



**Beyond Survival Mode: How to Recognize and Recover from Job Burnout (Dr. Christina Maslach)
(Transcript)**

**Educator Wellness Podcast
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[PODCAST INTRO] 0:00 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Hello, everyone. I'm Kari Vogelgesang, your host of the Educator Wellness Podcast. Here to share and promote my life's work and passion, all things wellness, but not just any wellness. We're here to discuss wellness specifically as it pertains to educators. I am a former elementary school teacher and I am passionate about helping educators see wellness in a very different way. This podcast is dedicated to educators across the globe, creating a space for us to come together in an authentic and therapeutic way, sharing our stories, our hopes, our joys, our fears, our sorrows, and hopefully creating some space to share some laughter with one another as well, in our journey to learn how to support one another, to prioritize wellness and enhance our overall well-being. Please join me as we talk with nationally recognized experts to guide us on a transformative journey of self-discovery, helping us to embrace and weave all dimensions of wellness into the fabric of both our personal and professional lives.

Also, please note that the opinions and perspectives that are shared on this podcast do not necessarily represent those at the Scanlon Center for School Mental Health, or the University of Iowa. In today's episode, we're diving deep into the world of job burnout with a special guest, Dr. Christina Maslach. She's the brilliant mind behind The Burnout Challenge: Managing People's Relationships With Their Jobs. We are going to explore the six critical areas of chronic job stressors and how they can lead to burnout. And trust me, it's eye-opening stuff, so grab your favorite beverage, cozy up, and let's unravel the mysteries of work related to exhaustion together. But before we get started, I would like to say a little more about Dr. Maslach and her work. Dr. Christina Maslach is a professor of psychology emerita and a researcher at the Healthy Workplaces Center at the University of California Berkeley.

She received her AB from Harvard Radcliffe College and her PhD from Stanford University. She is best known as the pioneering researcher on job burnout, producing the standard assessment tool, the Maslach Burnout Inventory, or the MBI, journal articles and books, including The Burnout Challenge in 2022. And if you haven't checked that out, you really should. She has received numerous awards for her work, including both academic, the 2020 award for scientific writing from the National Academy of Sciences and Public, named in 2021 as one of the top 100 people transforming businesses by Business Insider. She is an outstanding award-winning teacher and was professor of the year in 1997. As an administrator, she was Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and Instructional Technology, and the Chair of the Faculty Academic Senate twice actually at UC Berkeley. She has also served twice as the President of the Western Psychological Association, most recently when it celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2020.

So welcome, everyone. I'm excited for you all to join today's conversation. Welcome, Christina. I'm so happy to have you on the podcast today, and I'm happy that we can get to talk through really what burnout is and how we can think about it in the education profession, but even just our general understanding and sense of what it is, what it isn't, and what we can learn from you. I know that you are extremely well published and knowledgeable in this area, so I actually feel a little bit starstruck right now having you on the podcast today.

4:00 | Christina Maslach:

Thank you.

4:02 | Kari Vogelgesang:

No, so thanks for coming, but maybe we can just start with learning, and maybe this is like selfish, because I really just want to, I think you're so fascinating. I want to learn more about you, but maybe we can start with just telling us a little bit more about you and what led you to this career path.

4:17 | Christina Maslach:

Well, actually I think burnout found me. I mean, I stumbled upon it by accident. I wasn't looking for it. I didn't know about it, but I had, as a graduate student getting my doctorate, I had been doing laboratory research on emotions, and understanding what kind of feelings and emotions people have, how they cope with them, particularly I got interested in people who are dealing with very difficult, highly stressful kinds of things, and how do you manage to do the work you're going to do, feeling these kind of things? And when I started my job at UC Berkeley, right after I got my doctorate, they didn't have a laboratory

yet for me to do the kind of research I've been trained to do. So I thought, "Well, okay, well, I'm waiting for this to get established. Let me go out and talk to people who might come across these issues in their job."

So people who are working in the ER let's say, or police officers, or something like that. And then people would refer me, "Oh, I need to talk to this psychiatric social worker over here. She really knows about these things."

And so, they would answer my questions, but then they often would say, "Can I tell you some more about what's going on and what my job is?"

And I would say, "Yeah, sure, let me learn more about it."

And after a while, I was noticing that there was a kind of a rhythm, a kind of pattern that was emerging, even though I was talking to very different kinds of people, not just the same sort of occupation. And I would ask people, "Do you talk to others about that?"

"Oh gosh, no, it's such a stigma."

I mean, you wouldn't admit that you hate your patients or clients some days, and that kind of thing. And I was looking through the research literature to sort of find concepts. They often talked about treating the people they were trying to help or cure, or teach, or whatever in very distant dehumanizing ways. So dehumanization and self-defense. It's not the patient Mrs. Jones in room 402, it's the infarction as opposed to a person and how they would end up dealing with that. So they said, "No, no, no, no."

And I was looking at, well, detached concern that comes out of medical sociology. Well, no, really. And then, a second serendipitous thing happened, which was I went to a dinner at the university for all the newbies, all the new people who had joined the campus that year. And I was sitting next to people, we're chit-chatting, who are you and what you're doing? And I described a few of the things that I was hearing in the interviews that I was doing, and this woman sitting next to me said, "Oh my God. Well, I don't know what you guys call it, but in law, in poverty law, legal services, where I just came from, we call it burnout."

And I thought, "Oh."

7:21 | Kari Vogelgesang:

When was that? When was that? Do you remember what year that was?

7:25 | Christina Maslach:

Oh, yeah. I started the job in '71, so it would've been '71, '72 is when I heard that term. So then, when I had the next set of interviews after I was done, at the end I would always say, "Do you call it this? Do you have anything else you want to say?"

So detached concern, "No, no, no."

"Okay, well, how about burnout?"

"Yes, that's it. That's it."

And people would just sort of say, "Yeah, that got it."

Because you had, there used to be the flames, the passion, the dedication, hardworking, pioneering, all that kind of stuff. And now it's like it's gone. It's an empty heap of ashes. So yeah, that was how I came across the term. Now, I had heard the term before in a different context. I mean, I'm the daughter of an

engineer who did a lot of work and research on rarefied gas dynamics, and the space program, and so forth. So rocket boosters burn out, they lift the rocket up and then they fall, light bulbs burn out, ball bearings burn out. And so, you hear that kind of thing. I mean, in other words, they used to be functioning and doing well, and now it's not happening anymore. And if the ball bearing doesn't have the appropriate resource, which is some sort of grease or oil, it will burn out. And so, then I got this. But also, what was happening is that in Silicon Valley, as it was beginning to develop, people were starting up their new business in this kind of things, and they would often advertise as burnout shops.

And again, I think a lot of these are engineers. And so, the term burnout, I mean just like stress came from physics and engineering, and we applied it to human beings, as there's too much pressure on you and can you handle it? And so, the notion of a burnout shop, I think is applying is where I first heard the term being applied to the work environment and the kind of, can you take it? Burnout shop was basically, okay, you signed up for us, we own you 24/7 for two years, and then you'll burn out. You won't be able to want to be here or do anything, but you'll have stock options in our wonderful new invention, and you'll get to be a millionaire or something like that. So there was this notion that you would just work and work and work, and it didn't matter how many hours, or what time of day or night, and all the rest of that kind of thing.

And so, my hunch is really that that's where the term burnout began to be used by people to describe their work experience in that way. And that's sort of where the origin is. But I mean, the term burnout had those other origins earlier in life, meaning other kinds of things. But that's really where I began to hear it more and more in terms of people's experience about the job and the workplace. So that's how I found out about it. That's how I got interested in it, because clearly, unlike people who come into the laboratory, these people got emotional during the interviews. Some of them would be angry when they were talking about what was going on. Some people would cry. I mean, this is like, whoa, something is going on here. And I think I just sort of figured there's something to find out about here, because this is not exactly what I was expecting, obviously, but there's something important.

And so, I did some initial work. I couldn't get it published at first, because well people, only a few, 1%, maybe the workforce would feel like this and no, no. And so, even though I had these interview data, there really wasn't much interest at all in it. And until I spoke, happened to cross paths and speak to a woman who was a freelance writer and journalist, and she said, "Well, why don't you write it, not for an academic journal, but why don't you write it for a popular magazine, and give it back to the kind of people you were interviewing?"

As opposed to a journal, where somebody might not... For the journal, for my own progress and getting tenure, and promotion, and all that kind of thing, I needed to do that, but it was the other laboratory research that was really the basis. So she referred me to a magazine at the time, this is in the mid '70s, called Human Behavior, which I don't think exists anymore, but it was a kind of Psychology Today, but more broadly social science. So it involved sociology and economics, and more a broader scope. So I wrote an article for them about burnout, and they loved the article. And in fact, they even had cover art. My first article, my first publication had a full color cover of the magazine with all these little matches. Each one painted to look like a nurse, a teacher, a fireman, et cetera, a doctor. And they were beginning to burn. And then that image was all the way through the article until there was just ashes left.

So that article probably got, I mean in today's words, it went viral. Snail mail days, so we were way before that, but I was just inundated with letters and phone calls, and people knocking on my door saying, "I thought I was the only one like this. But you know what? There's other people. Let me tell you my story." And then, it just sort of this snowball effect. So this was an article that clearly, again spoke to a lot of people, and people were responding and telling me more stuff, and referring me to other things. And so, at that point, even though the academic journal wasn't interested in what I was getting, it was

clear to me that there were people out there for whom this was a real issue and a real problem, and they didn't know what to do about it, and they didn't know why it was happening.

And this was often from people who had gone into their profession with high hopes and big dreams, and of a sense of purpose. And you're going to be doing something important. You're going to really be helping kids get a great start in life. You're going to be curing people who are ill or have broken legs, or something like that, depending on where you were. And so for me, at first, the people that I was talking to and got referred to were all in what I would call human services. We now, in the wake of the pandemic would say first responders, a lot of them were first responders, that kind of thing. So these are people.

And so, I thought there was a lot that was about the kind of work they do with other human beings that can be very rewarding and gratifying, but it can also tug at your heartstrings and just be overwhelming at times. And how do you deal with how you're feeling and what you're doing, and is the way that you're coping with this, treating people more as objects rather than as people, is that something that actually has negative consequences for it? So anyway, it's a very long answer to your question, but it's how I just stumbled upon it in various ways. And that's why, I mean, that somehow burnout found me. And not that I ever said, "Ah, I know what burnout is, let me go out and study it." No. And then, the more I started working on it developed into other kinds of things. And so, it's now been, we're talking 50 years ago, so almost. That article got published in 1976, I believe.

15:52 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Wow.

15:53 | Christina Maslach:

Yeah.

15:54 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Well, first of all, I'm so happy that you shared that story, because it's super interesting to know the start of it, but also that we're just so happy that you actually started, somebody started to do this work, because it is really meaningful. It's important for us to understand what it is and to understand what it isn't.

16:12 | Christina Maslach:

Right.

16:13 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Because I think you're right, you said something in that explanation, where people started to use this term a lot, and I think we still do use it a lot, but I think sometimes we use it in a way where it's maybe not appropriate to use it, and it's not because people are trying to be inappropriate, but maybe we just don't quite understand what it is and what it isn't. So maybe you can explain to us a little bit more about

that. What is it and when is it different from just the general stress that you get from work that we all are going to get at different times?

16:48 | Christina Maslach:

Yeah, yeah. No, you're asking great questions on this, because I think it does get misused and misunderstood in critical ways. So first of all, when I did the research and I heard this term, I didn't know what was meant by that. And so, the research that I started doing then was to systematically go through the interviews, begin to pick out the themes, develop, take the kinds of phrases and things that people were using, and then doing more what we call psychometric research. Not only talking to the people, but talking to people who knew them, like their colleagues, their family, their clients or patients, or students, or whatever, so that we could sort of triangulate and sort of get a better sense of what are the components of this thing that people are calling burnout. And what we found from the research empirically was that it wasn't just a single thing, like a stress response.

It's more than that. And so, it's in the stress category for sure. It's a response to chronic job stressors. So the exhaustion, which is one component of this is the stress response, and we respond to stressors in all kinds of areas of life, but this was just really focusing on what's happening in the job, in the workplace. But what we found was that that was not enough to really capture it. There were two more things that were going along that are sort of related. One of them is that as people begin to deal with chronic job stressors or responding to chronic job stressors, they begin to try and distance themselves from the job or cut back, or do other kinds of things. And what this turns into is a very cynical, hostile, take this job and shove it kind of attitude about the workplace and the job. And I'm quoting Johnny Paycheck's country Western song there.

But for me, this is really the hallmark of burnout. Not that it's a response to, it's a stress response. Yes, it is. But in this case, what's happening is you are beginning to change the way you view the job and how you do the job. And so, what we see is that instead of trying to do your very best, you're trying to get by with the bare minimum, what's the least I can do and still get out of here, and get the job done and get my paycheck, and all the rest of it. So that kind of cynical, negative, to hell with this job, but you're still on the job and you're still doing it, is really changing how you do the work. And so, for me, that really is the important second component. The third component that we found was quite separately from this is whether you begin to feel negatively about yourself. What's wrong with me? Why can't I handle this? I thought this was going to be the great job and I'm not sure I'm cut out for this. I'm not always proud of how I've done it.

Maybe I should be somewhere else in doing something else, or maybe I'm just in the wrong school, and if I could go to another one, I would be okay. So it's those three things that's really that trifecta, which is job burnout, which is the response, the exhaustion of stress, the negative response to the job, and a negative evaluation of yourself. And when you've got all three of those, that's really when you're likely not to do well on the job. You make mistakes and errors, and you don't give a damn, and you're feeling not good about yourself and what you're doing. And it's not a great position to sort of be in. It can have health consequences, as we know all stress responses can. We've known this for a long, long time that if you are stressed out a lot and not coping well, and not dealing with it well, it will have negative effects, because we are not designed to be under stress all the time. That's not a normal state and it has wear and tear on us.

So it can affect our health, our physical health. If you remember years ago when people were first really starting looking at this kind of thing, it was like the type A kind of thing, or people having heart attacks and maybe dying in their 40s. And so there are health consequences, which is why the World Health

Organization officially recognized burnout. Not as a disease, not as a medical condition. It's not an illness, it's not some sort of problem with you that needs to be diagnosed or talked about as symptoms, or you need to see a doctor, or all that kind of thing, which I think, let me say a little bit more about that later. That's misunderstanding. But it can have health consequences. So a response to stressors is a normal response for all living things. If there's a stressor, if there's a threat out there, there's a challenge out there.

Our body, mind, we're all geared up like, oh my God, all hands on deck, got to deal with that. And then you recover and go back to a normal state. If you don't recover well and are stressed all the time, then that's going to have an effect on your health. It's going to have an effect on your relationships with other people. It's going to affect all kinds of other things. So again, to quote from World Health, "It's a response with these three components to chronic job stressors that have not been successfully managed." So there's two things that are important there. One, chronic, when it's chronic, it means that those stressors are there all the time or most of the time. No matter what you do today, you go back tomorrow and go back next week, they're there, they're back, you're having to deal with it again.

So if it's chronic, it's going to keep you stressed more longer and you're not going to be recovering as well. And we've known this about all kinds of stress responses to different stressors. When it's chronic, we have a harder time, much harder time recovering from that and coping well with that, as opposed to acute, more well-defined, end and beginning stressors. So there are people who work, for example in jobs that have episodic. If you're an accountant, April is the month from hell and you know it's coming, and you deal with it, and then you take off and have vacation or whatever. But you know that it's that kind of period. With chronic, it's like it's there all the time.

Some of the people who have written about burnout in healthcare among physicians have talked about pebbles in the shoe. And I like that phrase, because it gives a sense of scale. It's not like some humongous thing about the profession that will take billions of dollars to rethink completely how we do healthcare or education, or something. It's those chronic everyday stressors that get in the way that are a nuisance, that are painful, that are difficult, that slow you down, that get in the way, that drag you away from the really important stuff, you have to do this other meaningless stuff. So that's really, and the World Health said have not been successfully managed. There's a positive tone there. They could be better managed. So really the issue is how do we understand what the causes are and how can we begin to deal with what's causing those uncomfortable pebbles in your shoe, and get rid of them, or make them happen less often, or better recovery after them, or something like that.

So that's really what burnout is and why in terms of what's misunderstood is that people think of it always, I think predominantly as opposed to they shouldn't, as a disease, as a health issue. And then they frame it as something is wrong with you and what are you going to do about this? And sorry, job can't change. It is what it is, and you're the one who's going to have to figure it out. And either if you can't take the heat then get out of the kitchen kind of thing. And so, making it an illness changes, you know when you ask who is burning out and making it some sort of medical issue, when it's not, means that the answers we come up with to the who question are who answers. Well, you're going to have to get more sleep at night, honey. I'm sorry. You're just going to have to rest up, eat better, do exercise, mindfulness. I mean, there's all kinds of coping strategies, which are fine to help you feel better while you're doing this, but they don't change what's the cause of the problem.

And that's something else. So when we frame it as this individual thing, it's blaming the victim. This is why people often don't want to talk about saying, "I'm burned out, because I'm going to be stigmatized. I'm going to be thrown under the bus by my colleagues who are trying to get ahead of me. I'm going to be looked down on, because I'm less than a hundred percent. I don't dare raise a question to somebody about like, wow, I had a really difficult time with this lesson today, and have you ever run into, or do you

have some advice as to what I could try, or that kind of thing, because then I'll be viewed as weak, incompetent, all that kind of stuff." And people will say, "Should I confess that I'm burned out? I need accommodations or something."

And I'm saying, "Well, you're saying it's all my problem and that's not the way I would do it."

I quite honestly say we need to stop focusing on who and what to do about those poor people, and say why are people experiencing burnout? Because the stressors out there are probably affecting other people as well. And then for various reasons, they might not be completely burned out, but we have found they are not having a great time at work either. They might be really exhausted, big time, tired, overextended, but they still like the job and they still think they're good at it. So they're not burned out. No, they're overextended and tired. It's like, "Ah, but I'm glad I'm here and I think I'm proud of what I do."

There are other people who maybe aren't so stressed, but they're disengaged, because they really don't like how the whole place is being run. And this is not a great job, it's not a good fit, and you could do it differently. Or people who are made to feel like you're not that effective, you're not that good, although you like the job and you're managing, you're not exhausted in this stuff, but somehow you're not getting much positive feedback at all. So am I any good at this, am I, etc. So I mean there's even a Gallup poll, Gallup and others do these polls about things about how engaged are people with work.

And that's sort of the opposite of what we see in burnout. You've got high energy, you want to be doing this work rather than pulling away from it. You feel great about what you're doing, you're proud of it. It's not that you don't have stress some of the time, but it's not that frequent. It's not chronic, the way it is for people who are experiencing burnout. Their poll about a year, maybe a year and a half now globally, asking people to say if they're engaged with work, and usually they find about 30%, which I've never thought was very high to begin with, but it had dropped to 20% globally. So that means 80% of the workforce globally was saying, "I'm less than thrilled with my job. I'm not engaged."

Are they all burned out? No, not necessarily. I think that's usually more extreme response, but you're all those things in between, where you're beginning to have the exhaustion or you're beginning to feel negative about the job, but you haven't gone to the full trifecta. So my sense is that the question really should be framed not as who is burned out and what do we do about them, but why? And if we start figuring out how to successfully better manage those chronic job stressors, those pebbles in the shoe, we'd go a long way to just sort of making the job a little bit better.

And if we did regular checkups like we used to always have to do, go in and check how your health is every year, let's say, or every other year. So how's your weight? How's the cholesterol? Are there any symptoms that are coming up that you need to begin to pay attention to? And depending on what that is, the solution might be diet, it might be medication, you might have to do some other now, whatever. We should be doing the same kind of thing in the workplace, which is every once a year at least, how could we make things a little better around here?

What's working well? Yay, let's celebrate that. What's not working so well? What could we begin to do to to alleviate this hassle over here or this pebble over there? And do that on a regular basis, because the world changes and we need to keep adapting and we need to keep figuring out how do we do a good job now, given the circumstances? And so, that's why for me, it's the fit between people and the job. And you can make changes and adjustments on both sides of that. But we tend, when we ask who is, we're only looking at how do we fix the person? We're not looking at what do we do about the job? And we really need to look at that, because that in fact is the source of the chronic job stressors, which is leading us to be less than thrilled, and enjoying and being proud of the work we do.

So that's really where the research has taken me. I think in terms of that understanding, that if we don't understand what the job is and how it can be changed, then we're in less good shape. And quite frankly, I mean, I don't want to give a silver lining to a pandemic, which we just went through, but we had to change how we did our jobs big time. And sometimes it worked out and sometimes it was disastrous. And we have to learn from all of that. I mean, honestly for educators, teachers, often I think of them as having been thrown into the deep end of the pool. Without preparation, without good technology, with all of that kind of stuff to say, "You have to teach, but very differently and not with the kids in the classroom."

And I was seeing that happen at the university. I mean, I'm retired, so I wasn't involved in that right now. But that was, did it get done well? Sometimes yes, but a lot of times, you know. And it wasn't because people didn't know how to teach or weren't trying to be creative, or come up with some solutions on this, but the match, the misfit was just huge. It was really bad. And so, yeah, I remember talking to a colleague of mine from a company, a publishing company down in Silicon Valley, and she was saying, "We usually don't get a lot of people signing up for or trying to apply for a job opening, because we aren't competitive with all the high-tech companies in terms of pay and so forth like that."

But suddenly they were getting lines out the door and I was saying, "So who's coming in and applying for the job?"

And the vast majority of them were teachers saying, "I need to get into a better place where I can use my skills and whatever. I can't go back to this and I'm looking elsewhere for it."

33:58 | Kari Vogelgesang:

I think what you're saying too kind of leads us to something that I wanted to bring to our audience's attention, which is you identify in your book, Burnout Challenge.

34: 11 | Christina Maslach:

Yes.

34:12 | Kari Vogelgesang:

If you don't know about it, then you should check it out, but you identify these six key areas of chronic job stressors and I'm wondering if you can just, real briefly, go through each, all six, each of those.

34:24 | Christina Maslach:

Each of those?

34:25 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Yeah. Just give them a little teaser on each of them, that helps better understand this mismatch that you're talking about.

34:34 | Christina Maslach:

Right, right. So what we have found, and then I have to say when I say we, there's a lot of people, even before I started doing work on this who were doing research on occupational health and so forth. So there's a long history of other research that is in accord, sort of matches with this. But at any rate, what we have found is that there are at least these six areas where a bad fit, a bad match between people and the job can lead to burnout down the road for the six. And I'm going to list them in order of what people think of them, the one that everybody thinks about first is workload.

And basically this is what are the tasks that you have to get done and what has to be the work on there? And when there is a mismatch, it's usually the demands are really high. The resources to meet those demands are really low. You don't have enough time, you don't have enough people, you don't have the right materials, you don't have the information or the things you need to do that. So you're in a position where you have to do X, but you don't have what you need to actually do X, or do it well or get it done on time, etc. So that's the kind of mismatch. When you get a match, there's a better fit between what I have to do and I can get it done, and I can leave for home when the day is over, and I don't have to come back and work on the weekend, or in the nights or whatever.

The second area is sometimes even more important than the workload. It's control, which is how much autonomy, control, discretion you have over how you do your job. And when you're in a position where you are told exactly how to do it and you can't deviate it, you just have to do what it is, you have no control. Again, the risk for burnout is much higher. And so for people, often it's not the workload, it's uncontrollable workload that is the problem there. If you have appropriate control, then it's kind of like, okay, based on all the training and experience etc, I know how to course correct, I know how to make some changes as we go along, you can respond to new challenges, or there's something that's happening that you didn't have before that students didn't understand, and now you can work with that. And so, I think teachers in some sense, unlike other jobs come in usually with more control over what it is they're doing and how they're doing it. So that's a second area. Third area is what we call reward. And it's really about positive feedback when you do something well.

So it's not just salary, benefits, although obviously those are rewards, but we're finding that a lot of this has to do with recognition, social recognition, somebody notices and cares, and thanks you, and pats you on the back and says, "Oh, right, that was really, you saved us on that one. I should try and work with the family a little differently now seeing what you just did. That was really..."

And it's that recognition that people value what I've been able to do. I feel like I belong and I'm doing good work, and so forth. So that kind of, when I first did those interviews with people in human services, and some of those were teachers as well, when I would ask about a good day and a bad day, a good day, there was usually a pause, and then they would say, "Nothing bad happened."

That's as good as it got. So it's not that there were positive things, it was the absence of the screamers, all that kind of stuff. Fourth area is community. And by this I mean the workplace community. So these are the people whose paths you cross on a regular basis. Could be colleagues, it's supervisors or principals, CEOs, it's vendors, it's whatever in terms of your job, there are people that you see and work with in some way. And when there is a mismatch, it is what people are calling socially toxic workplace. This is where you may have lots of people around you and you don't know who to trust, you don't know who to turn to for advice.

It's the sense that you're going to be attacked or you're going to be harassed, because of who you are. You don't feel psychologically safe in this kind of environment. And it's as opposed to an environment that is supportive and you can trust people. And even if you disagree, you figure out how you come to a common, how do we get on the same page and move forward on this? And we're not sarcastic and belittling each other. We're actually having more of a camaraderie and feeling good about the people

we work with. And when it works really well and supportive people talk about it like, "Oh my god, that's like gold. That's like money in the bank. Building is falling apart. We're not in a great place of town, but the people that I work with are terrific."

Fifth area has to do with fairness. And it turns out in general, people want to be treated fairly, whatever the rules are, whatever the policy is that they are fairly followed. So this is when they are not being treated fairly, when they're being discriminated against, when there's those glass ceilings, when there's favoritism, there's the teacher's pet, or the principal's pet and the others, that kind of thing. Anything like that can really breed that cynicism about how things are done here. You feel you're asked to do extra work voluntarily, because we just don't have enough people around. And so, can you do this and do that and don't get rewarded with extra pay, but don't also get recognized and patted on the back, and sort of say, "Thank you, thank you for having done all this."

And that just feels unfair, because then you're feeling exploited as opposed to, I'm willing to do extra because I care so much about the job. If I'm engaged, I'm willing to do that, but you are not treating me fairly. Forget it. And then, the sixth area is what we call values. And this is really meaning and purpose, and why am I doing this work? And usually it's the thing that's, I'm going into this to do it, because here's what I care about. Here's how I can contribute, here's how the work I can do and bring, makes the world a little bit better in some way. And when people are working in accord with those kind of values, that gets you through a lot of bad stuff, difficult stuff, because you really believe in it. But when you are operating with value conflicts, you're having to do things you're not proud of or you think that are wrong, or you're being asked not to call out anything that is being done illegally or not right.

People talk about moral injury in healthcare, for example, in terms of what the job requires you to do, which is really hard and difficult to tell a family, "No, you can't be in and say goodbye to your loved one, because of contagion of COVID or something."

I mean, it was really those kind of values and the value conflicts, or the hospital is just about making money, it's not about actually caring about patients. I want to go to a better place where working with the patients is really number one. And so, that kind of erosion of the values that brought you into the job can lead people at some point to say, "I'm out of here. I quit. I can't do it."

43:05 | Kari Vogelgesang:

That moral injury is something that educators are experiencing and reporting a lot about, Christina. So I think that's going to really land and hit hard with some of our audience, because there's laws or legislation that's being passed that is oftentimes lately in conflict with the values that teachers actually have and their reason and motivation for wanting to be a teacher, and supporting all students, no matter how they identify or all families. And so, that can be really difficult in this time right now for teachers.

43:39 | Christina Maslach:

Oh, I can believe it. Yeah.

43:52 | Kari Vogelgesang:

So I know that's contributing to some of this and I love these six points, these key points that you highlight in your book and that you just walked us through. Because I do think if we can focus, I agree

with you, if we can focus on that, especially administrators, people, that more of the power can focus on these six areas, then they can create systems that better support their staff, their educators or healthcare workers, or whomever to avoid this and keep people in the profession. But now let's take it one step further and let's just say that the system failed to some extent, that's one person's fault or whatever, but let's just say did. And so, now we have a person or a group of people who are experiencing real burnout in their job. Maybe we can at the last part of this episode talk or address. So then what do you do as an individual? You're the creator. Is it possible to stay in that job and recover?

44:59 | Christina Maslach:

It might be possible to stay and recover, but I often think it's not enough just to do it by yourself, that we really need to be able to transition from a me focus and a me solution, to a we focus and a we solution. So that if we have a bunch of people who are all fed up with the fact that we have to do X, and that it takes time away from doing the real work of teaching, is there a way we can come up with ideas to do it differently? And it's we, because it usually means we have to be coordinated, we have to be on the same page about all of this and shift. And so, in the book *The Burnout Challenge*, we have little vignettes of how different organizations or groups of people tried to do this. And sometimes that can be done below the radar, that can be done just, you don't have to go to the top and say, "Do we have permission to do this?"

If the supervisor, the manager, whatever, of this particular unit or place, or school, or something like that says, "Yeah, let's do that. It's not going to cost a lot of money. We'll do better job than et cetera, let's go for it."

And so, we're empowering. That kind of thing I think is really more important. The other thing is that when it's more of a we focus, then it becomes what's causing the problem for us? Can all of us name our top five, 10 pebbles in the shoe and see which ones are kind of easy fixes and maybe could be done more quickly, more successfully? Can we do them on our own? Can we do them in making a change in how we do meetings, et cetera? So when we're working with our supervisor or something like that. And it changes the framework from focusing on who to blame for this, to really frame it as a question like, so how could we make things a little better around here? And that doesn't involve saying burnout, that doesn't involve saying overly worked and stressed, and can't stand the job anymore. It's basically saying, "How could we make it a little bit better? Let's figure out."

And the pebbles in the shoe scale that we're looking for, the chronic little stuff that's just getting in the way and that we can actually, or maybe with some help or maybe with some funding, get a little bit more going there. And once, I mean, what I've seen is when we've done this with different organizations is that if they fix one thing, it builds hope, optimism. Oh my God, if we could fix that, hey, how about this thing over here that all of us gripe and complain about all the time? Why couldn't we do something different over there?

And realizing, because often you feel there are things that are out of your control and you can't change certain things. And that may be true, but there may be ways in which you can have more of a voice in any discussions about what's being done. So a point that I would want to make in response to what you were saying earlier is that too often I have seen administrators, CEOs, C-suite people, whatever you want to call them, have done things for people in their organization with the best of intentions, but don't talk to people in advance about whether this is going to be a good thing or not.

And too often they miss the mark. And people, when I talk to the employees, they're saying, "They put a volleyball court on the roof? And think of all the money that was spent on that. Did anybody really need

that or want that? I mean, we don't even have time to do the exercise bikes in the basement, because we're working so hard and we can't get, working through lunch."

All that kind of thing. And why people often have ideas, they often complain about the fact, in fact, people who are really burned out are sort of saying, "I'm well-trained as engineer or teacher, something like that. But I never, ever get asked for any opinion or suggestions about what would make a difference, what would make it a little bit better around here? We're just told what to do. And sometimes it's like, you might've had a good intention, but this was not well thought through, because now we have doubled the load, because this is the impact of that."

So not having a voice, not having a way to collaborate and sort of say, "Let's figure out what could be five things that we could fix and make a little bit better," is really important. And that's where I think, again, having more people coming together to identify this rather than each person, what can you do on your own? And again, not knocking what you can do on your own in terms of trying to cope, but as I say, the coping may not change the cause. And if you want to change, cause then we have to have a larger discussion and getting on board with all of this.

50:33 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Yeah, I really like what you just said there, which is basically the feeling of you are an expert in a particular field. So let's just obviously use teacher as an example here today. But there are people who have never taught before, never had a classroom, who don't have a professional education around becoming a teacher or what it means to be a teacher, the pedagogy or curriculum, or managing classrooms, so on and so forth, making decisions for teachers without really listening to teacher voices.

51:14 | Christina Maslach:

Teacher voices, yeah.

51:15 | Kari Vogelgesang:

I do think that, and again, I don't necessarily think that people are sitting somewhere in an office, coming together and being like, "How can we really do bad?"

51:26 | Christina Maslach:

Yeah, I know, I know.

51: 28| Kari Vogelgesang:

I don't necessarily think that, but I do think that there is really truly a level of disrespect there. And my theory, and I think a lot of people's theories is that this has historically been a female job and that we've had people sitting in rooms not fully respecting the voice of female dominated professions, and making decisions for us. And I think this is causing some serious problems. And one of them is burnout, as a result of people making decisions about our careers and our professionalism without listening to voices.

52:00 | Christina Maslach:

Yeah, yeah. And that's why, I mean, I agree with you a hundred percent on that, and that's why I think the more voices you can have in chorus, so to speak, makes a more powerful statement than just, oh, there's an individual who can't handle it, is not doing well, and blaming again. I mean, the burnout mantra I think is not just the, if you can't take the heat, get out of the kitchen. You can change the temperature in the kitchen, you can put in better ventilation, you can make things better, you can do less harassment of the staff. I mean, there are things that could improve the kitchen, but the burnout mantra that I hear, and I've heard even before the pandemic, but certainly through it, is we have to do more with less. And I'm sorry, we can be really good about adding things to people's plate.

You have to do more. We can't hire more teachers, we're going to have to pick up more stuff, etc. We're very bad at subtracting. You've got to somehow remove some of this or redesign some of it, so that it doesn't take so much time, or have the right equipment functioning or the technology, so that it actually serves the purpose and reduces the workload rather than just adding to it. But this adding, we have to do more with less, is really now creeping into organizations not only having a heavier workload, but having much more of a mismatch on fairness. And that is really, I think, deadly in the long run, because if you feel that you're being exploited in that way, and it's not a voluntary thing to do extra, because you really value the organization, love the job so much and so forth, that's serious.

That's really serious and that's a problem. So with the six areas, it means that you can look at the job from at least six different perspectives, and some of it is going to be fine and maybe will never become an issue in this kind of work, but it will in other kinds of occupations. But it's worth going beyond workload and maybe control to look at the others, and particularly values and fairness, because those are the ones that people don't pay attention to. But those can be the areas where people, in terms of how they feel about the organization, and their sort of loyalty and commitment, and all the rest of that thing. So for example, one of the examples that we've given in the book is about fairness. And when we were working with this organization, we did an assessment of the six areas and we worked with them over time.

So we were going to come back and redo the study, and so forth. And I had asked the CEO, what do you think, which areas are going to come up as more negative, more a problem? And he said, "Oh, everybody complains about the workload, so that'll be a problem. And everybody complains they're not getting paid enough, so reward, that'll be a problem."

Turned out, it wasn't a problem in either of those areas. The problem area, the negative that came out from, and this was like 800 to 1000 employees in this group, was fairness. And he was shocked. I mean, he was like, "What? How could people think it's unfair? I mean, what? They think this is an unfair play? What do you mean?" Kind of thing.

So we talked and saying that there were different issues and different units within the organization, but there was one thing that everybody agreed on that they thought was really unfair. And I said, "Maybe you should start working on that."

And that was a distinguished service award where people got a little bonus check for doing something really extraordinary, and above and beyond, and so forth. And first he was saying, "Well, okay, maybe we haven't raised the bonus enough. Maybe we should need to make it a little bigger."

And I was saying, "It wasn't a reward issue. It was a fairness issue."

The wrong people, everybody thought the wrong people were getting that award. They were not the ones doing something special. They were the favorite of the supervisor and said, "Oh, I didn't get you a pay raise. I'll give you the service award instead."

Or the leader of the team that did the special thing got the award and none of the people who actually did the work on the team got it. I mean, many ways in which it was unfair. To his credit, this guy said, "Well, let's fix this and you do something about it." Everybody said to him and he said, "Look, I didn't see it. I didn't know it."

And he put together a thing that brought in employees from the different units to work together as a task force to come up with a better system. How do we recognize fairly the people who really do something special and are deserving of that? And they worked on and finally came up with something that everybody agreed this would be the way to handle that process. And then, when we came back later and assessed it, the fairness issue had disappeared.

It was like, wow, at least we did that. And now people were talking about, okay, what can we do this year? Okay, we took care of that one. Now let's move on to the next one. And so, for the last 20 years, that organization has been doing an annual, so how can we fix something that's not working well? We did it before, we can do it again. It just becomes a regular process of checking in and finding out what needs help at this point. If everything is working fine, then that's fine. We don't do anything. We just wait until the world changes and now we're in a different position, and things aren't working so well.

58:01 | Kari Vogelgesang:

I think that's a really great positive example to end on, because I think it gives people a tangible kind of example, I guess is what I'm saying, about how we can collect information from key stakeholders, from people involved in the organization or the school, and pinpoint things that aren't quite going well, and then working as a team, task force, whatever to improve. Especially if you focus around these six key areas that you talked us through today. I think that's doable. That's very doable for a school administrator to see those things and to work with their educators to, one of those is kind of maybe going sideways.

58:50 | Christina Maslach:

Yeah. And I think there were three C's that we talked about of sort of things we've seen when it works well in different places. And just quickly, one is collaborate, and that means you really need to get all voices in. So if we're going to make a change here, anybody who's going to be affected by it, by carrying it out, or the consequences of it needs to be, what's the pluses, but are there some downsides? Are there different ways we could do this, that, etc. So it's getting those voices of collaboration. The second one is to customize, which means that you never do just a one size fits all. If they do this over here in a banking industry, it's going to work here in the schools. No, you've got to figure out what's the general principle? How do we get better ways in which people can work together and socialize and actually get to know each other a little bit better, but do it differently that fits us and our hours, and the way we do our work.

So you take the general, the generic and customize it and make it our own. Make it something that, hey, this is the way we could better do it. And then the third C is the commit, which is don't just do a one-off or a workshop, or something for the weekend, and then you say, "Okay, we're done."

No, it takes time to get rid of how we used to do it, and now we're doing the new thing, and then we need to course correct, because we didn't anticipate something, so let's get it right and sort of keep saying, "What's our goal? What will success look like if this works? And how will this be better for us? And are we getting there, and do we need to make changes along the way?"

So having that more sort of active, how do we make this place just a little bit better for us to do the kind of job we want to do, is something that I think anybody in sort of any management level is really in a sweet spot to work with people, find out from them what are the things that would really make a difference if you had your five most worrisome pebbles in your shoe? Where should we begin and how do we get going? And I just feel that that becomes a more regular, normal process, which isn't blaming people, but is actually getting people involved in figuring out, what do we need that will help us with this?

And those may have changed. I mean, I started teaching at the university more than 50 years ago. We taught really differently then. And the way we teach now is really different, because all kinds of things have changed. We know more about how people learn and different ways of presenting material, and working with students. We have technology in many different forms that will affect what's going on, et cetera, et cetera. You have to adjust. The world changes. And so, there's a sense in which checking in and seeing how could we make it a little bit better? And it's going to be for all of us, it doesn't matter just for the people experiencing burnout who are more stressed than others, or the people who are sort of, but not really. Rising tide is going to lift all boats, if we can make it a little bit better.

And I might add, somebody just told me the other day about an acronym that I hadn't heard about before, which is GROSS, G-R-O-S-S, get rid of stupid stuff. And what it means is, as you can imagine, is that we often are dragged away from the important work to all these other kind of things. And the question is, do we need all of that other stuff? Can we redesign how it gets done if we need it? And can it be, how's a different way to go about this? Do we all have to check these boxes and all fill out these forms? Is there some other way, you know, etc. But it's really trying to sort of say, as we evolve and change, we don't just keep doing all the same stuff and just keep adding, adding, adding. We've got to change. And sometimes that means rethink, redesign, come up with a different way of doing it, not just more of the same. And so, instead of filling out a questionnaire with 20 questions, you now have a hundred you're going to have to get done, or something like that.

So those are some of the pebbles that people don't often pay attention to. And some of the things, not always, but some of them don't involve a lot of money. They involve really a different way of thinking about what we need to do and how we can do it, and how do we cut out some of the stuff that really is dragging us down, not making the job worthwhile. And actually, at some level, we should always assume that our managers, our bosses, want us to do the important work that we've been trained to do and been hired to do, and to drag us away to do other stuff, which is really not high priority, not number one. It's kind of like, how do we change this?

1:04:23 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Well, you've given us lots of things to think about. That's for sure. And I really appreciate your time, your expertise in joining us today. And I really do encourage everybody to check out the book, and particularly these key six key areas that Christina walked us through today. I do think it would be helpful for everybody when you're thinking through how you can create systems that best support educators in the work that they're trying to do in schools.

1:04:53 | Christina Maslach:

We do. Yeah. Yeah. It's really important work. And we've got to be able to figure out how do we create the best environment possible for people to do that work.

1:05:05 | Kari Vogelgesang:

For sure.

1:05:06 Christina Maslach:

And do it well and be proud of it.

1:05:07 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Wow. So today in this enlightening episode, I had the privilege of hosting Dr. Christina Maslach, a renowned psychologist and researcher. And I'm so grateful that we were able to delve into a conversation, unpacking the critical issue of job burnout and dissecting the six key areas where chronic job stressors can take their toll. We talked about workload control, or the level of autonomy and decision power, or decision-making power that a person has in their job. We talked about reward, or the balance between effort and recognition. About community and the sense of connection, fairness, or at least the perception of equitable treatment and values, our alignment of personal values with organizational values.

But I think what struck me the most was the realization that once again, we go back to this being more than just an individual issue to deal with, but something that is collective and requires community action and collaboration. Educators, administrators, and policy makers need to be challenged to work together, to build supportive systems that prioritize our wellbeing. And by fostering open dialogue like what we had today, and implementing effective policies and promoting self-care practices, I think we can create environments where burnout is not only just recognized early, but we can take proactive measures to make sure that we're taking care of ourselves, and we're also taking care of those around us. Until next time, I'm your host, Dr. Kari Vogelgesang, forever cheering you on.