



## Conscious Life presents

### Self-Leadership & Menopause: A Thriving Workplace

**Guest: Elizabeth Sergeant**

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**[00:00:09] Dr Anu Arasu**

Hi everybody, I'm Dr Anu, co-host of the Hormone Super Conference. Today I'm joined by Liz Sergeant. Liz is a nutritionist, and she's also a thought leader in women's health and performance. She's the founder of Well Nourished Club, and she's a changemaker through her work for public forums and corporations. Welcome, Liz.

**Elizabeth Sergeant**

Hello. Thank you, Anu. It's amazing to be here with you.

**Dr Anu Arasu**

It's such a pleasure to have you on. One of the things I wanted to start with was menopause in the workplace. We have this movement, and it's quite a big movement, we're hearing these words, but what does it mean? And how successful is it?

**Elizabeth Sergeant**

Here in the UK, it varies very much across the world, so it'd be amazing to get feedback from people who are watching, and how it becomes localized for them. Here in the UK, menopause in the workplace, over the last two, two and a half years has become quite a hot topic.

For the first time, it's like an awakening of an era because, for the first time, women are being heard in the workplace. The differences, the biological differences and changes, and ebbs and flows, that women experience as they move through their life course, including menstrual health, and then menopause, are for the first time being recognized and understood, with what that looks like in the workplace, and how that may influence a woman's ability to come in their best self, come be creative, come be a leader.

### **[00:01:58] Elizabeth Sergeant**

We're at this incredible pivotal point because women are being seen, quite boldly you could say for the first time. Women are being seen, and they are being understood, and they are being listened to. As a result, particularly in the UK, and I know a lot of the other European countries also have different movements happening within menstrual health and menopause, are being provided the opportunity to have a voice, say what their personal experience is, and receive support for that in the workplace. It is incredible, and so much of this wave has come over the last two years. It's got a long way to go, but I think this is a pivotal moment.

### **Dr Anu Arasu**

Is it working? Do you think that we are getting the results that women want and need?

### **Elizabeth Sergeant**

What's interesting is we have to celebrate... Because we have to celebrate that we have come a long way to be having these conversations. If you think back, my history is corporate I used to work for big pharma, if you think back then, talking about menstrual health, we're talking 15, 20 years ago, it wasn't that long ago, but talking about menstrual health in the workplace, talking about periods in the workplace, talking about menopause...

Menopause is interesting because for a lot of women when they're moving through the menopause, through their 40s and 50s, they're often at a time in their career where they're at their peak, approaching their peak. They've got a lot of experience behind them. To suddenly start showing what might be perceived as weaknesses, anxiety, loss of confidence, brain fog, hot flushes, more difficulty pulling ideas together on the spot, can suddenly become very paralyzing.

100% celebrating we've got to a point where these topics are being discussed, they're not being hidden, and people aren't hiding behind. People aren't necessarily suffering in silence like they perhaps were.

The issue that we are finding in the work that we do in companies, is that yes, it is ticking the box with regards to women being seen. It is ticking the box for corporations and businesses in we're providing menopause-friendly solutions for our employees. It's an employee well-being type box.

But it's not addressing the underlying root cause and the issue because what we're... In some respect, this could be exacerbating the issues, because what we have going on is firstly we're normalizing that menstrual health issues, PMS, and some of the other hormonal conditions, are normal. We're normalizing that some of the perimenopause symptoms that women experience are normal. In that, it can feel isolating.

Then in the measures that are being put in, flexible working, having a fan by your desk if you suffer with hot flushes, these are all great, but a lot of them are just allowing us to feel more comfortable in our discomfort. Particularly when it comes to flexible working, yeah, it's great to be able to work from home three days a month when you're not feeling great.

But then we have women in isolation at home feeling horrendous, feeling they don't have the confidence to do the job that they used to do, feeling that they've got to get on. They've got to pull

themselves together to get on a team's call and lead a board meeting. Yeah, they're in the comfort of their own home, but there's still that anxiety, there's still the questioning... What's going on? Why can I not perform at the level I can? Then they're more isolated.

### **[00:06:24] Elizabeth Sergeant**

What's happening is we've got this situation where we're moving forward, but we're also at risk of moving back and not progressing, because we're not getting to the root cause. Which is, firstly, when it comes to menstrual health, so many of the monthly symptoms that women experience are very common. We don't want to be necessarily saying, "Oh, it's common, of course, you're going to experience these, yeah, have a period day, take a day off work. That's fine, we understand."

But they're not biologically normal, there's a lot that as women, as individuals, we can be doing to support ourselves. But as companies, we're missing a trick. The companies are missing the trick in the fact that, brilliant we're acknowledging that this happened, but let's help the women understand what's going on. Particularly with menstrual health, we shouldn't be experiencing those symptoms.

And perimenopause, there's so much we can be doing to support a woman's perimenopausal journey and lessen those symptoms, whether that's through holistic health, understanding the role of stress, understanding the role of different foods, understanding what's going on, and/or with the addition of HRT. There's a lot we can be doing.

In that, we are then building the women's confidence, and their confidence to continue building their careers, to continue leading their team, to continue performing at their peak. For the companies, essentially, their performance is a reflection of the health of the individual in that organization. For the company to be getting to those root causes and lifting their employees up, it makes so much more sense.

We're at a pivotal moment, but we're also at this point where we need to be very strategic with regard to how we move forward. I think there's so much more we should be doing, companies should be doing, and as individuals, as women, what we can be doing to help ourselves.

### **Dr Anu Arasu**

It's a very interesting point you make. I imagine that a number of women listening to this, or even being offered these solutions in their workplace might feel in two minds. Because if they're at the peak of their performance, at the peak of their career, they've worked hard to get to where they are.

Then someone says, "Okay, fine, work from home." There can also be a fear of being replaced, or that you are somehow not reaching your peak performance, and that therefore somebody else may take that position, or make your position less strong. What would you say? What advice would you give to women who are feeling like that?

### **[00:09:30] Elizabeth Sergeant**

The main advice is to start to understand for yourself what is going on within, so understand where you are on your journey. For a lot of these women, they will be moving through perimenopause, there'll be a lot of changes going on. There's so much that we can do to support ourselves.

Now, if you are in that situation, where what we do see, and we hear from so many women who lose that confidence, and in that ability to perform on the board, in the C-suite, to often quite a very male-heavy audience, they can't keep up with what is required of them.

Firstly, what I would say is that you are seen, it is understood. One of the worst things you can do is to continue muscling through. We can work more efficiently when we start to lean into what's happening within. There's so much we can do to rebuild our foundation.

As women, we become so disconnected with our body, our cycle, and our hormones, really as teenagers. That comes round in part to the societal narrative around periods, it comes to the way we're taught about the periods at school, and it becomes our experience of our early periods in our teens and in our 20s. Quite often, we might be put on the pill at an early age to manage symptoms, and we become very disconnected.

So as we move into perimenopause, suddenly everything starts to heat up, symptoms start to rise, and anxiety starts to come in. These are experiences that we're very unfamiliar with, but they become all-consuming.

But the important thing to know is that there's so much we can do when we start listening to these symptoms, and when we start looking at the root cause of some of the imbalances. Whether that's HRT, which is an incredible solution, but if you're moving towards HRT, you still need to be doing so much of the foundational pieces for yourself. HRT isn't going to work alone on its own.

We need to be moving through the foundational pieces of looking at stress, looking at food, blood glucose imbalances, and looking at gut health. Some of these foundational pieces that if we've been a high performer for 20, 30 years, and we haven't been tuning into our body. It's probably got to a point where our body needs a little bit of TLC to bring it back into balance.

And that doesn't take long. It just requires us to take a moment to say, "Right, I'm ready for this next phase of life, and I am going to step into it with confidence. I'm not going to be shying away. And if I do need to be doing some work from home, on some days whilst I'm moving through this period, that's fine. But I'm moving towards it with confidence, knowing that I'm helping myself."

### **Dr Anu Arasu**

The thing that comes to me, when I listen to you, is this very clear difference between navigating around the problem without solving it, versus having the utmost confidence that you are going to get back to your peak performance. I think this could be related to stigma as well, because if other people in the company just see this as this is what's happening, she's going to solve it, and she's going to be back to her peak performance. That's a very different response from having a problem that you don't solve. Can you speak a bit to that issue, to the issue of stigma and peak performance?

### **[00:13:31] Elizabeth Sergeant**

I love that. Absolutely, that is what we're getting to with some of the solutions that have been put in place already. Like I say, it's amazing, that we have this awareness of conversations that are happening in organizations. This is an incredible step forward. But the issue we have is with that has come this assumption that women of a certain age may experience difficulties, and may require more flexibility.

That's the stigma we're talking about. That could be the unconscious bias that is coming in when we're looking at promotions when we're looking at building a leadership team. Whether we're looking at a large project that's going to be launched, who are we having on the team? We want critical thinkers, we want go-getters, we want doers, we want creatives. Who's going to be the best for that?

And because of some of the narratives that we've got going on, and the flexibility that's coming in in the UK, we have new flexibility policies coming in next year, which I know some companies are very supportive of. But at the same time, they fear having more requests for working from home, which creates a more disparate workforce.

There is this stigma with regard to the language that's being used as to what is normal for women to experience. Whereas what we're challenging, and what we're seeing within the companies that we work with, with the individuals we work with, that isn't the normal narrative. That doesn't have to be the normal narrative, biologically it isn't. We can very positively take ourselves towards peak performance when we look at root cause changes.

### **Dr Anu Arasu**

I think this is so relevant for so many hormonal problems. I know many women have used the word gaslighting, medical gaslighting, before because they've been told that their period symptoms or their hormonal symptoms are normal, and you have an average of 8 years plus to get a diagnosis of endometriosis, and women feel very let down by that.

The changes that you're talking about are the opposite of that. Can you tell us a bit more about what you would recommend? What changes would you like to see?

### **Elizabeth Sergeant**

How we're working with companies is supporting them in bringing health, to becoming a business imperative, a strategic imperative, versus it being a benefiting kind, a well-being package, which is what health generally has been historically.

But the health of an organization is your success pulse. The companies we're working with are very much forward-thinking, and it's very much looking at an athlete analogy. If you want a company full of prime athletes who are at the peak of what their talents are, physiologically you need to be attuned.

### **[00:16:48] Elizabeth Sergeant**

We're now working with companies who are supporting their women really at that physiological level because we know that our health, our physiology, our hormones, they influence everything about us. They will influence our personality and our confidence, they will influence the decisions we make on a day-to-day basis.

When our physiology, our hormones are out of balance, they get bigger as they shout, as we experience migraines, as we experience fatigue they shout louder. In that, we shrink, our leadership ability shrinks, and the energy with which we lead ourselves shrinks, which influences all those around us in our environment. Influences then our performance, our team's performance, and the company's performance.

We're now working with companies by supporting individuals. Either individual leaders, their leadership team, their future talent, and the menstrual health perspective. Then other women within their organization on that physiological level. Going in very much personalizing and understanding each individual, what's going on for them? And those that do need the support, then go deeper using lab testing, using wearables to get real data for the individual.

Then for the company, they can see how that is changing across their organization. We call it their health performance pulse. We can see how that moves from the beginning to where they are 3, 6, 12 months down the line.

### **Dr Anu Arasu**

That's amazing. If a woman is working with a company that is not yet that forward-thinking, what can she do? Or how should she start to shift her mindset in order to get herself to that athlete peak performance that you speak of?

### **Elizabeth Sergeant**

Yes, the athlete's peak performance. The core thing is looking... To know that so many of these symptoms are common but they are not normal, and that is for menstrual health and as we move through perimenopause, so many of those symptoms... Again, amazing awareness, but we hear a lot about the symptoms, and it starts to feel like we've got something to dread as we move into that phase of our life.

But to know that when we start understanding what's going on in our bodies and looking for help. Looking for functional medicine practitioners, registered nutritionists who understand women's health, like myself, like yourself, who can support you in understanding, this is where your body is right now, so whether it's just a one-off women's health assessment, or whether it's moving through a program. There's so much you can do to support yourself, whether you get help, or look for help online. There are so many incredible women out there, professional experts, who give incredible advice online as well.

## **[00:20:11] Dr Anu Arasu**

I know that you do some fantastic work with women. When you talk about things like mindset and limiting beliefs, what are some of the themes that come up that you would like to get a message out there to women who are going through this?

### **Elizabeth Sergeant**

This is such a core piece of all work that I do with women in either my private practice or with corporations because this comes back to the energy with which we lead ourselves. Quite often, a lot of the women I work with are high-performers, executives, and business owners. To have got where they are now, they have got a lot of drive. They potentially, at some point in their life, and maybe still are, very dominant in that masculine doing energy.

And that, over time, can wear down our resilience, and that can be one of the things that results in so many of our hormonal physical manifestations. One of the core things that I work with women on is helping them understand their energetics and the energy with which they lead themselves.

That includes the energy that they are taking on, so from other people, from the environment, from their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, because all of this that we take on, we internalize, and those thoughts, feelings, and beliefs become biochemical hormonal reactions within us. There's a lot that we might be doing very subconsciously, that is creating hormonal imbalance within, that can be exacerbating those perimenopause symptoms, or exacerbating our menstrual health.

Starting to become aware of negative thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, starting to become aware of when you're holding onto resentment or anger for the person who cut you off at the traffic light.

One of the big ones I see for women is control, particularly for women who have then become mothers at some point, because at one point in a mother's life, you are the primary caregiver, whether that's in the first few weeks of life, or the first year, or continues.

Because quite often, women are very much leading the household as well as leading their careers, and they take up a large proportion of that caring role. We become in control of that, and what ends up happening is that the need for being in control becomes suffocating and absolutely exhausting without us even recognizing it.

One thing that would be amazing for people to just think about as they as they're listening to is, what areas of my life, or what areas of my day-to-day am I holding onto with white knuckles? I could just ease, or even just maybe let go... Can I just take it back? Can I just let go? Can I take it back? There's so much we can put down that isn't serving us. In that, we create space.

### **Dr Anu Arasu**

I love that. How do you think we embark on this journey? Is it journaling? Is it helpful to be with others on this path? Where do we start?

**[00:23:45] Elizabeth Sergeant**

Journaling is a lovely place to start noticing some of the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs that are coming up. When you notice something coming in, when you notice something bothering you, when you notice you're still angry about a look a colleague gave you an hour ago, start recognizing what is that, where is that coming from?

But as you said, being in a group of women, women and men, who are raising their consciousness around this is so empowering. One of the things that I absolutely love to do in my private practice is a group program because you're with women... I'm a women's health clinic, so all of the people in my programs are women.

But you're with women who are going on the same journey, they are having the same aha moments, and they are releasing control of some of the same things. It's amazing how much commonality there is between us. We're all having the same should have, could have, and would have, internal conversations that aren't helping us in the here and now. The should have, could have, would have, they're things of the past. We're now focusing on, where are we going in the future.

Having those conversations as a group creates such a collaborative, and I like to say, collapsing of time with regards to how we can move through them, and how we ultimately step into our personal power, which is what it comes to. It's something I'm talking about at the moment in my community is personal power.

This comes down to our physical self, because when we're experiencing so many of these symptoms because we're leading ourselves outside of our personal power. We're not choosing foods that are nourishing us, we are not serving ourselves well with perhaps good sleep hygiene. We are consuming media that is moving our energy in a negative direction. All of which has taken us out of our personal power.

Then from a social-emotional perspective, these thoughts, feelings, beliefs, the should have, could have, and would have, all moving us out of our personal power. When we start to work with the physical self, and then the inner being, the emotional self, we come and we stand here, and we can be radiant, and we can be in our authentic energy, and in that personal power. That is what I want for everyone, no matter where they are on their life course.

We all deserve that, and we can all achieve that, no matter how far that feels at the moment. My own personal health journey, I was a long way from that 7 years ago, probably even 5 years ago, when my children were young because we go through different life phases.

But when we start becoming aware of the things that can influence it, there are so many choices we have at our fingertips, very simple choices that we can make. But it's about making the one that moves us forward right now. Then when we get into a routine with that, a pattern with that, when we enjoy that, we then move forward with the next.



**[00:27:09] Dr Anu Arasu**

I suppose those choices that you're talking about, could range from everything from relationships, behaviors, socializing habits, drinking, and eating. Are those the choices you're talking about?

**Elizabeth Sergeant**

100%, and obviously you could list out millions because the variables are so many. But for each and every one of us, there's going to be some needle movers. I bet if you're watching this and you're experiencing some hormonal imbalances or fatigue, there's going to be one that's there. You're like, I know if I move towards this and away from that, it's going to make such a huge difference. There are going to be some big needle movers, once we work with the big needle movers, some of the big ones are people often.

A big one is blood glucose control, thinking about the foods we are nourishing ourselves, often moving away from a typical Western diet of highly processed, mainly carbohydrate-based foods towards a balanced, nutrient-dense diet. That is a huge shift, and it's hugely beneficial for our hormones.

Exercise, is another big one for a lot of my high-achieving ladies, who like to exercise at 5:00 AM, let's crack it out before we get on. But unfortunately, it may have worked for us in our 20s, but as we move through our late 30s and 40s, the mix with cortisol, the change in hormones, the change in stress levels, and potentially the loss in resilience from the go, go, go energy. Working out fasted at 5 AM is potentially one of the things that's influencing, negatively influencing, our hormonal balance.

There's going to be very big needle movers for each and every one of us. It's not about thinking of all the different habits because you could think, Well, yeah, I do go to bed too late. Maybe I shouldn't be having a glass of wine every evening. Maybe I shouldn't be scrolling on my phone. If we do that, there are so many things that we can potentially change, it becomes overwhelming.

Just about picking one, picking maybe the biggest needle mover that feels achievable, and enjoy getting into that one, because you will feel such an uplift from that. Then you'll be like, "Okay, now what can I do? Let's try something different."

**Dr Anu Arasu**

I love that you mentioned how some of the things that used to work for us won't necessarily work anymore. I do think that there's something very interesting happening with our relationship with aging, we understand that we don't have to age gracefully, but we can have the option of aging powerfully. What would you say about aging, stigma, and where the future is at?

**Elizabeth Sergeant**

I love that. I feel that there comes such wisdom with aging, and I feel that... It's interesting, the stigma piece, because I feel that we're entering an age where there is so much less stigma with regards to aging. Now, this is important where the narrative incorporation needs to change around menopause, and where this is one of the things that we're championing. Yes, it's great to have

those conversations, but the narrative does need to change because we are at risk of creating a stigma around menopause.

### **[00:30:52] Elizabeth Sergeant**

Yes, there has been stigma in the past, which is why it was never talked about. It's amazing we're opening, and talking about it, but at the same time, highlighting it as a challenge for female leaders also isn't helpful.

But generally, I believe that we are entering an era where the wise woman, the wisdom. When I say wise woman, people might think of someone in their 70s, versus in their 40s, 50s, 60s. We're at the peak, we're at the peak of our lives, and of our careers. There's so much wisdom that comes when you get to that age, and women are stepping into their personal power.

They're releasing so much of what we probably held dear to ourselves in our 20s. Around how we look, how we're perceived, people's opinions, so much of the energy that isn't helpful. We get to a point where that just falls away because it's because we know ourselves.

I think this is really beautiful as well. As we start to know ourselves, know ourselves emotionally, know ourselves socially, know ourselves spiritually, know ourselves physiologically, know our hormones, know our body. I think for a lot of women, that is potentially one of the last pieces that falls in place. Whereas actually, it could be one of the first, because our body is here, it's been with us. Our minds change, we grow and we evolve. Yes, our body is growing and evolving, but we can start listening to them so much earlier on.

For women listening to this in their 20s and their 30s, start noticing the ebbs and flows of your hormones. Your energy will change at different times of the month. Your clarity, your creativity, and your introspection will change. Just starting to know what works for us, and then when things change, we'll start to notice that something feels a bit awkward working out at 5:00 AM, doesn't flow as it used to. Maybe I could try another time.

I feel like the whole aging process is a constant growth and evolution into this incredible space of wisdom, of being leaders. That's my view, that is my view of the world when it comes to aging. A lot of the women that I work with are in the same space. We have the same beliefs as regards to that.

### **Dr Anu Arasu**

It feels like there's a new wave entering for sure, where we're getting so many positive role models about age, and power, and how ridiculously healthy one can be in the later years.

### **Elizabeth Sergeant**

I know, it's amazing seeing women in their 80s and 90s so physically and mentally fit. Obviously, social media has so many great positives, and also not so many. But the media is being able to bring these women to us, like you say, as role models and seeing them leading themselves. It does come from that self-leadership piece, it comes from the choices. They have made choices at some

point in their life, that have led them to be that version of themselves now. We all have that opportunity at our fingertips.

**[00:34:34] Dr Anu Arasu**

I love the term self-leadership. I think that summarizes it. Any last tips for our viewers? Any take-home messages that you would like for anybody to know?

**Elizabeth Sergeant**

My big take-home message would be the initial attunement piece, the initial piece of listening to your body, and starting to understand, what is it telling us. For some women, this can be so difficult at the beginning.

I messaged a couple of my clients yesterday about taking a moment at different points during the day to feel sensations, firstly, in maybe your stomach, in your chest, in your heart, in your throat, and then in your head. These are the areas that are easiest to potentially feel the sensation. So behind your eyes, in your mouth, in your ear. Notice sensation, is there heat? Is there tension? Is there ease? Is there fluttering? Because quite often we hold so much tension and stress within.

Starting to acknowledge what we are feeling in our body is huge. Then obviously what's happening hormonally? As soon as you can start noticing and feeling what's going on within, you can then start applying that too as hormones change, noticing symptoms flow, noticing rhythm.

My big take-home message is really start noticing what's going on in this beautiful body, start journaling down the different things that you notice, and know that these are just signals from our body asking us to do something.

If we feel tightness here, if we feel a little bit of anxiety here, which is like a rumbling, maybe do a physiological sigh to allow the autonomic nervous system to reset, and release it. You may only need to do 2 or 3 of the physiological sighs to allow that nervous system reset, allowing it to be safe.

Something you could do simply between meetings. Again, the compounding effect of that will be huge, versus the constant go, go, go, next thing, next thing, next thing, next thing, not even just listening. We go through life not listening to this beautiful body.

I was there, I have been there... until it screams loud enough, then we have to listen, but we don't want to get to that stage. I would not recommend getting to that stage. Let's listen and then respond. See it, it might be that you move on, see it, breathe, smile, and move on.

**Dr Anu Arasu**

Thank you, Liz. That's been awesome today.

**Elizabeth Sergeant**

It's been really fun. I love good, juicy conversations, thank you so much for having me.