hope for those of you listening is that you know, like like I was saying, like we were saying, you know, even if the examples that were offered aren't resonant or don't feel accessible to you right now. I think the other piece that that we came back to another theme within this conversation that relationship, right? When we are able to sit in conversation with one another, whether it's same lived experience, similar lived experience, same identity, similar or completely different, when we get to have conversation with one another, it automatically opens our minds to things, and you know, and so what Shenelle may have done may not work for me. It may not be how I move through the world, right? It to to sit here and say, "Oh, I'm just going to work one one night late and leave the like what right like so that's okay if that's not for you or it may not be for you right now but the idea here is opening your mind to possibility and and like Shenelle was saying trusting yourself to arrive at the place for you to start or one of the places for you to start so it's okay if you're leaving this conversation as I always remind you, leaving this conversation with more questions. You can always connect with Shenelle in different ways to continue to follow her work because it's really important. So Shenelle, please go ahead and tell people how they can find you, and also let them know of any work coming up that you've got going on that you want them to know about.

Shenelle B 55:00

Yeah, absolutely. So first and foremost, I would say the easiest way is to find me on Instagram underscore with Shenelle. So my first name, S H E N E L L E, and that's where you can access my site that gives you all of the access points. So it has my LinkedIn, it has my Substack, all of those fun things for you to stay in conversation in whatever method feels ideal for you. So I would say start there. But if you are one of those folks who is on LinkedIn, feel free to find me at Shenelle B, where I also drop little nuggets. As you heard in this conversation, I'm very big on just planting seeds and letting them fall, and whoever is there to catch them will certainly catch them and apply them as they see fit as they continue navigating their journey. And as far as things that I have coming up, I this year I'm telling myself that it's all about collaboration. So of course this is one of those opportunities. But then in October I'll be facilitating at the LYLA'S unapologetically. I can't stand when words are so long at night because I talk so fast, and then I'm like, "All right, you got to slow it down. So yes, in October, I'll be facilitating at the LYLAS Unapologetically Whole Retreat in New Orleans. For those who are not familiar with the acronym LYLAS, it means love you like a sister, and I'll be leading two sessions there. One specifically on some of the things we talked about today, so boundaries as a leadership strategy, and then I'll be leading another session on legacy leadership. So, what is the the impression that you want to leave for those that you work with, work for, and then the balancing session is an applied version, in my opinion, of this whole conversation, which is why it came up. So, talking through the actual skills of stopping the absorption of what was never really yours to carry, and is for leaders, particularly women leaders who are looking to move from enduring to leading on purpose. So, if anyone's interested in getting more information or wants to sign up, I mean, let's be for real. New Orleans in October is a good time. I'm just saying. But if you wanted to fill your cup and also have a good time, you can find more information at www.lisbiz.com.

Steff Gallante 57:22

Amazing, and I will link everything in the show notes, so y'all don't worry about like you know furiously writing everything down. It's there for you. You can find it. Shenelle, thank you, thank you for being here in all the ways that you were present. I appreciate you so much.

Shenelle B 57:35

Of course, thank you, thank you for creating this space. Thank you for the good conversation. I'm just so excited to keep the conversation on or offline going, and it's just going to be a good turn.

Steff Gallante 57:46

Thank you. All right, y'all, that's it for now. Thank you for being here. Please find Shenelle in all the ways in all the places. I was like ways and places, ways,s apparently. And if you have capacity, please share the show with your people. I'm trying to get better at saying it because it feels like weird to me. But no, if I don't promote it, then nobody's going to do anything with it. So, please share the show, leave a review if you're if you're loving the show, of course, because these things really help it get out there in the world and let the people who are meant to find it find it. So, whatever your capacity looks like, I would love for you to do that. Please also consider signing up for my newsletter. That's way we can stay connected beyond all of the platforms. And then also upcoming offerings. There are pop-up yoga and Zumba classes happening this summer randomly. And then also I have a brand new offering coming out at the end of August, that links to another brand new offering in September. So please keep a

lookout for all that. But until then, and until next time, please allow yourself as much ease as possible and take the best care that you can of yourself, my dears. And we'll see you very soon. Be well.