

Ep #48: When Work Feels Like a Struggle



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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.

Hi there, friends. I'm recording this episode at the very start of December and I've noticed that this time of year feels really different for me than it has in other years. I think, first of all, it's because we decided as a family in advance to take our three, who are now kind of young adults, children for a Christmas holiday for their actual Christmas gift. And so the normal thought and preparation, that mental work of deciding on gifts for Christmas, feels so much easier this year.

So I'm here to tell you, first, if you've never gone away on vacation, not to actually visit family, which is also amazing, but to actually go away on vacation, I totally recommend it. It doesn't even need to be far. One year we actually did this by renting a super fun local Airbnb. But what I noticed by doing that, for myself at least, is that it placed my emphasis on the experience I wanted to have and not the gifts or foods. And it decreased my stress level enormously. So if that sounds fun to you, give it a try.

I've also noticed factually, there are a lot of hard things going on in the world. There are hard things locally in our respective professions, and also globally. And I've noticed that it is affecting people, and especially some people harder than others. So when I see my friends, and especially my clinical friends struggling, I feel both empathy and understanding, as well as this urge to want to help.

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So if things are feeling hard at work for you right now, know that I see you and I hope that this episode can be of help to you. Before I start, I mentioned before that this podcast really is my passion project. It's kind of like my love letter back to a professional clinical workforce that I actually really love so much.

My mission has really transformed over the course of my career from wanting to help relieve the struggle of my clients or my patients as a physiotherapist, to the struggle that clinicians have as they strive to help their own clients or patients. So if this podcast has been of any help to you at all, you can help me by sharing this in a couple of ways.

One, if you follow, rate and review this podcast, that helps to feed the algorithm. So then when a clinician just like you is searching for some kind of help just like this, the podcast will more easily come up for them. Secondly, if you share this podcast, or better yet a favorite episode, with a colleague, like your work clinician friend, consider it an early Christmas present to me if you'd like, because I'd be eternally grateful for you to do any and all of the above. So with that, let's talk about struggling at work.

One of the most important things we need to do when work feels like a struggle is to actually feel that and not to skip too quickly into fix it mode. Why, you may ask. It's because feeling the struggle, in my experience, is actually the way to problem solve in the long term.

So take your own clinical assessment as an analogy. If you had a client or a patient come up to you with a problem, we don't try and fix it first without pausing to understand the objective and subjective parts of the challenge we're actually trying to solve. We look at it from all sides, and then from that perspective look deeper into the parts that may help us see where the problem actually lies, to then start to find a path or a treatment plan to move forward with.

But when we struggle at work, if you're like me at least, we normally feel the struggle and then we instantly want to do something about it, I know I often do. Be it either avoid the feeling, distract from the feeling or really just solve for the feeling. Our brain quickly decides that feeling, the actual act of feeling is the

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problem. When the fact is the true problem is often the thoughts and the circumstances that brought that feeling to life.

So I think I've mentioned this on the podcast before, but I like to think of feelings like a check engine light in a car. When that light goes on in the car, we don't solve for it by covering it up with tape, driving faster or getting mad at the light. Well, maybe we might hit the light at the beginning, but getting mad at the light isn't helpful. None of that will actually change the light.

That's where validating your own feelings can be so helpful, because you are validating that you believe that the feeling that you have and acknowledging that there are thoughts and circumstances that lead to that feeling. Validation is an invitation to get curious and to find out more, to find out the why behind that feeling.

I can remember a time that I struggled at work, a time before I started at Abilities, although I can assure you there were times before that and after that that I have struggled at work. But I want to share this time with you specifically. I remember that time where I was going to work in a place whose mission I believed in fully and where the people I worked with also were amazing, I liked them so much. But I was having a hard time really just getting motivated to work.

Booking clients, because that was part of my job at the time, was really a problem for me. I wasn't motivated to book them. Not because I didn't have a huge list of people to see, this was in public practice, so the list was super long. But I just lacked the motivation for some reason to see them. And even when I did see the clients, I didn't have that same joy that I had felt earlier in the same job with very similar clients.

So what had changed? Many of the circumstances were the same as ever, the job was the same, the people I worked with were the same, the clients were essentially the same. And so once I fully acknowledged that the work actually was feeling hard and I actually was struggling, the thought became clear. I wasn't enjoying how I got to see the clients.

Now, to be clear, this wasn't anyone's fault. It was not the fault of the organization I worked for. It was not the fault of my supervisor. It was not the

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fault of my colleagues, and certainly not the fault of my clients. None of that had actually changed. What had changed was me. I was struggling because I wanted to see clients in a way that really just wasn't factually available in my current position.

I wanted more autonomy, and knowing that this wasn't possible in my current employment, my body lit up my own check engine light in the form of the struggling feeling that I felt. So, first, I noticed that feeling and I validated that feeling. Then I asked myself why. To understand the circumstances and in this case, the thoughts that were and weren't contributing, just like I would in any other clinical assessment. And then I did something about it.

So could I have done some thought work and then changed my feelings about my work without leaving the work? Absolutely, I could have because the truth is, the work was never the problem. It was who I wanted to become as a person and as a professional, and how that subsequently fit or didn't fit with my employment, which led me to leaving. And ultimately led me to starting Abilities.

So validating your own feelings at and about work is just as important as the feelings we validate for others. It's the acknowledgment of our own internal check engine light, which subsequently allows your own curiosity, your own empathy, and your own connection to what's important for you. That is the secret to an outstanding clinical assessment, and I would also argue to your own struggles at work.

So if you're struggling or next time you struggle at work, just start by noticing it. Notice how it feels in your body and do what works for you to validate your own feelings. And then when you're ready, get curious and ask yourself why you feel the way you feel. That curiosity, empathy and connection will always show you to your next best step at work, even if it means to create something different.

So give it a try and let me know how it goes. I know how smart you guys are as clinicians, so I cannot wait to see what you create with this. Have an amazing week, and I will talk to you soon.

If you enjoyed today's show and don't want to worry about missing an episode, you can follow the show wherever you listen to your podcasts. And if you haven't

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It doesn't have to be a five-star rating, although I sure hope you love the show. I'd really want your honest feedback so I can create an awesome podcast that provides tons of value. To learn more about me and the work that I do, visit my website at www.abilitiesrehabilitation.com/clinicianscorner to download your free Getting it All Done at Work process and to see what I'm up to. Thanks so much.

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.