

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

The way you'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 unwork. 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 expert, considerations, ideas, and tools you need to create work life integration that fuels your drive instead of draining your ambition.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

On today's episode, we're talking to Dr. Greg Wells, who is both a competitor of mine, but probably my favorite person to nerd out about human performance. He is self-proclaimed obsessed with health and performance, and is both a scientist and a physiologist that has dedicated his career to understanding the science of human limits, making it understandable and actionable. He has worked with some of the highest performing individuals on the planet, from Olympians to world champions. He's also an athlete himself doing absolutely insane things like a marathon 600 miles north of the Arctic circle, Iron Man Canada, and Tour D'Afrique, which is in 11,000 kilometer cycling race that is the longest in the world.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

He has traveled and adventured in over 50 countries around the world. He's a bestselling author of four books, and he has even hosted the Gemini award winning Superbodies series, which was aired during the Olympics worldwide. He is the CEO and founder of Well's Performance, which works with some of the leading companies to get them performing at their best. So we're challenged with how do we work less, produce more? So being a human performance coach and researcher, what do we do?

Dr. Greg Wells:

I think we have to start with why, to be honest. When we think about working less producing more, work smarter, not harder, which so many people want to do. You got to start with why, because if you understand why you're going to reduce the time spent working, it is super important to understand, what are you going to do with all that free time?

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

Right.

Dr. Greg Wells:

Otherwise just going to fill it up. In fact, Bruce Bowser and I did this program at AMJ Campbell, where we worked with a group of their employees, and we worked with them actively over 12 weeks to get them down to a four day work week. And believe it or not, there was some resistance because people were like, "Okay, well now I've got a day off. What am I going to do?" "And I'd rather be at work actually than doing house," like whatever it happened to be. So starting with why is the first big piece of puzzle. So you know what you're going to do when you have less time in the office.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

Yeah. And make it meaningful. Because what I did my first four day work week, which was only two weeks ago, is I did laundry and cleaning. And that's not a passion in my life. That's not what I want to do with my extra time. I want to make it meaningful. And then I also notice if I don't deliberately plan even my weekends, they just get full of nothingness, and without kind of conscious effort. So even with my kids being like, "We're going to the zoo." I mean they're two and five, so maybe no concrete plans on how long or anything, but being able to set up things, consciously design that time off.

Dr. Greg Wells:

Exactly. And that leads me to sort of the second idea, which is deconstruction. If you have a plan, if you know what you want to be doing more of that elevates your life. Hanging with your kids, creating magic moments on the weekends, taking let's call it Fridays to journal and practice gratitude, or go for Tear coffee with a friend who you haven't seen in a long time, connecting rebuilding community. Doesn't matter what it is, but deconstructing what you want your life to look like, so that when you make these adjustments, work less, produce more, so we're hyper efficient. That then liberates us to be able to deliberately craft, reimagine the way that we are living, the way we are moving forwards. And if you're not careful, you will fill it up with laundry. You will fill it up with vacuuming and doing the floors.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

That sucks.

Dr. Greg Wells:

Cleaning the bathrooms and all those sort, which is very important stuff to get done. It just might not be what brings you meaning in your life. And by the way, if you love cleaning, that's all good. [inaudible 00:04:56]-

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

So I'm glad that you're inclusive to our cleaners.

Dr. Greg Wells:

What's interesting is I remember Robin Sharma did a session at Titan Summit a few years ago, and he videotaped an interview he did with a gentleman whose job was to clean the airport bathroom in Johannesburg. And this man took such unbelievable pride in his work and what he was doing. It was incredible. And he was happy, and proud, and he worked really hard, and he was honored to be on the video, and like all those sorts of things. So when I say it doesn't matter what you do, it's whatever's meaningful to you, and it can be absolutely anything, is where we want to be crafting our lives. Nudging ourselves to spend more time doing that. For me, during the pandemic, I discovered I absolutely love and thrive on outdoor physical activity. I knew I loved it before, but I didn't realize that it was like mission critical for Greg.

Dr. Greg Wells:

And Judith, my wife discovered that she absolutely has to be in contact with human beings. Yeah, I'm great. But two years alone with me and our kids wasn't enough for her. So she's doing the dinners with friends. She's going to see her sister. So she needs that sense of community in order for her to have meaning in her life. So as long as we're aware of what it is, where we want to redirect our time, effort,

attention, energy, then I think we have a chance of reimagining and crafting a life that we love. While also, of course, doing an extraordinarily good job at our jobs.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

Exactly. And it's not about, I think there's this absolutely massive misconception is that a good worker spends a lot of time working. When really that's just kind of, you're kind of terrible at your job. Because we should be able to prioritize, to be able to be deliberate about both our work time and our non-work time, in a way that we totally disconnect from work in this non-work time, allowing us to totally connect when we're there. So you're doing, whatever you're doing, you're giving it a hundred percent of your attention. And so I have to bring this up just because I know you and I know where you are right now. So what Greg has done is we started this conversation, he's at, I assume a condo, on the side of a mountain working like crazy and skiing I can. So he got rid of his family. So I assume that's one of your suggestions, is just get rid of everybody else and dive into what you love to do in your work. And just alternate between the two. Responsibilities aside.

Dr. Greg Wells:

Oh my gosh. Yeah. So ditch all of your responsibilities. Ditch everyone that's important to you, that makes your life awesome, and just work in deep isolation. So that is in fact what I am doing, if I'm actually truly clinical about it. I am here right now, in a mountain town, in a condo on the side of a mountain. I'm here because I've got a massive work project that I'm trying to bring across the finish line and I needed to be totally focused because the results of this project are so profoundly important and impactful for my career. I happen to have the most spectacularly, wonderful, supportive wife, Judith, who is like, "Look, just stay." We were here for March break. I'm just staying a little bit longer. The kids went home on Monday.

Dr. Greg Wells:

I'll probably be here till sort of middle of next week because it's going to take me about 10 days to get this done. And so she's super supportive of what I'm trying to accomplish. And as a result, you know what? She's got school, she's got her job. She's a chiropractor. She does that during the day. And she's managing the activities for the kids at night, which we normally sort of split and run around with. I will totally, when I get back, probably send her to the spa and/or Hawaii. I'm not sure yet. But yeah, we're sort of tag teaming this one and I am in deep focus, which kind of leads me to my next thought for everyone. And whether you go to the side of a mountain or you simply establish some time for work and being with your family, ultimately what I would love for people to think about is really separating work from home.

Dr. Greg Wells:

And I don't mean this to be like a bad thing. I don't expect you to come for 10 days to the mountains or do anything like that. But simply when you're having dinner, for example, with your family, have dinner with your family. Turn the phone off. Don't think about work. Ask people about their days. Check in with your kids. Give them your full attention. Don't even have your phone on the table. Don't have the notifications on. Deeply connect. When you are taking your children to the zoo on the weekend, for example, be with them at the zoo. Don't check your email. While you're with them at the zoo, they want your attention. They want your love. They want your energy.

Dr. Greg Wells:

And so one of the micro hacks I've been doing around that is when I go outside with my kids, I take a camera, not my phone. I've got my watch on. So if I need to get buzzed, in an emergency, by Judith, she can text me and I can read what her text message is on my watch. But I don't bring the phone with me. I just bring a camera. So I can still take the photos I want to be taking, but I can be completely in the moment with my kids.

Dr. Greg Wells:

Similarly, when I'm at work, I turn off my email. I will check my email, but then it's off. So I can deep focus on what matters. In fact, I just got off a podcast with Mark Henick of Mental Health Advocate, and he's writing his new book. I was like, "What's up with you?" He's like, "I just got back from the monastery." I was like, "Monastery?" He's like, "Yeah, I need to go somewhere where I can write with absolutely no distractions and no technology. There's no wifi. There's no cell phone service." He's like, "That's the only way that I can focus." So it's just crafting, and being okay with separating work and home. So when you're at work, be at work. When you're at home, be at home. And I think that's the ultimate takeaway.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

I do want to go back just a second to how amazing Judith is, but-

Dr. Greg Wells:

We should spent all week on that. Anyway, yeah.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

That's actually the podcast now, is just how amazing your wife is. Just having a support system to be able to ebb and flow off of, I think is brilliant. And I know I have my parents that live around the corner. And being able to get into deep work sometimes I'm like, "Hey, could you take over X, Y, Z." Certainly with my husband, we switch back and forth to who's incredibly busy in the moment. But then we're realizing we actually need more of a system than that because the lives we have. We have dogs, we have a home, and we have kids. So being able to take those off our plates strategically, whether it's for each other, or with calling in help. A, we need to access it that again, since COVID, but we need to normalize that more, of I need focus and then knowing exactly what you need to get into that state of focus.

Dr. Greg Wells:

Yeah. And I think it's okay to say, I need help. Whether it's for, look, I need help to get this done, or I need help picking up the kids, or I need help managing the house, or I need help with my mental health. We need to normalize that. It's okay. We can't do everything. We're awesome. We're incredible. We're fantastic. We're super capable, but most of us, and if you're listening to this podcast, the reality is you're probably pushing the limits about close to your human potential. So you're looking to think about how do I truly optimize my life? How do I truly get a lot of stuff done? How do I build great relationships? So around all of that, so it's not, you take, take, take, take, take. The magic is radical communication.

Dr. Greg Wells:

That's what I've found has been super helpful. I have a vision. I'm trying to accomplish X. Talk to your partner, spouse, family, whoever needs to be in on the conversation, so that everyone's clear about

what it is that you're trying to do. What your dream is, what your goal is, what your vision. And if you have everyone on board, in my case, trying to build a company, do an Ironman. Whatever it happens to be, you communicate that to everyone so that you have that clarity of vision.

Dr. Greg Wells:

The second thing that happens is known as psychological safety, which is simply making sure that the support exceeds the risk. So we want to make sure that we are getting the support that we need to accomplish our goals and dreams, and communicating about that support. You don't want to burden the people around you, but if you can support each other and build a network of support, so we are collaboratively elevating each other, then I think there's a chance that this could actually work. But without that clarity of vision, without the psychological safety, without the support network, not burden network. And I love the idea of 51/49. Give 51% at least to every relationship so that you are always giving more than you are receiving. That's the key to what you, what you just said.

Dr. Greg Wells:

And that's what has really been helpful for Judith and I, is that I was super clear a few years ago. I was like, I think I want to accomplish X. And Judith was like, "Okay." And then we were like, "I think it's going to take Y." And she's like, "All right." I'm like, "Are you sure?" And she's like, "Yeah, okay, let's do this."

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

Yeah.

Dr. Greg Wells:

And so we're on for it. Once we accomplish it, then I don't know what's going to happen after that. We'll have to do a complete reframe. But then you just reestablish and you go about it again, you create the new dream. So make sure everyone's on board, and communicate it like crazy, and build the support network. So you're absolutely right. I hope I didn't take that too far off in a random tangent, but I love what you were saying.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

I like that. And I've said it so many times, getting out of burnout, being able to produce a lot, being able to have a life that really has multiple different facets to it, really diving into that both professional development, work, and then personal growth, and whatever you want to accomplish from the personal side. And then if you also, for example, have kids or have other things, responsibility, elder care, whatever it might be, is truly acknowledging you're not doing it by yourself.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

I wrote it down because I call it team care. And every time I say team care... I hate when we're yelling self care at people because that's part of it. But the people that need self-care the most don't have capacity. That's the issue to start with. So I've called it team care before, but I hate that term. You said something along the lines of collaboratively elevating each other. And I love that term. It's way more of a mouthful, but I do like the sense that it gives. Because that's the point, is being able to help each other out. And how can we create systems to help everybody around us? So both from, I think of during work in that four day work week, but then also to get the most of your non-work time.

Dr. Greg Wells:

Yeah. And don't forget, like we want to build teams at work to get things done, but you also can do the exact same thing at home. The team that's involved in having a healthy family is, and can be significant. By the way, I'm super privileged in that I can even have this conversation and think about it, knowing full on that there are single moms, two kids, working two shifts to make ends meet, unsupportive boss, no family around... I get it that this is extraordinarily difficult and actually impossible for many people.

Dr. Greg Wells:

Which is why I always think about elevating humanity, where if I can create a situation where everyone is able to reach their potential 1% at a time, and I help a company do better, and then their employees do better. And then they have better jobs, and better support, and better benefits, and all those sorts of things that cascade out around it. That's sort of how I justify my own work and what I do, against a context of not everybody can leverage the ideas that we throw out here. Because we're privileged and grateful, and I'm grateful to be able to even have this level of thinking and contemplate a life that we're describing.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

And I think that like for us, both of us, we're entrepreneurs. So we have the autonomy to choose a lot of things that people don't. But I'm hoping through the conversations, the messaging, we're going to start to have leaders understand what they could provide back to their team, to be able to create systems that help each other out, and literally and deliberately give them permission to have time off, for example, and by multitude of different ways, but not contacting them is one of them. And just understanding both the need for deep work and deep unwork. Being able to leverage the capabilities of both.

Dr. Greg Wells:

Yeah. And deep work and deep recovery. Okay. So we're going to a four hour work week. That's cool. Let's make sure that we support people-

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

Four day, sir.

Dr. Greg Wells:

Sorry, four day.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

I wish it was four hour, but no, we're not there yet.

Dr. Greg Wells:

So four day work week, and actually it's funny enough, it's obviously the book by Tim Ferris that keeps popping into my brain, but he'll probably be the first one to admit he works more than four hours a week. So the four day work week, excuse me. And when we think about an employer and what they could be thinking, imagine that you're, as the employer thinking, "How do I support my people to make sure that they're able to accomplish what we need them to accomplish in a shorter period of time, so

that we can then support them with that additional time for them to do what they need to do outside of the office. And when they are outside the office, I'm not calling them. I'm not contacting them."

Dr. Greg Wells:

You said that's super important. Which goes along with the idea of like email batching. Do your email as quickly as possible, then turn it off so you can return your focus to the things that matter the most rather than being constantly interrupted. But yeah, that's the idea of constant 365 degree support around you, to your employer, from your employer, to your family, from your family. We just want to build this dream team concept where we're all able to reach our true potential by focusing more deeply and then recovering very, very deliberately. Or separating work and home, so we can get a lot done with a lot less tension, a lot less stress, a lot less energy. So we can then allocate whatever energy is left over to our passion projects, our family, going to watch the school play, taking the kids to a doctor's appointment, fixing the whatever's broken at the house, going grocery shopping. All of those things we have to fit into our lives.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

So I'm just summarizing here, as takeaways, the things that I'm going to dig in deeper as this podcast goes on. A hundred percent of your attention based on where you are and what you're doing. So if that's email, that's email. If that's something else, emails off. If you're at work, you're at work. If you're at home, you're at home. If you're on the mountain, you're on the mountain. Whatever it is, being a hundred percent where you are.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

And then developing this system and network of people around you that you can give to and support, and also receive their support to make those clear goals happen. So in this case, the four day work week, how am I going to create those teams and systems? And how am I going to get my attention a hundred percent, which should be directed. Anything else to add?

Dr. Greg Wells:

I think the final thing is, in order to do this, it really just revolves around being intentional and having the faith in yourself that you're capable of doing this. Having the confidence in yourself that you can make these changes. And then this is going to create a different life. If you do this, this is not normal. This is a new way of thinking a new way of living for the vast majority of people. And so you will encounter resistance. Just ensure that when you're going down this road, no, it's going to be different. It's going to be a little bit hard. People are going to be confused. Not everyone's going to see the vision of what you're trying to craft. But once you've done it, once you've followed through, once you've been intentional, once you have done the work necessary to have the conversations, to change the routines, to build the new rituals, your life will get better. Without question, your life will get better. And then all of those people that were resisting you before going to be like, "How do you do it?"

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

How do you do that?

Dr. Greg Wells:

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How did you do that? And then you can bring everyone else along, kicking and screaming towards excellence.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

May I suggest this podcast.

Dr. Greg Wells:

Yeah. Perhaps [inaudible 00:20:08] check out this podcast. So just be intentional. Trust in yourself. You can get it done. The rewards are pretty awesome.

Dr. Lisa Belanger:

Check out our workshop, Mental Resilience: Thriving Through Rapid Change, offers you and your team practical application and skill development to navigate through rapid change and uncertainty. Visit consciousworks.com/workshops for more information. If you want to get in touch with me, you can find me on Instagram and LinkedIn at Dr. Lisa Belanger. You can look for Conscious Works on Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook, and find more resources from this podcast, and Dr. Wells' great books at consciousworks.com.