

Ep #7: Is It Okay to Not Feel Okay at Work?



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Heather Branscombe

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Welcome to *Clinicians Creating Impact*, a show for physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech-language pathologists looking to take the next step in their careers and make a real difference in the lives of their clients. If you're looking to improve the lives of neurodiverse children and families with neurological-based challenges, grow your own business, or simply show up to help clients, this is the show for you.

I'm Heather Branscombe, Therapist, Certified Coach, Clinical Director, and Owner of Abilities Neurological Rehabilitation. I have over 25 years of experience in both the public and private sectors, and I'm here to help you become the therapist you want to be, supporting people to work towards their dreams and live their best lives. You ready to dive in? Let's go.

Hello, friend. As I record this podcast I'm continuing to do it on a Saturday because I continue to live in Reno land, happily so. There are so many amazing changes that are happening in my house right now. And I'm also seeing some amazing changes in therapists and their perspectives as they listen to the podcast, so thank you.

Yay you! Can we just say that for a minute? Yay you for taking the time to invest in yourself. Let's have a mini-party for you. I love celebrating wins. One thing that I do with my leadership support team each week is we start out our meeting with the pit and the peak of the week. I get to learn so much more about the team and how I can support them, as well as it really normalizes having a pit or hard times at work.

So let's talk about whether or not it's okay to not feel okay at work. Do you ever feel overwhelmed, unsure, anxious or uncomfortable at work? I know I have. And I may have as recently as last week, some or even all of those. What I notice is when we have these feelings, we tend to blame two things. One, we blame other people for our feelings. Or two, we blame ourselves for our feelings and decide that it's our issue.

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Now, again, I just want to offer that I am a person who has done both. I have definitely blamed other people for my feelings; clients, other staff that I've worked with, especially if they were, in the past if they were my supervisor. I've judged myself when I was the one in charge. And I'm really trying to create a place now where I work where we create dream jobs for everyone else.

So as I do that, I often think about that judgment of like, shouldn't that include myself? And if I do feel any of those feelings that I mentioned before, does that mean that I'm not living up to my own vision if I ever feel overwhelmed, if I ever feel anxious, if I ever feel unsure? Does that mean that I'm a fraud?

I often see this with people I work with in the capacity of a coach, both inside and outside Abilities, where they use the model that we've talked about in previous episodes to see that they have a thought that's generating this negative feeling at work. So then they judge themselves or they want to just thought swap their way to feeling happy.

So if this resonates with you, I want to give you a couple of tools today to help you to be a little bit more effective. First, I want to offer the thought that it is okay to not feel okay at work. Nothing has gone wrong if you don't feel okay at work at any given time. Part of the reason that people are unhappy is because they believe that they shouldn't ever be unhappy. No one really teaches us that unhappiness is a necessary and even a valuable part of the human experience, even at work.

We don't leave our humanness at the door when we come to work, nor should we. Without unhappiness we would have no frame of reference for the happiness that we're searching for. And so I want to offer that negative emotions really make those positive emotions possible.

There's a concept out there that I like, that life is 50/50. And I really do believe that to be true. Most people experience more than half of their life as negative because they spend so much of their time being unhappy about being unhappy, instead of just accepting the unhappiness as a natural part of life.

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Now, I don't mean to say that you should be happy about being unhappy at work, not at all. And clearly, that would be a disservice especially for someone like myself who is trying to employ people like this at work. That would be really disingenuous for me to say.

I like this concept of the 50/50 because it really just seems realistic. A life that's all daisies and unicorns and rainbows really doesn't seem super real, even at work. Even when you're doing your dream job, which is, for many of you, what you're doing right now. So, then the question is what is the point of feeling your feelings, especially at work?

I want to offer you today that it's important for you to allow feelings at work instead of resisting them, reacting to them, or even avoiding them. When we resist an emotion it's really like trying to hold a beach ball under the water; you can do it for a while, but it's really exhausting. Eventually that beach ball is going to come popping up from under the water with a good deal of force.

Reacting to a feeling is what children or those with less emotional control do. It's letting the emotion control our behavior by doing things like yelling, slamming doors, throwing tantrums, and maybe even less subtle but more intentional communication that we're letting that emotion control our behavior.

Reacting is when we push against the emotion. We dramatize things or we freak out, on large levels or on small levels. And I think all of us have worked with someone that definitely reacts to their emotions instead of allowing their emotions.

Now, avoiding is when we sense the emotion but we look to escape it or we look to dull it. Typically with a buffering kind of behavior, like overeating, over drinking, over working, over shopping, Netflix, social media and so on and so on. Most often, those kinds of buffering behaviors have a net negative consequence and they ultimately don't serve our goals.

So when we can allow those negative emotions and come from a place of compassion, we ultimately gain authority over them. When we resist negative emotions, react to them, or attempt to avoid them, we actually suffer more.

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So I like to think of negative feelings kind of like a check engine light. What if those negative thoughts and feelings are really just an opportunity to connect with yourself? So just like a check engine light, sometimes it's just a faulty wire or a faulty thought. But other times it could be something larger that you really want to check into. It's taking the opportunity to check in with yourself that allows you to decide if that check engine light is useful or not.

So say a client isn't happy with the services you provide and they communicate that to you in an email. If you haven't had that yet as a therapist, you definitely will. I think all therapists have that at some point in their career. So you read the email and then you can feel your stomach drop. You notice that you feel hurt by the comment. And when you check into why, it's because you believe this might mean that you are a bad therapist.

Now, a normal human brain can go to judgment either by deciding that it's your fault or deciding that it's the client's fault that you feel this way. But when you understand that it is the thought that's generating that feeling of hurt, it makes sense that your primitive brain is thinking that, because that's the part of the brain that likes things to be safe, comfortable and easy.

If you've been questioning if you are a good therapist or not, it makes sense that your brain will decide that that client's email means that you aren't a good therapist. It's providing evidence for that. That's the easiest way for your brain to make meaning from that email. Now, just because it's easy to think that, doesn't make it true.

So, what if we treated that thought and feeling like a check engine light? It means that you get to check in with yourself with curiosity instead of judgment or blame. Curiosity could look something like, how is this thought true? Or how is this thought not true? So how is it true that you're not a good clinician? How is it true that you are a good clinician?

What I notice when I ask myself that question and sit with it for a bit, is that I can find evidence for both sides. So even now, 25 years into my career, I can see how I am a good clinician and how sometimes I am a bad clinician. I don't even need an email to help me to see both sides at this point.

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What you're doing when you give equal airtime to both sides is that you dial down the primitive part of your brain by giving it other options. Also by doing that, you allow your higher part of your brain space to decide what it wants to think, given that both options could be seen as true.

So given that your brain can see evidence for both, what do you want to direct your brain to actually believe? So, for me, I think it's much more helpful for me and my clients to believe that I am a good clinician. And when I see those thoughts and feelings that signal my check engine light, I don't make it a big deal because I know it's an opportunity to lift the hood and see what's really going on inside my brain.

So as I was preparing for this podcast I actually thought of an example that happened to me just this week from the other side. And I thought that it would be helpful to share just how wacky brains can be. So I was coaching somebody earlier this week, and less than five minutes into our session she had this massive aha moment. So much so that she said, "Oh, wow, we could end this call right now and I have got what I needed today."

Now, I don't say this to brag because I really just want to use this as an opportunity to show you what happened next for my brain. Instead of actually celebrating the win for the client, my brain made that mean something about myself, and then I felt a huge amount of pressure.

The thought that generated that pressure was something like, "Oh my goodness, I have 40 minutes left in the session and I don't know that I can deliver in the way that she might be expecting me to deliver based on what her reaction is in the first five minutes." What I noticed for me, is that things that I normally do in a coaching session took a lot more work for me because I was so in my head about the pressure I felt to be amazing.

Aren't brains hilarious? Brains can take both negative feedback and positive feedback and turn that into pressure. So, after the session I decided to check in with myself to see what was going on. What I learned from that is, as a physical therapist, I'm used to getting negative feedback. If you are a physical therapist

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or if you have worked with one, you know. They have often called us physical terrorists, and there's a reason for that.

But I was much less used to facilitating this huge positive shift within a five minute timeframe within the first session. My clients typically have been those with neurodiversities or neurological challenges. So we're really looking at the long term and we're looking to create an impact for the long term, not necessarily in the first five minutes.

So to my brain, a huge win within five minutes felt super unusual. And so therefore, alarms went off and generated a feeling of pressure. So now that I've taken that time to figure that out, if it happens again I'll have a better awareness about what's going on and I'll be able to respond the way that I want much more quickly, without the judgment or blame for me or my client.

So let's normalize it being okay for it not to feel okay at work. Let's start to see negative thoughts or feelings as a check engine light, and use it as an opportunity to connect with ourselves by looking under the hood and to check in and see what's really going on in our brain.

Ignoring the check engine light in our car can have catastrophic challenges, and it's no different for us in resisting or ignoring those feelings at work. Ignoring those lights has implications for those we work with, and ultimately ourselves. I can't wait to see the impact that you create with these tools. See you soon.

To celebrate the launch of the show, I'm going to be giving away a \$100 gift card and two \$50 gift cards to Amazon. I'm going to be giving them away to three lucky listeners who follow, rate, and review the show.

Now, it doesn't have to be a five-star review, although I sure hope that you love the show. I really want your honest feedback, so I can create an awesome show that provides tons of value for you. So visit abilitiesrehabilitation.com/podcastlaunch to learn more about the contest and how to enter. And I'll be announcing the winners on the show in episode ten. Thanks so much.

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Thanks for joining me this week on the *Clinicians Creating Impact* podcast. Want to learn more about the work I'm doing with Abilities Rehabilitation? Head on over to abilitiesrehabilitation.com. See you next week.