



Creating Safety in Toxic Work Environments

Guest: Kimberly Weeks

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[00:00:09] Meagen Gibson

Welcome to this interview. I'm Meagen Gibson, your Conference Co-Host. Today I'm speaking with Kimberly Weeks, a certified Trauma Recovery Coach and the Director of Association Leadership for the International Association of Trauma Recovery Coaching.

She works with narcissistic and psychological abuse survivors, as well as people with childhood trauma to both recover and discover life lived from the authentic self. Thank you so much for joining me today, Kimberly.

Kimberly Weeks

Thank you so much for having me, Megan. It's always good to be with you.

Meagen Gibson

So we're focusing on toxic relationships and discerning kind of what they are, and obviously there's different types. There's familiar, there's family oriented, there's work, and so today I want to kind of focus on what a toxic work relationship is.

Kimberly Weeks

Yeah, that's a really great question. And when I did a little research, it reminded me of how much time people spend at work. I think it's something like 90,000 hours across a person's lifetime are spent at work, in the relationships at work. It's a third of your life is spent in that kind of space.

And because of that, so much of what happens at work impacts how you develop and how you grow as a person. I think it's something like 53% of Americans have reported that there's been some kind of traumatic event that's happened for them in the workplace over the course of their careers.

So those statistics are like, yeah, we need to pay attention to what's happening for us in terms of how we relate to folks at work. And so I guess we can start kind of like defining terms like, so what is a toxic relationship and what is a toxic work relationship?

[00:02:05]

A toxic relationship is a relationship that hurts, and a toxic work relationship is a relationship that hurts at work. It puts you in a position where you are consistently distraught, you are undermined, you feel unsupported, you feel bullied or attacked, ostracized or marginalized in some way, and that produces impacts to your body, to your mind, to your emotions, or your overall health. That's a toxic relationship at work.

And if you think about those statistics, if you have to go into that every day and kind of like little kids who go to school and they know they're going to get bullied on the bus or they're going to get bullied at the playground or whatever, it creates quite a bit of impact for a person.

Meagen Gibson

I love the framing that you've given us to launch from of how much time we spend at work and the frame, the incredibly simple framing of what it feels like, and that's what defines it as toxic. And I also want to just name for a minute that it doesn't matter if the person who is creating the toxic environment intends to do so. So if you could spend a minute talking, just naming and talking about that.

Kimberly Weeks

Yeah, I love that, because often the ways that we have learned to relate come out of our childhood experiences. And so they're unconscious. We are not or most people are not intending, I'm not saying that no people are intending to cause harm at work, because some are. But most people are on autopilot.

They are operating from the attachment patterns that they develop with their childhood primary caregivers. They are coping in ways that they have automatically learned, that keeps them safe or in service of survival, as Linda Tai says. And so it's not an intentional thing. It's just the way that we kind of... What's the right way to say it? We just show up automatically.

And that lack of awareness is what makes it possible for it to brew, for it to develop, and for it to become something that's very damaging to the people around you. When you're not aware of yourself or situationally aware of your impact, that causes a lot of damage for people.

Meagen Gibson

Yeah. And I think it would probably be good, too, to spend a little bit of time discerning the difference between maybe covert and overt toxically abusive work environments. Because I'm thinking of an example. There's lots of work environments... I'm thinking of definitely like sales oriented work environments, where there's this very kind of overly masculine competitive... It feels like a football locker room, if I could be honest. And there's a lot of the context of ribbing each other or making fun of each other or saying cutting remarks and then following it up with, I was just joking.

Kimberly Weeks

Yeah.

[00:05:25] Meagen Gibson

Like the overt versus covert. It's not somebody backing you into a corner and actually physically and verbally abusing you, but it feels abusive.

Kimberly Weeks

Yeah, absolutely. And I love you as a person who works with narcissistic abuse survivors, defining that overt and covert is really important because most people think when someone shows up overtly as a bully, it's actually worse than the person who's sneaky and hides.

Overt work toxicity is when the person's in a position of power, influence, or authority to behave in a way that allows them to harm other people, hurt other people with no consequence, with no check or no balance. Okay?

And that's typically whether it's nepotism, whether it's some kind of dual or entangled relationship that they have with someone in management or in a position of power that they are literally allowed overtly and aggressively, whether it's cussing people, out at the office. Whether it's joking and doing the side jabs and all of those types of things, whether it's humiliating people by email or by in presentations, whatever it is, they are given a pass to operate that way. And it grows like gangrene, literally.

The covert which people say is less, some people say, is less harmful. I believe it's actually equally, if not more harmful, of a type of work toxicity or a relationship of toxicity, because you don't see it coming.

You don't have any idea it's happening. The smear campaign, the seeds of doubt have been planted about you little by little over time and all of a sudden you start to see people change how they treat you, speak to you, respond to you, respect you, and you don't know why.

And the whole time there is a person covertly plotting to either move you out of your position so they can have it or do something that... Because they see your capacity, because they see your gifts, they want to dim it so that they can be in a position where they get that attention or that promotion or any of those types of things.

So overt and covert dynamics are very difficult. They are equally damaging and they have an equal impact on your nervous system, on your capacity to function in that 90,000 hours that you're at work and your capacity to perform well. It really does.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely, and I'm thinking of people with different types of neurodivergence in the workplace being misunderstood and the way that people can try to be creating camaraderie amongst themselves, saying like oh, that person's so abrasive, or I don't know how to relate to them and then all of a sudden... It's hard to be a worker in the world today.

And I'm also thinking of like we think about, and you've touched on a little bit, not explicitly, but kind of in talking about this, our family systems growing up. Our work environments, as you've mentioned, we spend so much time at work, and if we're in an employment situation for a long time, that becomes like another family system in a lot of ways, I'm sure.

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And so I'm thinking again of the sales job, all the salespeople are going to write to me and be like how dare you demonize us. But I'm thinking of them again where in a lot of sales environments, people who are good at sales get promoted into management and they're leading people when it wasn't their leadership of people that got them to that position, it was their sales acumen.

And so then you've got people without great, in some cases, management styles, leading teams, when all they know how to do is go out and sell. It's like people who manage don't necessarily get to manage people because they're great managers and they're really inspiring and caring of people, it's because they were really good at the job they had before they got promoted to manager. And so, yeah, if you could just speak a little bit to the work environments that we get that can model our family environments.

Yeah, I think one of the things that's interesting when clients come to me. They come for something with an interpersonal relationship, or they may come because they're having a really hard time at work, but when we get underneath it, there are some things that happen in their childhood that they have not unpacked.

And those dynamics of how they respond and how they move and how they see themselves are showing up at work. They may have been the primary caregiver and had an attachment style that was anxious or avoidant or dysregulated, or the third attachment style is disorganized.

They may have some way that they're showing up, and when you're in positions where there is an authority figure or someone you report to, the inner children in us can show up in those spaces. And when that happens again, it's unconscious. It's not that you have full awareness of what's happening to you and you just start responding. You start responding and reacting.

And those family system dynamics, when I work with narcissistic abuse survivors, you can have a system that there are golden children, there are lost coworkers who kind of fly under the radar, you can have scapegoats who are the people that are targeted and punished and gone after by other folks in the system.

All of those dynamics can play out those attachment styles. So healing your own attachment patterns so that you have more and more secure attachment and attachment capabilities is a really big part of starting the process of healing what happens at work, because the parts of us that are young will be armored up and respond in ways that are very automatic again.

And if you don't have the capacity to see yourself while you're happening, I've said this before on other conferences, there's three ways you can see yourself. You can see yourself before you happen, you can see yourself while you are happening, or you can see yourself after.

And often people who are unaware of what is showing up from their childhood, they see themselves after they happen at the office, after something's happened, after they've had a blow up, after they've had a very immature response and they're playing cleanup, trying to correct the image that that situation created.

What we want to do as coaches is to support more and more people real time, seeing what's happening in this situation and what's coming up for them so that they have choices, so that they

can support and change the pattern. And if you can see yourself before you happen, you're in a really good place.

[00:13:09] Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. And I'm so glad that you named it because oftentimes it's not the abusive party that actually ends up getting the attention, it's the person on the receiving end of it that blows up or that has that last draw moment.

And then they are defending themselves with all of the added kind of like the cumulative effects of all of that covert dynamic for weeks, months or years. All of a sudden they blow up and now they're doing apology and repair when all along it was all of this kind of resentment that was building that they were unable to understand consciously, that was building up, right?

Kimberly Weeks

That's a really good point. Because I think, again, your awareness of the cues within you that something's not aligned, that something is off, that people are changing how they relate to you and trying to uncover or discover what that's about.

Sometimes you cannot because it's so subtle, these covert seeds that get planted that the person who is on the receiving end doesn't even realize they're changing the way that they talk to you or respond to you.

But if you can have the awareness of those cues and start to try your best to figure out what's going on situationally but then also figure out what's going on and what's coming up in you and go deal with that.

A lot of what people struggle with in the workspace is that there is an engine happening, there is a system happening and it's big. And so raising your hand to speak up about injustices, marginalizations, inequities, any kind of ism. Ageism, sexism, patriarchy, racism, any of those, it's a big machine that's operating and it's been operating for a long time.

And so the thing that we have the most agency over is looking at what's happening on the inside of us and regulating our own stress responses. That positions you to be able to stand up and communicate what things you're experiencing from a place of soundness.

So that those seeds that have been planted, that you're off your rocker, you're not in your right mind, all of those different things, those seeds that have been planted cannot be reinforced by your reaction.

And that happens a lot at work. So if you're not aware of what's happening in you and you're actively doing what's necessary to resource yourself, then it makes it very difficult for you to advocate for yourself in an effective way.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. And I'm so glad that you framed it that way because I think a lot of times in the stages of our journey, even if we identify the ways, if we've come to the final, we're like gosh, there's something going on with me, I got to figure out what it is.

The first instinct is I want the world to orient around my sensitivity now, right? I went through this. Everyone I know that comes to this realization is like it's just a stage in the development and all you can control is yourself.

And I'm thinking about also just the psychology and biology of every single person in that environment is unique. It's like a fingerprint, right? And so I think about myself, if I was in a work environment where I was being deeply, highly verbally criticized and attacked, I would not stay. That's not familiar for me.

I would immediately sense that as like, oh no, this is not a tolerable situation for me. But there are versions of me in the past that if somebody had just been constantly crossing my boundaries as far as how much work I could do, how much I could cover for other people ignoring these are my work hours. I would give and give and give and give and give, right?

And so that is a way in which I could get taken advantage of because of my innate biology and sensitivity and psychology and experiences. And so it's hard to define like, this is what an abusive work environment and toxic workplace looks like because it has so much to do with your inner experience, biology and psychology, right?

Kimberly Weeks

Yes. Even in that there are some kind of basics to what it looks like to be in a toxic work relationship. And let's just call it what it is, Meagen, there is no relationship or toxic work relationship or environment free of toxicity. Let's just call it.

There is some dysfunction and there's some toxicity in every work relationship. When I work with clients and we're looking at are you in an environment that's going to support your recovery? What we talk about is do the cues of safety in that space or in that relationship outweigh the cues of danger?

Because you got something to work with if you got more cues of safety, if there's more danger than safety, then you're in an environment that's poisonous to you.

But some basic things, and you kind of pointed out a couple of them already are things like your agency is not respected, your ability to make choices, you cannot say no, you are given assignments, and it gets piled on, piled on, piled on, piled on beyond your capacity, and you're expected to produce, and there's no appropriate reasonable expectations.

And you're pushed, going back to sales, because I am a former salesperson, you are pushed to perform so that you can compete. That is an environment that isn't going that there are going to be lots of cues of danger and lots of opportunities for abuse of power in that environment.

It's environments where there are normal, and when I say normal, meaning normative, dual or entangled relationships. And that puts you in a position where with those entangled relationships, there's just multiple roles people are playing that cross over.

There could be a boss who's also your best friend, who's also the person that you go to church with, who's also the person that is the godparent to your kid. All of those types of things

happening in a workspace creates the environment where there is a lack of boundary and accountability.

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That's another thing that you can know that something is if this is pervasive, that's not an environment that's going to support every employee being treated equitably. Abusive power dynamics, inequitable power dynamics. Environments where a person is routinely sabotaged with no check. Bullying and abuse goes unchecked with no consequences, those are things where the cues of danger are going to far outweigh the cues of safety.

Meagen Gibson

And then I love because you did a great job of outlining the cues of danger. So now let's talk about what cues of safety look like.

Kimberly Weeks

We talk about green flags and red flags.

Meagen Gibson

Yeah.

Kimberly Weeks

So the green flags in those spaces is people, especially people in positions of power who own their stuff, who are willing to admit when they messed it up. They don't pawn it off on someone else. They don't target someone and put the responsibility on them. They own it.

Coworkers who respect your time, they're not calling you all hours. They're not calling you to get support on weekends. That's an environment that is a respectful environment. That's a cue of safety.

I would say systems where there are, and when I say systems, I say systems within a workspace, where people are acknowledged and validated and supported for the work that they're doing. They are seen and heard. They have voice and choice. Those are some really good things, too.

And then also someone who and when I say someone, I'm referring to a coworker or a person, a manager, a boss who's willing to be vulnerable about the things that they're working on to improve themselves.

I'm not talking about getting all into your personal business, but they're just willing to admit that they're human. They're not holding you to a standard of perfection and then minimizing or making it all right for them to show up in a human way.

They embrace their own humanity and they embrace the humanity of their counterparts. Those are some great green flags.

[00:22:16] Meagen Gibson

Yeah. And then also change when they say they're going to, right? Like accountability with action.

Kimberly Weeks

Yes.

Meagen Gibson

Wow. I did not react or I overreacted in that situation, and I'm sorry, and I'm really going to, next time I feel that come up, I'm going to take a deep breath. And then you see them do it, right?

Kimberly Weeks

Yes. And if they reacted and it humiliated you, it defended you or demeaned you, there's an email or a communication that comes out that says, you know what? I did this with this, and I apologize to this employee or I apologize to this team.

That isn't what we're trying to create in terms of a culture in this environment. And so I want to own that and I want to repair it if it's possible. Those are some really good things that create safety for people just generally in relationships, but at work.

I've only experienced that a few times in my career where that's been the workspace. That doesn't normally happen there's normally, and I say normally, it's routinely covering up when someone in an upper or power position does something wrong, they scapegoat the other party or other parties. But if you do something wrong, your feet are held to the fire.

Meagen Gibson

Yeah. It's so interesting to have a level of understanding and then watch dynamics play out. And sometimes understanding gives you a level of compassion that can then be a barrier to holding other people accountable and making hard decisions for yourself.

If I just speak for the people that can't speak right now, right? If you have a certain level of understanding and I'm not subversively talking about the people that I work with right now.

But it's like you get a level of understanding and you see the dynamics playing out, and so you're creating this narrative in your head of like, well, I know such and such about this person and they can't help it.

We sometimes get too conscious for our own good and we have too much understanding for our own good and excuse behaviors and forget to advocate for ourselves and reinsert our boundaries because it's hard to.

Kimberly Weeks

Yeah, yeah. I love that you're... And what's coming up for me is Kristin Neff's book *Fierce Self-Compassion*. You can both end this. You can understand, have empathy, have a compassion, have a desire to make room for a person's growth. You can do that. And you can also call a spade a spade and say, this isn't okay, and here's what I'm asking you to do next time.

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And I think that, talk about seeds or accuse of safety, when we show up that way, both holding non judgment and compassion and holding here's what I would like for there to be a repair or accountability, we actually support the people around us growing.

We support the people around us expanding, and we grow because that conversation that we have with that coworker, somebody's going to have that conversation with us at some point. So a big part of this is being sober minded.

Like, I'm human and there are going to be times when I do not get it right in this space. And if I don't get it right, how would I want someone to handle me? How would I want someone to help me with a growing edge in a compassionate way that doesn't condemn me or cancel me?

We've got a lot of cancel culture happening. So those are those types of things I think create atmospheres for growth, for healing, for wholeness, and for productivity.

Can we talk about it? For productivity? When you have that kind of space again, going back to a third of your life that you're good to go to, it's important. It's very important.

Meagen Gibson

Yeah. And I have a ton of compassion too, for people who don't feel like they're in a position where they can voice these concerns. I've been in positions where I was the one voicing the concerns and I've had all kinds of different reactions, right?

Kimberly Weeks

Right.

Meagen Gibson

And it's not an easy position to be in saying the hard things. I've had experiences where they've been received really, really well and somebody didn't necessarily agree with me and said, I'm going to take that on and I'm really going to think about it.

It wasn't you're totally right, I'm an awful person and I'm going to apologize. It was just, I'm going to take that on and I'm going to think about it and I'm going to come back to you in a little bit, right? Saying hard things doesn't mean we have to all be in complete agreement about what's real. It just means we're going to be safe to be heard.

Kimberly Weeks

Yes. I love that you're bringing that up because sometimes people think toxic equals everybody's agreed. There's no challenges, there's no tension, and that's not accurate at all. That's not accurate.

As a matter of fact, when we are sharpened by other people through being confronted with things, through being called up to our highest good or performance, we're actually in the most safe space.

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When someone's honest enough to tell us to our faces or directly what things they see and what they need us to do to shift instead of going behind our backs and covertly planting seeds of doubt with everyone else and talking and smearing and gossiping.

When you're actually called to your highest capacity to work and to perform, you're actually in the best position to add to the health of that workspace. And a lot of times, people equate that word toxic, it's like the people saying the word narcissist, and it's kind of like brushstroked over everything.

Some people relate the word toxic to meaning everybody's supposed to be happy and getting along, and that couldn't be farther from the truth. As a matter of fact, if you're in a good workspace, you're going to be challenged, and you will have to deal with what comes up on the inside of you so that you can grow.

It is one of the best spaces because we spend so much time there for you to develop as a human being, I believe.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. And as you were talking, I was thinking of a concrete example from my own life. Some people might know, some people other people might not know, I used to be a television producer and director and I had a very strange situation on a TV show once where my direct boss was suffering from a substance use disorder, I wasn't aware of, I just knew we weren't getting along.

And then between seasons of the show, I was called in by her superiors and offered her job in the event that her newfound sobriety failed. And they said, what was your experience with her? And I was like, I'm going to stop you right there.

I've never said any of the things you've asked me to say to her. And so we need to stop, and I'm going to go have a meeting with her, and we're going to clear some things up, and we're going to have a conversation, and then we're going to come back and we're going to have this conversation.

And she and I were not friends in any shape or form at that point. And I can tell you today, this has been ten years now, we are best friends now.

Kimberly Weeks

That is lovely. Wow.

Meagen Gibson

Right? And I never could have predicted that if you had asked me ten years ago, this person is going to be one of your closest confidants, one of your best friends. You're going to see each other through some of the toughest things of your entire life.

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I would have been like, her?! No way. And so I'm not saying that every time you say something tough or every time you uphold these boundaries or every time you act in integrity that you're going to get a best friend out of it.

Nor am I saying that I do that all the time, that I always act in the highest integrity and I'm always like the morality and values police at work that I screw up all the time and have to repair.

But people who are sincerely growing, learning, changing, doing their own personal work, those are your people. And when you reflect to them that work, you find each other.

Kimberly Weeks

Yeah, I love that. It's like a vibration. You all are on the same frequency. And I love that example because every time that happens, especially when we're participating with it, we're sowing a seed into that workspace.

One of the things that I work with clients on who start dealing with this childhood trauma and or the attachment patterns that show up at work is we kind of set aside a declaration of what their standard is going to be for themselves at the workspace.

And you did that beautifully by saying, I'm going to stop you here, and I need to say my experience is directly to that person. That demonstrates for anyone who does it that you respect yourself and you respect the work and you respect the person you're working with.

And that seed is not going to come back to you without a wonderful harvest. It just isn't. It's going to produce... Because most people don't have that experience in their families of origin, in their friendships and their intimate partner relationships or at work.

And it's disarming. It means that person is not your enemy, they're not after you, they really care or have some level of respect for you. And most people rise to that.

Meagen Gibson

Yeah, and it's so interesting because I think and I wasn't consciously aware of all of this at the time, right? But it was like to have someone come to you and say, I see that you're struggling. Here's how it impacted me. I've been offered benefit if you fail and I don't want it.

I'm not going to take advantage of that fact, I'm not going to sabotage you, I'm not going to in any way conspire with the universe against you for my benefit. I reject it. And I think that's what is so, and again, this was at the beginning of my coming into myself and my own value journey, and I think that honestly is the hardest part, right?

Is acting in our own value and integrity and when it doesn't involve necessarily something like that, but it's just holding our own boundary around, even something as simple as like when I clock out at five, I'm going to go do my second shift at home with my kids. That is sacred time.

Or if you don't have children at home, right, I'm going to go walk my pet or I'm going to go be with my friends or whatever it is. I'm going to go do trivia night. And that's sacred time to me and you

may not interfere. I think our own discomfort around our own values and our own boundaries is what gets us tied up often enough, doesn't it?

[00:33:46] Kimberly Weeks

Yes, it does. And the fact that we have been a witness, our observer self has been a witness to the times where we haven't lived up to that. And so sometimes shame can enter in those spaces, and fear adaptations can be a part of how we move.

And so holding ourselves to certain standards and saying, this is who I want to be, and here's how I'm going to hold myself accountable for how I show up here is a thing that most people don't know how to do. We don't know how to do that. It may not have been modeled for us.

The other things that are showing up in the space, the ways that we've learned to cope, the ways that we've learned to hide, the ways that we've learned to cover, show up in the space.

And so I love that you brought up that this was happening at the beginning of your journey to really get clear about your value system and your image of yourself. Because that's the work that is needful to be able to take on that accountability and responsibility for self.

And when you do that, how you hold other people accountable is different. It doesn't come from a place of I'm better than you. It doesn't come from a place that you should or should not or you should be ashamed.

It doesn't come from that because you're doing that regularly for yourself. And how you treat yourself is how you're going to treat your neighbor. It really is true.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. I want to know from your experience what the Venn Diagram looks like between people who are battling with toxic work relationships who also have carried that into their personal life. Is it a commonality or is it an outlier? What's your experience been?

Kimberly Weeks

Oh, goodness, that's a wonderful question. And I would say there's a very big overlap between how we show up in our personal relationships and how we show up at work, how we show up in our family systems and how we show up at work.

And again, a lot of that comes down to not being clear or aware of what's going on inside of us real time. The work that many of my clients and I would do together, the work that I'm doing and continuing to do and will continue to do, is being able to be aware of what's coming up for me in the moment. What's emerging rest.

My Monakim calls it the emergence. What's emerging. Somatically what emerges in my emotions, what emerges in my mind, what meaning I make all of those things and slowing down or doing what's necessary to stop the automatic pattern.

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And as a result of that, there's a big center part of that Venn Diagram where you can literally take a trait, say it's people pleasing. Or take a trait let's say it's the hero complex. Or take a trait, say it's enabling.

And you can go trace that trait into how they are with their spouse, how they are with their kids, how they are with their boss or their coworkers, how they are with the person at the supermarket who wants to get in front of them because they got to go pick up their...

I mean, it's literally, like, you can trace that trait.

Meagen Gibson

I don't know why you had to personally attack me like that, Kimberly, but carry on.

Kimberly Weeks

It's a personal attack on both sides. Okay. Because I'm doing that work. And it is, again, sobering. It's sobering because when you realize what's underneath it, what legitimate human needs are underneath it.

The need to be acknowledged, the need to be loved, the need to be accepted, the need to feel like you have a place in this world and you belong somewhere.

When you start tracing it to that underlying need, it really does create this space of you being able to see other people from a different filter, from a different lens. You can have a lot of compassion that comes up. But really loving someone, really being kind to them, is confronting them with truth.

Even if it's really uncomfortable, even if it causes a rupture and it causes people to fall out, it is better to sow that seed than the seed where you're the innocent bystander who's kind of watching people be abused or accepting abuse or some kind of mistreatment and saying nothing.

Those seeds cause damage to your body, and they cause damage to your life. So I love that you brought that because that overlap, and literally, you can take one trait and just literally follow the trail like you're in the nature going from one point to the next. It's literally the work that I do with clients on a daily basis.

Meagen Gibson

I also just want to prepare people as they're assessing their lives for that trait they might want to trace that. The people that you're in relationship with, when you start to make changes, even if you don't even communicate them, you're just like, you know what? I'm going to start to conduct myself differently. They're going to experience discomfort because you are different in the role that you served for them, right?

Kimberly Weeks

Yes. When you change your part in the dance, it changes everything. There is no way for a pebble to be dropped in a pond, and there are no ripple effects.

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And often, if people have benefited from the relationship you have with yourself, that has not been healthy, if they've benefited from you being a hero or people pleasing or being a person that they can go gossip to and vent and get all they've benefited from that.

And then all of a sudden you shift and you change or you start setting boundaries, it may cause shame to come up for them. It may pull a wave of feeling like, wait a minute, what's happening here? And it could put you in the line of fire to be targeted when you shift.

So I love that you said, let's prepare people because that is real in the workplace. If you have been a person that anybody has been able to have as a confidant for stuff...

I call it like my son is a marine scientist and he works with sharks. It's chumming. Like when they're just throwing the stuff in there and you've been able to be in that ocean letting people chum with you, and then all of a sudden you cut that off, you're going to be the person that they now are trying to come for.

And that can feel and be very isolating. And you'll need some support. You'll need some support and some resourcing once you're doing that personal work for yourself.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. And I can think of one example, I really no longer participate in gossip and chum. And when you feed that back to people and you just kind of gently when they start doing it, when you gently just say, you know what?

And obviously there's context where if somebody says, I'm having a struggle with this particular situation, can you hear me out? That's different. That's not what we're talking about.

We're talking about just like this is how we relate to one another is by talking about other people that aren't here, right? And I don't participate in that anymore, and often when I fed that back to people, they receive it as an attack.

Because if that's how you comfortably relate to people is by just talking about other people, all of a sudden it feels like a hit. What do you mean? What you're saying is that's not what you're saying, but what you're saying is I'm bad, the way I relate is bad and you don't like it.

Kimberly Weeks

Yes. And then they feel fear of judgment and then they feel shame that they're not good enough. And all of their ways of surviving and protecting themselves will present. Absolutely.

And at the same time, those adjustments have to be made if you're going to be planting seeds of health in your workplace. It's just like if you're in an abusive relationship with your partner, those adjustments of how you treat yourself. We teach people how to treat us by how we treat ourselves. And that's no different in the workspace. It really is not.

[00:42:42] Meagen Gibson

Yeah, and you named earlier, when we experience discomfort both in the feelings we have after we start kind of setting these boundaries or self assessing and also just holding other people's reactions to the way that we're changing requires a lot of support. So how do you recommend that people find and get that kind of support?

Kimberly Weeks

That's a really great question. And really it deals with... it's multipronged. I think you need teams. When I work with clients, I don't want to be the only person that's supporting them because then that'll create codependent relationship.

I want them to have a mental health team. I want them to have a community of care. And so we start exploring. Is therapy with this particular kind of therapist appropriate for you? Is trauma recovery coaching with me going to be something we do for six to twelve months?

There are workplace trauma support groups for people who have experienced trauma in the workplace. And having this not for chumming purposes, but for a shared compassionate witnessing in a place to be able to have support for how it's impacting you on a weekly basis.

It's movement. It's working on what we call ADLs, which are activities of daily living. What are you feeding yourself both with food, water, the medications that you need, the supplements that you eat, how much sleep are you getting, how much movement and social interaction that supportive are you getting?

We look at those ADLs so that they're literally creating a foundation so that they can respond from seeing themselves real time in the moment and choosing making different choices.

How we feel every day is a big product of that is just what our health is overall. So it's those types of things. And I would say also I always give my clients affirmations.

Affirmations that they are worthy of their time and attention. Affirmations that they get to set boundaries out of respect for themselves and they get to do it with themselves and others. That their image of themselves is one of worth and value.

Instead of looking for that like a traumatized inner child does from caregivers or people who mirror their caregivers from childhood, we want to help support, and I want to help support them giving those affirmations to themselves.

And over time, that can be the thing that comes up when they feel that shame. When they make that mistake. When they're mistreated. I am worthy of my own attention. I am worthy of my own time, and I deserve to be treated with honor and respect in this space.

Meagen Gibson

Especially when that discomfort comes up, right? I imagine all of the Affirmations that you just named being kind of like a take what you need flyer, right?

[00:45:57]

And so I hope that everybody that's joining us today takes what they need, write down that affirmation. When that discomfort comes up, say it back to yourself. Hear Kimberly's soothing voice.

Kimberly Weeks

I appreciate that. That's one of the things that I learned from or I got out of being a mom, I have four children, is that tone sends a signal to my kids that they're safe with me. And so I try to speak to my inner child the same way.

Meagen Gibson

Yeah, I love that. Kimberly Weeks where can people find out more about you and your work.

Kimberly Weeks

They can find out things at thenarcissisticabusecoach.com. That is my website. I do a host of different things. I also train teams in corporate spaces as well as nonprofits so that they have trauma informed workspaces.

I work one on one with survivors of interpersonal narcissistic and psychological abuse. And I also support people who've experienced childhood trauma and want to repair it so that they can discover who they are apart from trauma.

Meagen Gibson

Fantastic. Kimberly Weeks, thank you so much for being with us today.

Kimberly Weeks

Awesome. Thank you so much, Meagen.