

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([00:00](#)):

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

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([01:09](#)):

On today's podcast, we're talking to Dr Bradley Cooper. Dr Cooper is the CEO of US Corporate Wellness, co-founder of the Catalyst Coaching Institute, author of four books and holds two US patents. Dr Cooper has a PhD in performance psychology, and dual master's degrees in physiotherapy and an MBA. He's the host of CATALYST Health, Wellness & Performance Coaching Podcast, with almost 225 episodes. One that I was very honored to be part of. And he was featured in the 2016 film God Speed, and identified by several publications as the world's fittest CEO. Along the way, he's fallen deeper in love with his bride of 30 years, treasured being a dad to three incredible and married kids, completed 11 Ironmen, won the Race Across America and spoken professionally in all 50 states and internationally. Needless to say, he's accomplished a couple things. So excited to talk to him today about exactly how he takes time off during a very busy schedule. So we're talking about work less, produce more, and you brought up recesses. So I got to know, what is this concept? How have you integrated it?

Dr. Brad Cooper ([02:26](#)):

So it was a desperate move. I have tried for several years, to get down to that four day work week or some semblance of that. And it just doesn't work. Part of the problem is, I enjoy my job. And you're like, "That's a problem?" Well, it's a problem for trying to trim it down to four days, right? Because I'm, I'm naturally drawn in it's that Simon song. So one of the things I've been experimenting with this year, and it's, I don't want to say I've got it perfected, but it's working better than the alternative. And that's this idea of recess. I'm in my mid fifties and I'm thinking 5, 6, 7 years from now. I want to dial it back from 60 hours to 40 hours to maybe 20 hours. So I was thinking, well, how do you go about that? So I'm trimming from different areas.

Dr. Brad Cooper ([03:09](#)):

So instead of getting up and being in the office at 6:00 AM, I spend that first hour and a half or so reading, journaling, thinking things through that type of thing. And in the afternoon, I do it at the opposite. I'm throwing in this recess idea where anything is on the table. So I might go for a walk. I might play Frisbee with a dog. I might dig rocks out of our, we've got a spot we live in out here in Colorado. That's got plenty of rocks to dig out the ground, or I might go shoot arrows in the archery that we've got it. It doesn't matter. It's not working. It's not screen time. That's the big one. So got it. I'm not going to pop on Netflix. I'm not going to go through social media of some sort I'm outside. I'm reading a book. I'm journaling, I'm playing with the dog.

Dr. Brad Cooper ([03:54](#)):

I'm going for a run. I'm hopping on the gravel bike. I'm going paddle boarding. I'm digging rocks. It doesn't matter, but it's not screen time. So I've got it blocked in at 2:00 every day. Sometimes it's an hour, sometimes it's 40 minutes. Sometimes it doesn't happen, but it's my afternoon recess. And I've played with it for a few months, the first month or so I was doing this, but I didn't have a good word for it. And then finally, one day, our daughter's a 5th grade teacher. And I think she said something about recess with the kids. And I'm like, "That's it. That is it." Because just that word, when you see recess on your calendar, it changes your mindset. It is literally a spark where you go, "It's recess time." Obviously not every day. I don't go, "It's recess time", but it just fills you with that sense of what you had as a 3rd grader. It's just like, "Hey, this is fun." And it fits the description too. It's not work. It's not TV. It's recess. And if the weather cooperates, it's outside.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([04:50](#)):

Well, think about when you are a kid, how forward you look to recess? You count down to it. Everybody just bombards the schoolyard, and you need it. We know that about kids, but it's true for adults. You will be more productive, you'll think clearer. There's all these really great benefits of being a little... And I love how you're describing it, but it is. It's play or it's enjoyment and fun, that we don't always schedule in. And then, that's the last... Or the first thing, excuse me, that comes off our to-do list when things get busy. So what is the impact you've seen from this? And I love using even the word recess, I think you're right. That is something to look forward to. And even the word break involves a little bit more of a guilt that comes with it and stuff than recess.

Dr. Brad Cooper ([05:36](#)):

Right. I need to get back.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([05:37](#)):

Yeah, exactly. So what have you noticed from this experiment?

Dr. Brad Cooper ([05:42](#)):

It's interesting, because I do monitor, what's the outcome. I'm a very outcomes based person in the first place. And you talk a lot on your podcast about greater productivity, not just for our four day weeks, but how can I get more done in the same time or less time? And I'm finding that's the outcome, because we naturally work in blocks. And I'm actually going to have a podcast coming out on our show here, talking about my typical day and just the short version of it. It's that reading reflection time early, and then my least favorite project, something that drains me or requires a lot of thought. So if I'm writing something, I might do that first thing.

Dr. Brad Cooper ([06:23](#)):

And then I'll take a break to workout, some kind of gym, run, bike, something like that. And then back to work for a couple hours. So that recess comes after about three of the four blocks during the day, generally 2:00-3:00, and then I've got one more block until about 6:00, where I'll put it in. And I've found, I think I'm more productive during the rest of the day. I don't think that hour out is causing any limits or reducing my outcomes. I think if anything is probably helping.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([06:55](#)):

I think that's incredible, because that's what the research shows. It demonstrates that, but it's hard to shift your mindset into not working extensively. And I joke around about this, but we're both recovering academics in a few different senses. And when you grow up in academia, your day has to be painful for it to be successful. So being able to shift that mindset, yet really targeting the bottom line stuff, being able to get what you need done, while taking these breaks. Is there anything else you noticed? So certainly from a productivity standpoint, from a mental wellbeing standpoint, from a behavior, sleep standpoint, is there anything else you notice about these recesses?

Dr. Brad Cooper ([07:33](#)):

I think it's yes on all those things you mentioned. This time of year in Colorado, it's starting to be sunny out. We're coming out of the colder time period. So it's easy to get out. So it's valuable to get that circadian rhythm back in track. It's valuable to get that time with the pup, which is always important. If you don't have a pup to spend time with, you're missing out.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([07:53](#)):

You got to get one.

Dr. Brad Cooper ([07:56](#)):

Absolutely. And I think it sparks that creativity piece, because if you're in a role where it's literally just put in your time and you produce based on the old Lucille Ball thing where she's on the conveyor belt and she's got to keep up. If that's your job, then hours matter, you've got to put in the hours, you don't have a choice, but if you're in a service industry, a creativity productivity piece where you're your writing matters, or you and I both do a lot of speaking, you're speaking matters. You're preparing talks, you're interacting with people. You're mentoring students or coworkers, or in our case, health and wellness coaches, then it allows you to do that more effectively. And I think I learned this when I was doing triathlons. I've done about... I guess I've done 11 Ironmans. I naturally wanted to do 20 hours a week of training, because I felt like if I do 20 hours, I'm ready. Well, that's a really generic statement. That's your five days of work.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([08:55](#)):

What is the quality? Yeah.

Dr. Brad Cooper ([08:57](#)):

Totally. And so, there was a period of time. It was actually when I went back for a PhD, that I didn't have the time. So I said, you've got one hour. What can you get done in one hour? And it was amazing, instead of doing a 30 minute warm up and then stretching out and doing this and doing that and then getting my intervals in. It'd be five minute warmup and I'm a physical therapist. So I know the physiology pretty well. Five minute warmup, ease in, build up, hit those intervals, come back down and then do your warm down through something else. Maybe going out to get your drink of water or your poaching drink or whatever it might be. So I think when you put those artificial time constraints on, you're amazed at what the brain and the body does to optimize the available time. What's the saying? Things expand to fill the available space. If you can [inaudible 00:09:44] 10 hours-

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([09:45](#)):

Exactly. And I think the same thing about purses. If I have a small person's filled, if I have a large person's filled. So why 2:00 PM? Is that the circadian rhythm dip? Is that where you personally feel like it fits?

Dr. Brad Cooper ([09:55](#)):

Yeah. I tend to finish the day well. I almost have to pull myself away from work. I'll look at the clock and go, "Ooh man, it's six o'clock, I got to get going." So I know the last couple hours of the day is super productive. I don't know what it is that things spark going forward at that point. But usually around 3:00k, 2:30, something like that, I hit a lull. And so, I tried to pick the lull time or just before it. So by having that block 2:00-3:00, and it's not always 2:00-3:00, that's just where it is in the calendar. But if it's somewhere around 2:00-3:00, I come out of that refresh and it gives me a stronger finish from 3:00-6:00 instead of 4:00-6:00. And then the time leading up to that, instead of being in a post lunch lull, I'm like, "Recess is coming at 2:00, I've got an hour and a half to get this done after lunch. So I got to get rolling." It's not, "Oh, I wonder what's going on Twitter now. I wonder what Lisa's doing with her latest podcast." It's like, "I got 90 minutes. Go."

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([10:53](#)):

I really feel like being a human is actually sprint and rest. To be able to do that, have that productivity in that way makes so much more sense to me. And I don't know if you've ever seen this quote or slide, don't ever speak after lunch because everybody's been fed and heated and then they are sleepy. And they're not [inaudible 00:11:12].

Dr. Brad Cooper ([11:12](#)):

They always put me on after lunch. That's my role.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([11:15](#)):

Yeah. Bring up the audience please. [inaudible 00:11:17].

Dr. Brad Cooper ([11:16](#)):

It's like, "Bring on Coop. We need to give them something to spark them here." So I always get-

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([11:21](#)):

Yeah. Fair.

Dr. Brad Cooper ([11:22](#)):

They always give me the 1:00 slot. So I don't know. That's not good.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([11:28](#)):

I know you're doing this instead of the four day work week, which totally makes sense. I think the four day work week, that conversation's really just around flexibility and what works for you. If you were to get a fifth day, what would you do with it? So anything and everything on the table. If you got one day a week with no work, no other commitments, what would you do?

Dr. Brad Cooper ([11:47](#)):

I think it's what I am doing now. I've basically taken that. That's a great question. I'm taking that extra day, and instead of saying, over this 10 hour day, I'd normally be working, I'm going to do this instead. I've taken that eight to 10 hours and I've spliced it into the other, well basically all five days. So I'm reading longer in the morning. I'm journaling more consistently. I'm exercising without quite the book ends. I'm taking that recess. You take those three things. I love to read. I love to write, I love to journal. I've always got three books going at once. And depending on the mood of the day, I love being outside. We were talking, before we hit record that we live on 35 acres in Northern Colorado.

Dr. Brad Cooper ([12:33](#)):

And I love just getting out and trimming bushes and digging rocks out of the ground with the dog and Suzanne and I love to get out and paddleboard at the reservoir nearby. So those kinds of things, if I were not doing them, spliced into my days, I would probably do less of those things on those four and more of those things on the fifth day. And I think that's where this whole concept came from, because as I'm in my mid 50s and I'm wanting to peel back a little bit, rather than going to a hard stop, like "I don't work on Fridays", because I've tried that. It didn't work for me. It does work for a lot of people. I found-

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([13:08](#)):

I'm Terrible at it.

Dr. Brad Cooper ([13:10](#)):

And I enjoy the interspersed thing, because I don't hate my work. I like my work. I just don't want to be doing as much of it. So this allows me to basically take that extra day and splice it into the full five days.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([13:25](#)):

Let's just explore that for a second. I don't want to be doing quite as much of it. You mean hours, because if you think about depth of work, you're still getting that. You're still doing that.

Dr. Brad Cooper ([13:34](#)):

If we're using the word producing. My goal is to not continue to produce at the level I've been producing.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([13:41](#)):

The level. Okay.

Dr. Brad Cooper ([13:41](#)):

Yeah. So if I've been putting out X number of blogs or X number of interviews or X number of talks or interacting with X number of clients. Our business, we provide health and wellness coaching for employers. And then, people that want to become health and wellness coaches, they come through our certification. And so, instead of spending as much time preparing lessons or interacting with those clients, working alongside other team members, to help them be able to step into those roles and then devoting more time to the deeper writing, the deeper reading, the deeper pondering, if you will.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([14:22](#)):

You have children that you still like, but they're all grown and out of home, which means you have the morning to journal and to read, a little bit more flexibility around the end of day that you have. So you

can push your hours and move them around and manipulate them. Do you have any advice for those that still have people to feed and water daily and don't have the same flexibility?

Dr. Brad Cooper ([14:45](#)):

I love that way you just said that, people to feed and water.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([14:48](#)):

Yeah. They're always around. I don't know. Every single day, they want to be fed.

Dr. Brad Cooper ([14:53](#)):

Oh, that was awesome. Yeah. So our kids are 27, 25 and 23. One's a 5th grade teacher. One's an occupational therapist and one's a med student right now. Eventually be a physician of some sort. First of all, there aren't answers people. Stop looking for the answers, because what works for Lisa is not going to work for Brad. I've been married 30 years this fall. Susanna's amazing. Lisa, you have not met her, but when you do, you'll be like, "Oh my gosh, Brad, you're so lucky."

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([15:18](#)):

I figured she was cooler than you.

Dr. Brad Cooper ([15:19](#)):

She's unbelievable, well obviously cooler than me, but she's just an amazing woman. And so, what would work for her is different than what would work for me. So just a few thoughts off top of my head. One is, keep in mind, phase of life. When your kids are two, when your kids are 12, when your kids are 19, those are different phases of life and the whole balanced wheel. I always laugh at this, because especially in my world of health and wellness, people always use this stupid balanced wheel thing. You have food, fitness, psychology, work, family, and they all need to be balanced. And you're like, in what world? Never, ever.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([15:55](#)):

There's not one day that I'm like, "That was balanced. Nailed it."

Dr. Brad Cooper ([15:58](#)):

And you don't want it to be, because it's a phase of life. There are certain phases where you're going to spend far more time building your career. There are other phases you're going to spend far more time watching your fitness levels. You're going to spend far more time working on your marriage. You're going to have to spend far more time working with your kids, but there are ways to link those in. For example, I coached our son's basketball team for eight years or something. And that was just awesome time together, where we'd enjoy that physical activity of running up and down the court and driving to and from, and that kind of stuff. But I don't get to do that with him now. He's in school, he's an hour away going to med school, doing his thing. And we still get away to the Nugget schemes a few times a year and the Rams games a few times a year, but I don't have that time.

Dr. Brad Cooper ([16:40](#)):

I don't look at it and go, "Oh my gosh, that relationship is totally unbalanced." No, it's a different phase of life. Or our daughter, Ashley, loves swimming. And so, I was doing triathlons at the time. We'd

probably swim together once a week oftentimes, and that's not something we do now. It's not something we did when she was two, it's something we did when she was in those middle years and I happened to be training. It's looking for opportunities and not assuming that everyone needs to be the same throughout their lifespan. You're different and tune into those differences and it'll take the pressure off you too. Two other things. One, when you examine your hobbies, remember they're hobbies. I just wrote a blog titled It's Not That Important. And it was to all my triathlon, ultra running, marathoning friends who are treating it as if their professional athletes and that every day lives and dies on their Strava splits and their heart rate levels.

Dr. Brad Cooper ([17:38](#)):

And I could say that, because I was one of those people, I was so focused on it and I learned, nobody cares. And that's not totally true. The person that finishes ahead of you in the race and the person finishes behind you in the race might care, but your family doesn't care. Your coworkers don't care. Your friends don't care. They love you no matter. Stop, put it in perspective. It's a hobby. And if you're going out for Ironman again, I threw out the 20 hour week thing. Let's say you're training 20 hours a week. If you're saying, "Okay, I've got to get my five hour ride in this Saturday.

Dr. Brad Cooper ([18:11](#)):

And so, the bike club goes at 10:00 AM. I'm going to do that." You're just an idiot. You want to be a dad and you want to start your five hour ride at 10:00 AM. No wonder your family doesn't remember your name. If you want to do a five hour ride, that's fine. If you've decided this is a priority, and you've talked to your family, and this is the route to go. Awesome. But that five hour ride needs to start at 5:00 AM. Not 10:00 AM.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([18:35](#)):

I just did this today. And I think this is such an excellent point. People that tend to compete at that level have a certain personality type. We're just born with it. It's how we work. And we're numbers driven and we're slightly obsessed of something or other, to compete at that level. I am not at that level. So when I say run, I'm using it like, lower case run. But I'm running and I'm training for a race right now. And it's the first time I've trained while having a young family. And the one thing that I have to say is, my peak time is not when I get out. My plan needs to be changed three times. And adaptability is just now one of the skills I need to still get in that hour run or hour training session. But when it works, when having much more flexible mindset. In a couple years, when they no longer want to spend time with me, that'll be very different, but right now, the training's not happening at the level I want it to, and I'm doing it when it works in, but I'm still training.

Dr. Brad Cooper ([19:29](#)):

And who cares, really?

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([19:31](#)):

No. And this is the thing I work with a lot of cancer survivors. I've had a lot of conversations about regret and retrospection on life. Nobody has said, "I wish I trained harder or worked more." That's never been the conversation. And so, I'm trying to remind myself of that often. And one of the reasons I'm trying this whole experience of the four day work week is, what can I make of that more time? Regardless if it's actually the fifth day or interspersed during the day, where you're getting in the things that really fulfill you and are meaningful for life.

Dr. Brad Cooper ([20:03](#)):

Well, and Lisa, that's important. Our conversation here is not an excuse for mediocrity. When I say it doesn't matter. And I joke about who cares. Well, if you've decided you want to make it to the Ironman World Championship in Hawaii, that's a great goal. That's a motivating goal, that will get you out of bed in the morning. That will keep you rolling. What I'm saying is, do that in sections. Instead of devoting seven years to it, build up gradually, spend three years just enjoying the sport and then say, "This year, I'm going all in." And talk to your spouse, talk to your partner, talk to your kids. How's this look, what do you guys think? I had a chance to do the Race Across America bike race a few years ago, and it was unbelievable. But the reason it was most unbelievable is, our whole family got to be part of that crew.

Dr. Brad Cooper ([20:45](#)):

So there's a crew of 17 people that supports you and make sure you're able to get some sleep at night when your partner's riding and you're getting food and all that. And our kids were at a phase of life where they could all participate on that crew. Our son is a cook. Our daughter's a driver. Other daughter was, I think she was keeping track of the map and helping people with logistics. And so, that's why it was special. That was the cool part. Had they been three years old, that would've been psychotic to try to do that.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([21:12](#)):

I probably would, because I'm crazy with my kids like that. So very different experience and very different memories that they would take from that. And I do think that's one of the reasons I'm looking at the Disney Half Marathon, is because that would be so much fun to do.

Dr. Brad Cooper ([21:24](#)):

Exactly. And they'll remember that.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([21:27](#)):

And what I do love about this, just to take in our conversation all over the place. But somebody once said to me, "Make sure you still have dreams and you keep them after you have a family, because you don't want to say I've had dreams, and then you came along." You want to model and you want to show that dedication, training et cetera, whether that's in your career or in sport or whatever it might be. But the way that looks, that's what I love from this conversation, might be very different. You might have to approach it much more strategically with having other constraints on your time, energy and effort, and sleep.

Dr. Brad Cooper ([21:59](#)):

Right. And folks don't sacrifice the sleep. 10 years ago we were all like, "Oh sleep when I'm dead." Well now we know that's just stupid. You're just not good.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([22:08](#)):

Don't sleep and you will be dead.

Dr. Brad Cooper ([22:09](#)):



Exactly. Or you won't be effective. You won't be a good dad. You won't be a good employee. You won't be a good writer. You won't be a good speaker. You won't be healthy. Occasionally we sacrifice sleep. If that's a habit, then we're on the wrong path.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([22:23](#)):

So one of the things that one of the experts I'm going to speak to right away here, is going to be a sleep expert to explore this much further, because it has such a pronounced effect on our performance. But for me just personally and just anecdotally, it is the response versus react. I react so quickly if I'm sleep deprived, versus having that ability to be much more responsive, taking in the information I need to and making decisions. So from a leadership or performance perspective, these are key. And so I think one, you've totally convinced me on the recess idea.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([22:56](#)):

So it's going to be something that I integrate and then going to get really creative. And if you have, Tweet me if you have some good ideas on what I should be doing during this recess. Again, I'm going to try it. And then I love the idea of the perspective of stage of life, because it's one of those things that I know what I'd like to do as morning routine. I never get to do it. So it's a version there that is meditating for five minutes, compared to 20 minutes would be more ideal. So just that flexibility and that nothing is forever.

Dr. Brad Cooper ([23:26](#)):

Totally. Some of my PhD work was on, it focused on mental toughness and what influences mental toughness, which is a lot of the performance stuff you're talking about. And sleep was one of the main things we looked at. It was fascinating to see how sleep impacted, or at least had a positive effect on that functional mental toughness piece.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([23:44](#)):

Absolutely. And resilient, whatever you want to call it from a mental capacity perspective, a mental health perspective. It's key. I'm terrible at it. And then I have a two year old that's terrible at it. So it's such a frustrating conversation, because of course you can't think yourself to sleep. If I can do that, I would. But yeah, I'm intrigued to learn more. Thank you so, so much for this conversation.

Dr. Brad Cooper ([24:05](#)):

Good to see you.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([24:05](#)):

This is brilliant.

Dr. Lisa Belanger ([24:07](#)):

At ConsciousWorks, we offer workshops for you and your team. Check out our Mental Resilience, Thriving Through Rapid Change Workshop. It focuses on practical application and skill development. Take away simple tools to build resilience, enhanced performance and avoid becoming overwhelmed. Visit [consciousworks.com/workshops](https://consciousworks.com/workshops) for more information. You can also find me on LinkedIn and Instagram @drlisabelanger. Also, look up ConsciousWorks on all the platforms @ConsciousWorks. For more information on today's guest, visit our podcast page on our website, at [consciousworks.com](https://consciousworks.com).