

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

The way we're working is not working. The old school approach of sacrificing your personal life for professional gain has succeeded only in breeding a workplace culture of overwork, disengagement, and burnout. Welcome to the Work Less, Produce More podcast. I'm your host, Dr. Lisa Belanger, CEO of Conscious Works Consulting and expert in proactive mental health and performance in the workplace. My goal is to teach leaders to consciously build their workplace culture. Whether you're leading five people or 500, the dynamics you set in your workplace matter. We will cover essential skills to live and lead sustainable work, leveraging the latest research on how to work and maybe even more importantly, learning how to un-work. This podcast will help you work sustainably, lean in and enjoy it with the support of an inspired and fulfilled team. While there's no one answer, each episode I will explore with a guest experts, considerations, ideas and tools you need to create work life integration that fuels your drive instead of draining your ambition.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

So why Work Less, Produce More? This is the third season of what started as, The Science of Work podcast. I switched to Work Less, Produce More for several reasons. One, the state of the world. So as we went through the episodes of the other season, what came up over and over again was people are burnt out. Work is changing at such a rapid pace and certainly becoming more humanistic. We're seeing empathy as the number one leadership skill that we're looking for. Soft skills have simply just become essential skills. But work is pouring over to the rest of our life and with everything from the gig economy, more people going into entrepreneurship, the great resignation, employees demanding more centralized activities around wellness at work and we're seeing this great reset. We have this ability to reimagine work.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

As I started talking to world experts on everything, from how we should take breaks, to burnout, to what exactly work life integration is, it's clear that while we have the science, it has not gone into practice in most areas. So I'm curious about this thought, "Can we work less and produce more?" Now there's a selfish aspect to this. I love what I do and I'm able to have the autonomy to do what I want when, but it started to become all the time. So, in order to really get a glimpse of what life could be outside of work, but also to make me better at what I do, I need to un-work. I don't know how to un-work. I don't think most people know how to un-work or not feel guilty when you're not being able to drive an ambition that is powerful but not overwhelming and not to the point where it interrupts life. It's really been interesting to me talking to people about how they are reimagining work.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

So a lot of what we talk about in this season is going to be different examples of what work could look like. For example, I am on a mission to work four days a week. I know it's all over the news, there's so many companies trying this, it is something that's talked about so much. But when I considered it and when I started to talk to people about it, we did a podcast episode on it. What does that mean? What are the considerations we need to think about?

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

So from an individual perspective, we know that the majority of people surveyed would like a four day work week. But what does that mean? Or what are they giving up? Or what does that look like? Is that 10 hour days, four days a week. And if so, if you have kids, where are they going? Childcare is eight

hours. If it is the same amount of work, what are you adjusting? How are we re-skilling leaders to be able to bring people through this four day work week? Are we doing better job at meetings? Are we looking and auditing our time so that we're restricting it to those four days?

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

But I think one of the biggest questions that has been fundamentally unanswered is, what do you do with those three days off? Because I started this experiment. I'm going to work four days a week. Immediately, one, I filled my fifth day with errands and laundry and then I was like, "No, that's not it. And then I noticed I was being brought back into work because everybody else is working a five day week. So I'm getting these emails and the urgency and what about my team and the people that I'm leading? Can I inspire them to do a four day work week? Would it be the same days? And to be honest, I've tried this project now for almost two months and almost every week, because I travel extensively, there's travel that's hindered my four day work week or having that respite or rest or however you want to look at it. And then my kids have gotten sick and I've gotten sick and it's just, it's never quite turned out the way I want it to.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

To make things more interesting, maybe it's not four days, maybe that is still a very time based way of looking at it. Maybe it's project based, maybe you can ebb and flow in and out of work as long as you are present in what you're doing and you get that respite or recovery. Talk to founders that are looking at micro breaking as their answer. And yet we'll talk about burnout as well.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

We're seeing people in their most productive years of life drowning. They're drowning and not being able to handle and do it all, if you will. So if you look at career loving parents, as I lovingly call them and I am certainly one with young kids, there seems to be more to do than hours in the day. I've asked in most of the episodes that I've recorded so far of this podcast, I really want to push people to say, "Yeah, there's an ideal of how we do things." But how is that practically implemented? And how is it practically implemented when you're in the soup, when you're in the mess, when you're in the thick of all of it, having more to do than hours in the day?

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

To throw another wrench in all of this, my son last week broke his elbow. He is five and so to keep him entertained and still and I had to take a him out of all the summer programming I had him in and I am somebody that, I am a workaholic, self prescribed. I love what I do and I work long hours. And for the most part, it doesn't bother me. When life gets tired, I can feel that and I know that it's held too tight. You need that ebb and flow to allow life to happen.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

Anyway, back to his broken elbow. What I'm going to do in the summer, instead of a four day work week, it's going to look different, I'm going to do a morning shift and an evening shift and work with my husband to be able to parent during the day. And my son has a whole list of hikes he wants to do and different projects and different sit still activities while he still is nursing this broken bone. I'm actually really excited for it, so I will keep you posted on it, on what that feels and looks like. When there's emails coming in, when I need to do different things to fully disengage from work.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

One of the things that stood out to me in the work life integration podcast and talking to these experts, is that work life integration can look a million different ways. So as you listen to this podcast, what does it look like for you? What could it look like for you? Because what I'm seeing from employers, the good ones anyway, is that they're trying to figure that out. And for leaders to ask that question, "What works for you?" Because a lot of people, five days a week, nine to five, does work. Whether that's childcare, whether that's just their habit, whether that's their productive hours.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

I know back when I was in grad school, I would leave for the lab and be there at 6:30 or 7:00 AM and work till 3:30 and it was perfect for me, because at 3:30, I just could stare at a wall, I was no longer being productive. So why sit there and not be productive? Now this made everybody else uncomfortable in my lab, wondering why I wasn't working long enough, because they weren't in the lab till 9:00. I also was raised, most of us were, in a workplace that it was thought that it wasn't a productive day unless your knuckles were bleeding and you were hurting from work. And unlearning that was so important, as I dive into this work. I say it like it's already done, I'm still in the process.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

So what I'm really curious about, is can we look into the science, organizational psychology, neuroscience, behavior change, habit development to see if we can work less hours and produce more? Can we really make sure that we're really present in those non-work hours? So we're going to examine the work part of it. We're going to examine, how do we focus? How do we learn? How do we be creative? How do we prioritize? How do we lead?

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

Well, the highest ROI for these traits, what behaviors and habits, what systems, what routines do we need to develop for our brain to function at its best to do our best work? We're going to talk to world experts and leaders in academics. We're going to look into, how does sleep apply to all of this. How does nutrition, how does physical activity? We're also going to look at how do we learn to un-work? How do we disengage from stress and work? How do we have fun? How do we play? What should we do on this time off? Whether it's weekends, whether it's a sabbatical, whether it's your vacation, what is that ideal vacation? Because I have certainly done vacation wrong before. So what does it look like and how do I get rid of the guilt?

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

For me, this is also happening at a really interesting time. We're opening the doors post-pandemic. The world is seemingly on fire. It's up time where I'm looking at, how do we heal from this collectively? How do we heal, but what does that look like in my life and the life of my family? I need to slow down. I need to reset my nervous system. I need to be able to be at my best to start traveling to the extent that I did before and then have the energy to really enjoy life when I get back.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

Heck, when I'm still traveling, last week I traveled 26 hours to be in a location and speak for just 11 hours. But of course, I got my hike in and some ocean and some friends and some really good fried fish. But I have to be at my best to do that. How do I get there? So can I work four days a week or some sort

of flexible version? Can I get away from this 9:00 to 5:00 because I'm terrible at it? We all are really. And what do I do in those three days off? How do I make the most of those? So it's not just laundry and chores, so that it's meaningful, so that there's respite, rest. And like I said, really getting away from this ideal.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

I've talked to so many performance experts that give me a morning routine that sounds lovely. You get up, you meditate, you have some hot water and a smoothie or a healthy breakfast and you stretch and you exercise and then you journal. And of course this is how to succeed and I'm like, "Cool. How do you do that with two small children that have needs and wants?" And to be fair, I think I have about four arguments about pants before I even leave the house. Let's get into some practical things that we can do. And what can you do when you're in the thick of all of it.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

I'm also going to focus on what leaders can do. You have as leaders so much influence around how people work. Everything from the systems they set up, to what they believe their work hours are, what is expected of them at work. When I was doing some consulting, [inaudible 00:12:21] in my mind so much, there was a father of a two year old and he was working in telecommunications and they're short staffed like we are everywhere and he was working till 7:30, 8 o'clock at night and he wasn't able to see his daughter for over a week, picking up again on Saturday. Burning yourself out as a leader is not the answer.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

So, we learn how to work from our leaders, but we also learned how to un-work from our leaders. How do you take time off? How do you create boundaries? How do you take care of yourself to show up at your best? Because we are teaching everyone around us how to do this and do it well or not well. What can we say, what influence do we have over their burnout levels, their psychological wellbeing, their performance? And it's more than you think. The best part is, most of this advice given on this podcast in this season are small, seemingly small things, huge ROI and free. We spend billions on corporate health and wellness programs. Huge fan, love it, in it myself, but these small things can go so far. Is there more influence we can have?

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

As I mentioned at the beginning of my rant, we are unlearning so much of what work was. Which means, as leaders, our leaders didn't necessarily model this for us or teach us this. There's so many new skills required as we look forward to the future of work and as certainly as we sit where we are right now. We need to re-skill as leaders. We need to lean in, we need to start asking questions and realizing that nobody has the answer. So when we're deciding, do we go back to the office two days a week, project based, all the time, hybrid, fully remote, there's no right answer? We have to ask a lot of questions. This is our opportunity to be researchers, constantly allowing our view of work not to be stagnant, allowing it to ebb and flow with the times, understanding that we are leading unique, full people that have different demands on their life and their time. How do we achieve a level of fairness? How do we accomplish those business goals while leading with empathy? Because they're not mutually exclusive. We can do both. But we have to have these conversations.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

This transcript was exported on Jun 16, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

So I welcome you to season three of the Science of Work, AKA Work Less, Produced More and I would love to hear from you, your thoughts, your experiences, your different takes on things as we dive in to what exactly do we need to Work Less, Produce More and heck, have a little fun while we're at it.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

Thank you for listening to the Work Less, Produce More podcast. You can find me on LinkedIn and Instagram to follow my mission of living a four day work week or well other versions of it, @LisaBelanger. Also, look for Conscious Works for more tips on proactive, mental health and performance on Instagram, LinkedIn and Facebook. For more information on today's guests and further resources, visit our podcast page on our website, @consciousworks.com.